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Los Angeles

Above Sea:
Modern and Contemporary Art
from the Ruins of Shanghai's New Heaven on Earth

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Jenny Grace Lin

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Above Sea:
Modern and Contemporary Art
from the Ruins of Shanghai's New Heaven on Earth

by

Jenny Grace Lin
Doctor of Philosophy in Art History
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012
Professor Miwon Kwon, Chair

Shanghai (translated as *Above Sea*) has long been characterized as Mainland China's most "East meets West" and modern metropolis. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists, designers, and filmmakers have confronted this identity, formulating diverging notions of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity vis-à-vis Shanghai's "cultural hybridity." This dissertation examines these formulations by analyzing examples of art, as well as fashion, print media, and film produced in dialogue with cross-cultural Shanghai in three key periods: the 1920s-30s during the city's semi-colonial "modernist heyday," the 1960s-70s during the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua dageming*), and the 1990s-2000s as Shanghai has re-emerged as a global center. My analyses problematize the trope of "East meets West" that has long informed the discourses both on Shanghai and modern and contemporary Chinese art, by exposing other cultural collisions (e.g., semi-colonial cosmopolitanism vs. anti-imperialist nationalism in the 1920s-30s, Maoist collectivity vs. individualism in the 1960s-70s, and local identities vs.

globalization in the 1990s-2000s). The examples explored (e.g., *Liang You/Young Companion* magazine, revolutionary woodcuts, and painting by Parisian-trained artist, Pang Xunqin, in the 1920s-30s, socialist realist murals, revolutionary Peking opera, and a documentary by Italian auteur, Michelangelo Antonioni, in the 1960s-70s, installations by transnational artists, Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, and films by Shanghai-based artists, Zhou Tiehai and Yang Fudong, in the 1990s-2000s) span time, media, and national boundaries, allowing for analyses of diverging notions of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity vis-à-vis visual culture and its transnational movements. Many of these examples are locationally linked through a particular neighborhood said to epitomize contemporary Shanghai. Today the site of *Xintiandi* (translated as *New Heaven on Earth*), a retail and cultural complex in Shanghai's former French Concession, this neighborhood encompasses an underground history of revolutionary art, film, and design, which this dissertation uncovers. While filtered through the lens of Shanghai, this dissertation confronts broader issues, including the stakes of “non-Western” art’s integration into art historical canons, and the role modern and contemporary Chinese art plays in the emergence of a globalized culture industry.

The dissertation of Jenny Grace Lin is approved.

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2012

For Jean and Pei-teh Lin

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Introduction

Shanghai (上海) – opened as a treaty port in 1842 and subsequently carved up into British, American, French and Japanese-run districts – has long been described as Mainland China’s most cosmopolitan and modern metropolis. The city’s modern identity has, since its inception, been linked to its foreign, and especially Western European and American influences, impositions, and cross-cultural translations, as signaled, for instance, by the fact that it was in early Republican-Era (1911-1949) Shanghai that the English (and French) words, *modern(e)*, were first transliterated into Chinese as 摩登/*modeng*.¹ At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Shanghai’s “East meets West” and *modeng* character, so mythologized in the first half of the twentieth, has become a subject of interest in contemporary art and academic discourse.

The 2000 Shanghai Biennale, for example, billed as China’s first international contemporary art event, took as its title, “Shanghai Spirit,” and framed present-day Shanghai, recently emerged as a global financial center, as heir to the city’s modernist legacy, defined by an “amalgamation of both Eastern and Western perspectives” and “cultural hybridity.”² Despite great curatorial interest, historians of Chinese art have paid relatively little attention to Shanghai’s modern (not to mention contemporary) art, tending to favor China’s traditional cultural and political capitals, such as Beijing and Hangzhou. Scholars of Chinese literature and East Asian studies, however, have made significant strides in identifying 1920s-1930s Shanghai as the seat of a particular brand of Chinese modernity defined vis-à-vis the city’s semi-

¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China: 1930-1945* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

² Hou Hanru, “Shanghai Spirit: A Special Modernity,” in *2000 Shanghai Shuang Nian Zhan (2000 Shanghai Biennale)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2000), n.p.

colonialism and “East meets West” encounters.³ This dissertation expands and critically intervenes into this discourse, revealing the seminal roles that visual culture, namely art, fashion, and film, have played in formulating Shanghai-based models of modernity and contemporaneity, while assessing the complex ways in which cultural hybridity has functioned, and in some cases, not functioned, within these formulations.⁴ I consider hybridity not only as an aesthetic principle, but as a conceptual problematic, and analyze its distinct development in the three most transformative moments of Shanghai’s history and cross-cultural identity – 1) 1920s-30s at the height of the city’s semi-colonial period and its so-called modernist heyday, 2) 1960s-70s amidst strained international relations and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, and 3) 1990s-2000s as Shanghai has re-emerged as a global center of art, design, and finance.

My analyses complicate the discursive framework of “East meets West,” exposing how this theoretical formulation has worked differently within each of these specific historical moments and how cultural hybridity has sometimes worked to obfuscate important political, economic and social tensions occurring within Shanghai and its visual culture throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. The goal is not to tell the story of a city which progressed through a series of harmonious cross-cultural encounters, but to picture Shanghai as a

³ For recent discussions on Shanghai’s “East meets West” character and its relation to Chinese modernity, see, amongst others, Lee, *Shanghai modern*, Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), and Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴ In Chinese intellectual thought, the concepts of modernity (现代性/*xiandai xing*, composed of modern/*xiandai*, which literally translates as now era) and contemporaneity (当代性/*dangdai xing*, composed of contemporary/*dangdai*, which literally translates as present era) both emphasize the condition of the present, while implying newness and a break with the past. Theorizations of modernity and contemporaneity have frequently accompanied debates over nation building, and the development of the new China (新中国/*xin zhongguo*), and over the new China’s *new culture* (新文化/*xin wenhua*), which have recurred throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. Art historian, Gao Minglu has observed that modernity and contemporaneity are today used as synonyms in China, while arguing that, as opposed to Western modernity (which he sees as existing primarily as a temporal marker, between pre-modernity and post-modernity), Chinese modernity always implies both the present, and the particular spatial terrain of China. See Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1.

battleground of collisions – between semi-colonial cosmopolitanism and anti-imperialist nationalism in the 1920s-30s, Maoist communism and democratic individualism in the 1960s-70s, and competing conceptions of the local versus the global in the 1990s-2000s, as China has shifted from a system of nationalized socialism to state-sponsored capitalism. Just as Shanghai's history defies linear logic, this dissertation rejects a unified continuation of the motif of cultural hybridity, picturing itself instead as a collage that draws from across time and media (fashion and print media, art, and film), and which examines works by local, foreign-trained, *Overseas Chinese*, and non-Chinese artists, designers, and filmmakers that have crafted particular fantasies of modern and contemporary Shanghai. The dissertation is divided chronologically into three chapters, each of which is arranged into three sections according to media. I analyze key examples of each period's fashion and print culture (e.g., 1920s lifestyle magazine, 1960s revolutionary pamphlet, 1990s fashion advertisement), art (e.g., 1930s watercolor, cartoon, and woodcut, 1960s mural and socialist realist painting, and 2000s installations), and cinema (1930s leftist film, 1960s film adaptation of revolutionary Peking opera and documentary, and 1990s-2000s art films) vis-à-vis their diverging formulations of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity, Shanghai (both real and imagined), and the problematic of hybridity.

Chapter One focuses on visual culture in Shanghai in the 1920s-30s, just after the concept of modernity surfaced in China as part of the rhetoric of the *New Culture Movement* (新文化运动/*Xin wenhua yundong*) (1917-1927). Led by Chinese intellectuals, this watershed movement promoted *new culture* as part of a modernity project aimed at nation building, combating Western and Japanese colonialism, and eradicating certain traditions linked to Imperial China,

recently fallen with the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).⁵ The movement's key leaders, such as Hu Shi (胡适) (1891-1962), explicitly advocated Western elements of modernity (e.g., Enlightenment philosophy, modern science, and democracy) as essential to strengthening the *new* China – the Republic of China (1911-1949). While the *New Culture Movement* originated in Beijing, by the 1920s many of its key figures, including Lu Xun (鲁迅) (1881-1936), known as the forefather of modern Chinese literature, had fled to Shanghai's foreign districts, far from the tradition-laden capital.⁶ This chapter reveals that 1920s-30s Shanghai spawned distinctive brands of artistic modernity, distinguished by structural engagement with the city and its so-called “East meets West” identity.

Chapter One's first section focuses on media and print culture, analyzing a 1929 cover of Shanghai's most widely circulated fashion and lifestyle magazine, *Young Companion* (良友 / *Liang You*),⁷ featuring Chinese American movie starlet, Anna May Wong (黄柳霜/Huang Liushuang) (1905-1961). Read vis-à-vis Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) writings on Anna May Wong and Zhang Ailing's (1920-1995) notes on fashion, I argue that the cover's imagery, graphic design, and layout constitute a Shanghai-based brand of cosmopolitan modernity, of

⁵ The *New Culture Movement* came to a head with wide-scale public protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on May 4th, 1919, and thus it is also referred to as the *May Fourth Movement*. The May 4th protestors were reacting against decisions made at the post-WWI Paris Peace Conference, especially the points of the Versailles Treaty, which transferred rights to China's Shandong Province from Germany to Japan. In addition to demanding a stronger domestic government that would stand up to colonizing powers, the New Culture Movement called for the transformation of classical Chinese into vernacular Chinese (a more easily legible language system), women's liberation, the re-examination of Confucian texts using modern critical methods, democratic and egalitarian values, and modern science.

⁶ It is one of Shanghai's many paradoxes that its foreign occupied districts – the International Settlement (run by the British and Americans), Zhabei District (run by the Japanese) and the French Concession (run by the French) – became, in the 1920s-30s, havens for anti-imperialist revolutionaries calling for the liberation of China from its semi-colonial occupation.

⁷ The magazine's English title, *Young Companion*, is not a direct translation of its Chinese title, *Liang You*, which would translate more directly as *Good Friend*. This discrepancy will be discussed at greater length in Chapter One of this dissertation.

which the transnational starlet emerges as ideal icon. My extended analysis of the *Young Companion* magazine further demonstrates that the hybridity said to define 1920s-30s Shanghai and its creative production was not only cultural, but also media-related and temporal, as evidenced by mixed content, collage layouts, and combined references to past and present. The second section focuses on art, and analyzes the watercolor, *Such is Shanghai*, or *The Riddle of Life* (如此上海, 人生的哑谜/*Ruci Shanghai, Rensheng de yami*) (1931), by Pang Xunqin (庞薰琹) (1906-1985), leader of the avant-garde collective, Storm Society (决澜社/*Juelanshe*)⁸ (1931-5). I argue that *Such is Shanghai* critically expanded the cosmopolitan modernity constituted by Shanghai's fashion and print media by utilizing surrealist collage tactics to ambivalently picture the city's semi-colonialism and growing commercialism, revealing an underbelly of corruption and bodily danger. I define the hybridity of Pang Xunqin's larger artistic practice not in terms of the recurring "East meets West" trope, but in relation to his conflicted identity as a Parisian-trained, Chinese painter working in revolutionary Shanghai, and in terms of his avant-garde goal of combining art and life. In contrast, I present two works by members of China's League of Left-Wing Artists (中国左翼美术家联盟/*Zhongguo zuoyi meishu jia liangmeng*) (1930-1934) – the cartoon, *Avenue Joffre* (霞飞路/*Xia Fei Lu*) (1937) by Cai Ruohong (蔡若虹) (b.1910), and the woodcut, *Roar, China!* (怒吼吧, 中国!/*Nuhou ba, Zhongguo!*) (1931) by Li Hua (李桦) (1907-1994) – arguing that they established an anti-imperialist model of modernity that maintained a nationalist stance against both foreign colonialism and China's dynastic tradition. I analyze the League of Left-Wing Artists' adaptation of tactics gleaned from German expressionism and dada, including agitated graphics, anti-heroic

⁸ The Chinese name of Pang Xunqin's art collective, *Juelanshe*, translates more precisely in English to Stormy Billows Society, as scholar Shu-mei Shih has suggested. See Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 124. The Storm Society, however, is the English name by which the group referred to itself.

realism, and satire, while also considering hybridity in terms of the mixing of fine art and artisanal craft, most evident in the League's woodcut movement, led by revolutionary writer, Lu Xun. The third section focuses on film and looks particularly at *Street Angel* (马路天使/*Malu tianshi*) (1936) by director Yuan Muzhi (袁牧之) (1909-1978). I analyze how *Street Angel*, loosely based on Frank Borzage's 1928 film of the same title, utilizes montage, and combines the aesthetic and political principles of both the anti-imperialist and cosmopolitan models of modernity (discussed in the previous two sections) towards a cutting critique of modern Shanghai. While presenting the cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist models of modernity as distinct, I also reveal these models' overlaps, including shared attempts at establishing the social role of art within the context of revolutionary, semi-colonial Shanghai.

Chapter Two focuses on Shanghai-based visual culture of the 1960s-70s, and especially during The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (文化大革命/*Wenhua dageming*) (1966-1976), when the project of Chinese socialism (established with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949) was overrun by a widespread, violent campaign aimed at purging China of the so-called "Four Olds" (四旧/*si jiu*), defined as "Old Culture, Old customs, Old Habits, and Old ideas." Leaders of the Cultural Revolution touted a hybrid form of *new culture*, which dictated that the "past serve the present and foreign things serve China," as a weapon of socialist revolution, and as an essential part of a nationalist project of modernity set in opposition to Western imperialism and capitalism.⁹ Chapter Two shows how the official art of the Cultural Revolution tried, unsuccessfully, to align itself with the anti-imperialist model of modernity

⁹ Mao Zedong, "Letter to the students of the Central Conservatory of Music" (February 1964), reprinted in numerous sources, including in *China Reconstructs* xvii, no. 10 (October 1968): 1.

described in Chapter One, manipulating and instrumentalizing the principles of the 1930s woodcut movement towards the creation of state propaganda.

Chapter Two's first section focuses on fashion and print culture, and analyzes a cover of a 1967 issue of *Meishu Zhan Bao*/美术战报 (*Fine Arts War News*), featuring former actress Jiang Qing (江青) (1914-1991), who was then the wife of Mao Zedong (毛泽东) and a key figure in the Cultural Revolution. I consider Jiang Qing's image as epitomizing the *new*, socialist woman, which became a symbol of Chinese modernity in the 1960s-70s. I further analyze the cover as a visual embodiment of the official aesthetic policies of the Cultural Revolution, as articulated by Jiang Qing at the Shanghai "Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces" (1966). The second section focuses on art produced by students at the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop (上海油画雕塑创作室/*Shanghai youhua diaosu chuangzuo shi*) (est. 1965), the city's chief official art school during the Cultural Revolution, namely *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* (毛主席各个时期的肖像/*Mao zhuxi gege shiqi de xiaoxiang*) (1968), a mural erected at Huaihai Lu (formerly Avenue Joffre in the old French Concession) and *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky* (火树银花不夜天/*Huo shu yin hua bu ye tian*) (1971), a monumental painting made in and about a Shanghai shipyard facility. Here, I analyze how hybrid forms of painting, adapted from Soviet socialist realist models and purportedly from the 1930s woodcut movement, were utilized to mask the era's social and economic tensions, such as conflicted notions of collectivity, depressed industrialization, strained international relations, and national isolation. The third and final section contrasts two films, *On the Docks* (海港/*Haigang*) (1972), a cinematic adaptation of a revolutionary Peking opera that celebrated industrialization and international exchange in Shanghai, and *Chung Kuo Cina* (中国/*Zhongguo/China* first in Chinese, and then in Italian)

(1972), a documentary by Italian auteur, Michelangelo Antonioni (安东尼奥尼/Andongniaoni) (1912-2007), which included footage of Shanghai and ruminations on Maoist communism as an alternative to Western modernity, defined by capitalism and imperialism. Here, I discuss the breakdown of “East meets West” relations by analyzing the controversy surrounding *Chung Kuo Cina*, which was initially officially approved and later decried, while considering its documentary realism as the antithesis of the heroic socialist realism presented in *On the Docks*. Chapter Two demonstrates that the official art of the Cultural Revolution manipulated the conceit of hybridity – both temporal and cultural – towards the production of an idealized portrait of a struggling nation that had mostly cut itself off from the rest of the world.

Chapter Three considers Shanghai’s visual culture in the 1990s-2000s, as the city has reestablished its international trade relations, while emerging as a global financial center that poses a viable threat to Western world market dominance. Employing the language used to describe 1920s-30s Shanghai, critics and curators often celebrate the city’s contemporary art for its hybrid, “East meets West” character, as identified, for instance, in the combining of traditional Chinese motifs, such as dragons, red lanterns, and calligraphy, with “Western styles,” such as installation, and pop art. My analyses of visual culture in 1990s-2000s Shanghai reveal other forms of hybridity at work, including media hybridity, as seen in the combining of art, design, and civic marketing, and temporal hybridity, as seen in artists’ and designers’ references to Shanghai’s semi-colonial and socialist pasts in reflecting, shaping, and/or critiquing the city’s cosmopolitan present. Chapter Three argues that the “East/West” discourse as it is employed today often obfuscates these more complex forms of hybridity, as well as other tensions in Shanghai’s visual culture (and in contemporary Chinese society at large), such as the clashing of

socialist values with late capitalist modes of production and distribution and the struggle to define a local identity within a globalized world.

Chapter Three's first section focuses on fashion and print culture, and analyzes an advertisement (1997) for Shanghai Tang (上海滩/*Shanghai Tan*) (est. 1994), a fashion brand and retailer said to epitomize contemporary Shanghai's "East meets West" identity. My analysis of an advertisement featuring the actress, Gong Li (巩俐) (b. 1965), reveals how the figure of the *Overseas Chinese* (华侨/*huaqiao*) woman functions as an icon of Shanghai's contemporaneity. I argue that this advertisement revives the 1920s-30s cosmopolitan model of modernity, deeply repressed during China's Cultural Revolution, which, in turn, becomes neutralized through commercial aestheticization. The second section focuses on art, and examines two installation projects – *Heavenly Lantern* (天堂红灯/*Tiantang hongdeng*) (2003-Present) by Gu Wenda (谷文达) (b. 1955), which proposes to cover modern skyscrapers and architectural monuments around the world (including Shanghai's Jin Mao Tower) with red Chinese lanterns, and *Tobacco Project* (烟草计划/*Yancao jihua*) (1999-Present) by Xu Bing (徐冰) (b. 1955), a multi-part installation that focuses on the 1920s-30s Shanghai-Durham tobacco trade while confronting renewed Chinese-American trade relations, and China's position as the "world's factory." I argue that *Heavenly Lantern's* emphases on "East meets West" cultural hybridity mask political and social tensions (between Chinese and non-Chinese nations, and the artist's own local Chinese and international art star identities), and media hybridizations (between art, architecture, design, civic and national marketing, and advertising). On the other hand, I argue that Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project* offers an epistemological critique of contemporary Shanghai vis-à-vis the city's conflicted semi-colonial and socialist pasts. The third section focuses on film, analyzing two

projects, *Will* (必须/*Bixu*)¹⁰ (1996) by Zhou Tiehai (周铁海) (b. 1966), a satirical spoof on the globalization of Shanghai's art world, which utilizes the rhetoric and imagery of war and the Cultural Revolution, and *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (竹林七贤/*Zhulin qi xian*) (2003-2007) by Yang Fudong (杨福东) (b. 1971), a surrealist, multi-part film that draws from the language of 1920s-30s era cinema in confronting the ennui and intellectual crises of young people in contemporary China, and specifically Shanghai. I reveal how both films, which span the decade framing Shanghai's most rapid urbanization, draw uniquely from the 1920s-30s cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist models of modernity and also from 1960s-70s formulations of *new culture* towards their respective contemplations of the shifting role of the artist/intellectual in 1990s-2000s Shanghai. The fashion, art, and film projects discussed in this chapter establish various models of Chinese contemporaneity, which respond to Shanghai's present, surprisingly often while referencing the city's semi-colonial and/or socialist pasts. I argue that projects like Shanghai Tang and *Heavenly Lantern* establish a celebratory model of Chinese contemporaneity that promotes commercialized, globalized art and design, while *Tobacco Project*, *Will*, and *Seven Intellectuals* formulate a critical model of contemporaneity that historically addresses major problems associated with Shanghai's so-called post-socialist present, such as class inequalities resulting from globalization, and conflicts between the desires to preserve local identities and achieve global aspirations.¹¹

In addition to this dissertation's meta-concerns of defining various models of Shanghai-based modernity and contemporaneity, while complicating the tropes of cultural hybridity and

¹⁰ The Chinese title of Zhou Tiehai's film, *Bixu*, more precisely translates into English as *Must*. *Will* is the English title given by the artist.

¹¹ For theorizations of post-socialism in China, see Zhang Xudong, ed., *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

“East meets West,” each chapter section is linked by leitmotifs. The fashion and print media sections, for example, examine how the figure of the *modern* woman, and in particular the transnational actress, served as a signifier of cosmopolitan modernity in the 1920s-30s, and its recapitulation in the 1990s-2000s, and how the figure of the *new*, socialist woman became a revolutionary icon in the 1960s-70s. The art sections analyze recurring aesthetic strategies, especially collage and realism, as well as formulations of artistic collectivity, art’s social role, and the avant-garde goal of linking art and life as they developed distinctly in each historic period. The film sections elaborate on the visual strategies and conceptual concerns analyzed in the previous two sections, showing how they were applied to moving images aimed at confronting Shanghai’s social, economic and political conditions (of the 1920s-30s, 1960s-70s, and 1990s-2000s), and the impact of these conditions on the individual and quotidian life.

All of the examples discussed in this dissertation are locationally linked, connected to Shanghai, and in many instances, to a particular neighborhood located in the city’s former French Concession, once a bastion of revolution and revolutionary art, and today perceived as a microcosm of contemporary, cosmopolitan Shanghai. The dissertation’s final pages turn to this neighborhood as it is today, occupied by 新天地 /*Xintiandi* (translated as *New Heaven on Earth*)¹² (est. 1997), an outdoor shopping mall and entertainment complex, said to epitomize Shanghai’s cultural hybridity. *Xintiandi*, which sits adjacent to the site of China’s first communist meeting (1921), now memorialized as a museum, was designed with reference to the French Concession’s vernacular homes of the 1920s-30s, and is today celebrated for its “East

¹² *Xintiandi*, a common name for Chinese establishments, has also been translated into English as *New Heaven and Earth*, though I would argue that *New Heaven on Earth* more adequately conveys the Chinese meaning. Architect Benjamin Wood originally wanted to call the complex *Taiping Qiao*, or *Peace Bridge*, but was advised that Chinese people would not appreciate this name because of negative associations with the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). The name *Taiping Qiao* is now used to describe the larger, 52-hectre urban development zone, of which *Xintiandi* is the central landmark. Benjamin Wood, interview by author, 1 April 2010, Shanghai, audio recording, Ben Wood Studio Shanghai, Xintiandi, Shanghai, China.

meets West” and “Old meets New” architecture. My concluding remarks will once more take to task such notions of hybridity, arguing that they cloud underlying conflicts between China’s socialist memory and rampant consumerism, and collusions between the Chinese Communist Party’s autocratic state power and capitalist development, while burying the rich cultural history of the site, which this dissertation aims to uncover.

Shanghai’s name translates into *Above Sea*, suggesting a space existing above borders, walls and “East/West” divides. Yet to occupy such a position *above sea*, despite its implications of freedom, requires a precarious balancing act. All the works included in this dissertation forge challenging new combinations between formal elements from China and elsewhere in an attempt to think through the Shanghainese urban landscape as well as Chinese modernity and contemporaneity. But as opposed to presenting the works as harmonious “East/West” blends, I problematize this ubiquitously used, but under theorized cultural binary by exposing others, such as those between nationalism and imperialist modernization, socialism and capitalism, and local identity and globalization. In doing so, I aim to establish an especially significant art historical study for today as we find ourselves navigating a post-Cold War geography where the distinctions between “East” and “West,” whether real or imaginary, are becoming less and less visible and their assessment, as an intervention into grander narratives of modernity, therefore increasingly urgent.

Chapter One

Modern Fashion and Print Media, Art, and Film in Shanghai during the 1920s-30s

Introduction

Republican-Era Shanghai (1911-1949), with its neon lights, streetcars, and cinemas, was considered the most modern metropolis in China, especially during the 1920s-30s when the city fostered a particular conception of “the modern” linked to cross-cultural encounters and translation. As Chinese literature scholar Leo Ou-fan Lee observed, it was in Shanghai where the English (and French) words for *modern(e)* were first transliterated into the Chinese term, *modeng*, meaning *novel and/or fashionable*, and insinuating a relationship with Western European and American influences and with Shanghai itself, the city most impacted by those influences.¹³ In addition to Shanghai’s *modeng/modern as fashionable* definition, there existed a broader term, 现代/*xiandai*, also translated as *modern*, which denoted the *now* and connoted the *new*. Derived from Japanese, *xiandai* combines the word for *now* (*xian*) with the word for *generation* and *era* (*dai*), historically used to designate dynastic periods, such as *Tang Dai* (Tang Dynasty, 618-907), *Song Dai* (Song Dynasty, 960-1279), and *Qing Dai* (Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911).¹⁴ What was considered *modern*, both in Shanghai and in China, hence, was not only

¹³ Leo Ou-fan Lee observes that it was in Shanghai itself that the English word *modern* (and the French word *moderne*) received its first Chinese transliteration into *modeng*, concluding that “Shanghai and modern are natural equivalents...in the Chinese popular imagination,” Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China: 1930-1945* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁴ *Xiandai*, as a broader alternative to the *modeng* as fashionable term, was derived from the Japanese word for modern, *gendai*. This is culturally significant for a number of reasons, one being that Japan was in the 1930s an increasingly powerful and influential occupying power. Furthermore, many Chinese encounters with cultural modernism were filtered through Japan. For a rich analysis of Chinese modernity analyzed vis-à-vis the replacement of English-language homophones with Japanese-derived terms, see Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995). For a discussion on modernism in China as filtered through Japanese modernism, see Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*.

related to what was culturally foreign (British, American, French, and/or Japanese), but was also clearly defined in opposition to China's longstanding dynastic past.¹⁵

Both of these formulations of the modern – *modeng* as fashionable and current and *xiandai* as now and distinct from the past – were linked to the condition of *presentness* and above all else, to an enthusiasm for what was new, articulated through the conceit of youth. The words *new* (新/*xin*) and *youth* (青年/*qingnian*) permeated the discourse on modern culture in 1920s-30s China and were first most explicitly evoked during the *New Culture Movement* (*Xin wenhua yundong*) (1917-1927), an anti-imperialist, anti-feudalist movement led by intellectuals demanding the development of modern science, democracy, and culture in China.¹⁶ The *New Culture Movement's* leaders published a journal entitled *New Youth* (新青年/*Xin Qingnian/La Jeunesse*) (1915-1926), whose masthead displayed both its Chinese and French titles, highlighting goals of cross-cultural communication and translation and heralding the ideal of youth as linked to the many young, often foreign-educated intellectuals who spearheaded the movement. While the *New Culture Movement* originated in Beijing, by the 1920s many of its key

¹⁵ After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the leaders of the newly established Republic of China (1911-1949) – a country immensely weakened by Britain's victories in two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860), internal feuding and relentless Western and Japanese invasion – rallied for a radical break from what they saw as China's anachronistic past and humiliating present.

¹⁶ The *New Culture Movement* came to a head with wide-scale public protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on May 4th, 1919, and thus it is also referred to as the *May Fourth Movement*. The May 4th protestors were reacting against the decisions made at the post-WWI Paris Peace Conference, especially the points of the Versailles Treaty, which handed German rights to China's Shandong Province over to Japan. In addition to demanding a stronger domestic government that would stand up to imperialist powers, the *New Culture Movement* called for the transformation of classical Chinese into vernacular Chinese (a more easily legible language system), women's liberation, anti-feudalism, the re-examination of Confucian texts using modern critical methods, democratic and egalitarian values and modern science. It is one of Shanghai's many paradoxes that its foreign occupied districts – the International Settlement (run by the British and Americans), Zhabei District (run by the Japanese) and the French Concession (run by the French) – became, in the 1920s-30s, havens for anti-imperialist revolutionaries calling for the liberation of China from its semi-colonial occupation. Shanghai's foreign settlements operated under their own legal jurisdiction and so it was there that many revolutionaries, as well as artists and writers with leftist leanings, gathered as a way of evading imprisonment by the Guomindang (Nationalist Party), which was supported by powerful local gangsters and warlords.

figures, including the revolutionary writer, Lu Xun (1881-1936), known as the forefather of modern Chinese literature, had fled to Shanghai's foreign concessions, far from the tradition-laden capital.¹⁷

In Shanghai, the ideals of the *New Culture Movement* spread throughout the realms of fine art and popular culture and helped establish a style defined by mixed media and combined cultural and temporal references, which critics in the 1930s referred to as 海派/*haipai* (*Shanghai style*, literally *sea style*), understood distinctly from 京派/*jingpai* (*Beijing style*, literally *capital style*) for its links to Shanghai's foreign concessions and commercialism.¹⁸ This chapter analyzes examples of *haipai* fashion and print media, art, and film, which, I argue, formulated new models of Chinese modernity. My analyses reveal two primary models of modernity as having emerged from 1920s-30s Shanghai, what I define as a cosmopolitan model, which utilized collage strategies and maintained an ambivalent stance towards Shanghai's semi-colonialism and

¹⁷ It is one of Shanghai's many paradoxes that its foreign occupied districts – the International Settlement (run by the British and Americans), Zhabei District (run by the Japanese) and the French Concession (run by the French) – became, in the 1920s-30s, havens for anti-imperialist revolutionaries calling for the liberation of China from its semi-colonial occupation.

¹⁸ In 1934, Lu Xun (under the pen name Luan Yanshi) entered into this debate. He published his remarks in the January 17, 1934 issue of *Shenbao Ziyou Tan* (*Shenbao Free Talk*), the *Shenbao* newspaper supplement. This short essay was entitled 《京派与海派》/“Jingpai Yu Haipai,” later translated as “Beijing Types and Shanghai Types,” but which is more accurately translated as “Beijing Style [Capital Style] and Shanghai Style [Ocean/Sea Style].” The essay sketched out the major differences between the art worlds of Beijing and Shanghai, rival cities that would continue to rise as China's two largest and most powerful metropolises. In “Jingpai Yu Haipai,” Lu Xun clearly defines the ways in which these cities' distinct social and economic structures impacted their respective art production, writing “Beijing was the imperial capital of the Ming and Qing dynasties, Shanghai is where various foreign powers have concessions. The old capital swarms with officials, the concessions with businessmen. Thus the literati in Beijing are akin to officials, those in Shanghai to merchants. Those akin to officials help the officials to win fame, those akin to merchants help the merchants to make money, filling their own bellies in the process. In a word, the sole difference between them is that the ‘Peking types’ are the protégés of officials, while the ‘Shanghai types’ are the protégés of businessmen. But whereas those fed by officials are fed in secret and can still put on airs before outsiders, those fed by merchants are fed openly and cannot hide the fact. Thus, the former sometimes forget themselves and think they are superior to the latter. And since the official contempt for merchants is traditional in China, this lowers ‘Shanghai types’ even further in the eyes of ‘Peking types,’ Lu Xun, “Jingpai vs. Haipai” [“Shanghai Types and Peking Types”] (1934) in *Selected Works of Lu Xun*, vol.4, 17-18. [Originally published in *Shenbao Ziyou Tan* (*Shenbao Free Talks*) (January 17, 1934): 15.] For further theorization of “Haipai,” see Lynn Pann, *Shanghai Style: Art and Design Between the Wars* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 2008).

imported capitalism, and an anti-imperialist model, which utilized satire, and expressionistic realism to critique socio-economic inequality and promote national revolution.¹⁹

The chapter is divided into three sections focusing on fashion and print culture, art, and film. In the first section, I analyze a cover of Shanghai's most widely circulated lifestyle magazine of the 1920s-30s, *Liang You/Young Companion*, arguing that it exemplified a new cosmopolitan modernity, chiefly defined by the collaging of cultural and temporal references. My discussion of a cover featuring Chinese American movie starlet, Anna May Wong (1905-1961), demonstrates how the figure of the young, transnational, *modeng* woman was promoted as the chief icon of this cosmopolitan modernity. The second section focuses on art, and begins by analyzing the watercolor, *Such is Shanghai (Ruci Shanghai)* (1931) by Pang Xunqin (1906-1985), leader of the avant-garde group, Storm Society (*Juelanshe*) (1931-5). I argue that *Such is Shanghai* critically expanded the cosmopolitan modernity prevalent in the popular fashion and print culture of the era, by picturing urban Shanghai not only as a cross-cultural urban terrain, but also as a multi-layered puzzle with deceptive façades masking corruption and violence. Next I examine the cartoon, *Avenue Joffre (Xia Fei Lu)* (1937) by Cai Ruohong (b.1910), a member of the League of Left-Wing Artists (*Zhongguo zuoyi meishu jia liangmeng*) (1930-1934) (a group spearheaded by Lu Xun), analyzing the use of social satire as a key feature of a distinctly anti-imperialist model of modernity. I end this section by analyzing the woodcut, *Roar, China!*

¹⁹ In using the term “anti-imperialist,” I am referring primarily to the model’s “anti-foreign imperialism,” although the model was also set against many of the traditions associated with Chinese Imperialism. The division I draw between the Storm Society’s cosmopolitan model of modernity and the League of Left-Wing Artist’s anti-imperialist one finds a sort-of precedent in the binary – “Enlightenment versus National Salvation” – drawn by scholar of Chinese intellectual history Li Zehou in his seminal essay, “Qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangcheng bianzou” [“The dual variation of enlightenment and national salvation”] (1990). Here, Li Zehou argues that the revolutionaries of the *New Culture Movement* initially held goals of intellectual “enlightenment,” but that China’s dire socio-political situation made them abandon their cultural and social concerns, turning instead to purely political ones and to Marxist revolution, embarking on what he calls a project of “national salvation.” But whereas Li Zehou discusses these two models in chronological ascension, from “Enlightenment” to “National Salvation,” I seek to sketch out two co-existing imaginations of Chinese modernity that occupied the same space and time. See Li Zehou, “Qimeng yu jiuwang de shuangcheng bianzou,” in *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi lun [History of Modern Chinese Thought]* (Beijing: Dongfang, 1987), 7-50.

(*Nuhou ba, Zhongguo!*) (1931) by Li Hua (1907-1994), also a member of the League of Left-Wing Artists, attending to the anti-colonial, revolutionary aims of the anti-imperialist model, and its development of a style I define as *anti-heroic realism*, while showing how and why the woodcut became its chief artistic medium. The chapter's third section focuses on cinema, analyzing *Street Angel (Malu tianshi)* (1936) by director Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978), a film that takes Shanghai and its conflicted identity as chief protagonist. I argue that *Street Angel* combines the aesthetic tactics (collage and realism) and socio-political concerns of both the cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist models of modernity towards the depiction of Shanghai as a site of socio-economic tensions and cross-cultural collisions. While this chapter defines two distinctive models of modernity – cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist – vis-à-vis Shanghai-based fashion and print media, art, and film of the 1920s-30s, it also reveals these models' shared concerns, including cultural hybridity (as seen in the adaptation of imported modernist and avant-garde styles), media hybridity (as seen in the merging, for example, of fine art and design), goals of linking art and life, and conceptualizations of art as social critique within the context of semi-colonial Shanghai.

Fashion and Print Media: Anna May Wong as Cosmopolitan *Young Companion*

In his descriptions of 1920s-30s Shanghai, English author J.G. Ballard marveled that “Shanghai was a media city before its time.”²⁰ Indeed, by the late 1930s, Shanghai's mass media industry was amongst the most advanced in the world.²¹ Lifestyle magazines, which circulated throughout the city, the country, and abroad, were arguably the most representative objects of

²⁰ J.G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton, An Autobiography* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), 4.

²¹ For instance, the vast majority of China's printing presses were concentrated in Shanghai, and the city's Commercial Press published annually the same amount of titles as the entire publishing industry in the United States. see Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 38.

Shanghai's booming mass media sector. In sketching a history of Chinese photography, art historian and critic Gu Zheng recently traced the origins of Chinese modernity to 1926 – the year of the establishment of the *Young Companion (Liang You)* (1926-1941) – the most popular and widely disseminated lifestyle magazine in 1920s-30s Shanghai, and the first Chinese publication to circulate photography at a mass level.²² The *Young Companion* utilized a large, pictorial format with striking images and fonts. The magazine promoted modern goods, especially imported products, and modern fashions, notably international styles for women, while providing coverage of current events and human interest stories, and numerous spreads devoted to modern architecture and modern art, especially showcasing foreign-trained artists. This section argues that the *Young Companion* defined a particular brand of cosmopolitan modernity, not only through its use of photography, the products it advertised, and stories it featured, but via the magazine's montage-like layout and mixed cultural and temporal references, which advocated an embrace, albeit not without reservation, of Shanghai's semi-colonialism and imported capitalism.

In January 1929, the magazine featured Chinese American actress Anna May Wong as its cover star (Figure 1.1), fashioning the transnational, culturally hybrid young woman as a key icon of an emerging Shanghai-based cosmopolitanism. As in all of the magazine's issues, the text on this cover showcase its two titles – its Chinese one (良友/*Liang You*), whose large characters serve as the primary logo in the upper left corner, and its English one (*The Young Companion*), which is featured separately and prominently above the issue number and date (No.

²² “Gu Zheng, “From Propaganda to Post-Photography: Chinese Photography in the Last Three Quarter Century,” *Visual Cultural and Social Changes: Fudan-LSE Global Media Communication Program*, course reader, Fall 2009, 1. [Translated into English Chinese and excerpted from introduction to art exhibition catalog.]. The *Young Companion* produced one additional publication, in 1946, after it ceased publication during the Sino-Japanese War in 1941. By the mid-1930s, the monthly *Young Companion* (whose inception pre-dated the United States' *Life* by ten years) had become almost completely bilingual (in Chinese and English) and claimed to have the widest circulation around. A promotional blurb to potential advertisers reads, “Enjoying a circulation of 400,000...besides being popular in all provincial capitals, big cities, commercial ports and inland towns, *The Young Companion* also finds many readers in the straits settlements and other parts of the world, being treasured by all Overseas Chinese.” See advertising promotional in *Young Companion* 125 (February 1937): n.p.

34, January 1929), also written in English. The *Young Companion*'s use of two titles reveals the common trend of integrating English – the language of Shanghai's British and American colonial occupiers – into the city's popular culture, which intimates an assimilationist position regarding Shanghai's semi-colonialism. Significantly, the English title, *Young Companion*, is not a literal translation of its Chinese counterpart, *Liang You*, which would more accurately translate as *Good Friend*. *Young Companion* carries its own distinctive meaning by swapping the adjective, *Good*, for *Young*. The concept of *youth* (so exalted during the *New Culture Movement*) is here presented as quasi-coded in an English-language title, rewarding bilingual readers with a double meaning, while also implying that *Young*, and Western, is synonymous with *Good*.

The cover's various fonts combine multiple cultural and temporal references. For instance, nearly mirroring the magazine's issue number and month written in English are its Chinese translations. Following traditional Chinese conventions, these translations are written vertically and from right to left in a quasi-calligraphic style (seen especially in the connectedness of strokes in the first character, *zhen*, which translates into *first*, for *zhen yue/first month*, meaning *January*). This more traditional Chinese style of handwriting is juxtaposed against the printed text at the cover's bottom, which still reads from right to left, but in a single line, thus blending the traditional Chinese writing convention (right to left, up to down) with a horizontal one, which was both relatively new, and Western influenced. The line of bold, red characters articulate the magazine's publication information in a style best described as *art deco*, because of the streamlined, highly geometricized, and symmetrical forms of the characters.²³ Each character

²³ For more information on the development of art deco in Shanghai-based graphics, see Ellen Johnston Laing, "Art Deco and Modernist Art in Chinese Calendar Posters," in *Visual Culture in Shanghai: 1850s-1930s*, ed. Jason C. Kuo (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2007). For a more general overview of the development of art deco in Shanghai, especially in regards to architecture, see Er Dongqiang (Deke Erh) and Tess Johnston, *Shanghai Art Deco* (Hong Kong: Old China Hand Press, 2006).

is designed differently, integrating hollow circles and semi-circles, bold rectangles set at unique angles, thin parallel lines, and in some instances (like at the bottom right part of *You*), small looped flourishes. The title/logo, *Liang You*, also read in a single line from right to left and printed in bold, red characters outlined in white, presents a third form of script, a hybrid form of Chinese calligraphy and modern graphic design, whose development was specific to Shanghai's booming Republican-Era printing and design industries. This hybridity, defined by the fonts' combining of stylistic, cultural, and temporal references, characterized the entire *Young Companion* cover, and especially its featured star.

Anna May Wong, while ethnically Chinese, was born an American citizen in Los Angeles' Chinatown. She highlights this dual identity, autographing her cover portrait, "Orientially yours," (in English) and using both her English and Chinese names – Anna May Wong and 黄柳霜/Huang Liushuang, which translates as (surname) *Yellow*, and (given name) *Willow Frost*. In signing her Chinese name, Wong follows traditional Chinese conventions, writing the characters from right to left, and placing her surname before her given name. Wong's cultural identity was more than double (American and Chinese), as her profession as a Hollywood actress demanded that she travel internationally. Inside this *Young Companion* issue, a spread featuring Wong tells readers, "The cover girl...is now in Berlin starring in many pictures. The photographs shown here were sent in by her courtesy."²⁴ This information emphasizes Wong's ability to circulate transnationally, not only physically, but also via the modern media of photography and film. Wong's identity could be understood as both fluid (able

²⁴ Spread on Anna May Wong, *Liang You/Young Companion* 34 (January 1929): 25.

to inhabit multiple cultures), and liminal (existing in between cultures, rather than belonging to any one), which made her, by Shanghai standards, both cosmopolitan and modern.²⁵

Embodying the quintessential *modeng* (modern, fashionable) woman, Wong sports the flapper hairstyle that was in vogue internationally during the 1920s-30s: a bob with thick bangs cut straight across her forehead. Her hands, adorning golden and pearlescent rings, and her sharply manicured nails, are prominently integrated into the image; one rests on her face, while the other is held up to her chest. Paired with wrists clad in shiny gold bracelets, these hands exude opulence, while their positioning suggests the source of Wong's wealth – herself. Combined with a straightforward gaze, Wong's hands and especially the pointed index finger in the image's foreground, exude confidence, communicating that she is at the center of her world, a self-sufficient young woman, heir to her own self-earned riches. Material wealth and individual consumer power, which, in late 1920s China, was most closely associated with the affluent foreign-occupied districts of Shanghai, are here proudly displayed. Through Wong's bejeweled body, magazine readers were able to catch a glimpse of the materialism that increasingly defined the more prosperous neighborhoods and shopping districts in 1920s-30s Shanghai.

Wong wears three distinctive garments. A shawl, probably silk as indicated by its sheen, appears draped over her left shoulder. Beneath this, she seems to be wearing a 旗袍/*qipao* (traditional Chinese dress), judging by its high neckline and the gold piping that extends diagonally across the right hand side of her chest. This piping recurs around the garment's sleeve, barely visible below the elbow of Wong's right forearm. Closer to her right wrist, a third garment appears: a blouse with a distinctive spotted print. This blouse was likely worn under the

²⁵ Anna May Wong was also notoriously typecast, as well as discriminated against for being either “too Asian,” or “not Asian enough.” For additional information on Wong in relationship to identity politics, see Karen Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

qipao, not normally done in China, adding an additional unusual twist to the already eccentric mixing of patterns, styles, and cultural references. Together, Wong's clothing, hairstyle, and accessories marked a fashion characterized by material wealth, and cultural and temporal hybridity.

In 1943, the Shanghainese author Zhang Ailing (1920-1995), known for her short stories and novels about bourgeois life in Republican-Era Shanghai, published a short article entitled, "Chinese Life and Fashions," which helps to illuminate the social significance of Wong's fashion as pictured on the *Young Companion*.²⁶ In her article, Zhang identifies three chief characteristics defining the major shift from Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) fashion to the *modern* fashion of China's Republican Era, all of which can be seen within Wong's cover star image. The first way in which modern fashion breaks from traditional fashion, Zhang notes, is through the streamlining of details, defined not as the elimination of details, but as the elimination of *useless* details (such as intricate designs on the bottom of women's shoes which were popular during the Qing Dynasty), and the privileging of details with a *purpose* (defined through their ability to enhance a woman's body). "In modern hats and dresses," Zhang writes, "the details always have a point – to bring out the color of the eyes, to create the illusion of a bosom, to lengthen, to shorten, to call attention to the waist, to annihilate the hips, etc."²⁷ For Zhang, the modern woman is the woman who flaunts her details publicly as opposed to privately (as would be the case with the intricate designs on the bottom of shoes covering bound feet during the Qing Dynasty).²⁸

²⁶ Zhang Ailing, "Chinese Life and Fashions" (1943), reprinted in *Lianhe wenxue (Unitas)*, 3, 5 (1987) (Special issue on Eileen Chang): 65-71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁸ The *qipao* is the quintessential signifier of this streamlining, and of modernity in fashion. Having grown out of traditional court dress, the modern *qipao* existed of far less material, and was in fact, intended to be constructed

Such *purposeful* details abound in Wong's *Young Companion* image. The gold piping on her *qipao*, for instance, brightens the actress's already bright skin. While a more traditional *qipao* would only have a single band of piping, Wong's version has at least four, creating a much thicker detail along the chest, which might have, in Zhang's words, helped "to create the illusion of a bosom."²⁹ While the piping detail is multiplied, it is simultaneously streamlined. More traditional piping would often include intricate designs, such as loops that formed flowers or the Chinese characters for words like happiness and longevity. The piping on Wong's dress, however, is strictly rectangular, with no excess flourishes.

Secondly, Zhang points to modern Chinese fashion's allowance of the form to be determined by the human body. Insinuated in this point is the idea that modern women have more control over their own bodies, are able to expose certain parts more freely, and are thus less submissive.³⁰ For Zhang, these new freedoms in fashion were to be understood as signs, not only of shifting gender roles, but of broader societal transformations defining post-1911 China. For example, Zhang theorizes that the "playful" shortening of sleeves, which allowed for women to expose their forearms publicly, was indicative of the youthful idealism that characterized intellectual life in early Republican-Era China. She offers as an example the "Trumpet Sleeve," a "breezy" and "fluttering" sleeve with a wide opening that stops just under the elbow.³¹ On the

entirely from one whole, single piece of fabric. For additional information, see *The Evergreen Classic – Transformation of the Qipao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of History, 2010), exhibition pamphlet.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ In contrast, Zhang discusses the traditional fashions of the preceding Qing Dynasty in the following passage: "Under those layers of clothing, the ideal Chinese female, petite and slender, with sloping shoulders and a hollow chest, made herself pleasantly unobtrusive, one of the most desirable qualities in a woman. History shows that even the more spectacular virtues – hacking off an arm, for instance, when it was accidentally seen by a stranger in its entirety – though much eulogized by the vulgar, were never quite approved by the intelligentsia, for a woman should not attract too much attention or get her name tarnished in the steamy breath of men," Ibid. 65.

³¹ Ibid., 70.

cover of the *Yong Companion*, Wong appears to be wearing a *qipao* with a “Trumpet Sleeve,” indicating the modern woman’s freedom of bodily exposure. Yet, Wong keeps her forearm covered with an undershirt, probably a Western-style blouse, which also connects the modernity of her fashion to its Western details. Zhang points to Western influence as the final key factor in defining the shift to modern fashion in China, arguing that “society girls” and “professional beauties” indiscriminate appropriation of all things foreign became the chief “sign of modernity” in 1920s-30s China, and especially Shanghai.³²

As pictured on the January 1929 issue of *Young Companion*, Wong, through her integration of Western accessories, including a shawl and blouse worn under a *qipao* with streamlined, “purposeful” piping detail, and her breezy, confident nature, as insinuated by her posture, gaze, hand gestures, and “Trumpet Sleeve,” emerges as an icon of 1920s-30s Chinese modernity. Furthermore, through the actress’s culturally hybrid identity, evidenced by her international travel, American citizenship, and Chinese ethnicity, Wong stands out as a quintessentially cosmopolitan figure.

The actress’s complex hybrid identity stirred great interest within the United States, China, and Europe. In July 1928, shortly before the *Young Companion* published Wong on its cover, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin published a short article on the actress, who he had interviewed while she was in Berlin (1892-1940).³³ The tone and choice of language of his article, “Interview with Anna May Wong: A Chinoiserie from the Old West,” betray Benjamin’s combined infatuation with, and exotification of Wong. He begins his article, “May Wong—the name sounds colorfully embroidered, powerful and light as the diminutive chopsticks that

³² Ibid.

³³ Walter Benjamin, “Gespräch mit Anne May Wong: Eine Chinoiserie aus dem Alten Westen,” [Interview with Anna May Wong: A Chinoiserie from the Old West] in *Die Literarische Welt* 4, no. 27 (July 6, 1928): 213.

constitute it, which unfurl into odorless blossoms like full moons in a bowl of tea.”³⁴ Here, Benjamin’s reference to imagery associated with traditional Chinese culture – “embroidery,” “chopsticks,” “flower tea” – is paired with words that suggest subservience, such as “diminutive” and “odorless.” Such language, which recurs throughout the article, highlights Wong’s Chinese ethnicity, while to a certain extent infantilizing the actress.

Describing Wong’s manner of answering his interview questions, Benjamin draws an allusion to the two playing on a swing set. He writes, “May Wong turns question-and-answer into a swing set: she lays herself back and flies up, plunges down, flies up, and it seems as though from time to time I give her a push. She laughs, that’s it.”³⁵ Here, Benjamin’s description likens Wong to a frolicsome child, while he positions himself, as swing pusher, paternalistically.

Despite Benjamin’s repeated references to Wong’s *Chineseness* and child-like identity, the article simultaneously reveals the actress’s own desire to transcend such fixed categories. Benjamin reports Wong’s frustration with being so frequently typecast as an immature party girl. “I don’t want to play flappers forever,” he quotes the actress as saying, “I prefer mothers. Once already at fifteen, I played a mother. Why not? There are so many young mothers.”³⁶ Significantly, Wong’s predilection for maternal roles does not clash with youth; she sees the two as co-existing. By referencing young mothers, the actress problematizes the conceit of youth as childlike, playful, and submissive, as it functions in Benjamin’s article, reminding readers that not only diminutive girls inhabit the terrain of youth. Wong’s embodiment of youth is more closely aligned with the way the concept proliferated throughout the literature of the *New*

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Anna May Wong quoted in Benjamin, “Gespräch mit Anne May Wong,” 213.

Culture Movement, and within the pages of the *Young Companion*; youth, in these cases, was not equated with submissiveness, but rather with empowerment, a cosmopolitan outlook (implied by the *Young Companion*'s English language title), and the uniquely modern ability to be *in fashion*, to fully occupy the present, and thus help shape the future. In flexing the agency of youth, as well as a culturally fluid identity, Wong constituted an ideal icon of Shanghai's emerging cosmopolitan modernity.

While Benjamin's article tends to fantasize Wong's *Chineseness*, emphasized through recurrent references to traditional Chinese motifs, other descriptions of the actress, particularly those related to her clothing, betray the difficulty of identifying her in culturally homogeneous terms. Just after the swing set passage, Benjamin writes of Wong's dress,

Her dress would not be at all out of place in such playground games: dark blue coat and skirt, light blue blouse with yellow cravat over—it makes you wish you knew a line of Chinese poetry about it. She has always worn this outfit, for she was born not in China but in Chinatown, in Los Angeles. When her roles call for it, though, she readily dons old national attire. Her imagination works more freely in it. Her favorite dress was cut from her father's wedding jacket; she wears it sometimes around the house.³⁷

While this passage expresses Benjamin's wish to find a poetic Chinese translation for his own description, it also reveals the impossibility of categorizing Wong using a fixed notion of national identity. She exists somewhere between, or outside of, both her *Chineseness* and *Americanness*, as signaled by her fashion allegiances that span both Western and Chinese conventions.

Both Zhang Ailing's and Benjamin's articles shed light on Wong's stylization on the 1929 cover of *Young Companion*. This *Young Companion* cover, through its picturing of a modern woman, mixture of cultural references, and showcasing of streamlined, liberated, and

³⁷ Benjamin, "Gespräch mit Anne May Wong," 213.

Western-influenced fashions, articulates the central tenets of a cosmopolitan model of modernity that was emerging with such great force in Shanghai during the 1920s-30s.

Up until 1937, the year of the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the *Young Companion* covers all followed a similar format, combining varied backgrounds with portraits of young Chinese women, models or actresses, who were usually pictured from the chest-up, although sometimes they were shown in full body.³⁸ These covers functioned like collages, combining varied graphics with images, photographic tinting, and decorative text, including the magazine's title and taglines. Collage, in fact, was a chief defining feature of the *Young Companion*, both in terms of its content, which combined coverage of a variety of topics, as well as the magazine's unique layout.

Inside each issue, the *Young Companion* often featured numerous photomontages. One two-page spread entitled, "Exquisite Beauty Reflects the Health of Sport-Loving Girls" (Figure 1.2) combined a shot of a large loop of bare-legged bodies, fanned out in synchronized sit-up postures, with images of four individual women, each on a motorbike, horse, bleachers and ladder.³⁹ Captions like "You'll see that she can ride," and "Charm of a girl, strength of a sailor," epitomize the strong sexual undertones of Shanghai's modern, liberated woman as promoted in new media like the *Young Companion*. A number of photomontages specifically about Shanghai depicted the city as an exciting patchwork of urban stimuli, of which the modern woman reigned

³⁸ As Leo Ou-fan Lee has observed, *Young Companion*'s picturing of a single woman as cover star may have come from the convention of late Qing dynasty newspapers, which featured "famous flowers," or courtesans, on their covers. See Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 65.

Up until 1937, each issue of *Young Companion* featured a young female model on the cover, often a movie starlet, dressed in the most current fashions, either a Western-style dress or, more frequently, a *qipao* – the Chinese dress popular in Shanghai in those days. By 1937, when China was on the brink of war with Japan, the magazine increasingly gave priority to stories on Chinese military operations. In these years, soldiers and generals, including Jiang Kaishek and others, replaced the young women as cover stars.

³⁹ "Exquisite Beauty Reflects the Health of Sport-Loving Girls," *Young Companion* 85 (February 15, 1934): 26-27.

supreme. A spread entitled “Intoxicated Shanghai” (Figure 1.3) combined a spattering of modern urban signifiers. Here, a woman sitting in a fashionable *qipao* with crossed legs dominates a backdrop comprised of a setback skyscraper (Shanghai’s tallest building, the international Park Hotel), the British-run racetrack, a jazz band, and a poster for the movie King Kong.⁴⁰ Another spread of a recurring segment entitled “Outline of Shanghai” (Figure 1.4) showcased the city’s electric lights, jazz musicians, a newspaper boy hawking the newly established mass media, a motorcar, and art deco architecture.⁴¹ The accompanying caption, “Where electricity goes mad,” hints at the exuberance, and sometimes hysteria that characterized Shanghai’s fast-paced urban development during these years. A subsequent “Outline of Shanghai,” under the heading *Such is Shanghai (Ruci Shanghai)* (Figure 1.5) featured the city’s foreign settlements, and articulated Shanghai’s unique multicultural layers as represented by a Turkish bathhouse, a Chinese bamboo fair, a Jewish Mansion (the Sassoon Mansion of industrialist Victor Sassoon), a British bank, a German restaurant, a Czechoslovakian shoemaker, Spanish bathers, an Italian steamship, an American movie, Japanese women, Indian policemen, Russian dancing girls, and a Dutch Inn.⁴² In both form and content, the *Young Companion* uniquely reflected the kaleidoscopic nature of 1920s-30s Shanghai.⁴³

⁴⁰ “Intoxicated Shanghai,” *Young Companion* 85 (February 15, 1934): 14-15.

⁴¹ “Outline of Shanghai,” *Young Companion* 87 (April 15, 1934): 24-25.

⁴² “Such is Shanghai,” *Young Companion* 89 (June 15, 1934): 20-21. Coincidentally, the Dutch Inn is also featured in the montage in Yuan Muzhi’s *Street Angel*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴³ The *Young Companion*, while celebrating the cultural diversity of modern, cosmopolitan Shanghai, was not without a critical edge. The magazine maintained an ambivalent relationship to the imported Western products, rising merchant class, and foreign imperialism that had come to characterize semi-colonial Shanghai in the 1920s-30s. On the one hand, the *Young Companion* promoted modern commodity culture, giving ample space to advertisers introducing foreign goods, such as nail polish, deodorant, foreign-brand cigarettes, and Western-style hats. Yet, sometimes even these advertisements, despite the foreign goods they promoted, articulated clear anti-imperialist, especially anti-Japanese imperialist, sentiments. In an advertisement for the Victory Shanghai Hat Store, for example, a tagline running alongside the figure pictured reads, *Qingzhu kangzan shengli*, meaning “Celebrate the Victory of the War of Resistance Against Japan.” The advertisement for Shanghai Victory Hat Store was,

The magazine's photo-montage layouts coincided with the overall character of the magazine, which combined stories of great variety. Films, sports, fashion, music, art, architecture, science, domestic and international current events, and human-interest stories all commingled within the pages of the *Young Companion*. The texts were short, usually just one to two pages. Frequently images dominated the magazine, and texts would appear, often both in Chinese and English, as mere captions.

In line with its wide-ranging content, the *Young Companion*'s art coverage was sweeping. The magazine included stories on fine arts, architecture, performing arts, design, and photography, and featured Chinese and non-Chinese artists, and male and female artists working in a variety of styles, from traditional Chinese painting to nude photography to modern, Western-influenced abstraction. The magazine also devoted ample space to street photography, political cartoons, and revolutionary woodcuts. It provided information on local and international art exhibitions, emphasizing exhibitions of Chinese art held abroad, and especially highlighting Chinese artists, such as Pang Xunqin, discussed at length in the next section, who had studied art overseas. The *Young Companion*'s extensive coverage of Western-trained painters betrayed its prioritization not only of Western-influenced art, but of a broader culture that was distinctly cosmopolitan and fashionably *modeng/modern*.⁴⁴

significantly, published in the special final victory celebration issue of *Young Companion*, published four years after the penultimate issue and after China's victory over Japan in WWII. See *Young Companion* 172 (October 10, 1945): n.p. Nonetheless, even as early as 1934, the magazine provided coverage of a nation-wide movement to boycott foreign goods, and buy Chinese goods, *Young Companion* 87 (April 15, 1934): 9-10. In a 1935 issue, a *Young Companion* staff writer asks under the heading, "Whither, Movies of Today?," "When the American pictures are busy with dances, songs, and all sorts of ecstasies, follies and intoxications, the Chinese are watching them with a sigh. We can have nothing of the kind. In our pictures, if truth they represent, what else could they reveal save life's gloomy side – poverty, starvation and death?" *Young Companion* 86 (March 15, 1934): 30-1. Other stories emphasized national pride, such as a story of the same year on the construction of a bridge, applauded as an "all Chinese project," *Young Companion* 72 (December 30, 1932): n.p.

⁴⁴ Beginning in 1934, the *Young Companion* devoted two full color pages to reproductions of artworks – one "Chinese" and one "Occidental" – by living Chinese artists in a section entitled, "The Young Companion's Series of Contemporary Paintings by Chinese Artists." The first "Occidental" style painting to be shown was Pang Xunqin's

Modern Art and Avant-Garde Experiments

China's earliest debates over modern art (*xiandai meishu*) began in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁴⁵ In China, the concept of modern art was inseparable from Western oil painting (*youhua*). During this time, when contrasted against traditional Chinese ink painting, referred to as *national painting* (*guohua*), Western oil painting, no matter the style, was considered as inherently new and modern. Diverging perspectives on what kind of styles of Western oil painting should be adopted were most clearly represented by the contrasting figures of artist Xu Beihong (1895-1953), a graduate from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris who promoted classical academic realism, and artist Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), who had also studied at the École des Beaux-Arts both in Dijon and Paris, and spent time living in Berlin, and who promoted post-impressionist styles, such as fauvism and expressionism.⁴⁶ These initial debates focused primarily on issues of style and were centered in art circles in Beijing, where Xu Beihong headed

Wujing (Landscape) (1934), which was featured along with a photograph and brief biography of the artist. See *Young Companion* 84 (January 30, 1934): 29. Other artworks by Pang Xunqin covered in the *Young Companion* were *Such is Shanghai*, which will be discussed in the following section, *In the Studio* (1931), *Spanish Dance* (1931), and *Houses* (1934). In addition, the *Young Companion* provided ample coverage of all of the Storm Society's exhibitions.

⁴⁵ The initial debates coalesced around the "Western Art" section of the "National Exhibition of Chinese Art" (1929) held in Nanjing, and its admonishment by Xu Beihong (1895-1953), a prominent painter who trained at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and who insisted on the superiority of Western academic realism. In an article entitled "Huo" ["Doubts"], published in the exhibition's literary supplement, *Meizhan Huikan [Art Exhibition Report]*, Xu Beihong chastised modernist painters Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and any of their Chinese followers for breaking with the great tradition of Western art, namely the classical insistence on artistic mimesis and "scientific" realism. The painter's remarks sparked off a number of responses by artists and literary figures, some of who sided with Xu Beihong and others who passionately defended modernist art. See Xu Beihong, "Doubts," *Meizhan Huikan* 5 (April 22, 1929): 1-2. "Doubts" provoked the response of Xu Zhimo (1895-1931), editor of *Meizhan Huikan*, who subsequently defended modernist painting in, "I Also Have Doubts," *Meizhan Huikan* 6 (April 25, 1929): 1-4. For a brief summary of these debates and an analysis of their relationship to greater questions of Pang Xunqin's and the Storm Society's activities, see Ralph Croizier "Post-Impressionists in Pre-War Shanghai: The Juelshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 135-154.

⁴⁶ Both newly established with the support of education reformer Cai Yuanpai (1868-1940), an active participant in the *New Culture Movement*, these institutions constituted (and continue to constitute today) the two most influential art schools in China. Hangzhou's proximity to Shanghai made for easy exchanges, and artists from the Academy often visited Shanghai, helping foster there a fertile ground for modernist experimentation.

the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and Hangzhou, where Lin Fengmian ran the East China Campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.⁴⁷

Beginning in the early 1930s, a number of younger, Shanghai-based artists and writers, many of them recently returned from studying art in Europe, or Japan, intervened into these debates by imagining modern art as a tool that would shape Chinese society, which was then on the brink of revolution. In the early 1930s, the young, Parisian-trained artist, Pang Xunqin, for example set about developing a Chinese avant-garde art scene in Shanghai, based on the principles of European avant-garde groups, like the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists.

Intentionally separating himself from the art academies in Beijing and Hangzhou, Pang Xunqin rejected a rare opportunity to meet with the influential Lin Fengmian, who would have had the power to secure the young artist a teaching post at his prestigious East China Campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. As Pang Xunqin recalled, he traveled to Hangzhou, the charming old capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) to meet with Lin Fengmian, who he was to be introduced to through a relative.⁴⁸ He walked up to the door of Lin Fengmian's impressive living compound, but just as he was about to knock, he changed his mind, and ran off to catch the next bus out of Hangzhou. Pang Xunqin would decide to move to Shanghai instead, what he had heard was the most modern of Chinese cities.⁴⁹ There he would establish an avant-garde art

⁴⁷ The capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the city of Hangzhou was located very near to Shanghai. This proximity allowed for easy exchanges, and artists from the Academy often visited Shanghai, helping foster there a fertile ground for modernist experimentation.

⁴⁸ Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang zou guo lai de* [*This is the way it happened/This is the path I traveled down*] (Beijing: Shenghua, douxin, xin he sanlian shudian, 2005), 119-20. Initially, Pang Xunqin chose instead to teach art to elementary school students in his hometown of Changshu in Jiangsu Province for a brief period in 1930. After moving to Shanghai later that year, he dug himself into debt trying to secure funds for the Storm Society, supported only by the odd portrait commission (which he loathed and considered outmoded by photography), the occasional sale, part-time teaching positions (i.e., at the Shanghai Art Academy) and free-lance advertising work. See Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*.

⁴⁹ Pang Xunqin had heard rumors of Shanghai's new literary activities and also of the city's growing modern art scene. One evening just before leaving France, he sat in a Chinese restaurant with two friends, the painter, Liu Haisu

collective, the *Storm Society* (1931-1935), the first of its kind in China, while striving to create an entirely new, modern art for China.⁵⁰ Similarly, a group of younger art students from the East China Campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, complaining of the “art for art’s sake” ethos of their school in Hangzhou, traveled in 1930 to Shanghai, which was then the center of a leftist, and communist underground. There they met with the *New Culture Movement* writer Lu Xun, who encouraged them to join the League of Left-Wing Artists (1930-1934), a collective devoted to bridging the gaps between art and life through the creation of modern cartoons and woodcut prints that could rally the Chinese populace to anti-imperialist revolution.

This section focuses on examples of modern art experiments like those led by Pang Xunqin and Lu Xun as they emerged from and in dialogue with Shanghai in the 1920s-30s. Examining three key artworks, *Such is Shanghai* by Pang Xunqin, *Avenue Joffre* by Cai Ruohong, and *Roar, China!* by Li Hua, I argue that Shanghai’s art world generated two primary models of Chinese modernity during this period: 1) a cosmopolitan modernity aligned with the popular fashion and print media of the era (as examined in the previous section), epitomized in *Such is Shanghai*, and the activities of Pang Xunqin’s art collective, the Storm Society, and 2) an

(1896-1994), and the art and literary critic Fu Lei (1908-1966), who were also sojourning in Paris at the time. They urged Pang Xunqin to go to Shanghai, the most *modern* of Chinese cities. Liu Haisu and Fu Lei gave Pang Xunqin the contact information of their Shanghai-based painter friend, Wang Jiyuan. Wang Jiyuan then suggested Pang Xunqin host a dinner to celebrate his arrival in Shanghai. In this way, Pang Xunqin was able to meet a number of the prominent artists living or passing through Shanghai at the time, among them the well known figures Zhang Daqian and Pan Yueling. Despite this insiders’ introduction to Shanghai’s small artists’ community, Pang Xunqin soon grew disenchanted. As previously stated, he was soon arrested by the French police, in conjunction with the Guomindang, for his activities with *Deux Mondes*. He also complained of the gross materialism in Shanghai and found that the public’s desires for Western commodities and fashions was deeply at odds with the overarching lack of interest in Western-style art. With very little chance of finding work and no audience for his modern painting, Pang Xunqin returned to his hometown of Changshu in Jiangsu and began studying Chinese art history and Chinese painting, scouring Ming and Qing dynasty art books his father had borrowed from the library. He also began working with ink, brush and paper, while simultaneously continuing to experiment with oil paints, even though he felt there was no audience let alone any market for this work. For a description of these early months just after Pang Xunqin had returned to China, see Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 118-120.

⁵⁰ Pang Xunqin and Ni Yide were also involved with *Moshe/Muse Society*, a broad-based group of modern, Western-style oil painters associated with Liu Haisu’s well-connected Shanghai Art School (Shanghai Meizhuan) that helped to financially support the smaller and more radical Storm Society.

anti-imperialist modernity epitomized in *Avenue Joffre* and *Roar, China!*, and in the activities of the League of Left-Wing Artists, spearheaded by revolutionary writer, Lu Xun. The section defines each model's distinctive political positions (the cosmopolitan model's ambivalent stance towards Shanghai's semi-colonialism and imported capitalism and the anti-imperialist model's revolutionary nationalism), and their primary aesthetic tactics (the cosmopolitan model's surrealism and collage and the anti-imperialist model's expressionistic realism). I further demonstrate how each model shared the goal of uniting art and life, and using art towards social criticism, which, I argue, was informed by the particular urban terrain of semi-colonial Shanghai.

Art – Towards a Cosmopolitan Model of Modernity: *Such is Shanghai*

In 1931, the artist Pang Xunqin, just returned to China after studying painting in France for five years, set up a studio on Rue Marcel Tillot in Shanghai's French Concession.⁵¹ That year, he created a watercolor bearing two titles, *Such is Shanghai (Ruci Shanghai)*, or, *The Riddle of Life (Rensheng De Yami)* (1931) (Figure 1.6). The watercolor integrates many of the skills Pang Xunqin had gained while living in Paris, including his translation abilities (he was fluent in French, reportedly more so than any of his other painter peers in China),⁵² as well as aesthetic tactics gleaned from the Surrealist artworks and writings he studied there, such as the transformation of everyday objects into occult symbols, the creation of an oneiric tableau through diaphanous, collage-like layering, and the utilization of the figure of the enigmatic woman as standing in for chances lost in the modern city. He incorporated all of these skills and tactics towards the production of a portrait of Shanghai as a multi-layered, conflicted site,

⁵¹ See Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 130.

⁵² In reflecting on her father's art practice, Pang Xunqin's daughter, Pang Tao, commented that Pang Xunqin's fluency in French set him apart from most all of his peers, even those who had studied in France. Pang Tao, interview by author, 6 September 2011, Beijing, audio recording, private residence and studio of Pang Tao, Beijing, China.

debunking its “East meets West” mythology, while formulating a critical model of cosmopolitan modernity.

Such is Shanghai reveals the artist’s familiarity with Latin-based languages, especially French, and with Western customs, as he chose to sign his name in its Romanized transliteration (also reversing the standard Chinese ordering of placing one’s surname before given name), signing Hiunkin Pang as opposed to using his Chinese name. Despite these nods to contemporary French culture, in which the young Pang Xunqin had just been immersed, the watercolor fashions a mythical landscape particular to Shanghai, the so-called “Paris of the East,” by layering imagery associated with its reputation as China’s most international, cosmopolitan, and vice-ridden city.

Of the young women pictured in *Such is Shanghai*, two are Chinese with Han features, and one is blonde and blue-eyed, possibly representing Shanghai’s many “White Russians,” some of who performed as dancing girls in the multiple cabaret clubs that were then popular in Shanghai. Atop the blonde’s head is a floral detail that bestows upon her a kind of kingly crown – collaging her into a king of hearts. The three women’s faces seem to appear and dissolve all at once. They might be dancing girls (common subject matter in Pang Xunqin’s oeuvre), movie starlets (icons of Shanghai’s booming film industry), or possibly prostitutes (nothing shocking in a city in which one in one-hundred thirty people were).⁵³ Here, we may find a clue in the flower

⁵³ “In 1934, a local Chinese newspaper estimated that Shanghai led the world’s cities in prostitution as a specialty: in London, one person in 960 was a prostitute, in Berlin one in 580, in Paris one in 481, in Chicago one in 430, in Tokyo one in 250, and in Shanghai, one in 130,” Rhoads Murphey referencing the newspaper, *Shun Pao* (December 3, 1934), in Rhoads Murphey, *Shanghai: Key to Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 7.

As early as 1894, the year in which author Han Bangqing (1856-1894) published *The Singsong Girls of Shanghai* (a popular novel comprised of vignettes featuring courtesans and their patrons in Shanghai’s pleasure quarters), fleeting trysts with the city’s available women, treated in *Such is Shanghai* through faces that almost disappear in a dream-like sequence, was one of the primary activities associated with Shanghai. Courtesans belonging to all classes of brothels and singsong houses in addition to unlicensed streetwalkers congregated in Shanghai’s foreign settlements. In the International Settlement (first run under British rule as the Foreign Settlement, established in

tucked behind the most prominent face in the foreground and by those petals clenched in the candle-lit fist in the painting's bottom left corner; flowers in Chinese visual culture and literature often suggested sexual availability by punning on the term *flower girl* (*huaniang*) – a Chinese euphemism for prostitute.⁵⁴

While evading fixed classifications, the women in *Such is Shanghai* are all made unmistakably *modern* (*modeng*) through up-to-date hairdos and fashionable make-up. Between the seductive faces of these pretty women emerges another – an opera performer in full make-up. So-called *painted faces* (*hualian*) such as these were usually associated with certain characters from Beijing Opera (*jingju*), but were also to be found in Shanghai's own brand of opera, *Hu Ju*, a theatrical form particular to the modernizing metropolis and one which played a key role in constructing the city's cosmopolitan identity.⁵⁵ These deceptive surfaces – made-up women and a “painted face” opera performer – alternate between covering over and being covered up by those blemishes of the city's underside.

1843 and then merged with the American Settlement in 1863) and the neighboring French Concession (established in 1848), Qing dynasty officials were exempt from the Chinese law that prohibited them from having liaisons with prostitutes. The French Concession, in particular, housed the largest population of prostitutes and had the highest concentration of “flowered opium dens,” houses that served opium and also sexual services. See Eva Hung, “The World of the Shanghai Courtesans,” addendum to *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai*, by Han Bangqing, first trans. Eileen Chang, ed. Eva Hung (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 538-9.

⁵⁴ Women pictured with flowers insinuating sexual availability had long been a leitmotif in the history of Chinese art, as seen, most closely to Pang Xunqin's time, in turn-of-the-twentieth century courtesan portraits, which were ubiquitous in Shanghai beginning in the late 1800s. For further discussion on the role the courtesan played in shaping Shanghai's visual culture and urban identity, see Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1911* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006). The boundaries between these categories of Shanghai's eminent female “types” were anyway fluid, as the city's famous *singsong girls*, for instance, were skilled entertainers, considered as courtesans more than prostitutes and on rare occasions were even employed by the city's flourishing film business, turned into onscreen fantasies. An example of this is director Yuan Muzhi's employment of well-known singsong girl, Zhou Xuan, as the lead actress in *Malu tianshi* (*Street Angel*) (1934), a film centering on the precarious role of young women in Shanghai, which will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

⁵⁵ As Shanghai swiftly developed in the early years of the 1900s, Chinese opera took on new iterations along with the city's regional development of *Hu Ju*, which also included “painted faced” characters. On the importance of Shanghaiese opera and theater performances in defining the city's cosmopolitan character, see Meng Yue, “The Rise of an Entertainment Cosmopolitanism,” in *Shanghai and the Edges of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 171-209.

Such is Shanghai also conjures the city's underground, gangster operated mahjong parlors, casinos and opium dens with a coin, a target and Western-style playing cards that sink lightly, just like the women's faces, into the watery recesses of the paper. The entire watercolor, furthermore, appears as if structured around a playing card's axis, with parallel symbols occupying its opposing corners; in the upper right corner, there is a hand grasping a deathly dagger, while a hand clutching a candle of light illuminates the watercolor's bottom left corner. Along with brothels and dance halls, game rooms, by the early 1930s, housed one of Shanghai's most characteristic and ubiquitous vices. The city's commercial gambling, like its prostitution, was said to be more rampant than in any other city in the world.⁵⁶ Existing between fantastical and nightmarish dreamscapes, the latter made manifest in a chain of bondage bordering the woman in the bottom right and the seemingly bloody dagger above, which looks as though it might be plunging into a dismembered body form, this watercolor characterizes Shanghai's new, foreign-influenced culture as sparkingly novel and enticing on one side and menacingly sinister on the other.

This kind of multi-layered consideration of Shanghai, and of the city's particular brand of modernity, would, in the 1940s, be echoed in the writings of sociologist Fei Xiaotong. Against the clichés of early twentieth century Shanghai as a "Paris of the East,"⁵⁷ Fei Xiaotong wrote,

⁵⁶ Murphey, *Shanghai: Key to Modern China*, 8.

⁵⁷ "Shanghai, sixth city of the World! / Shanghai, the Paris of the East! / Shanghai, the New York of the West!" So begins *All About Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1935), an English tour book published in 1935. These catchy comparative labels epitomize the city's unique position as *doubly (dis)located* between "East and West." For a fully theorized account of Shanghai's *doubly located* position, see Meng Yue's introduction to *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, which borrows these phrases from *All About Shanghai* for its own opening. Here, the sociologist argues that Shanghai's denizens eagerly consumed foreign products without producing their own, creating an imbalance with far-reaching effects on the rest of the non-industrialized country. Fei Xiaotong, "Village, Town, and City," 107. It must be noted that despite these imbalances, Shanghai did have its own thriving industries, key amongst them cotton textiles and that by the 1920s, a majority of the city's industrial enterprises were Chinese-owned. Still, as Murphey argues, Shanghai became "the outstanding symbol of the economic exploitation of China by Western commercialism, and...the principle reminder of China's unequal-treaty status with the Western powers. See Murphey, "Politics and Population," *Shanghai: Key to Modern China*, 15-28.

Modern metropolises are the products of industrialization, [but] a country which has not been industrialized cannot have urban centers like New York or London. The treaty port brought about the invasion of an industrialized economy into an economically inferior area...creating a peculiar community which should not be classed with modern urban centers.⁵⁸

Fei Xiaotong further disparagingly characterized semi-colonial Shanghai as a kind of economic “rat hole,” where the import and consumption of foreign goods far exceeded Chinese exports, creating an imbalance based on East/West trade relations. In considering Shanghai’s economy, Fei Xiaotong wrote,

The fact that treaty ports like Shanghai had for a long period a special political position as foreign settlements where Chinese power could not reach was no accident, since economically they were also separate from Chinese economy. On the one hand, they were a gate by means of which foreign goods could come in; on the other, they served as rat holes for dribbling away Chinese wealth...a community of consumers and not of producers.⁵⁹

Pang Xunqin’s *Such is Shanghai* visualizes this kind of “peculiar community,” picturing modern Shanghai as a dangerous landscape of illusions, a kind of economic “rat hole,” in which glimmers of fleeting beauty and quick financial success bleed into traces of violence, injustice, drugs, and love and money lost. In order to present this multi-layered portrait of the city, *Such is Shanghai* utilized palimpsestic layering and a collage-like composition in order to create a landscape that hovers somewhere between dream and nightmare.

Such is Shanghai was exhibited in a solo exhibition of Pang Xunqin’s works held in 1932 at the Chinese Art Students Society on Aimay Yuxian Road in the French Concession.⁶⁰ On the

⁵⁸ Fei Xiaotong, “Village, Town, and City,” in *China’s Gentry* (1948), ed. Margaret Park Redfield (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁰ Hardly a glamorous exhibition space, the student hall was located nearby the Society’s faculty dormitories, in which resided two of the artist’s closest colleagues and friends: Ni Yide, with whom he’d co-founded the Storm Society and Fu Lei, the art critic, writer and translator of European literature and theory whose own sojourn in Paris overlapped with Pang Xunqin’s during the last two years of the 1920s. The exhibition displayed a wide variety of Pang Xunqin’s works, including *Such is Shanghai* and *Such is Paris* and the figurative paintings, *Xibanya Wu*

occasion of the exhibition's opening, the art and literary critic Fu Lei (1908-1966) published an article entitled "Xunqin's Dream" (薰琴的梦/*Xunqin de meng*). The article theorized that artists like Pang Xunqin hold the unique ability to conjure deeply meaningful dreams, which exist outside of the "false dreams" of consumer society, and which can help shape an improved social environment:

The dreams of artists shape the environment, whereas the dreams of non-artists are false fantasies, shaped by our environment and beholden to everyday demands and distractions. We (non-artists) believe we are clearheaded and aware, but in reality we are seduced by today's current situation, blinded by materialism. Only artists [like Pang Xunqin] who are outside this contemporary [false] dream, fueled by materialism, can truly know reality.⁶¹

Fu Lei argued that, in utilizing all of life's everyday materials, Pang Xunqin constructed art and dreams that in turn created new realities, reshaping the world into a sort-of creatively charged utopia (极乐世界/*jile shijie*).⁶²

(*Spanish Dance*) and *Huashi Zhong (In the Studio)*, all from 1931. As both a solo artist's show and one with artworks for sale, this exhibition marked two kinds of art practices seldom before seen in China.

⁶¹ Fu Lei, "Xunqin de Meng" ["Xunqin's Dream"], in *Yishu Xunkan/L'Art* (September 1932), reprinted and illustrated in Pang Xunqin, *Wen Xuan Lun Yishu, Sheji, Meiyu, [Essays on Art, Design, Fine Arts Education]* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chu Ban Shi/Jiangsu Education Publishing House, 2007), 31. Fu Lei's article references a myriad of artists, musicians and philosophers, comparing their unique ability to dream in an unencumbered way with Pang Xunqin's mental and material exercises. The vast range of figures Fu Lei mentions – from Greek philosophers to Michelangelo to Beethoven to Debussy to Picasso – is reflective of the artistic landscape of 1920s-30s Shanghai, in which a torrent of art, music and related writings from the West were introduced all at once. Poor translations and willful exuberance for Western art currents spanning vast geographies and time periods often clouded the specificity of these references. This jumble of references offered a certain freedom – an ability to work outside of stylistic uniformity, medium specificity and unified collectivity. Perhaps this is what Pang Xunqin imagined for the Storm Society – a collective based not on any one unified style or media but on a shared openness towards experimentation and the embrace of a variety of foreign forms and avant-garde sentiments. Fu Lei argues that Pang Xunqin was able to make dreams and art out of all of life's materials and in doing so, gave shape and form to reality and to the world. He lists off the artist's myriad encounters with the stuff of dreams in Paris, "Old and new architecture, bewitching seductresses, colorful ethnic populations, cafes, dancing girls, salons, Jazz clubs, concerts, cinema, the Paulo, charming waitresses, annoying landladies, university students, laborers, metro stops, chimneys, the Eiffel Tower, Montparnasse, Les Halles, City Hall, used book stalls along the Seine, wafts of smoke, beer, port, Comedia, the old, the new, the ugly and the beautiful, sights and sounds, the ruins of ancient times, the arrogance of new civilizations, from Pliny to Josephine Baker," *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁶² In a poetic essay entitled, "Yishujia de Chun Meng" ["Artist's Spring Dream"], Ni Yide also writes of an artist's dream and of a world filled with art and poetry, what he too describes as a utopia. The word Ni Yide uses for utopia, however, is *wutuobang*, a transliteration from the Greek-rooted word Thomas More chose for the title of his novel,

However, for the art critic, this utopia is not entirely imaginary; rather, it is built from the tangible urban experiences available in a city like Shanghai.⁶³ Fu Lei wrote that Pang Xunqin, stimulated by all the urban enticements and repulsions around him, embraced these subjects towards the crafting of dreamlike cityscapes. But what kind of dream are we confronted with? The figure of the alluring woman takes center stage in *Such is Shanghai*, as well as in Fu Lei's essay. In "Xunqin's Dream," Fu Lei cites, amongst Pang Xunqin's many sources of inspiration,

Utopia (1550). Ni Yide's use of this transliteration is significant as there were already in existence two Chinese words, Fu Lei's *jilleshijie* (meaning Paradise derived from Buddhism) and *taohuayuan*, also meaning utopia, or a sort-of "perfect place," referencing the classical Chinese story, "Peach Blossom Spring" (421) by Tao Qian. Ni Yide's *wutuobang* thus reiterates the way Storm Society artists looked, perhaps idealistically, to Western forms – of language, artistic styles or principles of foreign avant-gardes – as tools for *remaking* their world. See Ni Yide, "Yishujia de Chun Meng" ["Artist's Spring Dream"] in *Yishu Suibi* [*Art Essay*] (Shanghai: Wenyi Chufangshi, 1999), 21-23.

⁶³ Material drawn from Pang Xunqin's everyday urban surrounds shows up not only in the previously discussed *Such is Shanghai*, but in its sibling watercolor and Parisian counterpart, *Ruci Bali* (*Such is Paris*) (1931) created that same year. These two works share many motifs, like references to dancing girls (made more explicit in *Such is Paris* through the linguistic signifiers, BAL – the beginning of "baller," French for "to dance" and NCING, the end of the English word "dancing"), decorative harlequin patterning, playing cards and close-up portraits – fleeting faces representing various types of the crowd. Additional fragments of language, *HOT* and *CAF* (the beginning of "cafe"), float inside the picture plane, again betraying Pang Xunqin's familiarity with Picasso and Braque's cubist collages, whose incorporation of words and parts of words as well as flattened, overlapping forms informed both *Such is Paris* and *Such is Shanghai*. *Such is Paris* pictures a modern, industrial and specifically Western object; the bottom right quadrant features an upside down urinal, most likely a tribute to Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) well known "readymade," Fountain (1917), whose failed attempt at being exhibited in the Society of the Independents' "un-juried" exhibition in New York made waves in the Parisian art world, through which Pang Xunqin moved. While Pang Xunqin advocated an embrace of Dada's rebellious spirit, he never went so far as to exhibit a "readymade" ready-made. He did, however, draw from base, everyday material in figuring both *Such is Paris* and *Such is Shanghai*. In *Such is Paris*, Pang Xunqin also presents well-known figures of the Parisian scene like the popular icon Josephine Baker, a reference Fu Lei makes in his essay. It is revealing that Pang Xunqin decided to include bits of language, culled from French and English in *Such is Paris* but not in *Such is Shanghai*. As a young artist seeking to rebel against tradition, Pang Xunqin played with the linguistic experiments of cubist collage in his portrait of Paris. He would do the same in a watercolor, *Mu Yu Zi* (*Mother and Child*) (c.1925-1929), he made while living in Paris. This watercolor speaks to Pang Xunqin's studies of European avant-garde painting as he combines the fractured geometries of so-called analytic cubism with Futurist emphases on dynamism and Surrealist dream-like distortion. In *Mother and Child*, he signs his given name in Chinese and adds an inscription in French: *C'est la destin nous fait connaitre l'eu al l'autre...* [*It is destiny that we met one another*]... The work reads like a love letter, departing from the conventions of Western painting in its inscription. But in returning to his homeland and to local subject matter, Pang Xunqin would leave language out of the frame entirely, in turn constituting a more radical departure from Chinese painting traditions. Not only is the Chinese language, unlike any other extant language, pictorially based and therefore inherently linked to images and visual culture, but Chinese painting is rooted in and closely linked to calligraphy, traditionally considered to be the most elevated of all the art forms. Even Chinese ink paintings of subjects like birds, flowers or landscapes more often than not include language in the form of poetry, and/or imperial inscriptions and seal stamps verifying collector's identities. While the inclusion of language in painting broke the rules in Paris, its exclusion in Shanghai did the same.

“yaoyan de monu.” This term, which finds its best English translation as “bewitching seductress,” carries the connotations of an attractive woman who is also fraudulent and deceptive. More than metaphor, this figure, for Pang Xunqin, seems to provide a core definition of Shanghai – an enticing, seductive surface of deceptive charms.

Pang Xunqin’s personal relationship with Shanghai’s cosmopolitan commercialism was indeed deeply ambivalent. In writing his memoirs, the artist expressed his personal disdain for the crude materialism rampant in 1930s Shanghai, and his disappointment over the lack of a bohemian culture, like that in Paris, and his frustration over the dearth of a sustainable interest in modern, Western art. When he initially moved back to China, Pang Xunqin wore Western-style suits and hats, as he did in Paris. However, as he realized that the appetite amongst Shanghai’s denizens for Western fashions and commodities clashed with their general disinterest in Western art, he swapped his suits and hats for simple, traditional-style Chinese robes.⁶⁴ After that, Pang Xunqin noticed how people in the city looked down on him.⁶⁵ What stands out in Pang Xunqin’s accounts is that the majority of those who spurned him were his fellow countrymen, Chinese people, including those doing service jobs, and those elite traveling within the circles of well-to-do foreigners. For example, he recalls a time he attended a party hosted by a wealthy American art collector living in Shanghai, when everyone, especially those Chinese servants and guests, shot him disdainful glances until the collector introduced him as her guest of honor. In describing how it had been the Chinese people in Shanghai, not the foreigners, who would look down on you the most for not having fashionable clothes or for not speaking fluent English, Pang Xunqin laments:

⁶⁴ Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 118.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

Shanghai! Shanghai! For many years in France I had also worn lousy things, but never had people looked down on me as they did in Shanghai. If you go to the movie theater in Shanghai and you can't speak English, they will refuse to sell you tickets, exclaiming "You can't understand foreign films!"⁶⁶

For Pang Xunqin, this shallow snobbery defined the city.

In his art, he aimed to expose Shanghai's superficiality, while moving beyond its perfunctory identity as a site of harmonious "East meets West" encounters. Exposing the trickery of Shanghai's deceptive surfaces by layering imagery associated with a wide range of everyday references defined a crucial aspect of Pang Xunqin's wider approach to crafting an art that could help shape China's changing society in the 1930s. This approach is further elucidated by Pang Xunqin's writings, as well as those of his partners, with whom he aimed to establish an avant-garde art collective that insisted on individualism, and the unification of art and life.

In 1931, the same year he painted *Such is Shanghai*, Pang Xunqin, together with the Tokyo-educated painter and writer, Ni Yide (1901-1970), an avid translator and promoter of Surrealist texts, formed the Storm Society, conceived of as a radical avant-garde art collective that aimed to "hit the rotten art of contemporary China with a powerful wave."⁶⁷ The language of

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Wang Jiyuan quoted in Zhu Boxiong and Chen Ruilin, *Zhongguo xihua wushi nian, 1898-1949 [Fifty Years of Western Painting in China]* (Beijing: People's Art Publishing House, 1989), 302. The Storm Society grew out of Ni Yide's and Pang Xunqin's mutual dissatisfaction with the contemporary art scene in early 1930s Shanghai. Both figures criticized those artists who un-inventively copied great masters' works, as well as those Chinese artists who, like them, had studied European art and literature abroad, but who they felt simply reiterated Western academic styles with little innovation. The Storm Society came to comprise a group of young artists influenced by Western modernist and avant-garde approaches to art.

By the 1920s, there were already a number of schools, notably Liu Haisu's prominent private art school, Shanghai Art Academy (Shanghai Meizhun), and societies in Shanghai that promoted Western-style art education. Amongst them was the Société des Deux Mondes, of which Pang Xunqin had briefly been a member. However, there was a relatively small group of artists in Shanghai who had actually studied abroad and who were skilled in Western-style techniques, and even less collectors or art audiences interested in Western painting. Even fewer people were aware of or interested in the uniquely avant-garde goals of the Storm Society, who cited the Futurists, Dadaists, Fauvists and Surrealists in their cry to form a new art world in China. Nonetheless, a growing number of Chinese art students were coming into contact with European modernism and/or classical Western art traditions, mostly through the pages of imported Japanese art journals, and they were eager to experiment with what they perceived as these freshly non-Chinese, non-traditional art currents. The original members of the Storm Society included founders, Ni Yide and Pang Xunqin, Li Baoquan, Wang Jiyuan, Zhou Duo, Duan Pingyou, Zeng Zhiliang, Yang Qiuren, and

the Storm Society's manifesto betrays the group's rebellious spirit, their disgust with the current state of Chinese art and their embrace of the spirit of European avant-gardes such as the Futurists (established in Italy in 1909) and the Surrealists (established in France in 1924) towards their goal of creating a radical new art world in China:

The air around us is too still, as mediocrity and vulgarity continue to envelop us. Countless morons are writhing around and countless shallow minds are crying out. Where are the creative talents of the past? Where are the glories of our history? Impotence and sickness are what prevail throughout the entire artistic community today. No longer can we remain content in such a compromised environment. No longer can we allow it to breathe feebly until it dies. Let us rise up! With our raging passion and iron intellect, we will create a world interwoven with color, line and form!

We acknowledge that painting is by no means an imitation of nature, nor a rigid replication of the human body. With our entire being, we will represent, unconcealed, our bold and daring spirit. We believe that painting is by no means the slave of religion, nor a mere illustration of literature. We will freely, and cohesively, construct a world of pure shapes. We detest all the old forms and colors, as well as all mediocre and rudimentary techniques. We will represent the spirit of a new era with new techniques. Since the beginning of the 20th century, a new atmosphere has emerged in the European artistic community, comprised of the outcries of the Fauvists, the twists of the Cubists, the vehemence of the

Yang Taiyang. Later, Zhang Xian and female artist, Qiu Ti, who would marry Pang Xunqin, joined the group. For a succinct account of the Storm Society, see Ralph Croizier "Post-Impressionists in Pre-War Shanghai: The Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China" in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 135-154. The group maintained its headquarters at Pang Xunqin's French Concession studio and two years later, they tried and failed to establish an experimental art academy there. The Storm Society's academy was a gamble. In 1933, someone under the title of Secretary of Storm Society, most likely Pang Xunqin, wrote a letter to the French Consulate General of Shanghai, notifying him of the group's intentions to open an art academy in the Concession. Coincidentally, the French General Consulate, Edgard Napoleon Auguste Koechlin, collected a number of Pang Xunqin's works. See Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 123-125. In French, he wrote, "Dear Mr. General Consulate, I have the honor of letting you know that our society will found an academy of painting at our social center, 90 Rue Marcel Tillot." Storm Society letter printed in *Le Paris de l'Orient* [*The Paris of the Orient*], exhibition catalog (Paris, Albert Kahn Museum, 2001), reprinted in Lynn Pan, *Shanghai Style: Art and Design Between the Wars* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2008), 87. The brief letter goes on to explain that the academy would be free, modeled after Parisian salons and academies and that artists who were both members and non-members of the Storm Society planned to use the space to study nudes, still lifes and all other genres of drawing, sketching, watercolor and painting. The academy was to be styled specifically after the Parisian academies and salons that Pang Xunqin had attended, the Académie Julien and especially the large, public, haphazard studio, La Grande-Chaumière, where he ended up after leaving Julien for his dissatisfaction with its conservative academic training. Within this cosmopolitan-minded collective, there existed diverging views on the role art should play. Li Baoquan, for instance, insisted on "art for art's sake," while Pang Xunqin himself argued for "art for the sake of self-expression." See Li Baoquan, "Wei Yishu Er Yishu" ["Art for Art's Sake"], in *Yishu Yuekan* [*Art Monthly*] (January 1933), and Pang Xunqin, *Wen Xuan Lun Yishu, Sheji, Meiyu*, 6-10.

Dadaists and the cravings of the Surrealists...It is time for a new atmosphere to emerge throughout the 20th-century artistic community of China. Let us rise up! With our raging passion and iron intellect, we will create a world interwoven with colour, line and form!⁶⁸

The manifesto reacted to what the Storm Society members, and especially Pang Xunqin and Ni Yide, saw as stagnation in the prominent Chinese art practices of the day. While old masters, such as China's most famed calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303-361), were celebrated for their spontaneous freehand calligraphy, many Chinese art institutions had, by the early twentieth century, developed in a way that required art students to copy these masters endlessly, often leading to, as the manifesto diagnosed, "mediocrity" and "shallow minds." The manifesto also articulates a disapproval of the importation of classical Western notions of art as defined by mimesis, and art made exclusively in the service of religion.

In addition to the extremity of the language used and the references to Western avant-garde currents, what stands out in the Storm Society manifesto is the proposal to directly link art and the world: "We will create a world interwoven with colour, line and form!" Here, Ni Yide makes claims about fashioning the world through artistic praxis. Aligning their socially oriented goals with those of the European avant-garde groups their manifesto references, the Storm Society thus makes a passionate cry to unite art and life. In fact, Ni Yide and Pang Xunqin went even further than many of their Western counterparts by calling not only for the bridging of art and life, but for the *remaking* of a new world through their art. In this way, the Storm Society sounded the call of revolution.

Using equally revolutionary and even more militaristic language, art theorist and Storm Society collaborator Li Baoquan wrote of the group:

⁶⁸ Ni Yide, "Juelanshe Xuanyan" ["Storm Society Manifesto"], *Yishu Xunkan/L'Art* 1, 5 (October 11, 1932): 8. *Yishu Xunkan/L'Art* was a short-lived art journal (1932-1933) founded by Ni Yide and sponsored by Moshe/Muse Society.

They unite together...use their combined strength to forge ahead.
Their goal is to create a *Xintiandi* [*New Heaven and Earth*]
Their *Xintiandi* – under the flag of a new, modern 20th century Chinese art...
They are not only a tide or a wave.
They are a flood! ...
Of all the warriors of the Storm Society, some are veteran teachers, some
just came back from France or Japan, some are just planning to go
overseas for many years, after which they will return to marry their
lovers...
They want to rage past the dead environment.
They use their passion in this depressing world, becoming its illuminating
beacon.
In the darkness, they bend their backs. Their faces flush and grow sweaty. Their
eyes grow bloodshot. They look down on everything in the past.
They are only thinking about the great mission they have amidst this darkness...
The creation of twentieth century Chinese art.⁶⁹

Li Baoquan's statement insists on the importance of the "combined strength" of the Storm Society members, likening them to warriors, who might collectively build a "New Heaven on Earth."

Yet, even while valuing collectivity and collaboration, Pang Xunqin encouraged the Storm Society members to maintain their artistic individuality, promoting "self expression" as the most important feature of art. In 1930, Pang Xunqin wrote a series of untitled essays defending his position. In them, he identified three distinct categories of art, naming each using both Chinese and English. The first type, which he championed, he called "self expression" (*ziwo biaoxian*) defined as art derived from one's personal life experiences. The second type, "art for life's sake" (*rensheng de yishu*) he defined as art that serves social agendas and ideologies, as in art for social purposes. The final category he called "art for art's sake" (*yishu de yishu*) referencing the popular concept of mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century bourgeois European art, and also the artistic ideal upheld by more traditional Chinese artists and art institutions. Pang Xunqin cautioned that both "art for life's sake" and "art for art's sake" insisted on a separation

⁶⁹ Li Baoquan, "Hongshui fan le" ["A Great Flood Rises"], in *Yishu Xunkan/L'Art* 1, 5 (October 11, 1932): 9.

between art and life, rendering the two as distinct entities that interacted with each other only through relationships of dependency. While valuing these kinds of art, he argued that only through “self expression” could art remain an integral part of life and vice-versa, because self-expressive art comes from an artist’s emotions that are inherently linked to daily living.⁷⁰

Even while establishing the Storm Society and maintaining a general exuberance for European avant-gardes, Pang Xunqin expressed a great mistrust of artists’ collectives. In fact, he opened an essay of 1930s with an argument against artists’ groups, warning that groups can restrict personal expression, much in the same way that merely imitating a European artwork, or simply following a particular teacher in school could do.⁷¹ Pang Xunqin quotes Immanuel Kant – “The beauty of art is freedom” – and then asks, “In light of this and amidst our ever-changing, dynamic universe, how can we maintain artists’ groups that insist on fixed ideas and principles?”⁷² During its brief duration, the Storm Society aimed to constitute an alternative form of collectivity, one based not on uniform cohesion, but on colliding values, styles, and varied approaches to art making. Pang Xunqin’s dreams for the Storm Society paralleled his understanding of Shanghai as a terrain of cultural and temporal collisions, best pictured, as in *Such is Shanghai*, through a collage-like format. Through multiple layers and varied references, Pang Xunqin was able to consider the most modern of China’s cities as the *Riddle of Life*, while posing a critical model of cosmopolitan modernity.

⁷⁰ Pang Xunqin, *Wen Xuan Lun Yishu*, 6-10.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6-7. [Pang Xunqin’s essays originally published in *Yishu Xunkan/L’Art* vol.1, no.1 (September 1932) and vol.1, no. 2 (September 1932).]

⁷² Ibid., 7.

Art – Towards an Anti-Imperialist Model of Modernity: *Avenue Joffre* and *Roar, China!*

Apart from the Storm Society, another group of artists active in Shanghai during the 1920s-30s, the League of Left-Wing Artists spearheaded by revolutionary writer, Lu Xun, embodied a more cohesive notion of collectivity, and envisioned a more uniform approach to making modern Chinese art.⁷³ Members of the League of Left-Wing Artists promoted satirical cartoons and revolutionary woodcuts that were both expressionistic and easily legible, as the ideal tools for linking art and life. In this section, I show how Lu Xun, members of the League of Left-Wing Artists, and two of the collective's most emblematic artworks – the cartoon *Avenue Joffre*, and the woodcut, *Roar, China!* – formulated a Shanghai-based, anti-imperialist model of modernity rooted in anti-colonialism, and a pro-nationalist, revolutionary stance.

As was the case with the work of Pang Xunqin, Shanghai's street-level realities, and especially those of its foreign concessions, impacted the subject matter, formal considerations,

⁷³ The League of Left-Wing Artists, a sort-of umbrella group comprising a number of smaller societies and approximately forty members, valued a relatively conventional form of collectivity. The League maintained a unified leftist political position and shared beliefs in proletarian-related artistic content and styles rooted in realism, defined broadly as non-idealized, true to life representation. While the Storm Society was never officially aligned with any one art institution, the League of Left-Wing Artists was centered around Shanghai's *Zhonghua Yishu Daxue* (China Art Academy) and in particular the Department of Western Art, as they elected the department's chairman, Xu Xinzhi (1904-1991), as their leader. The League was formed just a few months after *Zuolian/Leftist League* (the League of Left-Wing Writers), a loose group of around fifty writers working under the slogan, "Use all public possibilities to broaden propaganda." See Patricia Stranahan, *Underground: The Shanghai Communist Party and the Politics of Survival, 1927-1937* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 159. While not all Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members, most of those involved with the League of Left-Wing Writers and Artists were close sympathizers with the growing CCP and all of them took an anti-imperialist and anti-Guomindang stance. Lu Xun himself was not a CCP member, but an ally. While he would have a falling out with the League of Left-Wing Writers, Lu Xun remained the most central figure in the League of Left-Wing Artists. In addition to Marxist art theory, Lu Xun translated debates by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and aesthetic writings of the Russian Marxist art theorists Anatoly Lunacharsky and Georgey Plekhanov that emphasized political struggle, realism in art and the unification of art and production. See *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), 82. The activities of the League of Left-Wing Artists, what they characterized as comprising a Proletarian Art Movement, were closely linked to Shanghai's many woodcut societies and also to the over fifty-people large League of Left-Wing Writers and the League of Left-Wing Dramatists. Core members of the League of Left-Wing Artists included Hu Yichuan (also in the Hangzhou-based Eighteen Society), Chen Yenchao (a pioneer of Shanghai's woodcut movement), Zhang Yi (of the Shanghai Art Academy), Cai Ruohong (a prominent cartoonist), and chairman Xu Xingchi (of Shanghai's China Art Academy). For further information on the League of Left-Wing Artists, see Shirley Hsiao Sun, "League of Left Wing Artists (1930-1934)," in "Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement, 1929-1935" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1974), 69-76.

and conceptual concerns of many members of the League of Left-Wing Artists. In 1937, just months after the start of the devastating Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the artist Cai Ruohong produced a pen and watercolor cartoon, entitled *Avenue Joffre* (Figure 1.7). This cartoon ridiculed the main thoroughfare of Shanghai's French Concession, from which the cartoon took its name, by presenting the commercial thoroughfare as a site of collision between rich and powerful Westerners, represented by a fat businessman and a police officer, and poor, local Chinese people, represented by a boy in rags, a young man being arrested, a woman and child in tattered clothing, and a young woman in a *qipao*.⁷⁴ Cai Ruohong depicts these multiple figures in a busy urban scene, but rather than present Shanghai as a fantastical, multi-layered cityscape, the cartoon takes a mocking jab at its street-level realities.

A foreign policeman, probably French, aggressively throws a limp bodied man into a truck. Meanwhile, an over-stuffed foreign man wearing a thick, fur lined jacket and carrying a hefty parcel stands idly in the background. A destitute looking mother, with patches on her clothes, carries her child just behind him. A scrawny Chinese boy with torn clothing and a ragtag dogs are also pictured, juxtaposed against the portly foreigner and his nicely groomed dog. This image recalls the oft-cited racist exclusion of Chinese people from Shanghai's foreign-run parks through signs stating, "No Chinese (excluding Chinese servants of foreigners)" and "No dogs." The impoverished boy is more likened in scale to the dog near his side than the foreigner.⁷⁵ Behind the boy looms a large store with a "SALE" advertised in English on the storefront's window. A lone twisted tree recalls those lining the avenues and lanes of the colonial French

⁷⁴ Avenue Joffre, just one block north of the Storm Society studio on Rue Marcel Tillot, became a subject of ridicule by the artist Cai Ruohong (b. 1910), formerly a member of the League of Left-Wing Artists During China's Communist era, Cai Ruohong rose to prominence in the powerful Chinese Art Association, and was subsequently condemned as a counter-revolutionary during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). See Chapter Two for further discussion of art in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution.

⁷⁵ Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds. *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Institute of East Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1992), 47. By the 1920s, these laws had changed.

Concession. In the cartoon's foreground is a woman dressed in a *qipao*, probably a prostitute. Unlike the beautiful, enigmatic women of *Such is Shanghai*, or the modern models and movie stars on the covers of *Young Companion*, this figure is caricatured and made to look hardened – the rouge of her cheeks globbed on unevenly, and the skin of her arms and hands both taut and wrinkled. Cai Ruohong, through this cacophonous sketch, presents the injustice lurking below the supposed prosperity of the city's foreign concessions.

Stylistically, *Avenue Joffre* clearly enters into dialogue with the work of German artist George Grosz (1893-1959), who was associated with the Euro-American avant-garde art collective, Dada. Grosz's satirical pen and watercolor drawings of the late 1910s and 1920s criticized the corrupt, bourgeois culture of Germany's Weimar Republic, as well as that of other countries in Europe. Grosz's drawings also pictured people as "types," such as overstuffed businessmen, materialistic women, automaton soldiers, and teasing prostitutes. As with Pang Xunqin's *Such is Shanghai*, both Grosz's and Cai Ruohong's pen and watercolor drawings incorporate simultaneity. However, while *Such is Shanghai* fabricates a misty, dream-like landscape through images that overlap in their watery recesses, Cai Ruohong's *Avenue Joffre*, following in the vein of Grosz's drawings, creates a kind of mechanical simultaneity, one that more closely resembles an engineering diagram than a subconscious dream. The figures in *Avenue Joffre* are also more straightforward. Rather than the "bewitching seductresses" and cloudy, potentially menacing forms that are overlapped one over the other in *Such is Shanghai*, *Avenue Joffre* presents a number of readily categorizable characters as co-existing, albeit seemingly on multiple planes.

Avenue Joffre was published in 1937 in the Shanghai-based, English language journal, *T'ien Hsia (Tian Xia/Worldly) Monthly*, in conjunction with an article entitled, "The Younger

Group of Shanghai Artists,” which featured many artists associated with the League of Left-Wing Artists.⁷⁶ Echoing the values of the *New Culture Movement* and the cosmopolitan model of modernity, as seen in the *Young Companion*, the article, written by Chen Yiwan, emphasized the importance of youth in distinguishing the new, left-leaning cartoons and woodcuts coming out of Shanghai. Chen writes,

It should be noted that this is a movement of youth. Not one of these artists is over thirty. The older generation of artists may have greater proficiency in both Chinese and Western classical mediums (and even this is open to question), but their creative phantasy is still hamstrung by traditionalism in subjects and themes. They seem shy of getting creatively interested in the inelegant pulsating life of this modern Eurasian Babylon... The younger generation of artists, has, on the contrary, seized avidly on the artistic possibilities of Shanghai.⁷⁷

This statement argues that younger artists who are not bound to classical art traditions (Chinese and/or Western) are more capable of taking advantage of the artistic possibilities of Shanghai. In the case of *Avenue Joffre*, this didn't mean just seizing upon “this modern Eurasian Babylon,” as subject matter, but also treating the city as a conceptual framework with which to critique Shanghai's semi-colonialism and imported capitalism.

By juxtaposing wealthy, powerful foreigners against poor, miserable locals in a diagram-like drawing that plots these individuals as existing on separate planes, *Avenue Joffre* establishes a damning social critique of Shanghai. The cartoon effectively deconstructs the mythology of Shanghai's prosperous foreign concessions, revealing an underside of poverty, and grave inequalities between colonizer and colonized. In this way, the cartoon visually images comments made by Lu Xun regarding the dichotomy between the main roads of Shanghai's foreign concessions and its residential side streets. Writing in 1933, Lu Xun commented:

⁷⁶ Chen I-wan, “The Younger Group of Shanghai Artists,” *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 5, no. 2 (September 1937): 147-151,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

Walk into any lane in the residential district, and you will see buckets of night-soil, portable kitchens, flies swarming in all directions and children milling around, some engaged in active devilry, others swearing like experts – a microcosm of utter chaos. On the main roads, however, your eyes are caught by the splendid, lively foreign children playing or walking – you see scarcely any Chinese children at all. Not that there are none, but with their tattered clothes and lackluster expression they pale into insignificance besides the others.⁷⁸

Both Lu Xun's statement and Cai Ruohong's cartoon picture Shanghai's foreign concessions as sites of extreme disparity. On the "main roads," like Avenue Joffre, Lu Xun observes, one finds "lively foreign children playing or walking," and, as Cai Ruohong shows us, the latest imported fashions for sale, as well as wealthy, fattened up foreigners able to afford them. Simultaneously, down the side-streets, as Lu Xun argues, or even visible below the thin veneer of prosperity, as Cai Ruohong shows, one would also find jaded children running about in tatters, and filthy conditions, like those made to endure by working families, the street's hardened prostitutes, or those local Chinese who might fall victim to foreign police raids. Both Lu Xun's passage and Cai Ruohong's cartoon formulate a clearly anti-colonialist, and anti-capitalist stance in the face of the cultural and class inequalities that largely defined 1920s-30s Shanghai.

The League of Left-Wing Artists hoped to articulate this position to as many people as possible, aiming to rally the public towards a movement of resistance. Towards these ends, cartoons proved an effective medium, as they were able to circulate widely throughout the city's print media. For Lu Xun, however, it was not only important that a political message be spread through popular culture, but that the lines between popular culture and high art be blurred,

⁷⁸ Lu Xun, "Shanghai Children" (1933) trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, in *Selected Writings of Lu Xun*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1959), 299. The vernacular architecture of the backstreets of Shanghai's foreign concessions, "microcosms of utter chaos" for Lu Xun, would half a century later be celebrated as the perfect blend of Eastern and Western design principles. See this dissertation's conclusion, which discusses the present-day shopping, entertainment and heritage complex, *Xintiandi*, located in the side streets of Shanghai's former French Concession neighborhood, which replicates the site's vernacular architecture and advertises itself as the contemporary embodiment of Shanghai's rich "East meets West" past.

effectively changing, or understanding anew the definition of art.⁷⁹ In addition to promoting the use of cartoons, Lu Xun devoted his energies to promoting the woodcut as the chief artistic medium amongst the members of the League of Left-Wing Artists.⁸⁰

Lu Xun's writings, teachings, and workshops helped spawn a revolutionary woodcut movement, which peaked in Shanghai in the 1930s. Amongst the most emblematic work of this movement is the artist Li Hua's (1907-1994) print, *Roar, China! (Nuhou ba, Zhongguo!)* (1935) (Figure 1.8). The print utilizes an expressionistic style to depict a struggling, screaming man. The

⁷⁹ In 1932, Lu Xun defended picture books (and cartoons) as art, writing: "Picture books...are already seated in the 'palace of art'...In the histories of art to which we are accustomed we find no reproductions from 'picture books'... Evidently picture books are considered too low to enter polite company. But if you visit the Vatican...you will find that virtually all those splendid frescoes are serial pictures of the Old Testament, New Testament and Acts of the Apostles. When art historians reproduce one section in a book on art with the title 'The Creation of Adam' or 'The Last Supper,' readers do not think it low-class or propaganda. Yet the originals were obviously propagandistic picture books. The same is true of the East. Once the murals of the Ajanta Caves in India were reproduced by the British, they shone in the history of art. And *The Life of Confucius* in China has long been valued by collectors...In one case the life of Buddha, in the other the anecdotes of Confucius – these are clearly picture books," Lu Xun, "A Defense of Picture Books," (1932) in *Selected Writings of Lu Xun*, vol. 3, 166-8.

⁸⁰ Already by 1935, Lu Xun's efforts to promote woodcuts had moved beyond their regional origins in Shanghai and nearby Hangzhou. That year, the modern woodcut movement swept all over China as the "First National Woodcut Exhibition," organized by the Ping-Jin (Peking and Tianjin) Woodcut Research Association, opened in Beijing before traveling to Tianjin, Jinan and Shanghai. This "First National Woodcut Exhibition," in the words of scholar Shirley Sun, became "a veritable festival (with) over 700 items entered from all over the country ranging from contemporary and traditional to foreign woodcuts," Shirley Hsiao Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement*, 157.

In addition to hundreds of prints, the pedagogical exhibition also displayed a number of woodcut tools. Lu Xun presided over the exhibition as a judge and wrote the preface to its catalogue. The preface is the only surviving remnant left from this incendiary exhibition that resulted in numerous arrests and the destruction of works intended for publication. In it, Lu Xun summarized once more his thoughts on the superiority of the woodcut and its appropriate fit for revolutionary Chinese artists. The preface highlights the issue of "high versus low" that Lu Xun engaged ever since his earliest endeavors with the *New Culture Movement*. He opens his essay with a brief discussion of the woodcut's history in China, highlighting its use in Buddhist portraits, worshipping plaques and in popular picture books toward the end of the Tang Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty, Lu Xun continues, woodcuts began to illustrate poems and were integrated into a form of literati brush painting, thus moving the woodcut into the realm of the elite and showing how a popular form might migrate this way. He argues against landscapes and still lifes, once popular genres depicted in woodcut prints, urging those woodcut artists of the *modern* movement to focus on figures and scenes from everyday life. On the relations between the woodcut's past and its present, he writes: "The recent development of the popularization of the woodcut, while not having *nothing* to do with our ancient history, is of course not just some dead body, or a dead body dressed in new clothes...These new woodcuts...represent the passion of art students, hence the modern movement expresses the spirit of our modern society." Lu Xun concludes that the new Chinese woodcut movement, unlike its historical precedents, created a category in its own right, existing outside of both strictly populist and elitist camps. Lu Xun celebrates the modern woodcut's ability to break through these boundaries, arguing that it creates a new category of art for the people. See Lu Xun, "Quanguo Muke Lianhe Hui Zhanlan Hui Zhuan Ji Xu" ["Preface to the Catalog of the First National Woodcut Exhibition"] (1935), in *Lu Xun Lun Meishu*, 161.

thick contour lines bordering the man's figure, and those lines shaping the musculature of his body are harsh, and jagged, like the dagger that he grabs for, which lies barely within reach. The man is blindfolded, and bound to a post with rope that wraps itself tightly around his body and neck. His constricted body contorts as it tries to seize the dagger, free itself, and rise up. The title, *Roar, China!*, suggests that this struggling man might serve as a symbol for all of China, which, as a nation, was considered to be beaten and bound by a humiliating century of corruption and imperialism.

The title of the work, *Roar, China!*, had become an international anti-imperialist rallying cry in the early 1930s, when the Soviet poet and playwright Sergei Tretiakov (1892-1939), leader of the Left-Wing Group of Writers in Moscow, wrote an anti-imperialist poem and play set in China with the same title.⁸¹ Tretiakov's play, *Roar China!* (1930), responded to the writer's own sojourn in China, and in Shanghai in particular, in the mid-1920s. The play is based on an actual incident that occurred in the western town of Wanxian (present-day Wanzhou), in which British forces, upon finding the body of an American merchant floating in the Yangtze River nearby their Royal Navy gunboat, publicly killed two innocent Chinese coolies as retribution.⁸² The play highlights the ruthlessness of both American and British merchants, as well as those soldiers stationed in China. In doing so, *Roar China!* aimed to spur an anti-imperialist uprising. Following the assassination of the two Chinese coolies, the play concludes with the following revolutionary response:

⁸¹ For an analysis of *Roar, China!* as anti-imperialist rallying cry, see Tang Xiaobing, "Echoes of Roar, China!: On Vision and Voice in Modern Chinese Art," in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2, no. 14 (2006): 467-494. See, also, Tang Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

⁸² On September 5, 1926, following the incident that inspired Tretiakov's play, two British gunboats attacked the local Chinese army, killing hundreds of civilians in the town of Wanxian in an event that came to be known as the September Fifth Massacre. Tang Xiaobing discusses in "Echoes of *Roar, China!*," 484.

Stoker: In Shanghai there is revolution! Look! They're running.
The Crowd: Run! Run!...
Stoker: ...China is roaring...
Student: Roar over the whole earth! Roar China in the ears of all the world! Roar
China the story of this crime. Out of our China.
The Crowd: Out! Out! Out!⁸³

Through the use of chorus – The Crowd – that recited lines in unison, the play advocated collective participation in anti-imperialist resistance. This conclusion also recognizes Shanghai to be not only the seat of semi-colonialism, but also the base of Left-Wing cultural activity, a growing communist resistance, and the breeding ground for a new model of anti-imperialist modernity.

Tretiakov insisted on depicting an un-idealized portrait of contemporary China, as opposed to what he criticized as the typical Westerner's exoticized image of the "Far East." The play thus begins:

Barefooted workmen, in grey and blue clothes, at first sight apathetic, working slowly; dignified officials dotted among them rustling in their black silk jackets; portly merchants; young intellectuals with glasses and Western hats – this is the true China which must be opposed to the old false and exotic ideas about China, with its wonderful vases, embroidered kimonos, phoenixes, dragons, pagodas, princesses, refined courtesans, cruel mandarins, dancers...opposed, in a word, to all the harmful tomfoolery which is still believed in the West. Above all, the stage must not be decorated with pretentious curved roofs, screens, dragons, or lanterns.⁸⁴

Like Li Hua, Tretiakov was staunchly opposed to picturing Republican-Era China, and/or Shanghai using any motifs associated with traditional Chinese culture.

Both writer and artist insisted on a particular brand of realism, what could be referred to as anti-heroic realism, that depicted life as it was, defined by class disparities ("barefoot workmen" side by side "dignified officials," "portly merchants," and "young intellectuals with

⁸³ Sergei Tretiakov, *Roar China!*, (1930) trans. F. Polianovska and Barbara Nixon (London: Martin Lawrence, 1931), 86-7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

glasses and Western hats”) and cultural inequalities (between Japanese and Western occupiers and local Chinese people). The protagonists of Tretiakov’s play are the dockworkers who slave away to make international trade possible. While they are ultimately positioned as heroic martyrs, they are not idealized, but pictured instead as poverty-stricken, appearing “at first sight apathetic,” and “working slowly.” This is the same figure that Li Hua pictures in *Roar, China!*, one that is bound and beaten. Through its emotionally evocative expressionistic style, legibility, production as a woodcut capable of wide circulation, as well as its double repetition of the anti-imperialist rallying cry, *Roar, China!* (both in title and image), Li Hua’s *Roar, China!* transforms the image of the suffering figure into a national symbol.

Woodcuts had a long history in China, the technique having been invented there almost one thousand years before, and these origins fit well the League’s anti-imperialist, nationalist spirit. Nonetheless, the members of the League of Left-Wing Artists primarily conceived of their woodcut art as modern and tied to modern society. As Lu Xun wrote,

The recent development of the popularization of the woodcut, while not having *nothing* to do with our ancient history, is of course not just some dead body, or a dead body dressed in new clothes... These new woodcuts... represent the passion of art students, hence the modern movement expresses the spirit of our modern society.”⁸⁵

The woodcut artists were also interested in incorporating Western influences, which were perceived as modern. Lu Xun promoted this cultural hybridity, instructing the woodcut artists to

⁸⁵ On the relations between the woodcut’s past and its present, Lu Xun writes, “The recent development of the popularization of the woodcut, while not having *nothing* to do with our ancient history, is of course not just some dead body, or a dead body dressed in new clothes... These new woodcuts... represent the passion of art students, hence the modern movement expresses the spirit of our modern society,” Lu Xun, “Quanguo Muke Lianhe Hui Zhanlan Hui Zhuan Ji Xu,” 161.

adopt the latest techniques and expressionistic styles coming out of revolutionary Russia and volatile Germany, places where a socially critical woodcut art had begun being developed.⁸⁶

In 1931, Lu Xun introduced the Chinese public to Käthe Kollwitz's art by contributing one of her prints, "Sacrifice" from the series, *War* (1922) (Figure 1.9) as the cover to the inaugural issue of the short-lived, leftist journal, *Beidou* (*Big Dipper*). Five years later, Lu Xun ruminated on that contribution in an essay, "Written Deep in the Night: Introducing Käthe Kollwitz":

One may pass by a heap of burned paper on wasteland, or inscriptions on a ruined wall and never see them. Yet each is eloquent with love, mourning or with wrath stronger than the human voice can express. And a few people do understand their meaning.⁸⁷

This opening passage refers to Lu Xun's contribution of the Kollwitz print to *Beidou* and its coded meaning. Kollwitz's "Sacrifice" depicted a mother closing her eyes in grief while holding her baby in outstretched arms. Lu Xun selected this print for the cover in 1931 as a disguised homage to his former student and close collaborator and friend, Rou Shi (1901-1931), another ardent promoter of woodcuts who, along with twenty-two other Left-Wing intellectuals, was secretly arrested and executed by the Chinese Guomindang (Nationalist Party) earlier that year. As no newspaper dared to report the killing, Lu Xun imagined Rou Shi's old blind mother "who continued to think of her beloved son as still working as a translator and proof-reader in Shanghai."⁸⁸ Lu Xun's publication of "Sacrifice," which he encountered in a German bookstore in Shanghai not long after Rou Shi had been killed, was intended as a sort of private mourning.

⁸⁶ In addition to holding three exhibitions showcasing woodcut prints he had collected from Europe, particularly prints by the German artists Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) and Carl Mefferet (b.1903), and the Belgian artist Frans Masereel (1889-1972), Lu Xun reproduced and published these works in a variety of formats.

⁸⁷ Lu Xun, "Written in Deep Night: Introducing Käthe Kollwitz" (1936), in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, vol. 4, 253.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

Nonetheless, a number of people came to realize the implied meaning of the *Beidou* cover. Many others read the print as a broader salute to all the young victims of Shanghai's years of anti-leftist violence, what came to be known as the White Terror.

Lu Xun's essay on Kollwitz clearly advocates woodcuts over other media, claiming that "by their study one finds a different kind of graphic art and recognizes their universal advantage over oils."⁸⁹ The writer further believed that Kollwitz's works could introduce another face of foreigners to the Chinese people, enabling them to grasp the universality of their struggle. He writes,

Chinese who have not had an opportunity to travel abroad often have the idea that all white people are either preachers of Christianity, or well-dressed, well-fed managers of business firms given to the habit of kicking people about when out of humour. But the works of Käthe Kollwitz show that there are others "injured and insulted" like us in many places on the earth, as well as artists who mourn, protest and struggle on their behalf.⁹⁰

Lu Xun's comments here further identify and promote an anti-heroic realism, as seen both in Cai Ruohong's *Avenue Joffre*, and Li Hua's *Roar, China!*. By depicting figures who are "injured and insulted" (the impoverished locals beside the rich foreigners in *Avenue Joffre* and the beaten man, that is, beaten China, in *Roar, China!*), the League of Left-Wing Artists formulated a brand of anti-imperialist modernity set in strict opposition to foreign colonialism.

While aiming to represent the underrepresented, members of the League of Left-Wing Artists also altered their own artistic practices, insisting on taking a more active role in the labor of their woodcut creation. This media hybridity significantly contributed to the movement's revolutionary nature. In addition to introducing anti-heroic realism, the Shanghai woodcut movement also broke from historical precedents by instigating a more hands-on approach to art

⁸⁹ Ibid., 255.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

making that drastically altered the expectations of the role of the artist. Historically, woodcut efforts by fine artists meant the outsourcing of labor to skilled carvers and printers. Yet, the artists involved in the 1930s Shanghai-based woodcut movement sought to handle, for the first time, all aspects of the technical execution of their art. Dissatisfied by the “art for art’s sake” ethos prevalent at the Art Academy of Hangzhou, for instance, the woodcut artist Hu Yichuan led a number of the Academy’s socially engaged art students to Shanghai in 1930 to attend the Summer Sessions of Art and Literature of the League of Left-Wing Writers and Artists. Hu Yichuan later described how this group, charged up by the revolutionary spirit prevalent in Shanghai, eagerly sought out carving shops upon their return to Hangzhou, urging the masters to teach them their craft. The seal carvers were befuddled as “hitherto, it was unheard of that ‘gentlemen-artists’ would condescend to take up the tools of the craftsmen.”⁹¹ The League of Left-Wing artists thus re-imagined the social role of the artist and of art, aiming to more closely link art and life, towards the formulation of an anti-imperialist model of modernity, and as a means of revolutionizing China.

Throughout this section, I’ve considered two distinctive models of Shanghai-based modernity – what I defined as cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist – as shaped, respectively, by the Storm Society and the League of Left-Wing Artists. These models, while diverging in key ways, also shared many primary aims: the forging of a *new* Chinese culture, the adaptation of foreign forms, and the connecting of art and the social realm. Furthermore, both models critiqued the trope of “East meets West” that was said to define modern Shanghai, picturing and producing cross-cultural collisions as opposed to harmonious encounters.

⁹¹ Shirley Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement*, 83.

Film – Cosmopolitan and Anti-Imperialist Models of Modernity in Montage: *Street Angel*

Multi-layered Shanghai, as explored in artworks towards the formulation of these cosmopolitan and anti-imperialist models of modernity, also played a crucial role in numerous films made about and set in Shanghai throughout the 1920s-30s. During these two decades, Shanghai was one of the world's chief centers of film production and consumption. By 1927, Shanghai had twenty-six movie theaters, which played both the latest imports from Hollywood, as well as Chinese movies, most all of them produced by Shanghai-based companies.⁹² This section analyzes one of the most well known films of this era, *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*) (1937), directed by Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978), a leftist film director, screenwriter, and actor active in Shanghai throughout the 1930s.⁹³ *Street Angel* takes the city of Shanghai, where it was made, as its chief protagonist. Like Pang Xunqin's *Such is Shanghai*, Yuan Muzhi's *Street Angel* also explored Shanghai using collage-like effects, in this case employing filmic montage, and through the trope of the modern woman. At the same time, *Street Angel* presents a story that revolves around an underclass of "injured and insulted" figures, like those depicted in *Avenue Joffre*, and *Roar, China!*. In this section, I argue that *Street Angel* combines the aesthetic tactics (namely collage and anti-heroic realism) and political principles of both the anti-imperialist and cosmopolitan models of modernity in order to produce a scathing critique of Shanghai that pictures the city as a site of festering class inequalities, in which corruption, injustice, and squalid poverty form the roots of its glamorous, modern façade.

⁹² Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 83.

⁹³ Pang Xunqin couldn't be sure, but he thought he remembered Tretiakov's play, *Roar China!*, being rehearsed above his studio on the third floor of his French Concession studio at 90 Rue Marcel Tillot. There he recalled seeing many members of the League of Left-Wing Dramatists, a troupe associated with the League of Left-Wing Writers and Artists. Pang Xunqin imagined the actors and directors upstairs, amongst them the well-known Yuan Muzhi, all rehearsing *Roar China!*, Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 136.

Based loosely on the 1928 American film of the same title by Frank Borzage (1894-1962), *Street Angel* tells an oft-recounted tale of a young innocent woman, in this case with a beautiful, crystalline voice, trying to make her way in the city. The young woman nearly falls victim to Shanghai's seedy urban underworld when her greedy landlords scheme to sell her off to a wealthy, local gangster. As if paying homage to the multi-layered surface of *Such is Shanghai*, Yuan Muzhi opens *Street Angel* with a montage sequence, cut from the director's earlier film, *Cityscape (Dushi Fengguang)* (1935), that also serves as the film's opening credits (Figures 1.10-1.18). Overlapped one after the other are scenes of flashing neon lights illuminating signs in both English and Chinese, the stone facade of the neo-classical Customs House on Shanghai's Bund (the city's colonial waterfront and major thoroughfare of the British and American occupied International Settlement), a flock of birds flying peacefully over the city, well to do locals strolling in parks in the foreign settlements, overhead shots of congested traffic, crowds of pleasure-seekers gathered outside a theater, a uniformed marching band, the pointy spires of Gothic revival cathedrals and other church rooftops, clock towers, fireworks, dance halls and cabaret girls, a young blonde woman laughing on a crowded street tram, towering art deco hotels, and bright street lamps. All of these images, presented in rapid succession, provide a fusillade of pictures of Shanghai's modern, so-called "East meets West" identity.

This opening montage also features a pair of bronze lions that then stood at the entrance to the British-owned Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (built in 1927), one of the earliest and mightiest foreign banking institutions to enter China, which occupied an imposing neo-classical building on Shanghai's Bund. This particular segment of the montage sequence includes four separate, close-up shots of the lions, alternating between side views, and frontal views of the roaring lion. Through repetition and juxtaposition, the lions are made to appear as if

they hold a stupefying strength, thus flexing the power of British imperialism and China's newly imported finance capitalism.⁹⁴ *Street Angel*, however, ultimately casts a critical judgment on this invading economic system, as the film progresses to reveal the devastation and unjust class inequalities wrought by capitalist greed. Viewers might thus project a second meaning onto these roaring lions, the possibility of the uprising of the working class, and more broadly, of China, as displayed in the woodcut *Roar, China!*, made two years prior to the film's release.

By contrasting this opening montage – which produces an enticing portrait of cross-cultural Shanghai – with the rest of the film's anti-heroic realism, *Street Angel* suggests that the alluring façade of cosmopolitan Shanghai obscures the quotidian realities experienced by the majority of its denizens. This point is further accentuated through the juxtaposition of the city's modern architecture, and the local slums, where most of the film is set. *Street Angel* both begins and ends its narrative with the image of a towering, gleaming white, set-back, art deco skyscraper (Figures 1.19), which is immediately contrasted against the film's other sets – overcrowded tenements housing the city's poor (Figures 1.21-1.22).⁹⁵ At the end of the opening montage sequence, the camera fixates on the top of this art deco skyscraper, framed by an open sky, and then pans vertically downward, across the expanse of the sprawling mid-section, and down to its bottom. This shot reveals that just beneath the base of the building (which is constructed as a life-like model) lies a cross section of open earth. The camera then descends into this dark underground, as the subtitles, 上海地下层/*Shanghai Dixia Ceng (The Slums of*

⁹⁴ For a description of Shanghai's so-called Fire-O (Finance, Investment, Real-estate and Opium) Capitalism, see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, 177.

⁹⁵ Built as a model for *Street Angel*, this is most likely referencing the Hamilton House, or its neighboring Metropole Hotel, two iconic art deco buildings (both built in 1934), which were commissioned by Shanghai's wealthiest foreign industrialist, Sir Victor Sassoon, and designed by British architectural firm, Palmer and Turner.

Shanghai) appear (Figure 1.20).⁹⁶ Through this contrast of monumental modern architecture and local slums, Yuan Muzhi suggests that Shanghai's modern achievements, such as its internationally influenced architecture that extends high into the sky, exist side-by-side with destitute poverty.

Street Angel, like those artworks by the League of Left-Wing artists, also promoted the poor and vulnerable as anti-heroes. Xiao Hong (Figure 1.24), the young girl who is almost sold off by her landlords, finds unlikely saviors in her neighbors – two playful, working class young men. One of these young men works as a newsboy. Between shifts, he plasters leftover newspaper fragments all over the walls of their dilapidated home (Figure 1.25). “It’s better than looking at the cracks,” he says.⁹⁷ Cosmopolitan fantasies propagated by the new mass media (such as those seen in the *Young Companion* lifestyle magazines discussed in this chapter’s first section) thus provide a bandage to their squalid reality, serving as a kind of wallpaper that masks the poor conditions of their living space, while providing “windows” that look out onto current events and worldly fashions. The newsboy and his friends constantly reference the wallpaper/news that surrounds them, checking, for instance, how to write certain Chinese characters. After they hear that Xiao Hong’s evil landlords are plotting against her, the young men scour the news surrounding them in order to find ideas for how to save her. However, all the ideas they glean from the newspaper, such as suing Xiao Hong’s would-be-traffickers, soon reveal themselves to be far beyond these youths’ modest financial means. This distance between the newspapers’ stories and the realities of working class men and women comments on the extreme economic disparities that defined Republican-Era China. *Street Angel* thus argues that,

⁹⁶ The full subtitles read, 一九三五年/秋/上海地下层/*Yi jiu san wu nian/Qiu/Shanghai Dixia Ceng/1935/Autumn /The Slums of Shanghai*. *Shanghai Dixia Ceng* literally translates into *Basement of Shanghai*.

⁹⁷ *Street Angel (Malu tianshi)*, directed by Yuan Muzhi (1937; Shanghai, China: Mingxing Film Company/Cinema Epoch, 2007), DVD.

despite the era's greater dissemination of information, and the potential for news to be used as an empowering informational tool, modern mass media ultimately generates false promises, which lay beyond the reach of most people.

At the end of the film, Xiao Hong is rescued by joining forces with the young men, one of whom she has fallen in love with and promises to marry. But, her older sister (Figure 1.23) a more hardened figure, who presumably has worked as a prostitute, meets a tragic demise. In trying to protect Xiao Hong, the older sister is stabbed, and left to die. Xiao Hong and her friends are unable to save her older sister, because, as the film's last line tells us, "We don't have enough money. The doctor won't come."⁹⁸ A shot of the group of poor friends, huddled around Xiao Hong's dying sister, is pictured from outside of the squalid tenement, and through its shabby windows. The screen then fades to darkness, and viewers are transported back underground, where the story began (Figure 1.21). Slowly, the camera pulls back and rises up to end with an image of the sparkling white art deco skyscraper. *Street Angel* finally pictures Shanghai as a city whose modern architecture, along with its modern mass media and cross-cultural enticements, all obscure, and are in fact built upon the exploitations and miseries of the working class, buried beneath its gleaming facades.

During the volatile years of the 1920s-30s, Shanghai – with its foreign settlements, imported architectural styles and fashions, extreme economic disparity, Chinese refugees from nearby war-torn provinces, as well as foreign refugees from unstable Europe – would often be presented, as it was in *Street Angel*, as a terrain of multiple, overwhelming realities. In describing one older man's bewildered encounter with the city in *子夜/Ziye (Midnight)*, a novel set in 1930s

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Shanghai, Mao Dun (1896-1981), a modernist writer associated with the *New Culture Movement*, presented this view:

He was plunging into the “sinners’ paradise” of Shanghai...Good heavens! The towering skyscrapers, their countless lighted windows gleaming like the eyes of devils, seemed to be rushing down on him like an avalanche at one moment and vanishing at the next. The smooth road stretched before him, and street-lamps flashed past on either side, springing up and vanishing in endless succession. A snake-like stream of black monsters, each with a pair of blinding lights for eyes, their horns blaring, bore down upon him, nearer and nearer! He closed his eyes tight in terror, trembling all over. He felt as if his head were spinning and his eyes swam before a kaleidoscope of red, yellow, black, shiny, square, cylindrical, leaping, dancing shapes, while his ears rang in a pandemonium of honking, hooting and jarring, till his heart was in his mouth.⁹⁹

Here, Mao Dun employs the image of the kaleidoscope, a motif that had appeared in the earliest theorization of aesthetic modernity, as articulated in Charles Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life,” written in dialogue with nineteenth century Paris. Yet, the bewildered outsider of Mao Dun’s story, terrified by Shanghai’s modern stimuli, is a far cry from Baudelaire’s *flâneur* – that dandy observer of modern Paris, a passionate spectator, and urban stroller who was himself like “a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of...[the crowd’s] movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.”¹⁰⁰ In conflicted, semi-colonial Shanghai, the city itself had become, in the words of author J.G. Ballard, a “bright but bloody kaleidoscope,”¹⁰¹ and for some, its shards of clashing perspectives gave rise to visceral responses, including sickening repulsion.

In Mao Dun’s description in *Midnight*, like in Yuan Muzhi’s *Street Angel*, and Pang Xunqin’s *Such is Shanghai*, we see a shared set of tactics in the conceptual mapping of modern

⁹⁹ Mao Dun, *Midnight (Ziye)* (1939), trans. Hsu Meng-hsiung (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1957), 8.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 9.

¹⁰¹ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, 6.

Shanghai. The overarching formal strategy can be identified as collage, articulated in the drawing together of a smattering of urban imagery in *Midnight*, the layering of *Such is Shanghai*, and the montage footage and juxtaposition of enticing views of the modern city with harsh, street level realities in *Street Angel*. In depicting Shanghai's incessant collisions – between the wealthy and the poor, and between colonial powers and a colonized underclass – all coming to a head in the frenetically paced city during the interwar period, these writers, artists, and filmmakers embraced collage as a charting device. Shanghai, far from a harmonious landscape of “East meets West” encounters, was mapped instead as it was more uniformly described in *Roar, China!* – as a violent battleground of collisions.

Chapter Two New Fashion, Art, and Film in Shanghai during the 1960s-1970s

Introduction

While the terms *new*, *youth*, and *modern* dominated the cultural discourse in 1920s-30s Shanghai, the word *new* became the primary signifier in the speeches, discussions and publications on Chinese art and literature in the period following the Chinese Communist Party's establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1949).¹⁰² The emphasis on the *new* reached its most extreme peak during the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua dageming*) (1966-1976), a movement spearheaded by Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976), allies including Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (1914-1991), and an army of Red Guards, comprised mostly of young, radicalized students.¹⁰³ The Cultural Revolution maintained as its primary mission the elimination of China's

¹⁰² The development of a new national painting (新国画/*xin guohua*) based on Soviet socialist realism was considered inseparable from the construction of the new China (新中国/*xin Zhongguo*), or post-1949, post-Liberation, socialist China. As art historian Zou Yuejin argues, "The history of the fine art of new China [post-1949 China] is, in itself, the process of the apprehension, the reception, and the presentation of the image of new China...As a matter of fact, the internal connection between the connotation of new China and the creation of the artists was the primary feature of the history of fine art of contemporary China, in a greater coverage of time, that is, the whole twentieth century. What differed was that, in the history of new China, fine art creation was performed to the dimensions of the cognitions, the apprehension, the conception, and the expectation of new China as acquired by CCP, the ruling party. In light of this, the history of the fine art of new China was, in its essence, an inseparable part of the ideational totality of the cognitions and the apprehension of new China. It is on such a basis that we say the fine art of new China was the presentation and they symbolization of the image of new China," Zou Yuejin, Foreword to *Xin Zhongguo Meishu Shi: 1949-2000 (A History of Chinese Fine Arts: 1949-2000)* (Hunan: Hunan Art Publishing House, 2002), n.p.

¹⁰³ Aside from Mao Zedong, the primary group of political leaders responsible for the Cultural Revolution, disparagingly labeled as the "Gang of Four," after their denunciation and arrest in 1976, included: Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyan (1931-2005), Zhang Chunqiao (1917-2005), and Wang Hongwen (1935-1992). The very beginning of the Cultural Revolution could be characterized as its most radical period. As artist and curator Zheng Shengtian explains, "The first half of 1967 was marked by the eruption of large-scale armed struggles across many regions of China. Fearing loss of control over the situation, Mao Zedong embarked on an inspection tour to several critical provinces...In his speeches, Mao for the first time criticized the Rebel Factions, saying the 'little generals' (*xiaojiang*) may have committed errors. He also put forth relatively milder and more reasonable slogans, including 'we must use nonviolent [verbal] struggle, not violent [armed] struggle,'" Zheng Shengtian, *Art and China's Revolution*, eds. Zheng Shengtian and Melissa Chiu (New York and New Haven: Asia Society in association with Yale University Press, 2008), 32.

“Four Olds,” defined as “Old Ideas, Old Customs, Old Habits and Old Culture.” While recognizing the widespread destruction that took place during the Cultural Revolution, the priority of this chapter is to examine the cultural production emanating from Shanghai during this period, while considering the relationships between China’s *new* fashion, art, and film of the 1960s-70s, and Shanghai as the site of the country’s most drastic revolutionary transformation.¹⁰⁴

Shanghai occupied a conflicted position during the Cultural Revolution. Officials and Red Guards condemned the city as the primary seat of colonial occupation and bourgeois corruption during China’s Republican Era, while simultaneously celebrating its legacy as the origin site of Chinese communism, and its reputation as a hotbed of revolutionary literature and art during the 1920s-1930s.¹⁰⁵ The work of former Shanghai denizen, Lu Xun, was singled out as

The exact origin of the Cultural Revolution is usually attributed to May 16, 1966, when “the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party passed the famous ‘May Sixteenth Directive,’ a document [criticizing Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping] partially written and edited by Mao that announced the theory, guidelines, and policies for launching the Cultural Revolution,” Zheng Shengtian, “Brushes Are Weapons: An Art School and its Artists,” in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2010), 95.

Scholars have traditionally divided the Cultural Revolution into two phases; the years from 1966-1971 are considered as the most extreme, violent period of the Cultural Revolution, in which all schools were closed and large swaths of the Communist bureaucracy overthrown. The artworks emerging at this time could be characterized as amateur works made by the masses. The period from 1972-1976, during which the National Bureaucracy was reconstructed and more professional artworks were allowed to be produced, is considered to have been less extreme. See Andrews, “The Art of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Art in Turmoil*, 27-57.

For an overview of the political events leading up to the Cultural Revolution, see Roderick Macfarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (London and Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹⁰⁴ While Beijing, the capital of the PRC, was the center of the most concentrated radical activities during the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai also held a prominent position during these years. In addition to being one of Jiang Qing’s key cultural bases and a center for revolutionary theater and industrial workers’ art, Shanghai was also the site of the “January Storm” (January 3, 1967), considered a key event during the Cultural Revolution, in which throngs of workers, encouraged by Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, embarked on a widespread campaign to publicly criticize and purge the city of many of its chief municipal leaders. The “January Storm” resulted in the subsequent formation of the Shanghai Commune, over which “Gang of Four” members Zhang Qunqiao and Yao Wenyuan presided. See “Storm of ‘January Revolution’ Shakes Whole World,” *Survey of China Mainland Press* (hereafter cited as *SCMP*) 3931 (May 3, 1967), 14.

¹⁰⁵ A 1966 issue of *Peking Review* (*Beijing Zhoubao*) described attempts made at ridding Shanghai of its capitalist and imperialist past: “In this huge city which has the largest concentration of capitalists in the country and which, until the liberation, had long been under the rule of the imperialists and domestic reactionaries, the revolutionary students and the broad masses of workers and staff have taken up their iron brooms to sweep away all old habits and customs,” *Renmin Ribao/People’s Daily* editorial, “Guided by Mao Tse-tung’s Thought: Red Guards Destroy the Old and Establish the New,” *Peking Review*, 9, no. 36, (September 2, 1966): 18.

the primary model for Mao's revolutionary line on literature and art, and Cultural Revolution leaders attempted to establish a linear progression from what I defined in Chapter One as the anti-imperialist model of modernity of the 1920s-30s to the new Chinese art of the 1960s-70s.¹⁰⁶ Against this official history, I argue that CCP officials instrumentalized and perverted the values of the anti-imperialist model, promoting idealized, heroic images of Mao, and of workers, peasants, and soldiers (工农兵/*gongnongbing*) that manipulated and transformed the very notion of realism as developed in leftist art circles in 1920s-30s Shanghai.¹⁰⁷ I argue, furthermore, that traces of the anti-imperialist model of the 1920s-30s are more readily found in works that were officially denounced during the Cultural Revolution, such as in the controversial film, *Chung Kuo Cina* (translated as *China* in Chinese and Italian), by Italian director, Michelangelo

¹⁰⁶ Frequently reprinted during the Cultural Revolution was Mao Zedong's Statement on Lu Xun from "On New Democracy" (1940): "Representing the great majority of the nation, Lu Hsun breached and stormed the enemy citadel; on the cultural front he was the bravest and most correct, the firmest, the most loyal and the most ardent national hero, a hero without parallel in our history. The road he took was the very road of China's new national culture." Mao Zedong, "In Commemoration of Lu Hsun," in *Chinese Literature*, no.1 (1967), n.p. See, also "Gang of Four" member Yao Wenyuan's book on Lu Xun: *Lu Xun: Zhongguo wen hua ge ming de ju ren* [*Lu Xun: Giant of China's Cultural Revolution*] (Shanghai: Shanghai wen yi chu ban she, 1959). Beginning with Mao's watershed "Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (1942), and continuing on through the 1960s and 1970s, Lu Xun was upheld as the key figure to have paved the way for a new revolutionary culture in China. Statements about Lu Xun became hyperbolic, and in some cases inaccurate as he was hailed as a major follower of Chairman Mao's doctrine and the Communist Party, even though he himself never actually joined the CCP, still in its infancy at the time of Lu Xun's death in 1936. Paradoxically, the heroic light in which Lu Xun was cast in post-1949 China contrasted greatly with the depictions of *anti-heroes* – the humiliated and oppressed figures of everyday life – which he and his adherents championed during the woodcut movement. This chapter seeks to expose the fallacy in reading the officially approved works of the Cultural Revolution as a natural continuation of the anti-imperialist model explored in Chapter One.

¹⁰⁷ My position is supported by the writings of Chinese cultural studies and literature scholar Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu, who squarely stated, "After 1949, the original agenda of the May Fourth Movement [New Culture Movement] was further suppressed by the state. The Movement itself was usually appropriated by official discourse as a great 'patriotic movement' that had inspired nationalistic, patriotic, and anti-imperialist sentiments among the Chinese people. The ultimate purpose in all this was to consolidate the legitimacy of the regime. In the Cultural Revolution, Mao skillfully manipulated the rhetoric of the May Fourth Movement for his political ends: a revolution in the realm of ideology and "culture" necessitated a radical rupture with the past," See Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu, "Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China," *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (1997): 125-7. Lu's argument refers to the *May Fourth*, or *New Culture Movement* of 1919 as discussed in the introduction to Chapter One. But the post-1949 "manipulation" of historical precedents also extends to the Cultural Revolution's lauding of Lu Xun's activities with the League of Left-Wing Artists in Shanghai.

Antonioni, which posed the question, “Is it still possible to film a documentary?,”¹⁰⁸ as it considered Maoist socialism in the context of post-Liberation Shanghai.

The chapter is divided into three sections, which analyze how fashion and print culture, art, and film helped construct, and/or posed alternatives to the new art of China’s Cultural Revolution. The first section analyzes a cover of a 1967 issue of *Meishu Zhan Bao* (*Fine Arts War News*) featuring Mao’s fourth and last wife and Cultural Revolution leader, Jiang Qing, vis-à-vis shifting notions of fashion and gender in 1960s-70s Shanghai and as a visual embodiment of the official aesthetic policies of the Cultural Revolution as articulated by Jiang Qing at the “Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces” held in Shanghai in 1966. The second section focuses on art produced by students at the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop, the city’s chief official art school during the Cultural Revolution, namely *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* (*Mao zhuxi gege shiqi de xiaoxiang*) (1968), a mural erected at Huaihai Lu (formerly Avenue Joffre) and *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky* (*Huo shu yin hua bu ye tian*) (1971), an ink painting made in and about a Shanghai shipyard facility. I analyze how and why heroic socialist realism, adapted from Soviet models, was promoted as the ideal style for expressing the new China, and argue that this new style departed from the 1920s-30s anti-imperialist model of modernity it claimed to emulate, while masking social and economic tensions, such as conflicted notions of collectivity, depressed industrialization, and strained international relations. The third and final section elaborates on diverging approaches to realism (heroic socialist realism vs. documentary realism) in picturing the new China by contrasting two films: *On the Docks* (*Haigang*) (1972), a cinematic adaptation

¹⁰⁸ Here, I contrast the heroic socialist realism of the Cultural Revolution with alternative models of realism, re-visiting Antonioni’s question, “Is it still possible to film a documentary?” This reference is taken from the title of Antonioni’s preface to the script of *Chung Kuo Cina*, “È ancora possibile girare un documentario?” [“Is it still possible to film a documentary?”], in *Chung Kuo Cina*, ed. Lorenzo Cuccu (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), vii-xvi.

of a revolutionary Peking opera that celebrated industrialization and international exchange in Shanghai, and *Chung Kuo Cina* (1972), a documentary by Italian auteur, Michelangelo Antonioni, which included footage of Shanghai and ruminations on Maoist socialism as an alternative to Western capitalism. I examine the controversy surrounding the initially officially approved and later decried *Chung Kuo Cina*, and consider its documentary realism as the antithesis to the heroic socialist realism presented in *On the Docks*. This chapter argues that the official art of the Cultural Revolution insisted on heroic socialist realism towards the production of false images of flourishing Shanghai, and of China, and towards the establishment of a totalizing model of modernity, which, despite claiming to value cultural and temporal hybridity, insisted instead on an unwavering, collective submission to the single doctrine of Maoism.

Fashion and Print Culture: Jiang Qing on *Fine Arts War News*

In the early years of the Cultural Revolution, news bulletins and pamphlets espousing the movement's central tenets circulated throughout the city. The cover of one such pamphlet, *Meishu Zhanbao* (*Fine Arts War News*) (published May 13, 1967), offers insight into the intimate relations between the cultural policies of the 1960s-70s, including fashion, art, and linguistic reforms, and the Cultural Revolution's project of modernity based on Maoism.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *Meishu Zhanbao*, like much of the era's newspapers and magazines, was published in Beijing, as opposed to Shanghai. By the 1960s, the publishing industry that had flourished in Republican Era Shanghai was largely replaced by officially controlled publishing houses in Beijing, China's political capital, which oversaw the production of all of China's newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, which circulated throughout the country. While Shanghai produced a great amount of visual propaganda during the Cultural Revolution, especially posters, the leading, now all State-run publications no longer came out of the old printing capital of Shanghai, but the political capital of Beijing. In the 1960s-70s, Beijing produced the majority of Chinese publications, including the widely circulated monthly pictorial magazine, *China Reconstructs*, which was similar in format to the *Young Companion* discussed in Chapter One, except that it was State versus privately run. *China Reconstructs* replaced the *Young Companion*'s advertisements for modern, foreign products with quotes by Chairman Mao and advertisements for new collections of his writings. The cover stars of China's popular 1920s-30s publications – fashionable movie starlets and models – were replaced by smiling farmers, workers and soldiers, or stately images of Chairman Mao. Two other popular publications of the period were *Chinese Literature*, which covered contemporary Chinese art and literature in the 1960s-70s and the weekly *Peking Review*, which provided short news stories accompanied by black and white photographs. These publications, mostly dominated by bold graphics and bright colors, especially red, were translated into a number of foreign languages, including Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish, and all

The *Meishu Zhanbao* pamphlet, which is printed in black, white, and red – the chief color associated with communism – features Jiang Qing, who was then Mao’s fourth and last wife, and a key figure in formulating the official aesthetic policies of the Cultural Revolution. The cover is dominated by what appears to be a touched up photographic print of Jiang Qing. This image visually embodies the new, socialist woman. She stands proudly, with her right hand raised in a powerful fist. Jiang Qing’s image is laid over a red background, on which are drawn characters and episodes from the Revolutionary Peking Operas and Ballets, a series of plays that incorporated traditional Peking opera and Western style ballet to tell stories of anti-feudalist and anti-imperialist uprisings, which Jiang Qing promoted as the key “model works” of the Cultural Revolution.¹¹⁰ Placed in the cover’s upper left corner, so that it appears as if Jiang Qing is clutching it in her upraised fist, is a drawing of a book – Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” (May 1942), a watershed forum in which Mao mandated that the primary goal of the new Chinese art and literature must be to serve socialist revolution. The book is

followed a relatively standardized format. Each and every issue of *Chinese Literature*, for instance, featured a red, black and white woodblock print of Mao on its cover. Inside *Chinese Literature*, as in *China Reconstructs*, the first two pages following the contents always featured a photographic portrait of Mao accompanied by one of his quotes. Coincidentally, this particular publication, *Meishu Zhanbao*, was published out of *Zhongyang Gongyi Meishu Xueyuan* (China Industrial Art Institute), which was originally founded by the artist, Pang Xunqin (discussed in Chapter One), before he was denounced as a rightist during the Cultural Revolution. Pang Xunqin’s lifelong goal was to establish an academy that united fine art and industrial design in China, in part modeled after Bauhaus. As Pang Jun, Pang Xunqin’s son noted, Pang Xunqin felt that “establishing a design academy should be one of the main tasks of a nation, the foundation of intellectual advanced society.” See Pang Jun, “Zhongguo Xiandai Sheji de Qimengzhi Pang Xunqin”/“Illuminator of Modern Chinese Design: Pang Xunqin,” in *Pang Xunqin: Zhongguo Chuangtong Tuan/China Decoration Figure Pang Xunqin (1939)*, ed. Wu Wenxiong (Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshi and Changshu Fine Art Museum, 2009), 56. This dream began to take flight in 1957 when Pang Xunqin founded *Zhongyang Gongyi Meishu Xueyuan* (China Industrial Art Institute) in the suburbs of Beijing. The Academy, supported by Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), fell under the power of the Handicraft Industry Administrations Bureau (later the Ministry of Light Industry), whose bureaucrats soon dismissed Pang Xunqin’s proposal to introduce the combining of new departments including painting, graphic design, interior design, metal art, porcelain, dyeing and weaving and pattern design, instead insisting on the apprentice-based production of folk handicrafts (ivory carving, bamboo, and rattan weaving, embroidery, clay figurine), deemed profitable as trade exports. During the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, Pang Xunqin fell victim to an administrative struggle for power over the Academy and was “condemned as the most ‘radically anti-party right-winger’ in the Chinese art world,” and in 1972, forced to resign. He was not fully reinstated as a professor at the Academy until 1979, six years before his death.

¹¹⁰ For further discussion of the Revolutionary Peking Opera of the Cultural Revolution, see the third section of this chapter, which discusses the film adaptation of the Revolutionary Peking Opera, *On the Docks* (1972).

bordered by a white aura and emanating rays, which liken Mao's philosophies on art and literature to the life-granting source of the sun. These rays illuminate Jiang Qing's image, which is bordered by a white outline, suggesting that Mao's divine teachings irradiate her thought and being.¹¹¹

Jiang Qing is presented as wearing the obligatory uniform of the time, the 中山装/*Zhongshan zhuang* (what would later be referred to outside of China as the "Mao Suit"). This uniform was based on suits worn by Sun Yatsen (1866-1925), the founder of the Republic of China, which were made popular when Mao and other key CCP officials wore them at the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1949.¹¹² The suit consisted of a grey, or dark blue button-up jacket with set-in sleeves, a close fitting, turndown collar, and four symmetrical patch pockets with flaps (two over the chest, and two over the midsection), and loose fitting trousers. During the Cultural Revolution, these suits, which were by then mass produced in cotton in modified styles (also produced in a khaki color like those worn by the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army) became mandatory, as both Western and traditional Chinese style clothing was berated as representative of the "Four Olds." Typical of the violent street-level realities of the time, Red Guards who spotted pedestrians wearing

¹¹¹ In a great deal of China's post-1949 painting, Chairman Mao was often depicted as the sun. For further information on Mao's depiction in Cultural Revolution-Era painting, see Yan Shanchun, "Painting Mao," in Chiu and Zheng, *Art and China's Revolution*.

Music, in addition to visual culture, became a platform for celebrating Chairman Mao as the sun, evidenced, for instance, by "The Red Sun," a popular song of the Cultural Revolution.

¹¹² During the early to mid 1950s, the use of such suits amongst civilians was not obligatory, though many people adopted the style, made widely available in department stores, alongside Western clothing and more traditional Chinese outfits, such as *qipaos*, as a way of expressing their support for the "new" China. Later, as a result of the economic hardships of the Great Leap Forward, more and more people wore the readily available *Zhongshan zhuang*. See Valery Garrett, *Chinese Dress: From the Qing Dynasty to the Present* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 218.

“bourgeois” and “imperialist” Western-style clothing, or “old” traditional Chinese clothing, reportedly held the offenders down and cut their outfits to shreds on the spot.¹¹³

A *Beijing Zoubao (Peking Review)* article from 1966 described the new mandates placed on individual style during the Cultural Revolution, especially within Shanghai:

The revolutionary workers and staff of Shanghai barber shops have adopted revolutionary measures in response to the proposals of the Red Guards: they no longer cut and set hair in the grotesque fashions indulged in by a small minority of people; they cut out those services specially worked out for the bourgeoisie such as manicuring, beauty treatments and so on. In those shops which sold only goods catering to the needs of a small minority of people, workers and staff have taken the revolutionary decision to start supplying the people at large with good popular commodities at low prices.¹¹⁴

The obligatory mass-produced, inexpensive, and unisex “Mao Suits,” combined with simplified personal maintenance (no manicures, no beauty treatments), as described in the quote above, stood in stark contrast to the “grotesque” flapper-style hairdos, accessories, make-up, and *qipao* dresses popular in Shanghai in the 1920s-30s.¹¹⁵ Such shifts in fashion dramatically transformed the expectations of how women should look.

Compared with the cover stars of Shanghai’s lifestyle magazines of the 1920s-30s, such as Anna May Wong on the *Young Companion* (discussed in Chapter One), Jiang Qing on the

¹¹³ Ibid., 222.

¹¹⁴ *Renmin Ribao/People’s Daily* editorial, “Guided by Mao Tse-tung’s Thought: Red Guards Destroy the Old and Establish the New,” *Peking Review* 9, no. 36, (September 2, 1966): 18.

¹¹⁵ Yet the mandatory “Mao suit” also signaled a departure from more immediate stylistic precedents. As late as 1956, amidst early optimism regarding Communist reconstruction, some leaders encouraged the development of vibrant fashions. As Macfarquhar reported in *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (1974), “Symbolic of the new relaxed national mood [during 1956] was a drive to make clothing more stylish and colourful. A meeting arranged by the Youth League and the Women’s Federation on 1 February decided that current fashions did not reflect the growing colourfulness and happiness of the Chinese people in their new life. Beautiful clothes had nothing in common with bourgeois decadence. A fashion show was arranged for mid-March, but the entries were so numerous that later it had to be postponed till the end of that month. In May, Liu Shao-chi’i [Liu Xiaohu] told broadcasting officials: ‘Radio broadcasts should have a close connection with the people’s thought, life and needs...For example, many people in Peking are rather concerned with fashions lately. It is up to you not to let go [of] this and similar topics,’” Macfarquhar and Liu Xiaohu quoted in, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 37-8. Liu Xiaohu (1898-1969), once Mao’s close ally, would become a major target of attack of the Cultural Revolution, dying under cruel treatment in 1969.

cover of *Meishu Zhanbao* constitutes a strikingly different image, although the latter also functions, like its 1920s-30s counterpart, as an icon of a *new* China and its project of cultural modernity. Unlike Wong, Jiang Qing wears no make-up at all, and her hands are left un-manicured. A hat bearing the revolutionary communist star conceals her hair, which would have been cut in a short, unisex style, as was the expectation for married women.¹¹⁶ Jiang Qing also wears a red and white badge featuring Mao's profile above her heart. Mao badges, in addition to other Mao memorabilia, such as posters, figurines, lighters, and dishware, proliferated throughout Mainland China during the years of the Cultural Revolution. Worn and/or displayed as talismans, such objects revealed devotion to Chairman Mao as a supreme leader, and helped establish what has come to be called "the cult of Mao."¹¹⁷

Aside from the hat and badge, Jiang Qing's only other accessory is a pair of glasses that, unlike the luxuriant rings and bracelets sported by Wong on the *Young Companion* cover, appear purely functional. In contrast to the 1920s-30s streamlining of details and imbuing them with *purpose*, defined through their ability to enhance the physical traits of individual women (as articulated by Zhang Ailing), the looseness of Jiang Qing's "Mao suit" conceals all her particular bodily features. Here, all of the accessories and details, such as the Mao badge, and bright red tinting of Jiang Qing's collar and the star on her hat, serve only as reflections of allegiance to Maoist communism.

¹¹⁶ Younger women wore their hair in braids.

¹¹⁷ After 1949, Mao rapidly became the primary signifier of the "new" China. Whereas soldiers began replacing the female models and movie starlets adorning the covers of magazines like *Young Companion* in the later half of the 1930s, by the late 1950s, Chairman Mao clearly dominated popular visual culture as China's most identifiable icon, elevated to the status of a deity. In addition to a public sphere saturated in such images, families often replaced religious icons or ancestral portraits in their private homes with portraits of Mao. For more information on "the cult of Mao" as it developed during China's socialist years, and as it has continued to hold sway in China's post-socialist era, see Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, New York and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

The *Meishu Zhanbao* cover does, however, share some stylistic similarities with the *Young Companion* magazine. For example, *Meishu Zhanbao* employs a photomontage format, as evident in the mixing of photography, text, and drawing. The cover also nods to temporal hybridity, as evident in the combining of simplified, printed characters, with more traditional calligraphic style text.¹¹⁸ This use of photomontage and mixed visual references, however, ultimately combine to promote one totalizing image that touts a singular ideology, Maoism, which appears as the sun. This reveals the primary way in which the Cultural Revolution's modernity project departed from the cosmopolitan model of modernity, which allowed for clashing perspectives, ambiguities, and ambivalences.

The white text printed on the cover's upper right hand corner reads, "To learn from Comrade Jiang Qing, To Pay Respect to Comrade Jiang Qing!" (向江青同志学习,向江青同志致敬!/Xiang Jiang Qing tongzhi xuexi, xiang Jiangqing tongzhi zhijing!). In contrast to the title of the news pamphlet, *Meishu Zhanbao*, which appears in a more traditional, handwritten, calligraphic style in the red block in the cover's lower right hand side, this order to learn from and respect Jiang Qing is printed horizontally from left to right using simplified characters. A result of Mao's linguistic reforms established in the 1950s, simplified characters, which contain less written strokes than traditional Chinese characters, were introduced in an effort to increase literacy, and as part of the cultural project of communism, supposedly designed to reclaim literature for "the masses."¹¹⁹ The standardization of printing sentences horizontally and from left to right, a style adapted from non-Chinese written systems, was also part of Mao's reforms.

¹¹⁸ Following examples of other official publications of the era, such as *Peking Review* (北京周报/*Beijing Zhoubao*), it is likely that this publication's title, *Meishu Zhanbao*, produced in a calligraphic style, was actually written by Mao.

¹¹⁹ According to an oft cited anecdote, "When Mao Zedong met Joseph Stalin in 1950, he asked him how to reform the Chinese language. 'Yours is a great country,' Stalin said, 'You should create your own phonetic alphabet,'"

In contrasting the new, foreign-influenced writing structure against the more traditionally written title, this *Meishu Zhanbao* cover adheres to one of the key slogans of the Cultural Revolution, “Make the Past Serve the Present and Foreign Things Serve China.”¹²⁰ This slogan, with its emphases on *servicing* the present and *servicing* China, implies that the cultural and temporal hybridity that defined Shanghai’s emerging models of modernity in the 1920s-30s, had, by the time of the 1960s, been replaced by mandated subservience of “foreign” and “past” cultures and traditions to the current nationalism. Throughout this chapter, I argue that such references to “the past” and “the foreign” functioned only at a stylistic level, ultimately obscuring the singular and totalizing nature of the project of modernity of the Cultural Revolution.

This totalizing nature can be identified through the project’s insistence on absolute allegiance to Maoist doctrine, as evident on the cover of *Meishu Zhanbao*, and its insistence that art function entirely in the service of politics. Articulating this position is the text in the red-bordered box on the cover’s lower left hand side, also printed in simplified Chinese characters and read from left to right, which comes from Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”:

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are

Recounted in Mark O’Neill, “How a Linguist Set Out to Rewrite Chinese History,” *Sunday Morning Post* (May 30, 2010): 14. In 1955, the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, held a national conference and organized two teams of scholars to enact linguistic reforms, namely the simplification of Chinese characters by making complex written characters and more streamlined with less strokes. Both the pinyin and simplified Chinese systems that developed in the mid to late 1950s remain in place to this day as the primary linguistic systems of Mainland China.

¹²⁰ Mao Zedong, “Letter to the students of the Central Conservatory of Music,” 1.

part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.¹²¹

This quote, incessantly reprinted during the Cultural Revolution, presents Mao's conceptualization of art and literature, informed by Vladimir Lenin's writings on the subject, as "cogs," also referred to in other instances as "weapons," of the "proletarian revolutionary cause." Echoing the language employed at Mao's "Yan'an Forum," both the title and the imagery of the *Meishu Zhanbao* (*Fine Art War News*) cover were overtly militaristic, furthering the mission to make art serve as a revolutionary weapon.¹²²

To support this mission, Mao mandated that art and literature become more easily legible and widely accessible to the proletarian class. This was the same rationale used to support the PRC's linguistic forms. Paradoxically, however, these more efficacious language systems allowed literature to become more widely accessible at precisely the same time that Mao's regime extremely narrowed the literary content that could circulate, signaled through the profuse repetition of Mao's, and Jiang Qing's notes on art and literature, and the absence of most all other voices from the circulated discourse on Chinese modernity during these years.

In February 1966, Jiang Qing held a nearly twenty-day long forum in Shanghai that established the chief principles of the Cultural Revolution's artistic policy, all of which echoed points made by Mao in his previous speeches and writings.¹²³ Following the cultural line

¹²¹ Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (May 1942), reprinted in *Quotations from Mao Tsetung* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1972), 299.

¹²² Jiang Qing demanded the "new" China "turn our literary and art criticism into daggers and hand-grenades and learn to handle them effectively in close combat" and "place the weapon of literary and art criticism in the hands of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers." See Jiang Qing cited in "Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces With Which Comrade Lin Piao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching," in *Peking Review* 10, no. 23 (June 2, 1967): 15.

¹²³ Jiang Qing's "Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces" (*Budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui*) was a meeting, lecture, and workshop series sponsored by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Lin Biao (1907-1971), the Minister of Defense and then close ally of Mao Zedong. The Forum was held in Shanghai from February 2 to 20, 1966. During the forum, Jiang Qing continually repeated that there must be more thorough attempts made to

established by Mao, Jiang Qing used the forum to position culture as a weapon and to insist that art and literature be considered as crucial components of overall proletarian revolution. Jiang Qing advised her audience, which was comprised of People's Liberation Army soldiers, to immerse themselves fully in both politics and culture, and to rally against "black," or anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary influences, such as those, she argued, that permeated Shanghai in the 1920s-30s.¹²⁴ Despite these condemnations of the "bourgeois and imperialist" values of past Shanghai-based art, Jiang Qing, reiterating a key point made by Mao, praised the literature of Lu Xun, referring to the writer as "the leader of the fighting, Left-Wing cultural movement," and advocating his (and by extension, the League of Left-Wing Artists') emphases on "truthful

disseminate and understand Mao's philosophies of culture, especially as explicated in Mao's "On New Democracy" (1940), "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Art and Literature," (1942) and "Letter to the Yan'an Peking Opera Theatre After Seeing 'Driven to Join the Liangshan Mountain Rebels'" (1944), as "the most complete, the most comprehensive and the most systematic historical summaries of [the] struggle between two lines on the cultural front," Jiang Qing paraphrased in "Summary of the Forum," 11. Her speech identified this "struggle" as an ideological split between Mao Zedong's thought, based on Marxism-Leninism, and that of corrupt, rightwing CCP officials, who were cast as representatives of "the black anti-Party and anti-socialist line," described as "a combination of bourgeois ideas on literature and art, modern revisionist ideas on literature and art and what is known as the literature and art of the 1930s (in the Guomindang areas of China).

In his introduction to Jiang Qing at the Forum, Lin Biao told the servicemen and women who would be traveling to Shanghai to attend the Forum, "Comrade Jiang Qing...is very sharp politically on questions of literature and art, and she really knows art. She has many opinions, and they are very valuable. You should pay good attention to them and take measures to insure that they are applied ideologically and organizationally. From now on, the army's documents concerning literature and art should be sent to her. Get in touch with her when you have any information for her to keep her well posted on the situation in literary and artwork in the armed forces. Ask her for her opinions which will help improve this work. We should not rest content with either the present ideological level or the present artistic level of such work, both of which need further improvement," Lin Biao quoted in "Summary of the Forum," 10. Lin Biao thus seems to have placed full trust in Jiang Qing, urging his comrades to take her suggestions seriously. The Minister of Defense also proclaimed, as a barely veiled warning, that all new documents on art and literature must meet her approval. This introduction reveals Jiang Qing's immense power over the State's cultural apparatus during the mid-1960s, a power that would continue to grow over the ensuing decade.

¹²⁴ During the "Shanghai Forum," Jiang Qing persistently repeated statements against the "black line" of art and literature: "In accordance with the instructions of the Central Committee of the Party, we must resolutely carry on a great socialist revolution on the cultural front and completely eliminate this black line. After we are rid of this black line, still others will appear and the struggle must go on. Therefore, this is an arduous, complex and long-term struggle which will take decades, or even centuries. It is a cardinal issue which has a vital bearing on the future of the Chinese revolution and the future of the world revolution," Jiang Qing, "Summary of the Forum," 11-12.

writing” and “the deepening of realism.”¹²⁵ Despite this rhetoric, however, the project of modernity promoted during the Cultural Revolution clearly broke with the anti-imperialist model as developed in 1920s-1930s Shanghai, specifically through its privileging of heroic socialist realism, which marked a major departure from Lu Xun’s insistence on anti-heroic realism.

When Lu Xun promoted Kollwitz’s woodcuts, he argued that their revolutionary power lie in the artist’s ability to show that “there are others ‘injured and insulted’ like us in many places on the earth, as well as artists who mourn, protest and struggle on their behalf.”¹²⁶ As discussed in Chapter One, Kollwitz’s image that Lu Xun had published on the cover of *Beidou* in 1931 (to secretly mourn the assassination of his friend) depicts a beaten mother forced to sacrifice her baby as a victim of war. Both Kollwitz’s image and the *Meishu Zhanbao* cover incorporate auras, yet, while the former serves to cast light on individual suffering, the latter casts a single ideology, represented by Mao’s book, as the sun. The *Meishu Zhanbao* cover, for its victorious posturing and suggestion of Jiang Qing’s illumination by Mao’s divine philosophies, constitutes an idealized portrait that stands as the opposite of what Lu Xun had advocated. Through its emphases on heroic realism, and Mao as ultimate hero, the Cultural Revolution’s model of modernity drastically diverged from the 1920s-30s anti-imperialist one it purported to emulate.

¹²⁵ Despite Jiang Qing’s condemnation of the “bourgeois and imperialist” values of the art of the 1930s, she contended that there were “some good things” about this era, referring specifically to Lu Xun, who she extolled as “the leader of the fighting, Left-Wing cultural movement,” “Summary of the Forum,” 13. The paradox of Mao’s and Jiang Qing’s upholding of Lu Xun as a model for the art of the Cultural Revolution will be further discussed throughout this chapter.

¹²⁶ Lu Xun, “Written in Deep Night: Introducing Käthe Kollwitz” (1936), in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, vol.4, 255. See Chapter One for further discussion of Lu Xun’s theorization of anti-heroic socialist realism vis-à-vis the woodcut movement.

New Art and the Collapse of Artist, Worker, and Audience

While Lu Xun's work was relentlessly praised throughout the Cultural Revolution, many of the living artists who had pioneered new forms of modernity in 1920s-30s Shanghai, including Pang Xunqin and Cai Ruohong, were denounced as "rightists" or "bourgeois imperialists," and exiled to labor camps, publicly humiliated, forced to destroy their artworks by their own hands, and/or banned from teaching and exhibiting.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, art schools throughout China were restructured according to the artistic policies mandated by Mao and Jiang Qing. Students seized control of established art academies, while young Red Guard artists, with the support of officials, established new art schools throughout China. In 1966, a catholic cathedral in Shanghai's former French Concession (not far from the bygone Storm Society studio) was converted into the campus of the newly established Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop (*Shanghai Youhua Diaosu Chuangzuo Shi*).¹²⁸ Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Shanghai Oil Painting and

¹²⁷ During the Cultural Revolution, older intellectuals and artists who discussed or made "feudalist," traditional Chinese art or "imperialist," Western art were imprisoned, physically attacked, retained in caged areas called "cowsheds," forced to do manual labor, exiled, publicly scorned, and in some cases badly beaten, or even killed. Even former members of the League of Left-Wing Artists, such as Cai Ruohong, whose satirical cartoon discussed in Chapter One, *Avenue Joffre* (1937), critiqued Shanghai's bourgeois consumerism, were subject to persecution. During the Cultural Revolution, both Cai Ruohong and artist Hua Junwu (1915-1982), the heads of the Chinese Artists' Association in the early 1960s, were blamed for art practices labeled as "black" rightwing activities. They were condemned for promoting "variety of subjects, innovations, individualism, and 'poetry' in art, the travels of professional artists... the publication of monographs of artists' work... one-man shows... [and] permitting the sale of the exhibits." See Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 63. In a 1967 issue of *Chinese Literature*, Cai Ruohong and Hua Junwu were accused of the following "crimes" as outlined in the article's subject headings: "Instead of Serving the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers They Worked for the Restoration of Capitalism," "They Encouraged Pleasure Trips but Opposed Merging with the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers," "They Used Fame and Profit to Undermine the Ranks of Proletarian Art," and "They Tried to Stop Workers, Peasants and Soldiers from Mastering the Weapon of Art." Chao Hui, "An Art Program Serving the Restoration of Capitalism," *Chinese Literature* 4 (1967): 123-127. Art historian Julia Andrews wrote of an instance in which young Red Guard artists from the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop severely beat the Catholic sculptor Zhang Chongren, and aimed to publicly humiliate the painter Lin Fengmian, an associate of the Shanghai Chinese Painting Institute, by forcing him to paint in front of a public audience. See Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 348. For information on the denunciation of Pang Xuqin as a rightist during the Cultural Revolution, see footnote 105.

¹²⁸ The Workshop was officially formed in 1965, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, through a merging of the Chinese Sculpture Institute, founded by the Minister of Culture in 1957, and the Shanghai Art Design Company/Sculpture Division. In 1966, the Workshop moved its location from West Jian Guo Road near Huaihai

Sculpture Workshop became the most actively involved art institution in the city, and the works produced there helped to establish the Cultural Revolution's model of modernity. In this section, I look at two examples of emblematic works produced by the artists of the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop, a public mural and a socialist realist painting, each of which aimed to uplift Shanghai's urban environs towards the support of the new model of modernity as it insisted on all categorical distinctions between artist, worker, and audience, and a totalizing unification under the banner of Maoist ideology.

Art in Mao's Public: *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*

In the early years just after the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop was established, its young artists were primarily involved, like their counterparts all over China, in producing public murals depicting Mao. In November 1968, artists from the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop collaborated to produce one such project, a large-scale mural entitled *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages (Mao zhuxi gege shiqi de xiaoxiang)* (Figure 2.2).¹²⁹ While murals of Mao sprang up all throughout China during these years, Shanghai was reportedly the first city to produce works that matched Mao's portraits with his sayings, as in *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*.¹³⁰

This mural consisted of eight separate panels, each of which was divided into two parts, top and bottom. The top half of each panel contained a portrait of Mao, whose centralized figure

Road (formerly Avenue Joffre), to an old Catholic church at the corner of Changle Road and Ruijin Road, both sites set in the heart of the old French Concession. In the converted cathedral, painters and sculptors set out to create a "new" Chinese art in adherence with the program of the Cultural Revolution. For a timeline of events surrounding the establishment of the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop (later called Institute), see, Qiu Ruimin, ed., *40 Years of Shanghai Youhua Diaosu Yuan (Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute): 1964-2005* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2005).

¹²⁹ "Events of Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute," in *Shanghai Zhongguo Huayuan 1956-2004/Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy: 1956-2004*, ed. Shi Dawei (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 2005), 301.

¹³⁰ Laing, *Winking Owl*, 65.

dominated the frame. Arranged from right to left (following the conventions of traditional Chinese scroll painting), these individual portraits of Mao represented key moments in his life in chronological order, from the time he first emerged as a hero during the Long March (1934), a military retreat in which the CCP's Red Army successfully escaped Guomindang attack (far right panel) to his speech at the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China (1949) (fourth panel from left) to his current longstanding position as China's chief commander (far left panel). All of these portraits were adapted from pre-existing imagery (photographs, and/or paintings), including images that had been, or would later be used in large-scale oil paintings.¹³¹ In adopting pre-existing images, mimetically representing photographs, and by collaboratively producing *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* (no single artist's name is signed, only *Xin Hua Yuan/New Painting Academy*), students at the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop worked to undermine the values previously placed on individual artistic creativity and self-expression.

At the same time that individualism in art, and in society more generally, was denounced, Mao was upheld as China's supreme leader and singular icon. As in all officially approved images of Mao, the portraits in this mural were executed in a socialist realist style adapted from Soviet models, and depicted the leader in a variety of heroic postures. In three of the images, Mao commandingly holds out his right arm and waves his right hand, a supposed sign of communist solidarity. In two other images, his hands are placed firmly on his hips, revealing a sturdy constitution. He is pictured in the countryside in many of the images, celebrating his military victories in China's mountainous western regions, successfully rallying peasants

¹³¹ For example, the third panel from left features a portrait of Mao in the countryside, wearing a white shirt and carrying a hat. This image would later be incorporated into Chen Yanning's (b. 1945) large-scale painting, *Chairman Mao Inspects the Guangdong Countryside* (1972). Both images take their subject matter from an inspection visit Mao made to the outskirts of Guangzhou in 1958.

towards revolution, and ingeniously spearheading the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). (The Great Leap Forward, now understood as a disaster resulting in the death by famine of nearly thirty million Chinese people, was incessantly celebrated in the official art and literature of the Cultural Revolution). Mao is also shown delivering speeches (the second panel from the right is likely referencing his 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum” discussed in the previous section), honoring his intellectual prowess and oration skills.

The bottom half of each of the mural’s panels contains a quote, most likely culled from Mao’s philosophical writings and poems, which were reproduced in the leader’s own highly individualistic, handwritten calligraphy. During the Cultural Revolution, both Mao’s poetry and calligraphy were reproduced incessantly, and were to be found throughout the public realm. As scholar Geremie R. Barmé noted, “lines from Mao’s poems, or the poems in their entirety, had been carved on every conceivable surface; they were etched onto the minute to the monstrous, from grains of rice to mountain crags and rock facades.”¹³² Mao’s calligraphy, meanwhile, was ubiquitously reproduced on surfaces, ranging from magazine covers to murals. Compared to the pro-revolutionary graffiti and banners with slogans (often executed in bold, simplified characters) that were commonly seen in late 1960s and early 1970s China, Mao’s calligraphy stood out as relatively traditional. While Mao’s writings, including his poetry, privileged revolutionary content, they often utilized what might generally be described as pre-revolutionary forms.¹³³ The characters incorporated into the mural’s panels, for instance, were written in a

¹³² Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, 33.

See, also, Mao Zedong, *Mao Tsetung Poems* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1976).

¹³³ Mao’s calligraphy, while adhering to tradition in its very nature as calligraphy, has nonetheless been called “flamboyant” and “undisciplined” by some critics, who argue that his writing departs from classical precedents in a number of stylistic ways. See Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, 34.

For an indepth discussion of Mao Zedong’s calligraphy and calligraphic style, see Bai Qianshen, “From Wu Dacheng to Mao Zedong: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Twentieth Century,” in *Chinese Art:*

freehand style, and vertically, from right to left. Such modes of writing followed conventions in place long before even the New Culture Movement. While Red Guard artists would attack master calligraphers as representatives of “old” culture, they paradoxically upheld and widely circulated Mao’s calligraphy. This double standard reveals the hypocrisy underlying the Cultural Revolution. While the movement supposedly called for complete equality amongst all, Mao was positioned as the supreme leader; he set artistic policy, but need not follow its dictates.

Even while propagating this hierarchy of power, the public placement of *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* helped collapse the division between artist and audience, one of the chief aims of the Cultural Revolution’s distinctive brand of Maoist modernity. The mural was created and exhibited publicly on a wall on Huaihai Road, near Maoming Road. Huaihai Road was formerly the main boulevard of the French Concession – Avenue Joffre – the subject of Cai Ruohong’s satirical cartoon of 1937 (as discussed in Chapter One). By producing a mural at the site of what was once the commercial center of a foreign-run concession, the Red Guard artists of the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop publicly declared that Maoism had successfully replaced the semi-colonialism and Western capitalism of “old Shanghai.”

A handwritten slogan above the portraits of Mao further announces this victory: “To be sure, a complete collapse of colonialism, imperialism, and all systems of exploitation, the complete rising up of the world’s oppressed people, and the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, is not far off” (可以肯定, 殖民主义, 帝国主义和一切剥削制度的彻底崩溃, 世界上一切被压迫人民, 被压迫民族的彻底翻身, 已经为期不远了/*Keyi kending, zhimin*

Modern Expressions, ed. Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 246-283.

zhuyi, diguo zhuyi he yiqie boxue zhidu de chedi bengkui, shijie shang yiqie bei yapo renmin, bei yapo minzu de chedi fanshen, yijing weiqi bu yuanle).¹³⁴ In contrast with the mural (which is intended to be read from right to left), the slogan, following post-1949 writing conventions, is scrawled horizontally from left to right. Furthermore, the slogan's characters, printed in large, bold, easily legible styles, are clearly differentiated from Mao's more formal calligraphy as presented in the mural.

The slogan's writing style parallels those of the era's 大字报/*dazibao* (big character posters) – homemade posters that were used to exalt Mao Zedong and the principles of the Cultural Revolution.¹³⁵ Big character posters, which were plastered all over the city's surfaces in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were also used to denounce “class enemies,” who were labeled as “snake demons” and “ox spirits.” Those individuals labeled as counter-revolutionaries, such as “bourgeois” teachers, were often made to wear big character posters around their necks. These posters reported individuals' alleged crimes, and/or bore their names with large “X's” through them (or with their characters turned upside down or sideways) as signs of disrespect, and public humiliation (Figure 2.3).¹³⁶ During the Cultural Revolution, language was not only made more accessible (through more readily legible styles), but was also manipulated, and harnessed to completely cover over anyone and anything considered counter-revolutionary. Big character

¹³⁴ In the image of the mural, *keyi*, the two characters before *kending*, are missing, as is *guo* in *diguo*.

¹³⁵ *Dazibao* held a prominent role in the Cultural Revolution. As Andrews writes, “The most frequently seen, yet transitory, art form of the period may have been the big-character posters (*dazibao*)... On 1 June [1966], Mao approved broadcast of the text of a big-character poster that denounced the president of Beijing University. In the view of the Red Guards, he personally launched the Cultural Revolution by this act,” See Andrews, “The Art of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Art in Turmoil*, 33.

¹³⁶ Official newspapers and pamphlets of the era were, for example, filled with headlines denouncing Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969), a target of attack during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, who later died under cruel treatment in 1969. The leader was condemned not only with stories attesting to his rightwing thinking and policies, but also with large “X's” used to cross out his name, or by printing one or more of the characters of Liu Shaoqi sideways or upside-down. Photographs of those accused of counter-revolutionary activities were also crossed out with “X's.”

posters, as well as murals such as *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*, were plastered on and painted over facades as a means of burying Shanghai's semi-colonial history.¹³⁷

By 1966, the condemnation of Shanghai's decadent past had reached a powerful crescendo, and the city was aggressively, physically transformed. A 1966 issue of *北京周报/Beijing Zhoubao (Peking Review)* described this new face of Shanghai:

In this huge city which has the largest concentration of capitalists in the country and which, until the liberation, had long been under the rule of the imperialists and domestic reactionaries, the revolutionary students and the broad masses of workers and staff have taken up their iron brooms to sweep away all old habits and customs. The show windows of the Wing On Co., one of the biggest department stores in the city, are plastered with big-character posters put up by the Red Guards and workers and staff of the store, proposing that "Wing On" (Eternal Peace) should be changed into "Yong Hong" (Red For Ever) or "Young Dou" (Struggle For Ever)... The posters point out that in the old society the boss of the store chose the name "Wing On" because he wanted to be left in peace forever to exploit the working people. "For a long time now their store has been in the hands of the people and we are certainly not going to tolerate this odious name a day longer," say the protestors.¹³⁸

This passage reflects the importance Red Guards placed on the transformation not only of Shanghai's urban landscape, but also of the language within that landscape. Protestors plastered over the signs of private businesses and centers of material consumption, such as Shanghai's Wing On department store, and any façade that was a reminder of the city's semi-colonial,

¹³⁷ Big character posters, public murals portraying revolutionary peasants, workers and soldiers united, or individual portraits of Mao Zedong, as well as long banners with revolutionary slogans saturated Shanghai's landscape. In one striking instance, the twenty-four story high *Guoji Fandian* (literally International Hotel), or Park Hotel, in downtown Shanghai – once Asia's tallest skyscraper and long celebrated as a shining example of imported art deco and setback architectural styles – was draped in the longest communist banner of the Cultural Revolution. See Er Dongqiang (Deke Erh), introduction to *Shanghai Art Deco*, eds. Er Dongqiang and Tess Johnston (Hong Kong: Old China Hand Press, 2006), 15.

In recalling his youth spent growing up during the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai-based documentary photographer and cultural historian Er Dongqiang stated that the city could be characterized by a literal veiling over of its internationalist past, as big character posters and long banners with communist slogans covered building facades. Er Dongqiang, interview by author, 27 January 2009, Shanghai, audio recording, Deke Erh Centre, Shanghai, China.

¹³⁸ *Renmin Ribao/People's Daily* editorial, "Guided by Mao Tse-tung's Thought: Red Guards Destroy the Old and Establish the New," *Peking Review*, 9, no. 36, (September 2, 1966): 18. See also "Shanghai, Tianjin xianxi xinde geming re" ["Shanghai and Tianjin stir up new revolutionary heat"], *Bo er ta la bao [Bo er ta newspaper]* (August 26, 1966).

bourgeois past. *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*, erected at Huaihai Road (formerly Avenue Joffre) should be understood as one such intervention, which strove to express national ownership of public space that had once been occupied by Western imperialists and bourgeois industrialists. By producing art not only about the streets, but in and on the streets, artists at the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop aimed to claim the public for art, and art for the public. Yet, through its exaltation of Mao as a deity-like figure, evidenced by the references to religious iconography and the allowance of his words and calligraphic script to reign supreme, the mural ended up, like many of the public works of the time, staking a claim not for everyone, but for one, namely Mao.

During the early years of the Cultural Revolution, non-professionally trained artists, especially workers, peasants, soldiers, and young students, were encouraged to make art in the streets. Officials such as Mao and Jiang Qing advocated the creation of murals, like *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*, big character posters, and public performances as a means of hybridizing artist and audience. In Shanghai, art produced by cultural troupes and propaganda teams made up of workers, peasants, and soldiers culminated in the “Shanghai Festival of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers” (Figures 2.4-2.5), a citywide literary, art, and performing arts festival held on April 21, 1967.¹³⁹ The festival’s artworks, consisting mostly of public performances, were celebrated as “propaganda” that “raised high the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung’s thought,” and as “the weapon of revolutionary literature and art” “displaying the tremendous power of the main force of the great proletarian cultural revolution, so that this festival sparkles with the radiance of the age of socialism.”¹⁴⁰ As Liu Debao, a young

¹³⁹ For an official description of the worker-peasant-soldier festival of literature, see “The Brilliance of Chairman Mao’s Thought on Literature and Art Irradiates the Shanghai Stage,” *Chinese Literature* 9 (1967): 178-186.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178-9, 183, 186.

Shanghai student turned cultural producer during the Cultural Revolution recalled, “It was a very exciting time. All of a sudden, anyone could make art, everyone was an artist.”¹⁴¹ The idea that non-professionally trained artists could, and should make art marked a radical shift, as the idea of “everyone as an artist” gained ground.

While sharing similar language, this notion of widespread artistic participation departed markedly from its theorization by European and American avant-garde artists during the 1960s-70s. When Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), for instance, claimed that “EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST” in 1973, it was in relation to his conceptualization of “direct democracy,” which he saw as an alternative to communism, a de-centralized social organism without hierarchies that offered everyone freedom and self-administration.¹⁴² In the early years of the Cultural Revolution, however, the promotion of “everyone as an artist” sprang from a highly centralized political sphere, which dictated all of art’s aspects: who could participate (with special privilege given to workers, peasants, and soldiers), what media could be used (public murals, posters, and performances were especially promoted), what content could be produced (works had to celebrate Chinese communism, honor Mao and his teachings, and decry bourgeois imperialism and feudalism), its style (easily legible writing styles and heroic socialist realism were mandated), and its reception (there was an insistence on the integration of art makers, workers, and audience).

¹⁴¹ Liu Debao, interview by author, 9 May 2010, Shanghai, video recording, private residence and archival warehouse of Liu Debao, Shanghai, China.

¹⁴² In 1973, Joseph Beuys wrote, “EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER. Self-determination and participation in the cultural sphere (freedom); in the structuring of laws (democracy); and in the sphere of economics (socialism). Self administration and decentralization (three-fold structure) occurs: FREE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM,” Joseph Beuys, “I am Searching for Field Character” (1973), trans. Caroline Tisdall in the exhibition catalogue, *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974). There have been numerous other movements in the realms of art and culture more broadly, such as punk, which promote the idea of “everyone as an artist.”

Through its public placement and collective creation, *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*, like many of the public art works produced in Shanghai during the late 1960s, aimed to promote the concept of “everyone as an artist.” Yet, through its monumental scale, divine representation of Mao, and erasure of all individuals under Mao, the mural more accurately established a law of *everyone as an artist subservient to Mao*.

Artist and Worker: *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky*

Further guided by Maoist doctrine, a number of artists from the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop set out to collaborate with workers, following the leader’s instructions:

China’s revolutionary... artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and whole-heartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyze all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work.¹⁴³

In Shanghai, adhering to this call meant that artists were expected to align themselves with factory workers, and especially those working in shipyards and/or docks, as the city’s main industry was shipping.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Mao Zedong quoted in Yoshihisa Higasa, “We Follow Chairman Mao’s Revolutionary Line on Art and Literature,” *China Reconstructs* XVII, no. 4 (April 19, 1968): 32-33.

¹⁴⁴ Under the art policy of the Cultural Revolution, based on Mao Zedong’s watershed “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” (May 1942), artists were required to align themselves with workers, peasants and soldiers as per one of Chairman Mao’s most frequently reproduced statements, “All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use,” Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum” (1942), reprinted in *Quotations*, 300. Mao also argued that the question of audience changed dramatically when the CCP established their wartime headquarters throughout China’s vast countryside, “In the Shanghai period [1927-1937 when the Communist Party maintained their base in Shanghai], the audience for revolutionary works of art and literature and art consisted primarily of students, office workers, and shop assistants. In the general rear after the war broke out, this circle expanded a little, but it still consisted primarily of the same people because the government there has kept workers, peasants, and soldiers away from revolutionary literature and art. It is a completely different matter in our base areas. The audience for works of literature and art here consists of workers, peasants, and soldiers, together with their cadres in the Party, the government, and the army,” Mao Zedong, “Talks at Yan’an Conference,” in *Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, trans. and ed., Bonnie S. McDougall (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), 60.

In 1971, a group of painters from the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop, who, following the Cultural Revolution-Era convention of not naming individual artists, referred to themselves collectively as the Creative Group (组画的创作/*Zuhua de chuangzuo*) spent a number of months living with, observing, talking to, posing as, and producing art alongside workers in a Shanghainese shipyard.¹⁴⁵ According to the artists' accounts, they "went deep into the workshops and the docks, and there lived and labored side by side with the dockworkers."¹⁴⁶ Employing Maoist rhetoric, they reported,

In our thoughts and feelings we strived to form one with the old master workers. In our creative work we strived to depict the heroic image of the working class who tried to lift China's shipbuilding industry to its own feet and to represent the seething, splendid fighting life on the shipbuilding front.¹⁴⁷

As this statement declares, the members of the Creative Group aimed to hybridize the roles of artist and worker, to "form one" with the "old master workers."¹⁴⁸ Also in line with Maoist

¹⁴⁵ *Trees of Fire* was intended to exist as a collaborative work, both as testaments to the cooperation between workers and artists and also as multi-authored paintings created by a team of artists instead of just one. However, as later admitted by Zhang Guiming, the artists' collaborative works were often less successful than their singularly produced ones. While four artists were credited with the creation of *Trees of Fire* and the work itself left unsigned, Zhang Guiming later confessed that the artist Yan Guoji, one of the four who spent time at the Shipyard, painted the work by himself. As reported by Zhang Guiming, the four artists from the Creative Group were he himself, Yan Guoji, Xu Zhiwen, and Chen Shifan. See Zhang Guiming, "Shanghai Zaochuan Gongye Da Dafan Shenzhang: Zu Hua de Chuangzuo" ["Shipbuilding Industry Fights to Stand On Its Feet: Painting Group's Creation"], in *Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy*, 194.

¹⁴⁶ Creative Group of Academy of Chinese Painting of Shanghai, "Some Experiences in Creating the New in Chinese Painting," *SCMP* 5208 (September 5, 1972): 9. [Originally published in *Renmin Ribao/People's Daily* (August 22, 1972).]

Zhang Guiming described how the artists first produced a number of sketches, including those of welders and machinery on site at the shipyard. Zhang recalls that the artists fully engaged themselves in both industrial and artistic production by posing for each other as models/laborers, and creating sketches on site that would be used as the basis for the series. See Zhang Guiming, *Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy*, 194.

¹⁴⁷ For the Creative Group, working side by side with laborers adhered to the, "Marxist stand, viewpoint, and method [that] the artist must observe, experience, study, and analyze through all the phenomena the rich raw material of life with which he comes into contact, grasp the things in life that have typical significance, and proceed to think artistically and to compose. Meanwhile, he should strive to achieve "unity between revolutionary political content and the most perfect possible artistic form," Creative Group, "Some Experiences," 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ The workers and artists did not always share the same views. One anecdote offered by the Creative Group hints at the ever-present division between the two groups, "On one occasion we drew a sketch showing a welder welding steel plates in a rainstorm. We drew a woman worker holding an umbrella over another woman worker in order to

doctrine, these artists stressed a desire to picture the shipyard workers as heroic, and to represent the “splendid fighting” strength of China’s shipbuilding industry. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, China, which had cut itself off almost entirely from international trade, was crippled by poor quality factory equipment. Nonetheless, Mao and CCP officials projected an image of nationalized self-sufficiency, and industrial progress, continuously boasting of technological achievements that could compete with, and indeed overcome, those of capitalist nations.

During and immediately after the period in which the Creative Group artists lived alongside workers at the Shanghainese shipyard, they produced a series of paintings entitled, *Shanghai Shipbuilding Industry Fights to Stand On Its Feet* (上海造船工业大打翻身仗/*Shanghai zaochuan gongye da da fanshen zhang*).¹⁴⁹ The Creative Group especially upheld one painting from the series, *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky* (*Huo shu yin hua bu ye tian*) (Figure 2.6), for embodying the *new* Chinese painting of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵⁰ In the words of the artists, this painting depicts:

Shipbuilding workers fighting to complete several 10,000-ton ships simultaneously and racing against time in their work. The flashes of the electric welders on the docks at night light up the whole place and turn it into day. It is a moving picture of the heroic splendor of socialist construction.”¹⁵¹

show this concern the worker comrades felt for each other. Seeing the sketch, one old master worker said, “We open our umbrella to prevent the welding from getting wet and insure the good quality of the job, not to prevent our clothes from getting wet. What you have drawn is different from what we think,” Ibid., 10. The Creative Group used this story to argue “that if our ideological domain was not high enough, it would not be possible for us to reflect profoundly the thoughts and feelings of the workers, peasants and soldiers and things of essential significance in life,” Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ The English translation of this series title, “Shipbuilding Industry Fights to Stand On Its Feet” appears in Creative Group, “Some Experiences,” 9.

¹⁵⁰ The title *Huo shu yin hua bu ye tian* literally translates to “Fire Tree Silver Flower No Night Day,” insinuating that the sparks and lights from the machinery light up the night sky. The English translation, *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky*, appears in Creative Group, “Some Experiences,” 12.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

This statement employs the language of battle, using terms and phrases like “fighting” and “racing against time,” in order to stress the heroic efforts of ship builders and Chinese industry.

In a later recollection of his time spent at the shipyard, Creative Group member, Zhang Guiming, reflected that the workers had manufactured a very large boat “despite the poor conditions.”¹⁵² Any reference to poor conditions, however, was totally absent from *Trees of Fire and Flowers*, an idealized representation of glowing, state of the art industrial shipbuilding efficiency. The shipyard is depicted as fully functioning at night, suggesting that the workers labored proudly and without tiring around the clock. Towering derricks glow bright in the background, as does a red banner located in the painting’s central vanishing point. The glistening banner reads, *Long Live Chairman Mao* (毛主席万岁/*Mao zhuxi wan sui*), and below it, there is a smudged afterimage, representing the banner’s reflection in the distant sea. The banner promoting Mao’s everlasting life appears like an apparition in the sky, imbuing the leader with divine qualities (as in the previously discussed *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages*). In the left foreground of the painting, two small figures – a welder, and another man standing watch – are pictured atop a crane. The welder sends out a burst of orange and red flames, making the crane resemble a flowering tree.

While the title, *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky*,¹⁵³ references natural elements, the industrial landscape pictured is devoid of nature, save the sliver of sea reflecting Mao’s banner. Indeed, artificially lighting up the night sky so that it never turns dark celebrates the triumph of industry over nature. The work’s title plays with this metaphor,

¹⁵² Zhang Guiming, *Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy*, 194.

¹⁵³ This title is likely referencing a Chinese poem. See, for example, Liu Ya-Tzu’s poem for Chairman Mao written during China’s socialist era, which begins with the line: “Displays of fiery trees and silver flowers, a night without darkness.” This first line, which reads like the title of the painting, might also be referencing an older poem. See Liu Ya-Tzu, Liu Ya-Tzu’s poem, in *Mao Tsetung Poems*, 29.

comparing the glowing derricks, illuminated construction cranes, lit up windows of the boats under construction, and sparks from welding machinery to “trees of fire” and “flowers of silver.” By employing ink (a traditional medium), and by replacing trees (a motif of traditional Chinese landscape painting) with a modern industrial scene, the Creative Group aimed to use “old forms” to represent “new subjects.”¹⁵⁴ Further supporting this goal, the artists of the Creative Group wrote of their incorporation of “the brush technique of Chinese painting of varying strokes to show different shades of light and darkness.”¹⁵⁵ By combining the traditional Chinese medium of ink, references to landscape painting, and traditional Chinese brush stroke techniques with techniques of Western-style oil painting, identified as the mixing of warm and cold colors, the Creative Group purported to create a hybrid painting that would satisfy Mao’s order to “Make the Past Serve the Present and Foreign Things Serve China.”¹⁵⁶

Simultaneously, the Creative Group strove to destroy old, “outmoded” ideals. Its members wrote:

To give expression to revolutionary content, Chinese painting must put “destruction” in the lead. For a long, long time Chinese painting has been misappropriated and utilized by the exploiting classes. The old methods of

¹⁵⁴ As the Creative Group wrote of the entire series, “The subjects of the pictures are new, but the form used is old. This is certainly not merely a question of form of art or method of expression, but a reflection of old thoughts and feelings and old esthetics,” Creative Group, “Some Experiences,” 11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Mao Zedong, “Letter to the students of the Central Conservatory of Music,” 1. As the Creative Group explains, “To emphasize the night scene, we began by simply emphatically using various shades of black ink for the shadows and darker portions of the picture. As a result, the picture appeared dark and gloomy. But according to the mood of the subject, we made use of the technique of sketching to show the sense of quality and quantity and different degrees of light and shade as well as the method used in oil painting of treating the relationship between warm and cold colors. This intensified the air of seething activity and the brightness of ardor and enthusiasm. The brush technique of Chinese painting of varying strokes to show different shades of light and darkness in treating the relationship between substance and void was also used,” Ibid. 12. The artists thus utilized techniques drawn from both Chinese ink and brush painting, and Western oil painting, blending the ancient and the foreign to create a work that was *modern*, in both content and style.

expression came into being in conformity with the life and customs of old times.¹⁵⁷

In regards to this argument, the artists of the Group, echoing a strategy used by Mao and Jiang Qing, referred to Lu Xun as inspiration for their aesthetics of “destruction,” citing Lu Xun’s famous quote, “In adopting an old form there will necessarily be rejection of some parts, and where there is rejection there will necessarily be additions. The result is the emergence of a new form...”¹⁵⁸ However, *Trees of Fire* departed from those works promoted by Lu Xun in an essential way. While Lu Xun’s advocated anti-heroic realism, a depiction of “injured and the insulted” individuals, as he put it, the Creative Group staged a scene that was supernaturally heroic.

The shipyard workers in *Trees of Fire* are not presented as individuals, or imbued with any human traits. Instead, they are pictured as tiny, identical, red figures, “cogs” of a larger Maoist machine. Together with the *mythical* powerful machinery (we know that the shipyard actually suffered from “poor conditions”), the dockworkers appear to be able to light up the entire night sky, all under a floating banner of “Long Live Chairman Mao.” In this painting, both socialist industry and Mao emerge as heroes, while individuals are melded into a single collective responsible for serving Maoist progress.

The Creative Group wrote of their allegiance to the official line of the Cultural Revolution vis-à-vis a desire to revolutionize Chinese painting:

Under the correct guidance of Chairman Mao’s proletarian line, a profound change has taken place in the realm of literature and art. The garden of one hundred flowers of proletarian literature and art, marked by the revolutionary

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

model plays, is teeming with life and full of the air of spring. In the face of such an inspiring, excellent situation... Chinese painting needs revolutionizing...¹⁵⁹

In this statement we hear resonances of the revolutionary language utilized by groups like the League of Left-Wing Artists, and even the Storm Society, in the early 1930s (as discussed in Chapter One). The primary difference here, however, is the Creative Group's stated adherence to "Chairman Mao's proletarian line," which reveals the deep-seated intimacies between art, Maoist ideology, and the official line upheld during the Cultural Revolution. *Trees of Fire*, like these writings by the Creative Group, poses a model of modernity that, while based on the conceit of hybridity (between artist and worker, past and present, foreign and Chinese), actually serves only to reproduce the singularity of Maoism.

The Creative Group's reference to "the revolutionary model plays" in the above cited statement reveals that, in aiming to revolutionize Chinese painting, many of the artists of the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Group were taking their cues from a series of Revolutionary Peking Operas and Ballets, which were lauded as "model works" throughout the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶⁰ According to Mao and Jiang Qing, these plays, which incorporated conventions of

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁰ In 1970, some of the painters from the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop organized a revolutionary opera and oil painting group, using the *Red Detachment of Women* as the subject matter of a series of paintings. See Shi Dawei, *Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy*, 191. In the mid-1960s, Jiang Qing extolled eight model operas (including two ballets): *On the Docks (Haigang)*, *The Red Lantern (Hongdeng Ji)*, *Shajia Stream (Shajiabang)*, also a symphony), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (Zhiqu Weihushan)*, *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment (Qixi Baihutuan)*, *The Song of Praise of Dragon River (Longjiang song)*, and the ballets, *The Red Detachment of Women (Hongse niangzijun)*, and *White-Haired Girl (Bai mao nü)*. According to Jiang Qing, these operas revolutionized traditional Peking opera by presenting anti-imperialist, nationalist themes, contemporary subject matter, and updated costumes and singing styles, while the ballet successfully adapted foreign forms to Chinese needs by utilizing Western-style dance within a nationalist, revolutionary narrative. More than any other cultural production of the era, the "Model Opera Series" adhered to and indeed formed the central tenants of the artistic program of the Cultural Revolution: collaboration, representations of and for workers, peasants and soldiers, legibility, and pro-Maoist pedagogy. All of the works in the "Model Opera Series" followed a relatively similar format. Heroes, who were always represented by non-landowners (workers, peasants, and/or soldiers), were clearly distinguished from villains – capitalists, counter-revolutionaries, and/or imperialists. The heroes were always depicted within larger collectives, not familial, significantly, but work or military units. Heroes were formally distinguished by vivid, bold colored clothing and by brighter stage lighting, and their singing styles and body movements were confident, youthful and strong. Villains, on the other hand, were often

Western ballet and traditional Peking Opera, revolutionized these “foreign” and “past” conventions by presenting anti-imperialist, nationalist themes, contemporary subject matter, and updated costumes and singing styles. The following section focusing on film begins with a discussion of the film adaption of one of the Revolutionary Peking Operas, *On the Docks* (1972), which was set in contemporary Shanghai. While purporting to present a hybrid cultural form, I argue that *On the Docks*, like the officially approved artworks of the Cultural Revolution, instead established a singular model of modernity, which insisted on heroic archetypes towards the devaluing of the individual, and the projection of a totalizing form of collectivity.

Film and Revolutionary Peking Opera: *On the Docks* and its Heroic Socialist Realism

On the Docks, originally written by Li Xiaoming and revised under Jiang Qing’s direction in 1972, was soon canonized as one of the “revolutionary model plays.”¹⁶¹ Produced by the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, the stage production of *On the Docks* was, also in 1972,

depicted as old, ugly solitary figures, who receded into the shadows. Such tropes informed the official formulations of art and literature of the Cultural Revolution, as seen in the following directive made in a 1970 issue of *Chinese Literature*, “A proletarian hero invariably shows his heroic mettle in fierce struggles against the counter-revolutionary forces, and in a revolutionary collective. Therefore, in the creation of proletarian literature and art, we must follow the principle of giving prominence to the principal hero by using negative characters as a foil, by setting off the principal hero with other positive characters, by a judicious use of environment and atmosphere,” Strive to Create the Brilliant Images of Proletarian Heroes,” *Chinese Literature* 1 (1970): 67.

While the revolutionary Peking operas originated in Beijing, Shanghai soon followed suit by becoming the second largest center for their production. A publication from 1967 reported the following, “The great victory scored with the guidance of the radiant thought of Mao Tse-tung in the revolution of Peking opera has a far-reaching significance for China’s and the world’s cultural revolution. It has written a brilliant page in the history of culture. Shanghai had long been an important stronghold in which the chief protagonists of the counter-revolutionary line on literature and art...had entrenched themselves. Nevertheless, Shanghai has produced such fine prototypes of Peking opera as ‘Taking the Bandits Stronghold’ and ‘On the Docks.’ This has come about because Comrade Chiang Ch’ing [Jiang Qing] and Comrade Ko Ching-shih brought into full play Chairman Mao’s guiding line on the revolution of Peking opera, because they closely followed Mao Tse-tung’s thought, and because, relying on the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers and on revolutionary workers in literature and art, they carried on an unremitting struggle against the No.1 Party person in authority taking the capitalist road,” “Revolutionary People in Peking and Shanghai Acclaim Revolution of Peking Opera,” *SCMP* 3939 (May 16, 1967): 15.

¹⁶¹ Aside from *On the Docks*, most all of the revolutionary ballets and operas were set in the Chinese countryside or even abroad during the 1930s-40s, the years of Civil Chinese and Sino-Japanese wars, in places where the CCP had won their victories and established their headquarters. Thus, *On the Docks* was unique both for its contemporary (1963) and Shanghai settings. For more information on the other “Eight Model Plays,” see, amongst others, Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and his article, “Model Theatrical Works and the Remodeling of the Cultural Revolution,” in *Art in Turmoil*.

adapted into a film by directors, Xie Tieli (谢铁骊) and Xie Jin (谢晋) (1923-2008). According to official news sources, audiences, both foreign and Chinese, applauded *On the Docks*:

On the Docks, staged to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Chairman Mao's brilliant work *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature*, is the first model revolutionary Peking opera on a contemporary theme to reflect lofty qualities of the working class in the socialist era. Heroic figures from the working class in the socialist era are successfully portrayed on the Peking opera stage for the first time. Shining with the brilliance of the great thought of Mao Tse-tung, *On the Docks* is a splendid fruit of the great proletarian cultural revolution. Since its first performance, the opera has been warmly received by audiences, both Chinese and foreign.¹⁶²

Despite these official reports, there is no evidence that *On the Docks* traveled abroad, so that foreign audiences would have seen it, and there has also been indication that *On the Docks* was one of the least popular of the “revolutionary model operas.”¹⁶³ These discrepancies between projection and reality characterize the entire project of *On the Docks*. This section analyzes the film's promotion of heroic socialist realism towards a falsely idealized portrait of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, when international relations were especially strained. I argue that, despite *On the Docks*' “hybridizing” of Western ballet, Peking Opera, and revolutionary themes, it ultimately supports the singular model of modernity of the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁶² “Chou En-lai and Other Comrades See ‘On the Docks,’ Revolutionary Peking Opera on a Contemporary Theme,” in *Peking Review* 25 (June 16, 1967): 9. Key political figures were also said to have responded enthusiastically to the opera. A later issue of *Peking Review* featured a photograph of the cast of *On the Docks* surrounding Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Lin Biao. The short accompanying article reported, “Chairman Mao was in buoyant spirits as he entered the theatre amid enthusiastic cheers...When the curtain rose, the actors and actresses lined up in the front of the stage. Demonstrating their boundless respect and love for the great teacher Chairman Mao, they held up their copies of the revolutionary treasured book Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung [Little Red Book], read some of his teachings and joined the audience in shouting: “Long live Chairman Mao, the very red sun that shines most brightly in our hearts! A long life to him! A long, long life to him!” “Chairman Mao and Comrade Lin Piao See ‘On the Docks,’” *Peking Review* 27 (June 30, 1967): 6.

¹⁶³ Paul Clark has written that, despite the play's official approval and induction into the canon of Jiang Qing's “Model Opera Series,” *On the Docks* was regarded amongst general audiences as the least popular of the “Eight model Plays.” Clark hypothesized that this was due to *On the Docks*' having the most contemporary setting. See Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 39-40.

Following in the vein of *Roar China!* (1930) (the anti-imperialist play by Sergei Tretyakov discussed in Chapter One), *On the Docks* centers around seafaring workers along the Huangpu River. The dockworker protagonists of *On the Docks* also recall the chief subjects presented in many of the revolutionary woodcuts of the 1920s-30s.¹⁶⁴ However, in the post-1949, post-Liberation setting of *On the Docks*, Chinese dockworkers are no longer portrayed as beleaguered slaves oppressed by heartless imperialist industrialists and military powers, but as heroic laborers contributing diligently to the nation's industrialization. The story of *On the Docks* revolves around the overcoming of a "black line" incident at the Shanghai loading docks. The corrupt, counter-revolutionary dispatcher, Qian Shouwei, attempts to sabotage an export shipment headed to Africa by contaminating a sack of grain with fiberglass. In the process, this villain nearly tricks a confused young dockworker, Han Xiaojiang, into serving as his accomplice. With the help of her fellow dockworkers, Fang Haichen, the Secretary of the Communist Party branch of the dockers' brigade, and a strong, benevolent female leader, unearths the conspiracy before it's too late and sets Han Xiaojiang down the correct, communist path (Figures 2.10-2.11)

As the only "revolutionary model opera" with a current setting, *On the Docks* most closely met Jiang Qing's insistence on revolutionizing Peking Opera through imbuing it with current themes. Historian Paul Clark has argued that Jiang Qing wanted to ensure that the work was believable and realistic, citing the reported anecdote that, after seeing the opera's original version, *Early Morning on the Docks*, Jiang Qing revisited the Shanghai docks, asking the leader: "What did the dockworkers themselves think of the opera?, Was the incidental mixing-up

¹⁶⁴ Jiang Feng's woodcut, *Workers on the Wharf* (1932), for example, presents a scene from quotidian Shanghainese life. In the woodcut print, a group of dockworkers, hunched over and burdened by the weight of their heavy tools, set off towards their days of grueling labor at the docks, which are polluted by smoke from the factory's chimneys. See Tang Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde*, 122-123, and plate 4.

of cargoes a realistic event?, and Did a mistake with fiberglass beads ever happen?,” to which all three questions were answered in the affirmative. Clark thus concludes that Jiang Qing, “aware of her own ignorance about workers’ lives...wanted to be sure she was endorsing a relatively realistic portrayal of dockers.”¹⁶⁵ I argue, however, that Jiang Qing was not ultimately interested in realistic portrayals, but in idealized, heroic ones, following Maoist mandates which required that, “Life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane...nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”¹⁶⁶

Throughout the film, the dockworkers are especially hailed for their abilities to export invaluable goods to other previously colonized nations (in this case shipping grain to countries in Africa), extolled as active agents in the establishment of universal socialism, evidenced by the opera’s opening scene (Figure 2.12):

A summer morning, 1963. A dock on the Huangpu River in Shanghai. Red flags flutter gaily on numerous ships. Sunlight shimmers over the fluctuating current. The slogan “Long Live the General Line for Socialist Construction” hangs from a tall derrick.

The performers, clad in dockworkers uniforms, dance into the frame with synchronized ballet moves. Using a singing style reminiscent of Peking Opera, one worker convivially reports:

Shanghai certainly is...
A port that never sleeps!
Thousands of ships come and go.
Our dockers move grain in
Millions of jin with
Their left hand while their right
Shifts steel by the ton
Neither mountains nor seas can block
Our revolutionary fervor
We send our sincere friendship

¹⁶⁵ Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 39-40.

¹⁶⁶ Mao Zedong quoted in “Summary of the Forum,” 15. Throughout the “Shanghai Forum,” Jiang Qing articulated her allegiance to this goal, stating, “The basic task of socialist literature and art is to...create heroic models of workers, peasants and soldiers,” Jiang Qing, “Summary of the Forum,” 16.

To all parts of the globe.¹⁶⁷

These opening lines, like the idealized portrait of the Shanghai shipyard in *Trees of Fire*, picture the Shanghai dockyard as a thriving entity that never ceases production. Exaggerated quantities of ships and grain are purported to be moved day and night. The goal of universal socialism is articulated as the dockworker sings of sending “sincere friendship to all parts of the globe.”

While the People’s Republic of China did maintain a small number of international allies and exchanges during the Cultural Revolution, notably with Albania and Zambia, for the most part, the country had entirely cut itself off from foreign trade. Two years before 1963, the year in which *On the Dock* was set, China had officially denounced the policies of the Soviet Union, officially declaring the start of the so-called Soviet-Sino split, and isolating itself until the early-mid 1970s. Even in the face of these tensions, *On the Docks* propels the falsehood of China’s abundant international trade, while crafting an illusion of universal socialism.

The ability to completely control and project this myth was achieved through the film’s format, which, following the conventions of the stage version, was shot entirely inside a studio with constructed sets. Painted backdrops present idyllic scenery, such as large ships floating steadily on a peaceful sea, and a lightly clouded blue sky. In the film’s final scenes, when the dockworkers emerge victorious, the sky is presented as red, symbolizing the greatness of Maoist communism (Figure 2.13).

In addition to the constructed nature of the sets, all of the performers in *On the Docks* are represented as idealized, archetypal heroes, or, in the case of Qian Shouwei (whose name translates into *Money Conservative-Thinking*), as an archetypal villain. The film’s dockworkers are always depicted with excessively rosy cheeks and are almost always beaming with wide

¹⁶⁷ “On the Docks Group” of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *On the Docks* (January 1972 Script) (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1973), 1-2.

smiles, except when expressing concern, for instance, over the contaminated sack of grain (Figure 2.9). The workers wear identical light grey uniforms, resembling “Mao Suits,” which are accented by red stitching on their jackets, bright red shirts, and scarves decorated in a seafaring motif of vivid blue, white, and red. In tightly controlled gestures, they flex their fists in unison in a symbol of struggle, or else raise their open hands up and forward. When they sing in chorus, they stand close beside one another, always grouped in unified formations. The villain, Qian Shouwei, on the other hand, is always depicted in dark, muted colors (Figure 2.14). His wrinkled face looks grayish in tone, matching his aged hair. He is often shown scheming alone, or cast into the shaded areas of the set, so that he recedes into the darkness. The performers’ depictions and actions are highly contrived. Their gestures and expressions are forcefully posed, and exaggerated, while the colors of their uniforms and their faces (achieved through stage makeup), – bright and vivid for good workers and dark and muted for evil counter-revolutionaries – and even their names, artificially match their moral character.

The transformation of everyday individuals into heroic figures that were, as Mao dictated, “nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal” was further developed in *On the Dock’s* portrayal of its lead female character, Fang Haichen (whose name translates into *Honest Sea-Treasure*), as a de-gendered symbol of universal empowerment.¹⁶⁸ Fang Haichen flexes the kind of workplace power and authority, which was, prior to 1949, associated primarily only with males. As the Secretary of the Communist Party branch of the dockers’ brigade, she exerts strength in her resistance to rightwing thinking, wisdom in her ability to get to the bottom of the “black” incident, and benevolent leadership in her gentle, but firm steering of Han Xiaojiang

¹⁶⁸ The symbol of the revolutionary woman was prevalent in a number of revolutionary Peking operas, and especially in the two model ballets. For further discussion of this subject, see Bai Di, “Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets *The White-Haired Girl* and the *Red Detachment of Women*,” in *Art in Turmoil*.

down the correct socialist path. Fang Haichen's character thus embodies Mao's famous statement, "Women hold up half the sky," and his propagation of feminism rooted in egalitarianism.¹⁶⁹

Like Jiang Qing on the cover of *Meishu Zhanbao* (discussed in the first section of this chapter), Fang Haichen in *On the Docks* epitomized the shift in the image of women in post-1949 China (Figures 2.7-2.8). As discussed in Chapter One, female movie starlets and fashion models commonly served as signifiers of modernity in 1920s-30s Shanghai. In the 1960s-70s, female figures were also upheld as signifiers of the "new" China, but most striking was their de-gendering. Following the style of all older women, Fang Haichen wore her hair cropped in a unisex style that resembled those sported by female soldiers. (Younger women wore their hair in braided pigtailed.) Fang Haichen also wore a standard uniform, just as most all Chinese women, like men, wore "Mao suits," which were mass-produced and loose fitting. In short, Fang Haichen, was made to look equal to, and indeed barely distinguishable from her male counterparts.

Chinese Studies scholar Bai Di has argued that the androgynous representations of women in the "revolutionary model operas" constructed a kind of "feminist utopia."¹⁷⁰ However, this kind of feminism, one that stresses "gender-neutral" egalitarianism above all else, should be questioned. Mao's particular brand of feminism, while successfully leveling the power dynamics

¹⁶⁹ For an analysis of Mao's particular conception of feminism and related CCP policies, see Susan Perry, "Holding up half the sky: Women in China," *Current History* 97, no. 620 (September 1998): 279-285.

¹⁷⁰ In her discussion of the model ballets, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *White-Haired Girl*, Bai Di writes: "In its cultural essence, model theatre is feminist. Its feminism lies in its systematic construction of the heroic images of women against the background of Communist Party history, and of these women's strategic appropriation of class and political identities in order to escape from subordinate gender roles. Within a discourse of class struggle, model theatre creates a feminist utopia where androgyny, 'the only social form in which we [women] can live freely', is very much prevalent." See Bai Di, "Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets," 190-1. Here, Bai Di quotes Monique Wittig, *Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 53.

between men and women and eliminating certain oppressive patriarchal norms, neglected to account for the importance of sexual difference and the multiple roles, as both workers *and* mothers for instance, that women were obligated to play in post-1949 China. The de-gendering and idealization of women as universal symbols, as enacted in the revolutionary Peking operas and also in practical policy, essentially denied, rather than eradicated, the realities of inequality based on gender. The neutralization of gender, and denial of sexual difference, as enacted in *On the Docks*, ultimately helped support the Cultural Revolution's model of modernity based on the singularity of Maoist ideology.

Led by Fang Haichen, the heroes in *On the Docks* eventually overtake the villains so that, symbolically, Maoist communism and socialism triumph over feudalism, imperialism, capitalism, and individualism. At the end of the film, Qian Shouwei is discovered and caught, and the problem of the contaminated sack solved. Audiences are reminded that this particular story symbolizes a universal struggle, as Fang Haichen declares,

Comrades, although Chien Shou-wei has been caught, there will be others like him. The Pacific is far from pacific and Shanghai port is not a harbour of refuge. We must always remember Chairman Mao's instructions never to forget class struggle, every year, every month and every day.¹⁷¹

The opera concludes with a celebratory, revolutionary chorus: "Holding the red flag high, we charge! Holding the red flag high, we charge!" (They take a stance.) (A red sun slowly rises. It illuminates both banks of the Huangpu River).¹⁷² As the dockworkers celebrate the victory of socialism and communism over capitalist greed, the entire sky glows bright under the red sun – a symbol of Mao. Ultimately, *On the Docks* constructed a series of artificial and idealized scenes, and archetypal heroic figures, which added up to a single collectivity that should be identified

¹⁷¹ *On the Docks*, 40.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 41.

not as hybrid, but as purely Maoist. The film further developed the heroic socialist realism that Mao and Jiang Qing would uphold as the only acceptable style of the Cultural Revolution. The totalizing nature of their position, and its underlying nationalist and autocratic sentiments would become especially clear in light of Mao's and Jiang Qing's denunciation of a film made in the same year as *On the Docks*, a documentary made about China by a foreign director, which established an entirely different notion of realism.

Is it Still Possible to Film a Documentary? *Chung Kuo Cina*

In 1972, the Italian filmmaker, Michelangelo Antonioni received an invitation from the Chinese government to make a documentary in and about China. Significantly, the special invitation came not from Jiang Qing or Mao, but from a third powerful figure, China's Premier, Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), known for his more moderate foreign diplomacy.¹⁷³ The resultant film, *Chung Kuo Cina* (*China* in Chinese, followed by *China* in Italian) was comprised of 207 minutes of footage divided geographically into five locations where Antonioni and his crew were brought over the course of five weeks: Beijing, Linxian County in Hunan Province, Suzhou, Nanjing and Shanghai.¹⁷⁴ According to cultural critic Umberto Eco, the documentary's airing on Italian television in 1973 "manifested...an act of justice on TV's part which revealed to millions of viewers a true China, human and peaceful outside of the western propagandistic schema."¹⁷⁵ Eco suggests that *Chung Kuo*, which both he and Antonioni understood as a "true" documentary filmed in a realist style, provided a "human and peaceful" portrait of China at a time when Cold

¹⁷³ As discussed later in this section, the subsequent admonishment of *Chung Kuo* brought to the fore a power struggle between Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing in the face of Mao's ailing health.

¹⁷⁴ See *Chung Kuo Cina*, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (1972; Milan, Italy: RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 2007), DVD.

¹⁷⁵ Umberto Eco, "De Interpretatione, Or the Difficulty of Being Marco Polo (On the occasion of Antonioni's "China" film)," *Film Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 9.

War tensions were high, and anti-Chinese news stories prevalent in Western media. In China, however, Mao, Jiang Qing, and their allies denounced *Chung Kuo* as anti-socialist slander, and banned its release. Four years later, *Chung Kuo* instigated a diplomatic debacle when a number of Chinese Communist Party officials, supported by some local Italian bureaucrats, almost succeeded in halting the film's planned screening at the 1977 Venice Biennale.¹⁷⁶ The controversy surrounding *Chung Kuo* reveals the tense cross-cultural circumstances of the 1960s-70s, a period when "East" violently collided with "West."

Chung Kuo's perspective on the *new*, socialist China diverges drastically from those of the case studies discussed thus far. As a non-Chinese outsider, Antonioni looked to Maoist communism and socialism – like a number of other European intellectuals, filmmakers, and artists working in the 1960s-70s – as utopian alternatives to Western capitalism and individualism.¹⁷⁷ This section's analyses, which consider *Chung Kuo's* structure and content, focusing on its Shanghai segments, and the film's reception within China, aim to reveal the complexities of such utopian projections. I argue that the film's documentary realism was the antithesis of the heroic socialist realism advocated during the Cultural Revolution, while acknowledging the political underpinnings of *Chung Kuo's* denouncement.

The film's narrator summarizes Shanghai with this introductory description:

Ten million inhabitants, the second city of the world. The name of Shanghai evokes crime, drugs, corruption. But if Peking is the capital of pure revolution, Shanghai is the city of struggle and of the most evident transformation. In the space of only one generation, Shanghai changed with a profound turn around. The houses of the Western economic empires, which had their own concessions and general neighborhoods, are now public offices. The ex-slaves became an immense

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Amongst these figures were Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Joris Ivens, and Jean-Luc Godard. For further discussion of various non-Chinese intellectuals' interest in China and in particular Communist China, see, amongst others, Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

class of workers, who were the protagonists in the Chinese revolution in this half a century.¹⁷⁸

Here, Shanghai, because of its semi-colonial past, is introduced as the site of the most tremendous change since China's communist take-over, and, in contrast with Beijing, as a site of conflicted struggle, as opposed to one of "pure revolution." In line with the ideological message of *On the Docks*, Antonioni identifies Chinese workers under the corruption of feudalism and semi-colonialism as "ex-slaves," and identifies socialist workers as "the protagonists in the Chinese revolution."¹⁷⁹ However, unlike in *On the Docks*, which sings (and dances) this message through a symbolic narrative, *Chung Kuo's* commentary is narrated slowly and evenly, as anthropological-like observation. *Chung Kuo* was filmed entirely on location (as opposed to in a studio), and its accompanying imagery presents its subjects – the Chinese people – as everyday individuals moving naturally through their environs.

The footage of *Chung Kuo's* Shanghai portion begins at the Bund – the city's waterfront and the heart of the formerly American and British-run International Settlement. Here, Antonioni slowly pans over the Huangpu River (Figure 2.15). Unlike the large cargo ships painted in the backdrops of *On the Docks*, Antonioni's footage focuses on a number of small, rickety fishing boats. When Antonioni does show a larger ship, he zooms in to reveal workers on unsteady equipment, painting its rusty exterior (Figure 2.16). While shifting from the river to Shanghai's busy adjacent streets, the camera pans over details of the Bund's Western-style, neo-classical buildings (Figure 2.20), as well as a propaganda poster covering one such façade, which shows heroic, idealized portraits of revolutionary workers rising up against imperialist oppression (Figure 2.17). The images of Shanghai's colonial, neo-classical architecture and the propaganda

¹⁷⁸ Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 64.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

poster are then strikingly juxtaposed against an extended sequence focusing on throngs of people as they walk down the street (2.21).

With the camera set in a fixed spot, Antonioni films the Shanghainese crowd at great length, allowing dozens of individuals to filter in and out of the frame. In filming these pedestrians as they walk by, without any staging, costumes, direction, or constructed sets, Antonioni reveals Shanghai's "Mao suit" clad denizens as everyday individuals, rather than part of a heroic collective. Their eyes dart in different directions; some of them look directly into the camera inquisitively, others look away, and still others look forward, or to the side, their sightlines unknown. These particularized individual bodies provide a human scale that is a striking contrast to both the architectural monumentality of the Bund's neo-classical buildings, and the heroic monumentality of the figures in the propaganda poster. However unintentionally, *Chung Kuo* wound up directly contrasting the official aesthetics of the Cultural Revolution – as represented in public artworks such as murals like *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* or officially approved films, such as *On the Docks* – against Antonioni's documentary footage of China's quotidian realities.

In another scene filmed at Shanghai's famous Yu Yuan Gardens, a shot of what appears to be a miniature replica of *Rent Collection Courtyard*, an official work of the Cultural Revolution,¹⁸⁰ displayed in a window is immediately followed by shots of passersby reflected in that window, then an image of a man making *zhongzi* – sticky rice steamed in lotus leaves – and then a woman with school children, also all positioned behind a home window (Figure 2.18).

Next, a close-up shot of a public socialist realist sculpture comprised of male and female PLA

¹⁸⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, *Rent Collection Courtyard* was upheld for promoting the primary values of the art of the Cultural Revolution: collective production, lifelike realism, and the articulation of an anti-feudalist, pro-socialist message. See *Rent Collection Courtyard: Sculptures of Oppression and Revolt* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1968).

soldiers raising guns high in the air (Figure 2.19) flashes to a rainy street scene in which pedestrians hold umbrellas over themselves and one another. This is followed by a shot of children, clad in scraps and wearing straw hats, hauling wagons of hay through the street. These juxtapositions contrast the heroic representations of the official art of the Cultural Revolution against everyday individuals in Shanghai's cityscape.

Above all else, *Chung Kuo* focuses on Chinese people as individuals. In an article written after the filming of *Chung Kuo* entitled, "China and the Chinese," Antonioni explained:

In reality I did not make a film about China, but about the Chinese. I remember having asked, on the first day of our discussions, what, according to them, mostly clearly symbolized the change which happened in the country after liberation. 'Man,' they had replied. Therefore, at least in this, our interests coincided. And I tried to look at man more than at his accomplishments or at the landscape. Let me be clear on this: I think of China's contemporary socio-political structure as a model, perhaps imitable, worthy of the most attentive study. But the people are what struck me the most. What precisely struck me about the Chinese? Their candor, their honesty, their reciprocal respect...¹⁸¹

In this statement, Antonioni betrays *Chung Kuo*'s privileging of individuals over landscapes, socialist achievements, or socio-political structures. In this way, the Italian director's priority drastically diverged from the officially approved films of the Cultural Revolution, such as *On the Docks*, which were mandated to uphold, above all else, the collective as it functioned in support of a Maoist socio-political structure and accomplishments.

Due to Antonioni's interest in individuals, people's bodies, faces, actions, gestures and expressions dominate the majority of *Chung Kuo*. Amongst the numerous scenes depicted are children singing, the elderly practicing Taichi, a woman having an acupuncture-aided Cesarean birth, legs striding along the Great Wall, photographs taken in Tiananmen Square, and curious expressions framed by the Hunan countryside. These shots – either static or slow panning – are

¹⁸¹ Michelangelo Antonioni, "China and the Chinese," trans. Allison Cooper, in *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995), 116. [Originally published as "La Cina e I cinesi," *Il Giornio* 22, no. 25 (26 July 1972).]

simultaneously detached and persistent as Antonioni allows the camera, from a distance, to rest on these faces and gestures at length, letting viewers grow weary of the images before them.

The accompanying narration – mostly straightforward, detailed descriptions of the scenes as they unfold – are sometimes interwoven with historical, ideological, philosophical, and/or theoretical musings. For example, in one comment accompanying a shot of a young woman on the Great Wall in Beijing, the narrator asks: *Who built Thebes of the seven gates? In the books you will find the name of kings. Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?* (Figure 2.22).¹⁸² These questions, borrowed from playwright Bertold Brecht’s “Questions from a Worker who Reads” (1935), a poem that later asks, “Where, the evening that the Great Wall of China was finished, did the masons go?,” politicize the shot’s seemingly neutral content. Here, not unlike in *On the Docks*, Antonioni aims to think through social injustice using the image of a woman. However, rather than transform the young woman at the Great Wall into a de-gendered, universal symbol, Antonioni pairs an un-posed, shot of this individual with a series of questions that subtly call attention to the neglect of laborers throughout history. Here, the director maintains a focus on individuals, even in thinking through the possibility of socialism. Throughout *Chung Kuo*, as in this moment, Antonioni’s admiring reflections on China’s socialism stand only as incomplete fragments, paired with fleeting individuals, and particular details.

In the Shanghai segment, viewers are brought to the site of China’s first communist meeting (1921), a semi-colonial style home in the city’s former French Concession (Figures 2.24-2.27). Here, Antonioni ruminates on Maoist socialism as an alternative to his own Western

¹⁸² Quote in *Chung Kuo* is in Italian, “*Tebe dalle sette porte, chi la costruì? Ci sono i nomi dei re nei libri. Sono stati i re a trascinare quei blocchi di pietra?*,” Brecht quoted in Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 17.

capitalism, recounting the CCP's origin story with a tone of longing.¹⁸³ The camera moves into a courtyard and enters the meeting room of the first communist congress. As the narrator describes the events of the clandestine meeting, an invisible hand opens the door so that viewers are made to feel as if they themselves are walking into the meeting, or as if the space is haunted by the ghosts of Shanghai's underground, revolutionary past. "Tutto è rimasto come era" ["Everything remains as it was"] the narrator says, referring to the teacups on the table where the young revolutionaries first met. Added, however, is a painted portrait of a young Mao, who had, in 1921, not yet come to power as the primary leader, let alone a visual icon of China's then primitive communist network.

Antonioni imbues the home with a haunted feeling, and the dark, vacant space illustrates the narrator's tale of that first ill-fated meeting:

At this house of brick at number 108 Wang Tze Road, the story of communist China began. The first of July of 1921, a spy, possibly sent by the French police, entered in this second entranceway, across this hallway, and through this dark corridor. Then he entered into a room, blank and at that point empty. The men who had met there had just escaped. Those men were twelve, and that day they had held, in that room, the first congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Of the twelve men, only Mao resisted the storm of history, the others were all killed or remembered as traitors.¹⁸⁴

Here, Antonioni comments that Mao was the only one of the meeting's attendees to have resisted the great "storm of history." The absence of any figures in this footage is a somber reminder of

¹⁸³ The brief segment filmed at the site of the first communist congress is one of the few moments of the entire film where hardly any human presence is detected. Viewers do notice a crowd in the distance during an establishing shot taken of the site's exterior. There, people gather around a building covered by a large red banner. The text on the banner is non-identifiable, but Mao's name at the top hints that it is one of the ubiquitous pro-Mao slogans of the day.

¹⁸⁴ Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 65-6. Note that the date Antonioni gives, first of July, is inaccurate. While the group had planned to meet in early July, they didn't end up meeting until the end of the month. Furthermore, they were run out of their first meeting place, a nearby girls school on Rue Bourgeat. For an account of these early meetings of the Chinese Communist Party, see Stranahan, *Underground: The Shanghai Communist Party and the Politics of Survival*.

the assassinations of the meeting's other attendees. In this haunted architecture, Antonioni also hints, albeit unintentionally, at the distance between the utopian promises of the earliest inceptions of Chinese communism as first developed in 1920s Shanghai, and the totalitarian reality into which it had morphed.

Following the scene at the first communist congress, the camera meanders into a poor Shanghainese neighborhood, described as a reminder of the horrors of the city's semi-colonial past (Figure 2.22). The camera fixates on old mud homes, while the narrator utters, "During the war with Japan, the people drank rain water that collected in holes dug out by bombs."¹⁸⁵ These small details – traces of past poverty and tragedy – become Antonioni's tools for thinking through China's socialist achievements. Unlike in *On the Docks*, or *Trees of Fire*, where Maoism is exalted through idealized industrial landscapes, *Chung Kuo* focuses instead on the cracks in Shanghai's façade.¹⁸⁶

Antonioni also took this approach when filming a factory on the outskirts of Shanghai. Here, the camera hones in on various parts of equipment and on individuals laboring (Figures 2.28-2.30). The refinery appears shabby, as the camera betrays rundown machines, and a site shrouded in exhaust. The accompanying narration reads:

The immense industrial periphery of Shanghai was not born today. In a certain sense, the city was industrialized over many decades. Shanghai's products go all over China, but the industries are often little more than large warehouses, built in

¹⁸⁵ Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 66.

¹⁸⁶ This is not surprising, as Antonioni's films had long been characterized not by their *distaste of*, but *ambivalence towards* contemporary Italian society. His well-known feature films such as *Il Deserto Rosso* (*The Red Desert*) (1964) and the trilogy, *L'Avventura* (*The Adventure*) (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (*Eclipse*) (1962) critiqued bourgeois subjectivity while positioning it as a seductive puzzle. In *The Red Desert*, for instance, Antonioni anxiously focused on Italy's industrial urban outskirts, but his focus was always tender, honing in on details like the primary colors of a construction site, composed, framed and sometimes painted to look like dazzling abstract paintings. Antonioni approached China with this same ambivalent perspective, warning against blind faith in Maoist doctrine, and trying as hard as possible to shoot something that simply captured his act of looking.

a hurry. Even this refinery, the most major of the city, is a poor factory, made of materials that were almost discarded.¹⁸⁷

For Antonioni, this depiction was not intended to be critical, but rather honest, and even admiring.¹⁸⁸

Chung Kuo produced multiple moments in which Chinese poverty was looked upon with admiration, as in the stated narration of the film's opening scenes: "The residents of Beijing seem poor, but not miserable, without luxury and without hunger. What is so striking is their quality of life, which is so far from ours."¹⁸⁹ Such commentary, coupled with footage of crowds riding old bicycles, rundown factory sites, and drably dressed individuals, would receive drastically diverging receptions. On the one hand, such scenes and commentary were read as well meaning reflections by those, like Antonioni, who looked to Maoist China as an almost utopian alternative to Western consumerism, individualism and capitalism, and who considered the Chinese people to be resourceful and respectfully humble. However, for officials like Mao and Jiang Qing – defenders of the heroic representations of workers, peasants and soldiers – these scenes and commentaries bashed socialist achievement.

Official criticism released following the completion of *Chung Kuo* decried Antonioni's depiction of Shanghai, not as an idealized industrial city, but as a poor one:

¹⁸⁷ Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 68.

¹⁸⁸ Calling the refinery a "poor factory" might even be understood as a sort of misguided compliment, as Antonioni considered, as he put it, "China's contemporary socio-political structure as a model...worthy of the most attentive study," Antonioni, "China and the Chinese," 116. Umberto Eco offered this interpretation, "[Antonioni was] not so much interested in seeing those cases where the Chinese were able to construct industries like western ones; we know that they even have the atomic bomb: but it seems to me more interesting to show you how they were able to construct a factory, or hospital, or child-care center from a few scraps, in working conditions based on reciprocal trust... This entailed the search for China as a potential utopia by the frenetic, neurotic West; and the use of categories which for us assume specific values, where when people say 'arte povera' they mean a kind of art delivered from the frenzy of jargon required by the commercial gallery circuit... But what meaning can the same words have for a country where 'poverty' meant, only a few decades ago, death by starvation for entire generations of children, class genocide, sickness, ignorance?... Where the film means "simplicity" for "poverty," the Chinese viewer reads "miseria" and failure," Umberto Eco, "De Interpretatione," 10.

¹⁸⁹ Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 7.

Antonioni presents Shanghai as “an industrialized city,” only to sling mud at China’s socialist industry. Shutting his eyes to the large numbers of big modern enterprises there, the director concentrated on assembling unconnected scenes of poorly equipped hand-operated enterprises. There are, in fact, shipyards that build 10,000-ton vessels by the Whangpoo River, and Chinese-made ocean-going ships that berth in Shanghai. However, under Antonioni’s camera, all the freighters on the river are from abroad and China has only small junks. Taking an outright imperialist stand, the director asserts that Shanghai’s industry “was not born today” and “as a city, Shanghai was literally built by foreign capital in the last century”...His vicious implication is that if Shanghai, China’s major industrial city, is like this, imagine other areas!¹⁹⁰

The Chinese government had tightly controlled Antonioni’s access to locations and activities for shooting. School children singing, Beijing’s historical monuments, state of the art factories in Shanghai, and the engineering feat of the Nanjing Bridge mark some of the State’s preferred *mise-en-scènes*.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, the director, through his focus on mundane moments, intimate gestures, and the particularities of personal presence, unwittingly acted against governmental wishes.

Jiang Qing and her allies officially decried the entire documentary as a bombastic attack on the country and its people.¹⁹² One of the most frequently cited critiques referred to *Chung Kuo*’s footage of the Yangtze River Bridge set in Nanjing. Here, Antonioni begins with a long-distance shot that scans the bridge in its entirety.¹⁹³ Next, the camera zooms in on the middle of the

¹⁹⁰ “A Vicious Motive, Despicable Tricks — A criticism of M. Antonioni’s anti-China film “China,”” *Peking Review* 17, no. 5 (February 1, 1974): 8.

¹⁹¹ Antonioni did manage once to convince his escorts to let him break from the official schedule so as to film a roadside black market, technically illegal but widely overlooked. All the other scenes, however, were “pre-established.”

¹⁹² The general criticism of *Chung Kuo* was published as follows, “The film ‘China’ by the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni is an out-and-out anti-China film. Its appearance is a serious anti-China event and a wild provocation against the Chinese people. All Chinese who have national pride are greatly infuriated to see that this anti-China film attacks Chinese leaders, smears socialist New China, slanders China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and insults the Chinese people,” “Repudiating Antonioni’s Anti-China Film,” *Peking Review* 17, no. 8 (February 22, 1974): 13.

¹⁹³ The accompanying narration was as follows, “The monument that Nanjing is most proud of is recent and made of steel. It’s the bridge on the Yangtze River. It is long, 6 kilometers; 50,000 workers took eight years to construct it.

bridge, revealing two bold red Chinese characters that read, *Wansui (Long Live)* (Figure 2.33) part of a longer political slogan, before zooming in even further on still barely visible pedestrians walking across the bridge. The camera then travels under the bridge, providing a moving shot of one side of the bridge from underneath (Figure 2.31), before jump cutting to the other side. The camera finally focuses in on a row of junkets gathered at a base of the bridge, and then zooms in on a man on a boat, hanging his laundry to dry (Figure 2.32). This rather unconventional camera work, as well as Antonioni's focus on quotidian details purportedly prompted the following criticism, published in *Peking Review*:

In photographing the Yangtze River Bridge at Nanking, the camera was intentionally turned on this magnificent modern bridge from very bad angles in order to make it appear crooked and tottering.¹⁹⁴

In Europe, such criticisms were often explained away as examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding. As Eco observed in 1977:

The *Cina* question reminds us that when political debate and artistic representation involve different cultures on a worldwide scale, art and politics are also mediated by anthropology and thus by semiology... We see how the by now famous criticism in *Renmin Ribao* could consider the shot of the Nanking bridge as an attempt to make it appear distorted and unstable, because a culture which prizes frontal representation and symmetrical distance shots cannot accept the language of western cinema which, to suggest impressiveness, foreshortens and frames from below, prizing dissymmetry and tension over balance.¹⁹⁵

Eco was right to acknowledge the undeniable semiotic problems of cross-cultural translation.

But, his argument also resorts to reductive cultural categorizations. For example, Eco's comment that "the Chinese culture is one which prizes frontal representation and symmetrical distance shots," while adequately characterizing the aesthetic policy of the Cultural Revolution, denied an

The bridge is a majestic/stately (*maestosa*) work, uniting the river's two banks of China's two halves, until very recently were separated," Antonioni, *Chung Kuo*, 61.

¹⁹⁴ "A Vicious Motive, Despicable Tricks," 9.

¹⁹⁵ Umberto Eco, "De Interpretatione," 9, 11.

entire tradition of Chinese painting and calligraphy based on a-symmetrical relations between positive and negative space, as well as modernist embraces of montage, and inclinations towards chaos and a-symmetry as seen, for example, in many of the 1920-30s Shanghai-based artworks I discussed in Chapter One.

I argue, instead, that the *Chung Kuo* question was steeped less in vying Chinese and Western semiotic systems, and more in divisions arising from two very different, particular notions of realism: 1) the heroic socialist-realism promoted by the leaders of the Cultural Revolution and 2) the documentary realism developed in *Chung Kuo*. While heroic socialist realism mandated idealized subjects, subject matter, and unified historical narrative, the documentary realism of *Chung Kuo* depicted everyday subjects and content, focusing on the non-monumental, as fragments. A small book produced in conjunction with *Chung Kuo* included a preface written by Antonioni, aptly titled, “È ancora possibile girare un documentario?” (“Is it still possible to make a documentary?”).¹⁹⁶ He begins the preface with a quote by Lu Xun, “The truth, naturally, is not easy...But one can always say things that are true enough in a voice that is sincere enough.”¹⁹⁷ Like those dictating the official policies of the Cultural Revolution,

¹⁹⁶ In asking “Is it still possible to film a documentary?,” Antonioni offered a theory of what he understood as the Chinese emphasis on “visible reality.” He described this concept of “visible reality” by way of anecdote. While in Suzhou, Antonioni wanted to film a wedding scene. The interpreter asked around and reported back that none of the villagers were planning to marry in the coming days. A boy and a girl could fake a wedding scene, Antonioni suggested. But the interpreter responded, “It was not right that they pretend to get married given that they were not getting married.” Antonioni subsequently reflected, “Maybe the interpreter was simply naïve, but I wanted to remember this small incident because it seems typical of the importance that one can give to the image and how it can be captured. The Chinese have a very earthly, concrete, *visible* idea of reality,” See Antonioni, “Is it still possible to film a documentary?,” trans. by Allison Cooper in Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Architecture of Vision*, 114. [Originally published as “È ancora possibile girare un documentario?,” in *Chung Kuo Cina*, vii-xvi.] Michelangelo Antonioni, This anecdote and Antonioni’s conclusion were told in response to a review of *Chung Kuo* released in the Italian press, which claimed, “Socialism is not something one sees...Enough with the cinematographic documentaries on the long life of the People’s Republic of China.” In addition to Antonioni’s *Chung Kuo*, the reviewer also called into question Joris Ivens’ series of documentaries on China, *How Yukong Moved the Mountains* (1974-1976) and also a film by Jean-Luc Godard, most likely *La Chinoise* (1967), which focuses on young French Maoists. References are taken from Antonioni’s “Is it Still Possible.”

¹⁹⁷ Lu Xun quoted in Antonioni, “È ancora possibile girare un documentario?,” vii.

Antonioni turned to Lu Xun in thinking through the problem of realism. But, as opposed to the heroic socialist realism of the Cultural Revolution, *Chung Kuo* produces a realism that insists on showing things that are “true enough.”

In his preface, Antonioni cautioned against the “temptation of China” – the desire to reduce China’s scale and the world’s millions of Chinese inhabitants into one monolithic entity, while acknowledging the absurdity of his own fantasies prior to traveling to China that were premised on poetic Chinese landscape painting. He wrote, “To me it seems positive that I did not want to go on searching for an imaginary China, and that I entrusted myself to visual reality.”¹⁹⁸ This would be problematic, Antonioni admitted, if he had said: “Here it is, this is China, this is the new man, this is his role in world revolution.”¹⁹⁹ Instead, he wanted to make the following proposition: “These are the Chinese that I was able to film in a few weeks of work on a trip that has given me unforgettable emotions. Do you want to follow me on this trip, which has enriched my life and which could also enrich yours?”²⁰⁰ Antonioni’s insistence on letting *Chung Kuo* stand as a particular encounter with a foreign place, rather than as an authoritative picturing of socialist achievement in the *new* China, set his project dramatically apart from those officially approved works of the Cultural Revolution, as promoted by Mao and Jiang Qing.

Finally, the attacks made against *Chung Kuo* and Antonioni, were not merely reflective of an official disapproval of the film’s style, but were also intimately linked to a struggle for power over China’s cultural apparatus.²⁰¹ By the early-mid 1970s, the exuberance, wild abandon, and

¹⁹⁸ Antonioni, “È ancora possibile girare un documentario?,” xi.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., x.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ In retrospect, we have come to learn that the officially reported criticisms of *Chung Kuo* came from those aligned with Jiang Qing and the other three members of the “Gang of Four,” and were part of a much larger attack on Premier Zhou Enlai, who was chiefly responsible for the making of *Chung Kuo*. In a recent television interview, an

violence of the early years of the Cultural Revolution had somewhat subsided. It was suspected that even Mao, whose health began seriously waning in 1971, wished to temper the radical nature of the Cultural Revolution's first few years. Premier Zhou Enlai, the figure largely responsible for bringing Antonioni to China, was concerned with China's reputation abroad, and trying to promote forms of art that were less extreme than the Cultural Revolution's public murals, socialist realist paintings, and Revolutionary Peking Operas.²⁰² In 1973, Jiang Qing, sensing an usurpation of her absolute power over China's cultural sphere, launched a campaign against Zhou Enlai.²⁰³

Chung Kuo was caught in the middle of this political struggle. As a target of attack, it revealed the hidden agendas underlying the official art of the Cultural Revolution, as well as its insistence on a singular and totalizing model of Chinese modernity. In describing the pre-

emotional Luo Jinbiao, who was the Chinese ambassador to Italy during the filming of *Chung Kuo*, explained that Jiang Qing admonished the film as part of her anti-Zhou Enlai campaign, Luo Jinbiao, television interview (Beijing, accessed May 9, 2010); <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/JY219Magow0/>; Internet.

²⁰² Along with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zhou Enlai also promoted a less radical kind of Chinese painting produced by professional and/or scholarly artists, works he believed would be more palatable to foreigners. Zhou Enlai aimed to resuscitate traditional Chinese and even some modernist art experiments that had been banned during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, by inviting a number of older "master" artists who had been exiled or arrested to gather in Shanghai (and other cities such as Beijing, Xi-an and Guangzhou). These artists were supported and instructed to make works that would be suitable for exporting abroad and hanging in hotels – paintings that could present "Chinese culture" to visiting dignitaries (in 1972, the same year Antonioni filmed *Chung Kuo*, Premier Zhou Enlai and United States President Richard M. Nixon signed the "Shanghai Communiqué," now widely considered to have marked the beginning of restored U.S.-Sino relations after over two decades of vehement "East/West" Cold War divisions). A 1977 article published in *Meishu* [*Fine Art*] that denounced the "Gang of Four" and defended Zhou Enlai's artistic program, noted the Premier's stipulations for *binguan buzhi hua*/"hotel decoration painting" and *chukou hua*/"export painting": the art "must demonstrate national style and contemporary style...must express our country's long cultural history and artistic standards...must be *pusu* (simple) and *dafang* (elegant)." According to the *Meishu* article, Zhou Enlai also stated, "as long as it isn't anti-revolutionary, ugly, or pornographic...export art...could be produced and exported," Art Research Center of the Literary and Arts Research Institute, "Pi heihua shi jia, Cuan dang qieguo shi zhen" ["Criticizing Black Painting was False, Overthrowing the Party and Nation was the True Intention"], *Meishu* [*Fine Arts*] no. 2, (1977): 7.

²⁰³ "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius Campaign," which took as its real target Zhou Enlai. For more information on the struggle for power between Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing, see, among others, Wu Qington, *Zhou Enlai zai "Wen hua da ge ming" zhong: hui yi Zhou zong li tong Lin Biao, Jiang Qing liang ge fan ge ming ji tuan de dou zheng* [Zhou Enlai in the "Cultural Revolution": recalling Zhou's struggle against Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, two counter-revolutionary figures] (Beijing: Zhong yang dang shi chu ban she, 2002).

approved and pre-established scenes that he could film in *Chung Kuo*, Antonioni commented, “It is propaganda, but it is not a lie.”²⁰⁴ However, this chapter has aimed to demonstrate that the official art of the Cultural Revolution, for its heroic socialist realism and promotion of collective subservience to Mao, was an utter lie – a false portrait of a struggling nation and its broken cultural relations.

²⁰⁴ Antonioni, “Is it Still Possible,” 110.

Chapter Three

Contemporary Fashion, Art, and Film in Shanghai during the 1990s-2000s

Introduction

In the 1990s-2000s, the terms “East meets West” and *modern*, so prevalent in 1920s-30s Shanghai, have widely resurfaced. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, Shanghai was once again referred to as Mainland China’s most cosmopolitan and *modern metropolis* (现代都市 /*xiandai dushi*). In 1990, Shanghai was officially reopened to international trade, this time by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as opposed to by Western Imperialists, and was subsequently repositioned as a global financial center.²⁰⁵ Since then, the CCP has utilized culture to promote Shanghai’s *new, modern* identity within China, especially supporting the development of contemporary architectural projects and large-scale cultural events, such as the recent 2010 Shanghai World Expo. These investments in the city’s cultural capital are aimed at exporting abroad positive images of the new Shanghai, and by extension, the new, post-1989, so-called post-socialist China,²⁰⁶ contributing to what scholars in cultural anthropology and urban studies have referred to as the city’s “worlding,” or, its positioning as a cosmopolitan world center with

²⁰⁵ Since the early 1990s, China’s global finance capitalism has been centered in Lujiazui, the international banking hub of Shanghai’s Pudong District. Pudong, a large region of east of Shanghai’s Huangpu River, was once mostly farmland. In 1990, the government began converting Pudong into an urbanized zone, which was then annexed to Shanghai as a Special Economic Zone – a district guided by free market rules and relatively unrestricted international trade. The annex of Pudong increased Shanghai’s size by seven times, and officially established it as China’s chief financial center.

²⁰⁶ In contemporary Chinese studies, whether based in the humanities or social sciences, 1989 is widely positioned as a watershed year. In 1989, China made significant departures from its socialist past in the economic realm, while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secured its pervasive political power. The year marked the close of a relatively open interim reform era (1978-1989), which posed a fleeting alternative to China’s one-party rule, namely the student-led pro-democracy movement that ended with violent state suppression in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. For theorization of post-socialist China, see Zhang Xudong, *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), and Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, *Postmodernism & China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

international clout.²⁰⁷ Numerous critics, however, have expressed concern over the discrepancies between official images of the new Shanghai as socially, culturally and economically progressive, and realities defined by growing income disparity, pollution, corruption, inflation, and tightening control over civil liberties.

Outside of China's state-run media, criticisms of current CCP policies and initiatives are ubiquitous, especially on Internet blogs, and amongst families and friends. For example, despite the promise of the 2010 World Expo slogan, "Better City, Better Life" (城市, 让生活更美好 /*Chengshi, rang shenghuo geng meihao*),²⁰⁸ many Shanghainese privately lambasted the Expo as an extravagant waste of money, and/or as an event they themselves could not afford to attend. In certain circles, intellectuals joked that the Expo's China Pavilion, a shiny red structure resembling an inverted pagoda with upper levels that extend beyond its lower levels, appropriately symbolized the new, post-1989 China by projecting an overblown image to the world despite its lack of a solid foundation. For his 2010 exhibition held to inaugurate Shanghai's Rockbund Art Museum, artist Cai Guo-Qiang riffed off the "Better City, Better Life" slogan by painting, "Peasants, making a better city" (农民, 让城市更美好/*Nongmin, rang chengshi geng meihao*), on the wall of a construction site, calling attention to the fact that Chinese urbanization is fueled by devalued migrant labor.²⁰⁹ I cite the World Expo and these

²⁰⁷ Urban studies scholar Ananya Roy and cultural anthropologist Aihwa Ong recently proposed the term "worlding" in their theorization of the international promotion of Asian cities. See *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy (Chichester, West Sussex and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

²⁰⁸ *Chengshi, rang shenghuo geng meihao* was the official slogan of the Shanghai World Expo. Some critics have argued that this official slogan typically presumes that Chinese urbanization will lead to a more positive future. The English version of the slogan, "Better City, Better Life," has also been translated as 更好的城市, 更好的生活 /*Genghao de chengshi, genghao de shenghuo*, which, while differing from the official slogan, is a more literal translation from the English version.

²⁰⁹ See Cai Guo-Qiang, *Cai Guo-Qiang: Peasant Da Vincis* (Shanghai: Rockbund Art Museum, 2010), exhibition pamphlet.

myriad critical responses to demonstrate the extent to which “worlding” defines contemporary culture in Shanghai, and to reveal the local debates surrounding China’s rapid development that such “worlding” often masks.

This chapter examines fashion and print media, art, and film projects that have contributed to, reflected on, and/or critiqued Shanghai’s “worlding,” and which, consequently, I argue, formulate new models of Chinese *contemporaneity* within the context of global Shanghai.²¹⁰ The first section focuses on an advertisement for Shanghai Tang (est. 1994), a fashion brand and retailer said to epitomize contemporary Shanghai’s “East meets West” and “Old meets New” identity. My analysis of a 1997 Shanghai Tang advertisement featuring actress, Gong Li (b. 1965), reveals how the figure of the transnational, cosmopolitan woman functions as an ideal “worlding” device, while aestheticizing Shanghai’s socio-economic inequalities, and the conflicted desires to both preserve local identities and achieve global aspirations as they co-existed in the mid-late 1990s. The second section focuses on art, and examines two installation projects – *Heavenly Lantern (Tiantang hongdeng)* (2003-Present) by Gu Wenda (b. 1955) and *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* (1999-Present) by Xu Bing (b. 1955). I demonstrate how *Heavenly Lantern*’s “worlding” ambitions and emphases on “East meets West” cultural hybridity mask political tensions (between Chinese and non-Chinese nations) and media hybridizations (between art, architecture, design, and advertising). Alternately, I argue that Xu Bing’s *Tobacco Project* offers a critique of Shanghai’s present-day “worlding” vis-à-vis the city’s conflicted semi-colonial and socialist histories. The third section focuses on film, analyzing two projects, *Will (Bixu)* (1996) by Zhou Tiehai (b. 1966) and *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest (Zhulin qi xian)* (2003-2007) by Yang Fudong (b. 1971). I reveal how both films,

²¹⁰ See footnote 4 in this dissertation’s Introduction.

which span the decade that defined Shanghai's most rapid post-1989, urban development, draw from the models of modernity developed in 1920s-30s Shanghai and conceptions of *new* culture formulated in the 1960s-70s, towards their respective contemplations of the shifting role of the artist/intellectual in 1990s-2000s Shanghai, and China.

I analyze this chapter's fashion, art, and film projects as establishing various models of Chinese contemporaneity that broadly reference Chinese history, and/or Shanghai's particular pasts, either as "worlding" devices, or as a means of critically and historically addressing the problems associated with Shanghai's "worlding," such as class inequalities resulting from globalization. I argue that both Shanghai Tang and *Heavenly Lantern* function as "worlding" devices, and establish a celebratory model of Chinese contemporaneity that draws from Shanghai's long-repressed 1920s-30s model of cosmopolitan modernity through emphases on media hybridizations of art and design. Alternately, I consider how artworks and films, such as Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project*, Zhou Tiehai's *Will*, and Yang Fudong's *Seven Intellectuals* reference Shanghai's semi-colonial and socialist pasts towards contemplations of strained socio-economic and cultural relations, and the problematized role of the artist/intellectual in the present, all towards the construction of a critical model of Chinese contemporaneity.

Fashion and Print Media: Gong Li for *Shanghai Tang*

Since the early 1990s, a number of *Overseas Chinese* (the term used to refer to ethnically Chinese people who reside outside of Mainland China) investors have established transnational businesses in Shanghai.²¹¹ One such company that would greatly contribute to the city's

²¹¹ *Overseas Chinese* (*huaqiao*, literally translated as *Chinese sojourn*) is a nickname given to ethnically Chinese people residing in places outside of Mainland China, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the United States, and Canada. An enormous population comprised both of people born in non-Mainland locations, as well as those who left during or after the CCP take-over in 1949, *Overseas Chinese* have played an essential role in the development of post-Mao era China. In the early to mid-1990s, many *Overseas Chinese* investors began coming to Mainland China, for some coming home, to a landscape they would swiftly remodel. Within Mainland China, figures who have had extensive experience abroad (e.g., overseas education), and who maintain residences,

“worlding” capabilities is the Hong Kong-based fashion house, Shanghai Tang (est. 1994), originally founded by Sir David Tang (b. 1954).²¹² The company has retail outlets around the world, including two locations in Shanghai’s former French Concession. In concept, Shanghai Tang, which claims to be a “global ambassador of contemporary Chinese Chic,” and “the only Chinese ‘Haute Couture’ house with a unique fusion of east meets west,” combines details of traditional Chinese clothing and “imperial tailoring skills,” 1920s-30s Shanghai style (*haipai*), and contemporary, cosmopolitan fashions.

In addition to visiting one of Shanghai Tang’s art deco-inspired stores, a shopper can order a tailor-made *qipao*, which will be made updated through its length and form fitting qualities (shorter and tighter than its Republican-Era counterparts), contemporary colors (bright fuchsia, orange, or teal), and new details, such as an attached, waist-cinching belt. The

and/or careers both in and outside of Mainland China, are often classified as *Overseas Chinese*, even if they were born in Mainland China. This chapter’s following section on art discusses two such figures, artists Gu Wenda and Xu Bing.

Cultural anthropologist Aihwa Ong has studied and theorized the importance of *Overseas Chinese relations* (*huaqiao guanxi*) and the perception, within Mainland China, of a cosmopolitan, *overseas* culture, what is called *Blue Ocean culture* (*lanhai wenhua*). See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

²¹² In her anthropological account of Shanghai’s rising world status and the city’s far-reaching ties with Hong Kong, Helen Siu singled out Shanghai Tang, writing, “In the late 1930s and early 1940s... Hong Kong and Shanghai, competitors and partners linked by historically global networks, shone behind the grim shadows of war and political terror with charged commercial energies. Taken for granted were the circulation of cosmopolitan populations and their brashly luxurious cultural styles – film, opera, fashion, cuisine, markets, and the underworld of crime and political intrigue. Such mutual modeling has continued in the non-fictional commercial world today. Shanghai Tang, a Hong Kong-based fashion chain founded by Cambridge-educated Sir David Tang, stands out in the global consumer market. It specializes in re-orientalizing Shanghai chic at the high end, with a colonial touch and a postmodern twist.” See *Helen F. Siu*, “Retuning a Provincialized Middle Class in Asia’s Urban Postmodern: The Case of Hong Kong,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*.

Coincidentally, David Tang, as an avid collector, has, since the late 1980s, been one of the most influential figures in defining the field of contemporary Chinese art within an international context. Tang recalls that when he first began collecting contemporary oil paintings from mainland China, he stood alone amidst a sea of “traditional snobbish collectors [who] maintained their aloofness with the classical ink scrolls,” and continues, “Happily for me, these snobs have all been proved wrong – very wrong in fact. Chinese modern and contemporary art has risen like a meteorite in just the last 2 or 3 years. Not only oil paintings, but also sculptures and photographs and installations by living Chinese artists – they are all beginning to fetch monumental prices. Of course there is a difference between art and the market. But having a good market at least suggests good art,” David Tang, *Chink in the Armour* (Hong Kong: Enrich Publishing, 2010), 208-9.

company's tailors are described as multi-generational artisans employing "ancient techniques," and their fathers are identified as old Shanghainese master tailors, who successfully fled to Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution.²¹³ Shanghai Tang thus claims to connect its brand both to "traditional" China, and "old [Republican-Era] Shanghai," while distancing itself from China's more immediate socialist past, and especially the destruction of the Cultural Revolution.

However, while rejecting the social and economic tenets of the Cultural Revolution, there are instances in which Shanghai Tang's designs, as the following analysis shows, stylistically reference Cultural Revolution-Era fashions. I argue that these references transform the Maoist ideologies of the Cultural Revolution into commercialized aesthetics, while presenting a pleasant veneer of stylistic and temporal hybridity that helps to "world" Shanghai in the 1990s-2000s, while clouding the city's rising socio-economic tensions, such as those arising from the re-establishment of class divisions, and between vying conceptions of the local and global.²¹⁴

²¹³ A company-issued statement reads, "Much of the Shanghainese tailoring skills and fashions were lost during the Cultural Revolution with now only a fragment of houses employing the ancient techniques, Shanghai Tang being one of the last bastions," Shanghai Tang Website, <http://www.shanghaitang.com/en/shanghai-tang>, accessed June 1, 2011.

While it is true that many Shanghainese tailoring skills would have been "lost," or at least repressed during the Cultural Revolution, as people were forced to wear mass manufactured "Mao Suits" (as described in Chapter Two), this statement imprecisely conflates Shanghai's pre-Cultural Revolution-Era fashions and tailoring techniques with those of "ancient" China (Shanghai Tang uses the terms, "ancient China," "traditional China" and "Imperial China" are used interchangeably) China. As writer Zhang Ailing made clear in her discussions of modern Chinese fashions (discussed in Chapter One), the clothing and tailoring styles prevalent in Republican-Era Shanghai had already departed dramatically from their Qing Dynasty, not to mention "ancient" Chinese precedents, especially through modern fashion's streamlining of details, adoption of Western styles, and liberation of the female body. Shanghai Tang, nonetheless, insists on defining itself in terms of hybridization, as a mixture of traditional, modern, and contemporary styles. Here, we might identify the re-emergence of the values of the cosmopolitan model of modernity, which, while seemingly stressing the *new* and a distinct break with the past, also experimented with temporal hybridization, as seen, for instance, in the combination of traditional calligraphy with modern, art deco fonts (see Chapter One).

²¹⁴ The almost mythical claim carries with it political undertones that capture a sentiment shared amongst many investors in mainland China; now that the PRC has broken free from decades of Maoist socialism, it can return to and capitalize on the positive qualities and values of its former self (in a manner more in keeping with Taiwan and Hong Kong), values such as an appreciation for traditional Chinese culture and craftsmanship, which can be successfully paired with modern, internationally minded aesthetic and economic innovations (i.e., globalized production and distribution methods).

In 1997, Shanghai Tang released an advertisement on the back cover of a special souvenir issue of *TIME Asia* (a subsidiary of *TIME* magazine), devoted entirely to the upcoming Hong Kong handover.²¹⁵ This advertisement (Figure 3.1) featured the actress Gong Li – the first actress from Mainland China to gain international renown in the post-1989 era.²¹⁶ In the advertisement, Gong Li stands in the corner of a wood paneled interior. The actress wears one of Shanghai Tang’s characteristic “fusion” fashions. At first glance, Gong Li’s outfit resembles a Western-style, woman’s “power suit” – a tailored jacket worn with matching pants – that has been combined with “old Shanghai” and “traditional” Chinese details, such as intricate floral embroidery, the kind of which would have adorned Republican-Era *qipaos*, and bright golden hues (auspicious according to Chinese lore). Her necklace, comprised of multiple strands of crystal balls worn tight like a choker, slightly resembles Buddhist prayer beads, providing another “traditional” Chinese touch.

Yet, the Shanghai Tang suit also quite closely resembles the obligatory “Mao Suits” of the Cultural Revolution. The jacket buttons up in front and center in one straight line, and has a high neckline, and a short turndown collar – all features of 1960s-70s “Mao Suits” (discussed in Chapter Two). Furthermore, the Shanghai Tang suit references the four symmetrical flap pockets (two across the breast and two across the midsection), commonly found in “Mao Suits,” through three flap details sewn in on the upper portion of the jacket’s left hand side, and on the right and left hand sides of its lower portion. Significantly, the flap details of the Shanghai Tang suit appear more decorative than functional, signaling the shift away from the Cultural Revolution’s

²¹⁵ As July 1, 1997 – the date of the handover of Hong Kong from British to Mainland Chinese rule – approached, there was great speculation over the fate of Hong Kong. Shanghai, meanwhile, had been re-emerging as an international financial center in its own right, which posed a threat to Hong Kong’s economic power and identity within the region.

²¹⁶ Gong Li was made internationally famous for her leading role in director Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991).

strict emphases on utilitarianism, and a re-emerged embrace of the purely aesthetic. Furthermore, the asymmetry of the decorative flaps on the Shanghai Tang suit hints at the emphasis on the particular, as opposed to the uniform, which defined both the cultural and social realms of post-1989 China, as communist values gave way to individualist ones.

Despite its stylistic similarities to Cultural Revolution-Era fashion, the Shanghai Tang suit entirely overturns the former's Maoist ideological underpinnings. "Mao Suits" insisted on mass-produced uniformity, proletarian functionality, and gender neutrality, all under a collective adherence to Maoist doctrine. The Shanghai Tang suit subverts all these qualities and the values they espoused. For instance, while the colors of "Mao Suits" – grey, dark blue, and khaki – were selected because they resembled workers' and soldiers' uniforms, and were intended, through their dull and muted tones, to make all individuals blend into one revolutionary body, the Shanghai Tang suit utilizes bright orange and dazzling gold to make the individual stand apart, while celebrating opulence.

Furthermore, luxurious materials and jewels, which were vehemently denounced and banned during the Cultural Revolution, return in Gong Li's stylization. The Shanghai Tang suit appears to be made of embroidered silk and/or lace, and the buttons on the jacket's front and on its cuffs resemble shiny glass balls, or perhaps even pearls. In addition to the multiple strands of crystal beads around her neck, Gong Li wears a thick gold ring, suggestive of wealth, and, following Western conventions, of her married status. The ring not only reveals the renewed ability to flaunt one's good economic standing in post-socialist China, but also suggests a rehabilitated interest in integrating Western accessories, such as a wedding ring, into one's personal fashion. In contrast to the Chairman Mao badge Jiang Qing wore over her heart on the *Meishu Zhanbao* cover (discussed in Chapter One), which expressed a collective loyalty to

China's supreme leader, Gong Li's wedding ring suggests an individualized loyalty to her husband. Finally, while the Shanghai Tang suit is relatively modest (only the flesh of the actress's hands and face are exposed), it is, unlike the loose fitting "Mao Suit" that aimed to shape a gender-neutral body, individually tailored to accentuate Gong Li's particular bodily form. Albeit referenced through the fashion of the "Mao Suit," China's socialist past, and the extreme period of the Cultural Revolution, are buried by these signifiers of material wealth, global awareness, and feminine individuality.

In addition to the Shanghai Tang suit, this entire advertisement hints at the capitalist, individualist, and global values that emerged forcefully within Mainland China in the 1990s-2000s, and which came into collision with the socialist, communist, and nationalist ones of the 1960s-70s. In the advertisement, Gong Li stands tall and poised with clasped hands. This stance, significantly, alludes to one of Mao's standard poses; he was often featured standing with his hands clasped together. Gong Li's pensive gaze is directed off into the distance, suggestive of a worldly outlook and contemplations of the future. In the foreground sits a young man in a cook's uniform. The picture is cropped so that only half of the cook's face, which gazes directly at the viewer, can be seen. The cook in this image provides a foil to Gong Li, whose wealth and high social standing, signaled by her well-known international movie star status, her high quality accessories, and her upscale Shanghai Tang attire, are contrasted against the lowly position of the cook. Seated in front of the actress, who appears not to notice him, he wears a white hat and worker's shirt and jacket, slightly stained above the pocket. The stark contrast between these two figures visually embodies the economic inequalities of the post-socialist, class-based society that had, by the mid-1990s, arisen within Mainland China.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Never quelled in Hong Kong, which maintained a capitalist economic system with multiple class levels under British colonial rule, by 1997, the year this advertisement was published, Mainland China had mostly replaced its

As a result of economic reforms that promoted free markets and international trade, as instigated in the late 1970s by Mao's successor, leader Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), by the mid-1990s, numerous people in Mainland China had begun enjoying increased wealth, while a distinct under class emerged, and income disparity soared. Simultaneously, a strong domestic service economy developed, especially in cities like Shanghai, and those people of means hired servants, including maids, cooks, and drivers, of which there was a labor surplus. By including the figure of a cook, perhaps a personal servant, in the advertisement's frame, Shanghai Tang's purported stylistic references to Shanghai's 1920s-30s past become overshadowed by the economic similarities of that historic period, defined by semi-colonial capitalism, and the 1990s-2000s, defined by state-sponsored global capitalism.

The text in the advertisement, "GONG LI for SHANGHAI TANG," aims to equate the transnational status of the actress with the global nature of the brand, while also suggesting a cinematic reference (following the format GONG LI for/in FILM TITLE).²¹⁸ This advertisement is most likely referencing the film, *Shanghai Triad* (1995), directed by Zhang Yimou (b. 1951), which was released two years prior to the ad's publication. Set in the 1930s, *Shanghai Triad* tells the story of a young boy from the countryside who arrives in cosmopolitan Shanghai to work as the personal servant of a powerful gangster's glamorous mistress, Xiao Jingbao, played by Gong

socialist system with a capitalist one (referred to as "socialism with Chinese characteristics"). In registering China's socialist past at only a superficially level, the advertisement parallels the way in which the CCP continues to refer its economic system as one of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," while in actuality it functions as state-sponsored capitalism.

²¹⁸ Unlike in the fashion and print media examples explored in Chapters One and Two, this advertisement incorporates its text only in English, because of its publication in the English-language journal *TIME Asia*, and also because of the bilingual nature of Hong Kong. Still, like in the past two examples, this advertisement combines varied font styles to further emphasize temporal hybridity. While "GONG LI" and "SHANGHAI TANG" are printed in all capital, streamlined letters, the "for" that links these two is printed in a semi-cursive script. This text utilizes the bright colors (fuchsia for "GONG LI" and "SHANGHAI TANG" and bright green for "for"), which are a defining feature of Shanghai Tang's clothes. "GONG LI" and "SHANGHAI TANG" appear larger than "for," revealing a desire to equate the international movie star's name with the international clothing brand.

Li. The servant boy, Tang Shuisheng, who the cook in the advertisement is likely referencing, is bewildered by modern Shanghai, shocked, and often disgusted by the rampant materialism and corruption that defines the underworld that Xiao Jingbao inhabits.

In one of the film's earliest and most striking scenes, Tang Shuisheng meets Xiao Jingbao in her dressing room, after she has just finished performing in a cabaret act. The fully made-up Xiao Jingbao, who wears a provocative, bright red, lacy costume, and who is clad in a diamond necklace, earrings, bracelets, and rings, speaks to Tang Shuisheng through her dressing room mirror. She teasingly asks the fourteen-year-old if he has ever slept with a woman, and laughs amusedly, in between sips of alcohol, when he answers, "Yes, when I was small, I slept with my mom."²¹⁹ Their first bit of exceedingly Oedipal dialogue contrasts the corruption of Xiao Jingbao, defined through her erotic dancing and dangerous sexual exploits with gangsters, against the juvenile innocence of her servant. Immediately after this exchange, Xiao Jingbao grows impatient with Tang Shuisheng, as he fumbles to light her cigarette with a "555" (a British American Tobacco Company brand) lighter – a foreign, *modern* object he has obviously never encountered. In this scene, the cosmopolitan character of Xiao Jingbao is contrasted against Tang Shuisheng, who is defined as provincial through both his lack of sexual experience, and his lack of knowledge of foreign goods. Throughout the film, Xiao Jingbao's treatment of the servant, who she frequently refers to as a "country bumpkin" alternates between affectionate teasing, mocking condescension, and cruel verbal abuse. As the film progresses, viewers find that the harshness with which Xiao Jingbao often treats her servant comes from her own status anxieties, as it is revealed that she herself started out as a "country bumpkin." The scene in front of the dressing room mirror thus gains additional significance as viewers learn that Xiao Jingbao's

²¹⁹ *Shanghai Triad (Yao a yao yao dao waipo qiao)*, directed by Zhang Yimou (1995; Shanghai, China: Alpha Films, Shanghai Film Studios, et al./Sony Pictures Classics, 1995), DVD.

personal identity is a tormented one; she is pulled between her innocent, provincial, rural roots and her new, corrupt, cosmopolitan, urban identity.²²⁰

Shanghai Triad was made in Mainland China in the mid-1990s, as stories set in 1920s-30s Shanghai began proliferating within the realm of popular culture, also signaled by the development of Shanghai Tang. Both film and fashion brand attest to the increasing interest in Shanghai's semi-colonial past in the 1990s-2000s, a past that was condemned and whose memory was deeply repressed during China's socialist years. The renewed interest in this particular history comes in the aftermath of the collapse of China's project of Maoist modernity, as both Shanghai, and China, have re-established of international trade and re-instated a capitalist economic system. Through the lens of history, *Shanghai Triad* reflects on the social tensions created by these developments – tensions between urban and rural identities, between rich and poor, between ruled and ruling classes, and between morality and immorality – as they exist not only between people and classes, but often within single individuals. These are movements and tensions that have, since the early 1990s, come again to define Shanghai.

The Shanghai Tang advertisement also hints at the struggles between the desire to achieve global aspirations, embodied in the figure of international starlet, Gong Li, and the desire to preserve local identities, as fixed in the figure of the young seated cook. Nonetheless, while acknowledging the return of class hierarchies and global/local divisions, the Shanghai Tang advertisement, through its harmonious blend of stylistic and temporal references (to Cultural Revolution-Era fashions, to “old Shanghai,” to “traditional China,” and to contemporary cinema set in the past), ultimately covers over the tensions that defined 1920s-30s Shanghai, and that

²²⁰ When Xiao must retreat from Shanghai to the countryside, she reconnects with her “peasant” roots. She and the servant boy, meanwhile, gain respect and loyalty towards one another, which are tested when Xiao betrays her gangster lover, and must confront a tragic demise.

have come to define the city in the 1990s-2000s. *Gong Li for Shanghai Tang* creates a positive “worlding” portrait of Shanghai, as an “Old meets New,” “East meets West,” “Local meets Global” metropolis poised to rise as a new star in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary Chinese Art amidst Globalization

Throughout the 1990s-2000s, the word, new (*xin*), which dominated the literature of China’s *New Culture Movement* and *Cultural Revolution*, frequently reappeared in discussions on Chinese art, as seen, for instance, in multiple exhibitions devoted to *New Chinese Art*, or *China’s New Art* (中国新艺术/*Zhongguo xin yishu*).²²¹ Critics and curators have generally designated this category, also often referred to as *Chinese Contemporary Art* (中国当代艺术/*Zhongguo dangdai yishu*), as art made in China and/or by Chinese artists since 1989 – the year the CCP secured its autocratic political rule while the country’s economy continued to shift from nationalized socialism to globalized capitalism.²²² The term, *contemporaneity* (当代性/*dangdai xing*), meanwhile, has been used to describe *new Chinese art* that directly engages the current circumstances of post-socialist China, while emphasizing a break with the past.²²³ However, this section reveals how two artists working in Shanghai in the 2000s have formulated unique models of Chinese contemporaneity linked to the past, as well as to the locational specificity of global Shanghai.

²²¹ Two such examples are “China’s New Art, Post-1989” (1993), curated by Chang Tsong-zung, and “Inside Out: New Chinese Art” (1998), curated by Gao Minglu.

²²² 1989 marked the close of a relatively open interim reform era (1978-1989), during which time China’s artistic sphere was characterized by widespread experimentation, catalyzed by the sudden influx of previously banned philosophy, literature, art, and art history, and the loosening of the Cultural Revolution’s extremist policies. These artistic experiments, later classified under the term ‘85 Art New Wave Movement, climaxed during the “No U-TURN/China/Avant-garde” exhibition, which opened at the National Gallery in Beijing in February 1989, shortly before the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

²²³ See Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity*, 1.

This section focuses on two large-scale installation art projects – *Heavenly Lantern Project* (2003-Present) by Gu Wenda and *Tobacco Project* (1999-Present) by Xu Bing – both of which were conceived of, and/or created in dialogue with the global, urbanized Shanghai of the early 2000s.²²⁴ Both projects reference history, conceived broadly in terms of “traditional” China in the case of *Heavenly Lantern*, and more specifically in terms of the city’s pre-socialist, and socialist pasts in the case of *Tobacco Project*, while confronting the city’s reconstituted “East meets West” status. I argue that Gu Wenda’s *Heavenly Lantern Project* and Xu Bing’s *Tobacco Project* utilize historical references and hybridity to formulate two diverging models of Chinese contemporaneity: *Heavenly Lantern*’s celebratory model that helps to “world” Shanghai, and China, while celebrating the combination of Chinese state power and globalized capitalism, and *Tobacco Project*’s critical model, which examines the stakes of such “worlding.” These projects’ respective formulations of Chinese contemporaneity also provide insight into the ways in which China’s current globalization departs from its cross-cultural circumstances of a century ago, how overseas/local Chinese relations have today replaced old East/West binaries, how Shanghai has developed its finance and service economies, and how China, today referred to as “the world’s factory,” has become a primary exporter, versus importer, of consumer goods. I begin this section with a discussion of Gu Wenda’s practice, focusing on the *Heavenly Lantern Project*, after which I will analyze Xu Bing’s *Tobacco Project*.

²²⁴ Gu Wenda and Xu Bing are two of the most internationally well-known figures within the field of contemporary Chinese art. Since the 1990s, both artists have established and maintained transnational practices, with studios in Shanghai, Beijing, and New York City. Both figures first gained international fame for their various experiments with the deconstruction of Chinese characters and installation projects, praised by critics for their combining of “traditional” elements, namely Chinese calligraphy, with “modern,” “Western” frameworks for art, namely installation and “post-modern” linguistic deconstruction.

For an insightful discussion between Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, and others, see Simon Leung, Janet A. Kaplan, Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay, “Pseudo Languages: A Conversation with Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay,” *Art Journal* 58, no. 3 (Autumn, 1999): 86-99.

Art – Towards A Celebratory Model of Chinese Contemporaneity: *Heavenly Lantern*

Artist Gu Wenda, who maintains studios in Shanghai, Beijing, and New York, is most well known for his ongoing project, *United Nations: Babble of the Millennium* (1993-), a work that gathers human hair from around the world (at last count two million people were said to have donated their hair) and then spins it into large tapestries of pseudo-language (a nonsensical assemblage of illegible characters drawn from Latin, Arabic, and Chinese). This roving installation project has been exhibited on six continents, a record cited in marking the success of the project's cross-cultural aims. *United Nations* has been hailed by many art critics and curators for its "cultural hybridity," understood through the work's combining of traditional Chinese motifs and content (e.g., embroidery, pseudo-Chinese characters, references to calligraphy, etc.) with Western styles, namely large-scale installation, and international display. Evidence of the manner in which Gu's works, including *United Nations*, are often described in "East/West" terms, the artist's catalog entry in "China's New Art-Post 1989," a watershed exhibition on contemporary Chinese art, reads:

Gu has been characterized as the "Red Guard" of the art world: his work is done with a spirit of adventure and challenge which has brought him into collision with cultural values both East and West. His creative provocation of culture takes the form of deconstructing accepted norms and language in an attempt to alter conventional perceptions of things-as-they-are. Although Gu has frequently employed images and materials associated with traditional Chinese art, he always gives them a new interpretation.²²⁵

Referring to Gu as the "Red Guard" of the art world, this entry insinuates that the artist's practice is revolutionary, because of its "East/West collisions," and its re-interpretations of traditional

²²⁵ *China's New Art, Post-1989*, ed. Valerie C. Doran (Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993), 189.

Gu Wenda, furthermore, conceives of his practice in relationship to post-modern and post-colonial theories that have tackled the notion of hybridity, as evident in this self-generated statement, "Gu's work and contemporary philosophy books of Homi Bhabha, Michel Foucault, and Gayatri Spivak are to be discussed in American Universities as the phenomenon of 21st Century new culture. Gu's *United Nations* art project becomes one of the most symbolic and important art works of post-modern, post-colonial internationalism," Introduction to Gu Wenda, *Heavenly Lantern: Wenda Gu Works: Jinmao Tower Shanghai* (Shanghai, China, 2005), n.p.

Chinese art. Seeking to both challenge and expand such claims, I argue that Gu Wenda's practice, and especially his *Heavenly Lantern Project*, reveal more complex and fraught forms of hybridity, presenting striking combinations, not only between "Eastern" and "Western" aesthetics, but between fine art and marketing, between political and economic forces (i.e., autocratic state power and globalized capitalism), and between the artist's own local identity and transnational working methods.

Heavenly Lantern Project consists of a series of proposals to cover skyscrapers and other architectural monuments around the world in red Chinese lanterns. In *Heavenly Lantern Project for Shanghai* (Figures 3.2-3.3), for example, Gu proposes to cover Shanghai's Jin Mao Tower (built 1999), designed by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill – one of the city's most iconic modern skyscrapers – in red lanterns printed with the artist's signature pseudo-characters. Gu's stated intention is to create an "East meets West" installation by covering this modern, Western-designed skyscraper in "traditional" Chinese lanterns.²²⁶ Indeed, *Heavenly Lantern* stylistically draws from traditional Chinese motifs (including red lanterns and Chinese calligraphy – Gu's pseudo-Chinese characters adorns each lantern), while also referencing Western frameworks for art, such as land art, installation art, and public art projects, by Western artists, such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude.²²⁷

²²⁶ Gu Wenda describes the goals of *Heavenly Lantern*, as such: "[To] celebrate the multiple cultures in our modern society by erecting a series of large-scale works in a unique and grand manner full of Chinese cultural symbolism... The goal of this work is not only to cover buildings with simple hanging lanterns, but the lanterns are intended to be the mouthpieces of a civilization and an ethnic herald in this series. Famous architecture and historic icons all over the world represent different civilizations and periods in world history. Draping and covering these monuments is not the traditional visual concept of contemporary art, but is a symbol of a civilization's dialogue with a symbol of another civilization in a unique manner, as well as one civilization's understanding and exposition of another. Understanding civilization from another point of view is what the *Heavenly Lantern* project intends to promote while making the decorated building more splendid and meaningful; intending, like an ancient adage in China: "to make perfection still more perfect." Gu Wenda, "Heavenly Lantern: Shanghai, A Wenda Gu Art Production Proposal" (2005), trans. by David Mao, in *Heavenly Lantern: Wenda Gu Works: Jinmao Tower Shanghai*, n.p.

²²⁷ One of Shanghai's tallest and most iconic skyscrapers, the Jin Mao Tower, designed by American architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, is located in Shanghai's Pudong District, the city's financial center. Built by a

Yet, in addition to this “East/West” cultural hybridity, *Heavenly Lantern* also marks a prime example of media hybridity, as the project blends fine art, design, architecture, advertising, and civic and national marketing. Towards the visualization of *Heavenly Lantern*, Gu employs a lobby team (including, amongst others, museum directors and corporate C.E.O.s) to negotiate with civic administrations and governmental bodies, an assistant trained in architecture to produce mock-ups and blue prints, a contractor to design the assembly of the installation and the fabric for the lanterns, a construction team to physically install the work, Mainland Chinese factory workers to produce the lanterns, and assistants to translate the promotional material from Chinese into English, the lingua franca of the art world.²²⁸ In regards to his production methods, Gu Wenda comments:

Traditionally, if you practice painting, you just need a canvas and paint....Now you really have to conduct your work as a director...you have to consider all the elements...I still believe, if you want to go to other levels, if you want to do a public project, you need to collaborate with the government and corporations, financial aids...museums...transportation departments...city governments...central governments...²²⁹

As this statement implies, the artist runs an enterprise that relies on increased division of labor, and various bureaucratic, and institutional collaborations. The artist “works as a director,” overseeing the various aspects of an art installation’s production. These methods are not unlike those employed by contemporary artists working around the world, and which emerged as early

Western firm as a towering skyscraper, the Jin Mao Tower, home to international banking offices and international hotel, is said to be a striking symbol of China’s modernity, defined in terms of its global capitalism. Rather than merely emulate the skyscrapers of Chicago, New York, and Tokyo, the Jin Mao Tower integrates postmodern design elements that are said to make it specifically *Chinese*, such as a tiered, pagoda-like rooftop, its eighty-eight floors (eight being an auspicious number in traditional Chinese thought), and proportions that revolve around the number eight.

²²⁸ Gu Wenda, interview by author, 22 August 2008, Shanghai, audio recording, Gu Wenda’s studio, Shanghai, China.

²²⁹ Gu Wenda, “Heavenly Lantern,” n.p.

as the 1960s, when Andy Warhol (1928-1987) set up a “factory” in New York City to produce his silk-screen prints. What is markedly different in Gu’s practice, however, is its transnational fluidity, which is defined by the artist’s maintenance of studios both with Mainland China (Shanghai and Beijing) and in the United States (New York), as well as his own *Chinese* and *Overseas Chinese* identity. Not unlike Shanghai Tang, Gu Wenda sees himself as functioning like a cultural ambassador, promoting a positive image of Chinese culture abroad, and a positive image of Western culture within China.

He also conceives of his art in this way, promoting it for its ability to bridge cultures. In the case of *Heavenly Lantern*, Gu emphasizes the work’s potential marketing power, how it could help promote cultural tourism within, and a good image of, Shanghai, and by extension, China, worldwide. He writes,

The *Heavenly Lantern* project would take the possibilities of advertising to newer heights and become a magnet for the world’s media... It is hard to imagine that the media would not pay attention to the *Heavenly Lantern* project on the Jinmao Tower in Shanghai. Besides creating a glorious image for the society, politics and culture of the country and for Shanghai in particular, the project would create a charming focus for the Shanghai travel industry, and create a market for many commemorative products...while contributing to help shape Shanghai as an international metropolis.²³⁰

Such statements reveal Gu’s desire to contribute to Shanghai’s “worlding capabilities,” or its ability to shine on the world stage as both distinctly *cosmopolitan* (evident in the project’s engagement with global contemporary art trends and modern architecture) and distinctly *Chinese* (evident in the use of lanterns as national symbols).

²³⁰ Ibid.

Here, Gu Wenda’s combining of various cultural mechanisms, including art and design, in some ways echoes the cosmopolitan model of avant-garde art proposed by Pang Xunqin and the Storm Society in the 1920s-30s. However, the project lacks the socialist spirit of Pang Xunqin’s project and of one of his chief sources of inspiration, the Bauhaus School. *Heavenly Lantern*, instead, imagines a hybrid of art, design and architecture that would stand in the service of both private advertising and global civic marketing.

As with all of the artist's large-scale installation projects, Gu Wenda hopes that *Heavenly Lantern* will travel as a transnational art installation, promoting Chinese culture and "grand symbolism" abroad.²³¹ To this end, he has designed proposals for *Heavenly Lantern Hong Kong* (Figure 3.4), *Singapore*, and *Davos* (Figures 3.5-3.6). Significantly, Gu is most interested in exhibiting the project in cities that are financial capitals, and/or which hold particular significance within the global economy. *Heavenly Lantern Davos* (2003), for example, was designed specifically for the meeting of the World Economic Forum, which is held annually in Davos, Switzerland, and which, in 2003, coincided with the Chinese New Year festival. For *Heavenly Lantern Davos*, Gu Wenda proposed to cover the Hotel Belvedere, where Forum guests stayed, in red Chinese lanterns, in order to, as the artist put it, extend the Chinese New Year's celebrations of the "happiness of life [and] the joy of harvest" by "celebrating the good will of the world, which is concentrated in Davos during the World Economic Forum."²³² In this proposal, Gu Wenda establishes a celebratory model of Chinese contemporaneity, which utilizes Chinese cultural symbolism to celebrate transnational, free market capitalism (as promoted during the World Economic Forum), and the World Economic Forum (an event promoting transnational, free market capitalism) to celebrate Chinese culture (symbolized in the event of Chinese New Year and festive red lanterns).

However, I argue that *Heavenly Lantern's* combination of cosmopolitan and national symbols does more than simply promote Shanghai, and China, on a global stage; it also generates an image of China's new, hybridized political and economic circumstances, in which autocratic CCP power is combined with global capitalism. While aiming to smooth over cultural

²³¹ *Heavenly Lantern Project* debuted in 2009 at the Europalia China Art Festival in Brussels, Belgium.

²³² Gu Wenda, "Heavenly Lantern," n.p.

tensions resulting from the globalization of China's economy, *Heavenly Lantern's* circulation (or lack thereof) ultimately highlights such tensions.²³³ In the early 2000s, as Gu was drafting this proposal, Mainland China's position within the world economy was soaring, as it posed a viable threat to the Western-dominated, democratic-capitalist economic order. Considering the suspicion, and fear with which many non-Chinese political leaders have regarded China's economic ascension, it is not surprising that projects such as *Heavenly Lantern Davos* were not realized. While the project was conceived of as a celebration of multiple cultures' integration, uneasy sentiments attached to Chinese cultural symbols have continued to derail *Heavenly Lantern's* realization. In one specific instance, Gu Wenda's plans to install the work at the Dutch Cathedral of Groningen, were, after multiple years of planning, rejected by the city council after some of its members voiced concerns over China being a communist state.²³⁴ In such cases, *Heavenly Lantern* reveals more about cross-cultural conflicts than the harmonious cultural unions Gu Wenda purports to highlight.

Such cross-cultural conflicts can also be said to define the artist's larger practice. Gu Wenda narrates his own development in this way:

In the '80s [in China], it was totally about Western contemporary art and philosophy, so there was the danger of losing your own cultural identity. So I had a slogan in the early '80s: I want to use Chinese tradition to go against Western

²³³ While *modern*, foreign-designed buildings like Shanghai's Jin Mao Tower might herald the spread of Western-dominated capitalism and corporate power, as some cultural critics have theorized, *Heavenly Lantern*, by covering these buildings with symbols of Chinese nationhood, produces a hybrid portrait of global capitalism combined with sovereign power. The project thus indexes what cultural anthropologist Aihwa Ong has proposed as a "theory of sovereign exception." This theory poses an alternative to the notion (generally accepted by urban and cultural studies theorists) that the development of modern contemporary architecture around the world is "merely the reflex of the expansion of capitalism or corporate power," by recognizing that recent urbanization in Asia and the corresponding race for Asian cities to unveil the tallest, most cutting-edge skyscrapers, is fueled not only by corporate expansion and the proliferation of Western-dominated capitalism, but by the command of authoritarian regimes, exemplified by the Chinese Communist Party's autocratic power. See Aihwa Ong, "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty," in *Worlding*, 206.

²³⁴ Gu Wenda, interview by author.

contemporary, but use Western contemporary to criticize Chinese tradition...to go both ways, so that I wouldn't lose my own cultural identity.²³⁵

In discussing his practice, Gu Wenda foregrounds the uniqueness of his cross-cultural background, gained through his training in traditional Chinese painting (he notes that the majority of prominent contemporary Chinese artists studied Western-style oil painting),²³⁶ and his personal experiences with contemporary Western art gained by living in New York City, where he moved in 1987.

The artist's formative experiences in New York, however, extend beyond a familiarization with dominant Western art trends. As Gu Wenda explains, his early encounters with the art market and capitalism more generally were intensely revelatory:

When I went to the States, I was totally non-informed about capitalism. At the time I left China, there was no single commercial gallery. My generation, by formal training, (I'm talking about general education), was all about Marxist ideology, socialism, communist ideology. In a sense, it was very naïve, very romantic, very idealistic – nothing really related to reality. I never had a bank account before I left China. I got my first bank account in New York. So New York gave me actually a physical education...just being there, to be trained (about) capitalistic property, the art market...everything. So, I had these kind-of two extremes, existing in me.²³⁷

Gu believes that these new encounters with the art market and Western capitalism (what was in the late 1980s swiftly transforming into an increasingly globalized economic system in which China and the U.S. would emerge as the two most prominent powers) opened his eyes to the

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Wang Dongling, a painter and one of Gu Wenda's former classmates at Hangzhou's China Art Academy (*Zhongguo Meishu Xueyuan*), describes Gu Wenda as a renegade student, who daringly crossed boundaries in a conservative, cautious climate, where most professors were concerned only with recuperating the basic skills and techniques of traditional Chinese painting in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Wang Dongling, interview by author, 17 April 2010, Hangzhou, Wang Dongling's studio, Hangzhou, China.

²³⁷ Gu Wenda, interview by author.

future of contemporary art, and made him better equipped to confront the inevitable changes that art would undergo in post-socialist China:

By the time of the turn of the [21st] century, Chinese artists are mostly not focused on social issues anymore, or political issues. The younger generation is more focused on the market, self-promotion, it's more capitalistic than the older generation, like my generation, which had more social criticism... I better understand the younger generation, because of being in New York, so I think in the future, the market will be the centerpiece.²³⁸

Gu Wenda's statement reveals the drastic ways in which artists' ideas about art have changed from China's socialist to post-socialist era. In opposition to old ideas about collectivity and art as a political tool, which were prevalent up through the 1980s, Gu observes that Chinese artists of the younger generation are more interested in selling their art commercially, and in establishing their own art careers as individuals.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Shanghai's contemporary art scene underwent rapid growth, supported by both the emergence of a strong overseas market for contemporary Chinese art, as well as increased support from the Chinese Communist Party.²³⁹ During this period, art was no longer positioned as an ideological tool or revolutionary weapon (as it was during the Cultural Revolution), but was instead upheld for both its commercial viability, as well as its ability to

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ The year 2000 has been said to mark a major turning point for contemporary Chinese art, for it ushered in not only a strong overseas market, but also a noticeable attitudinal shift within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which began vocally proclaiming its support for contemporary art and culture. In 2008, Gu Wenda commented, "Chinese artists are benefiting so much from political, social, and economic developments in China... Ten years ago, you only saw the promotion of traditional landscape painting or calligraphy that was safe from politics, but now you can see more contemporary culture being promoted," Gu Wenda, interview by author. Acknowledging recent expansion of governmental support for contemporary art, artist Xu Bing, when discussing his official appointment as Vice President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2008, commented, "The old concept about art and government being at odds has changed. Now artists and the government are basically the same. All the artists and the government are both running with development," Xu Bing quoted in David Barboza, "Schooling the Artist's Republic of China," in *The New York Times* (March 30, 2008).

promote a positive image of Shanghai, and by extension, of China, abroad.²⁴⁰ Gu Wenda aligns his practice with these new expectations, formulating a celebratory model of Chinese contemporaneity through “worlding” projects like *Heavenly Lantern*, which aim to positively image the hybridization of culture, governmental sponsorship, and international capital. As unintended consequences, however, the failure of such projects end up revealing the persistence of cross-cultural tensions as capitalist values clash with socialist ones in late 1990s-2000s Shanghai.

Art – Towards a Critical Model of Chinese Contemporaneity: *Tobacco Project*

During these years, the artist Xu Bing embarked on a multi-part installation project, *Tobacco Project* (1999-Present), that intentionally foregrounds the social, political, and economic tensions accompanying Shanghai’s “worlding.” In doing so, he has formulated a more critical model of Chinese contemporaneity set in contrast to the celebratory model posed by projects such as Shanghai Tang and *Heavenly Lantern*. Although more closely connected with art scenes in Beijing and New York, two cities in which Xu Bing currently maintains studios, in 1999, the artist began working on this ongoing project, which focuses on the city of Shanghai and its status, both past and present, as a center of international exchange and cross-cultural tensions.

Tobacco Project (1999-Present), first exhibited at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina (2000), later at the Shanghai Gallery of Art (2004), and most recently at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2011), confronts issues surrounding globalization and Western-Chinese

²⁴⁰ Acknowledging recent expansion of governmental support for contemporary art, artist Xu Bing, when discussing his official appointment as Vice President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2008, commented, “The old concept about art and government being at odds has changed. Now artists and the government are basically the same. All the artists and the government are both running with development,” Xu Bing quoted in David Barboza, “Schooling the Artist’s Republic of China,” in *The New York Times* (March 30, 2008).

economic relations through the lens of urban and transnational histories. The project focuses on the Durham-Shanghai tobacco trade of the early twentieth century, which was then dominated by the British American Tobacco (BAT) Company, financed in large part with money from Duke University. A result of extensive research that Xu Bing began conducting during an artist's residency at Duke University, *Tobacco Project* engaged Shanghai's particular 1920s-30s visual history by exhibiting BAT's advertisements, such as the company's annual calendars, as readymades, along with the artist's own mock advertisements and smoking paraphenilia, including multi-stemmed tobacco pipes, and matchbooks printed with satirical slogans such as, "Even Communists are Free to Smoke." These objects were juxtaposed against archival documents and statistical reports exposing the lucrative tobacco trade between Duke University, BAT and Shanghai (where BAT located its headquarters and chief manufacturing plant), and medical records related to the death of Xu Bing's father's from smoking-related illness. Individual artworks and installations were added and/or altered within each exhibition. My discussion focuses on the Shanghai exhibition of *Tobacco Project*.

The Shanghai exhibition was held in two separate locations: the prestigious Shanghai Gallery of Art at Three on the Bund (an upscale cultural complex in a revamped colonial building on Shanghai's waterfront in the former British and American-run district),²⁴¹ where the majority of the exhibition was housed, and an abandoned warehouse, meant to conjure the site of an old tobacco warehouse, which housed a single installation, *The Invention of Tobacco*

²⁴¹ Regarding the Shanghai Gallery of Art location of *Tobacco Project*'s Shanghai exhibition, Xu Bing comments, "I think the additional location at the Shanghai Gallery of Art at Three on the Bund is very fitting because it is the base of American presence in Shanghai," revealing the artist's desire to ruminate on Shanghai's semi-colonial past towards a rethinking of present-day East/West trade relations. Xu Bing, interview by author, 13 May 2010, Beijing, audio recording, Beijing, China.

Today, the luxury goods and services offered by places like Three on the Bund have largely replaced the Bund's old economic and state services – international banks, import/export centers, the British and American-controlled International Settlement's quasi-autonomous governing institutions, and after 1949, CCP bureaus.

composed of stage smoke and neon signs forming the text of an early twentieth-century Chinese tobacco advertisement (Figure 3.15). The main exhibition, held at the Shanghai Gallery of Art, consisted of five primary installations/artworks: *Traveling Down the River* (Figures 3.8-3.9) (comprised of a pedestal on which sat a replica of the classic, Song Dynasty Chinese landscape painting, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival*, which had been burned by a giant uncut cigarette laid and lit across the replica), *Tobacco Book* (Figure 3.13) (an oversized book handmade out of tobacco leaves, on which were stamped Chinese translations of passages from Sherman Cochran's *Big Business in China: Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry 1890-1930*, a key source for Xu Bing's research, which was displayed opened in a glass case), *Honor and Splendor* (Figure 3.10-3.12) (an assemblage of hundreds of thousands of individual cigarettes arranged on the gallery floor so that they resembled a giant tiger skin rug), *Window Facing Pudong* (Figure 3.7) (an ink drawing on the gallery's wall and window facing the skyscrapers of Pudong, which represented the view of what the waterfront would have looked like during the early twentieth century, including large cargo ships on the river and countless laborers hauling sacks of tobacco), and *Match Flower* (Figure 3.14) (a vase containing a "bouquet" made of long matches, which was exhibited together with a number of smaller sculptural works).

The smaller sculptural works surrounding *Match Flower* included, amongst other objects, a ceramic ashtray painted with a "No Smoking" logo, and a work entitled *Rounding Up/Rounding Down* (Figure 3.16), made of packets of "555" cigarettes decorated with ink drawings of an abacus. Not long before *Tobacco Project's* exhibition, "555," a British cigarette company popular in Shanghai during the 1920s-30s (as featured in *Shanghai Triad* discussed in this chapter's first section), announced its plans to establish a large tobacco production and

supply base in China. Xu Bing's abacus drawings in *Rounding Up/Rounding Down* were likely a comment on the collision of the local Chinese economy, symbolized by the abacus – a traditional Chinese tool for counting, and counting money – with foreign business expansion. Throughout the *Tobacco Project* exhibition, details like these hinted at the ways in which Shanghai's semi-colonial past, defined by the importation, and imposition, of foreign products on a local population, resonated in Shanghai's global climate of the early 2000s.²⁴²

The overall display of *Tobacco Project* at the Shanghai Gallery of Art also raised parallels between foreign-brand cigarettes in the 1920s-30s and contemporary art in the 1990s-2000s, both as fashionable, luxury commodities. For instance, the small sculptural works like *Rounding Up/Rounding Down* that surrounded *Match Flower* were arranged in a series of illuminated glass cases set in the most luxurious part of the Shanghai Gallery of Art – a marble-clad atrium, designed by American architect Michael Graves (b.1934), whose open plan provides glimpses of the gourmet goods and elite services (including those offered by the Three on the Bund complex's Armani flagship store and Evian spa) offered on the floors above and below the gallery.²⁴³ These glass cases, the center of which was adorned with *Match Flower*, closely

²⁴² Wu Hung, art historian and curator of *Tobacco Project*'s Shanghai exhibition, emphasizes the parallels between the history this project presents, and Shanghai's current socio-economic situation, in which the city is emerging as a center of global finance, reliant on investment by multinational corporations, who in turn depend on China as low-cost producer and giant consumer of goods. He writes, "Because of the *Tobacco Project*'s relocation to Shanghai, its central concepts subtly shifted to the Sino-American relationship and China's globalization process. In this way, the movement of the project from Durham to Shanghai came to mirror the global expansion of the American tobacco industry in general and its rapid development in China specifically... Viewing the show, no one could fail to hear a loud echo between the past and the present: once again there was the huge investment of foreign money, technology, and management, and once again China provided the world with cheap labor as well as an oversized market," Wu Hung, "Xu Bing's Tobacco Project and its Context," in *Xu Bing: Tobacco Project*, edited by John B. Ravenal (Richmond, VA: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2011), 37-40.

²⁴³ In 2004, Three on the Bund, originally built as the Union Assurance Building (1916) by British architectural firm, Palmer and Turner, was refurbished and readapted by architect Michael Graves (b.1934). Michael Graves is most well known in the United States for his postmodern buildings such as the Portland Building (1982) that draw from a myriad of historical referents, and his belief that design should be accessible to everyone. The exterior of the building was left intact, while the interior was transformed into an open plan, multi-floor "concept space" housing China's first Armani flagship store, Evian spa, gourmet restaurants and bars, and the Shanghai Gallery of Art.

resembled the cases found in jewelry stores. Thus, in what the artist claimed was an unintentional outcome, this formal display strategy ended up framing *Tobacco Project*'s small sculptures as pristine luxury items in an upscale, globalized commercial space. Xu Bing's production of a local history (through small sculptures like *Rounding Up/Rounding Down*) was hence itself impacted by globalization, which had made the development of the international, luxury complex of Three on the Bund possible.

During a conference held in conjunction with the Shanghai exhibition of *Tobacco Project*, Beijing-based art historian and critic Yin Jinan made the following comment about *Match Flower*'s surrounding installation:

In Shanghai, one views art as one views jewelry, one views jewelry as one views art. This would not likely be the case in Beijing. This [display] environment is demonstrative of Shanghai's development. Shanghai becomes a very big city; it develops into the financial center. This [way of viewing art as jewelry] is just one symptom of Shanghai's sudden explosion. When I look at these works, I grasp a sense of irony...²⁴⁴

Such comments hint at the ways in which Shanghai in the 1990s-2000s was compared against Beijing, similarly to how the two were contrasted it was in the 1920s-30s. As China's financial center and its most globalized city (having the highest volume of foreign financial and business institutions), Shanghai continues to be described as a place in which commercial aspirations trump intellectual and "pure" artistic pursuits.²⁴⁵

Already at the time of the exhibition, held just after Three on the Bund opened in 2004, the Shanghai Gallery of Art had become known as the city's most prestigious contemporary art gallery.

²⁴⁴ Yin Jinan in panel discussion that accompanied the exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, printed in "Yancao jihua · Shanghai" Xueshu Tao Hui ["Tobacco Project – Shanghai" Academic Seminar] (2005), in *Xu Bing – Yancao jihua (Tobacco Project)*, edited by Wu Hung (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2006), 152.

²⁴⁵ "The problem with Shanghai," Shanghai-based art historian, artist, and curator Gu Zheng would later comment, "is that everyone wants to buy real estate, and no one wants to buy books," Gu Zheng, in conversation with author.

Li Xu, chief Curator at the Shanghai Art Museum, describes the jewelry-like display of *Tobacco Project* vis-à-vis museological issues, which he in turn relates to breaks with Chinese tradition and the import of foreign cultural paradigms:

I see so many delicate and beautiful things arranged in the display cabinets. It doesn't matter if you describe this display using the concept of the library, or the jewelry store...Most of all, this exhibition uses the methods of museum display...Is this method of display originally Chinese? It's not Chinese. Historically, China didn't have a museum system, or an art gallery system, or an exhibition system. Imperial court art held a monopoly over the museum system...Nowadays, art has become more populist – that's why everyone can get involved in this discussion.²⁴⁶

Li Xu's comments voice an ambivalent position held by many critics of contemporary Chinese art. As he suggests, the foreign-influenced institutionalization and marketization of Chinese art, which climaxed in Shanghai in the early 2000s, has problematically undermined Chinese tradition, while simultaneously affording the possibilities of more populist receptions and a more open discursive terrain. Furthermore, unlike in the 1960s-70s, when art was made "populist" and art makers and audiences were collapsed through centralized state power and official mandates that dictated content, style, and means of circulation, the 1990s-2000s saw the de-centralization of the art world through the emergence of multiple, private institutional frameworks for exhibiting art, including foreign-funded commercial galleries like the Shanghai Gallery of Art, as well as both state-run and privately developed museums devoted to contemporary art.

Li Xu draws further connections between China's contemporary cultural sphere and Shanghai's past cross-cultural exchanges and tensions, which, as Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project* reminds viewers, abounded in Shanghai ever since Britain's victory in the Second Opium War (1839-1842), an event that thrust the city open as a treaty port and which is to this day considered a primary marker of China's period of deepest humiliation. Li Xu theorizes:

²⁴⁶ Li Xu, "Yancao jihua · Shanghai," 158.

Tobacco replaces opium, and in the case of our discussion amidst this exhibition, we also use contemporary art to replace tobacco. This is to say these things are all fashionable (*shishang*) – these are all fashionable addictions. Now, we are addicted to contemporary art. This is a global addiction. It's also an outcome of globalization. This society uses large amounts of money...the media uses giant images, all in search of more and more new trends. The public is in search of the latest fashions. It's like an addiction...like a craze. There is a desire for and worshipping of contemporary art – this is also an addiction. This is the outcome of globalization – making Chinese culture contemporary...Today we are holding this conference in this building – this is a result of the combination of economic capital and cultural capital. This method of combining these two is an international style (*guoji hua*). This exhibition in Shanghai shows that there is no distinction between cultural capital (*wenhua ziben*) and economic capital (*jingji ziben*). Three on the Bund's Armani store and famous restaurants all show distinguished, international styles – does this capitalistic movement and its understanding and expression of cultural capital share much in common? Of course.²⁴⁷

Here, Li Xu draws analogies between opium, tobacco, and contemporary art, all considered as foreign, and thus as fashionable products. He argues that the localized addiction to contemporary art is a symptom of Shanghai's participation in a global economy, which, as during the semi-colonial period, now spawns hybrids of economic and cultural capital. The craze for the *new* (which both in the 1920s-30s and in the 1990s-2000s was indelibly linked to foreign influences) is here likened to an addiction, or a desire that will never be fulfilled.

Li Xu sees in the combination of economic and cultural capital the emergence of an international style. Here, we hear echoes of the theorization of *Shanghai style* (*haipai*) in the 1920s-30s, epitomized by Lu Xun's early descriptions of Shanghai's cultural production as being supported by and functioning in support of commercial business and the city's foreign concessions.²⁴⁸ In the early 2000s, however, economic capital is produced *as* cultural capital and vice versa, through the media's relentless promotion of new commodities as new culture, and by

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 158-160.

²⁴⁸ See Chapter One of this dissertation, especially footnote 18.

global brands, like Shanghai Tang, and venues, like those in Three on the Bund, which seemingly endlessly promote new fashions, and new art.

Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project* intervenes into this conflation of economic capital and cultural capital. Rather than simply creating *new* artworks, *Tobacco Project* demands that viewers think historically about Shanghai's semi-colonial period, while suggesting that this past haunts the city's globalized present. By displaying 1920s-30s archival documents and found imagery, along with a wall of drawings that reference the former colonial waterfront, *Tobacco Project* presents traces of the early twentieth century export of cigarettes by business ventures aligned with Western imperialist powers, and their import by a local Chinese population eager to consume these harmful products because their *foreign-ness* made them fashionable. *Tobacco Project*, however unwittingly, further highlights the artificiality of this fashionable allure through displays like that one accompanying *Match Flower* in the gallery's atrium. By presenting contemporary art objects as pristine jewels, the installation generated the above mentioned discourse over the commodification of contemporary art and culture in global Shanghai, thus helping to pose a critical, and historically minded model of Chinese contemporaneity.

In a separate installation, Xu Bing mocked the preciousness, not only of contemporary art, but also of classical art. *Traveling Down the River*, one of *Tobacco Project*'s largest installations, and a piece that generated great discussion, consisted of a thirty-foot-long cigarette, which was laid on and burned over a reproduction of the famous classical Chinese painting, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* (清明上河图/*Qingming shanghe tu*) by Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145). During the conference held in conjunction with *Tobacco Project*'s Shanghai exhibition, a number of art historians and critics debated the merits of *Traveling Down the River*; their comments provide insight into issues surrounding the field of Chinese art history,

including the tendency to privilege classical over contemporary art, and concern over the commercialization of contemporary Chinese art.

For example, Yin Jinan revealed a bias towards traditional Chinese art when he argued that the rest of *Tobacco Project*'s works could not begin to compare to *Traveling Down the River* because *Qingming Shanghe Tu* had long been recognized as the most important painting in Chinese art history. Recalling his inclusion of *Qingming Shanghe Tu* in an exhibition of Tang and Song Dynasty art that he curated in Shanghai two years prior, Yin Jinan stated, “[Even] in Shanghai, *Qingming Shanghe Tu* attracted the most attention. I was surprised to find that such a painting would receive such attention in Shanghai.”²⁴⁹ Echoing the tone of the Beijing-based literati who defended *Beijing Style* in the *Jingpai vs. Haipai (Beijing vs. Shanghai Style)* debates of the 1930s,²⁵⁰ Yin Jinan added that Shanghainese viewers all rushed to the left hand side of the hand scroll, which is, as true scholars know, intended to be viewed slowly from right to left. He concluded that the cigarette burns in Xu Bing’s reproduction of *Qingming Shanghe Tu* symbolize how foreign imperialism and modern capitalism have sliced through traditional China.²⁵¹ While Yin Jinan’s comments subtly hint at the complicity of *Overseas* artists, like Xu Bing, in this “slicing” process, his main insinuation is that Shanghai, once the bastion of foreign imperialism and today China’s center of global capitalism, set the stage for the corruption and commercialization of traditional Chinese culture.

²⁴⁹ Yin Jinan, “Yancao jihua · Shanghai,” 166.

²⁵⁰ Lu Xun’s statement, as cited in footnote 14 in Chapter One, reads, “Beijing was the imperial capital of the Ming and Qing dynasties, Shanghai is where various foreign powers have concessions. The old capital swarms with officials, the concessions with businessmen. The sole difference between them is that the “Peking types” are the protégés of officials, while the “Shanghai types” are the protégés of businessmen...And since the official contempt for merchants is traditional in China, this lowers “Shanghai types” even further in the eyes of “Peking types,” Lu Xun, “Jingpai vs. Haipai” [“Shanghai Types and Peking Types”] (1934) in *Selected Works of Lu Xun*, vol.4, 17-18. [Originally published in *Shenbao Ziyou Tan (Shenbao Free Talks)* (January 17, 1934), 15.]

²⁵¹ Yin Jinan, “Yancao jihua · Shanghai,” 166.

In another instance, Shanghai-based art historian, curator, and cultural critic Gu Zheng remarked that the low cost reproduction of *Qingming Shanghe Tu* was “converted into gold” through Xu Bing’s fame as an *Overseas Chinese* artist and through the upscale space of the Shanghai Gallery of Art.²⁵² He playfully cited a scolding he had received from a gallery assistant when he leaned on the plinth displaying *Traveling Down the River*, and also referenced a comment made by the gallery’s art director: “Once artworks enter this space, they become like holy scriptures (*Jingdian hua*).”²⁵³ Here, Gu Zheng highlights how an artist’s and an exhibition space’s cosmopolitan identity and commercial cachet inform the reception of contemporary art, transforming simple objects, such as an inexpensive reproduction of a classical painting, into luxury items. This is a point that the artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) first raised when he (in)famously tried to exhibit a urinal in the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917, and when he created his own art piece by doodling on a reproduction of the Mona Lisa in 1919. But, whereas Duchamp’s experiments blurred the boundaries between low commodity culture and high art, *Tobacco Project* further complicates this blurring by calling attention to the ways in which *foreign* products, including imported cigarettes, and contemporary art made by *overseas* artists, get turned into luxury items, and establish a high commodity culture within the context of a post-colonial, post-socialist country.

Tobacco Project further illustrates this point by visually transforming cigarettes into luxury items, which in turn stand as contemporary artworks. Another installation, *Honor and Splendor*, uses hundreds of thousands of cigarettes to create the illusion of a fashionable luxury commodity – an oversized tiger skin rug – which takes up almost the entire floor of the gallery’s main exhibition hall. *Honor and Splendor* was constructed out of 660,000 cigarettes, which were

²⁵² Gu Zheng, “Yancao jihua · Shanghai,” 162.

²⁵³ Ibid.

arranged on the gallery floor, with their heads and filters alternating, so that they produced the appearance of an orange and white striped carpet. In a comment on the use of labor during the early twentieth century when a number of foreign companies, such as BAT, employed a large number of poorly trained Chinese laborers, Xu Bing hired old migrant workers to open the hundreds of cigarette packages, and students to assemble the cigarettes. By acting as a director, overseeing this labor-intensive assembly (which was photographed and published in subsequent *Tobacco Project* publications), the transnational artist Xu Bing does more than merely reflect on the parallels between 1920s-30s Shanghai and the present, he himself actively engages the dynamics of globalization.²⁵⁴ *Honor and Splendor* thus hints at two important ways in which Shanghai's globalized capitalism of the 1990s-2000s departs from its 1920s-30s semi-colonial capitalism: 1) China, today known as the "world's factory," has become not only a large importer, but also a tremendous producer of goods, and 2) *East/West* trade relations, have today largely been overshadowed by *Overseas Chinese/local Chinese* exchanges.

Further illustrating these points, in the Shanghai exhibition of *Tobacco Project*, Xu Bing acknowledged his own position within a globalized trading network, by prominently displaying a check from an American collector who had purchased works from the show in Durham, along with checks from Duke University, who helped finance the project, and documents detailing the university's financial support.²⁵⁵ These inclusions rendered transparent the private and institutional support that funded the project from overseas, while revealing the artist's own role as a trader in transnational luxury items, namely contemporary artworks. Together with the

²⁵⁴ For interesting reflections on the relations between internationally recognized "non-Western" artists and their utilization of labor from "developing" nations, see Miwon Kwon, "Is it a Small World After All?" (unpublished conference paper), presented at the conference, *Empire/Globe: Art in International Networks*, Yale University, Whitney Humanities Center, April 10, 2004.

²⁵⁵ See Wu Hung, "From Durham to Shanghai: Xu Bing's Tobacco Project" (2006), in *Wu Hung on Contemporary Chinese Artists*, Wu Hung (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2009).

installation, *Honor and Splendor*, these documents point to the two crucial ways in which the global economic circumstances of Shanghai in the 1990s-2000s have departed from those of the city's semi-colonial era. Whereas during the 1920s-30s, Shanghai was a major importer of foreign-made goods, during the 1990s-2000s, the city (and China more broadly) has also become a major exporter of Chinese-manufactured goods, including Chinese art eagerly bought by foreign collectors in the early 2000s. Furthermore, as Xu Bing reveals both by acting as directory of artistic labor, and by presenting documentation of his own fiscal success, cultural and economic exchanges in Shanghai are no longer dominated by Westerners (British and American Imperialists), but, rather, have been largely steered by *Overseas Chinese* (figures like Xu Bing and Gu Wenda, who are able to move fluidly between Mainland China and abroad).²⁵⁶ In thinking about the project, Xu Bing remarks, "*Tobacco Project* looks like it's talking about history, but it's still applicable to the [East/West economic] relationship today."²⁵⁷ This section, has shown that *Tobacco Project*, in addition to drawing parallels between Shanghai's 1920s-30s economic circumstances and those of the city in the 1990s-2000s, has also done more than merely extend the East/West trope. *Tobacco Project* reveals additional, more complex hybridities, such as overseas/local Chinese exchanges, foreign/fashionable commodities, and economic/cultural capital, as they informed Shanghai both in the 1920s-30s and the 1990s-2000s. In doing so, I argue, *Tobacco Project* formulates a model of Chinese contemporaneity that encourages viewers to think both critically and historically.

²⁵⁶ See footnote 211 of this chapter.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

Film – Haunting Shanghai

Further helping to establish this critical model of Chinese contemporaneity, a number of Shanghai-based artists have, since the late 1990s, been experimenting with film projects that critique the rising materialism of contemporary Shanghai, and its impact on local identity. This section will explore two of these examples – Zhou Tiehai’s *Will (Bixu)* (1996), and Yang Fudong’s *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2003-2007). My analyses reveal that both films reference Shanghai’s particular pasts (socialist, and/or semi-colonial) towards fuller examinations of, and critical responses to the city’s current globalized conditions. I argue that both films complicate the trope of “cultural hybridity,” as it has been applied both in relation to contemporary Shanghai and the category of contemporary Chinese art, by hybridizing the media of art and film to present cross-cultural conflicts, such as those between Chinese artists and foreign curators in the case of *Will*, and those internal conflicts within the figure of the urban artist/intellectual in the case of *Seven Intellectuals*.

Film – Contemporary Art and War: *Will*

For his inclusion in the 1999 Venice Biennale, Shanghai-based artist Zhou Tiehai exhibited *Will (Bixu)* (1996), a ten-minute long film satirizing the overseas discovery and consumption of contemporary Chinese art. Set in Shanghai, *Will* mocks the randomness with which clueless foreign curators, critics, and gallerists visit studios and select works for exhibition inclusion and the desperation of local artists seeking international acclaim. While seemingly set in the present-day (insinuated by the discussion of art world professionals flying into international airports), the film also makes reference to Chinese history. The film is black-and-white and silent (subtitles relay pertinent information and dialogue), and utilizes a kind of comedic timing reminiscent of Shanghai’s silent-era films of the 1920s. Meanwhile, costumes,

including thickly lined “Mao Suits” and Soviet-style hats with earflaps, along with the military rhetoric the artists employ in plotting how to put the Shanghai art community on a global art world map, distinctly reference China’s socialist history. This hybridization of temporal references suggests that the uneven relations and tensions between foreign, and specifically Western, critics, curators, collectors, and gallerists, and Chinese artists, are akin to those inequalities and tensions during both China’s semi-colonial period and the Cold War.²⁵⁸

Divided into nine acts, “Act One – The Military Meeting” (Figure 3.17) opens with the following scene: “A military officer is explaining the war situation in front of a map (It’s a map belonging to the Shanghai Avant-garde Business Association).” A group of actors are huddled around the map, to which the military officer points. The film’s subtitles read,

This is a military airport to secretly welcome museum presidents, critics and gallery owners. In order to smash their blockade against us forever, we must take action immediately to build our own airport... Comrades, we must remember that we will have nothing without our own airport.²⁵⁹

This opening scene draws two parallels, between avant-garde art and business (as suggested by the name, the Shanghai Avant-garde Business Association), and between art and war, as the military officer announces the need for war-like strategizing to establish the position of Shanghai-based avant-garde art in an international art world. Likely referring to Beijing, which, by the mid-1990s, had established an art scene (much larger and more substantial than that in Shanghai), which was frequented by foreign critics, gallerists, and curators, the military officer

²⁵⁸ *Will* draws two conclusions often articulated by Zhou Tiehai himself: 1) “Avant-garde art is a business,” and 2) “Being an artist is like being a soldier in war,” Zhou Tiehai, interview by author, 18 August 2008, Shanghai, audio recording, Zhou Tiehai’s studio, Shanghai, China.

Press Conference II (1999), a painting made by Zhou Tiehai, is a realistic self-portrait of the artist standing at a podium and microphone with a background of gold and various international flags. In the foreground, a scrolled black and white text block reads, in English, “The relations in the art world are the same as the relations between states in the post Cold War era.”

²⁵⁹ Zhou Tiehai, *Will* (1996), script reprinted in *The Art of Zhou Tiehai* (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2006), n.p.

points out that location's "monopoly" in welcoming museum art world figures, and declares that Shanghai must have its own airport. The scene not only references military strategizing, but also specifically that of China's socialist era, as the "Mao Suits"-clad men refer to one another as "comrades." Mixing such terms with those related to business, such as "monopoly," Zhou Tiehai insinuates that, while cross-cultural tensions (like those of the Cold War) define relations in the art world, these tensions were, by the 1990s, steeped in economic, as opposed to ideological concerns. As early as the 1960s, artists working in the United States and Western Europe, and most famously Andy Warhol, had begun thinking of avant-garde art as a business. Zhou Tiehai, however, introduces the additional analogy of war in thinking through the production, reception, and circulation of avant-garde art, suggesting that the "business" of Chinese art in the 1990s was based on cross-cultural exchanges (foreign critics promoting Chinese artists, foreign curators exhibiting Chinese artists, foreign collectors buying Chinese artworks, etc.), and the need to defend one's territory, as is the mission of the "Shanghai Avant-garde Business Association," in the scramble to secure limited resources (namely foreign investment in contemporary Chinese art).

After the "Military Meeting," *Will* continues to unfold in a series of vignettes. In "Act Two – The Cafeteria," Chinese artists discuss their need to "establish close relationships with critics and journalists" in a local cafeteria. In "Act Three – In the Hospital" (Figure 3.21) a long line of Chinese patients line up for brief meetings with a foreign doctor, played by a Caucasian woman, who meets briefly with each patient, checks their X-rays and vitals, and then moves on to the next one. Act Three draws a metaphor between patients waiting for a doctor's check-up and artists' waiting for quick face time with foreign curators, the insinuation being that these meetings are both essential to the artists' well being and extremely rushed because of the vast

number of other artists scrambling to get an appointment. “Act Four – Art Tour Guide” shows a local Chinese tour guide discussing with a group of a few foreigners which artists’ studios they will visit that day. Their discussion reveals the randomness with which foreign curators, critics, collectors, and museum staff choose to visit certain studios. At one point a few people in the group express interest in visiting the studio of Z – “I’ve heard that Z is an outstanding artist, shall we go and see his work as well?,” but the guide concludes, “Z lives far from here, we don’t have enough time.”²⁶⁰ In “Act Five – Heartfelt Calls,” an artist makes numerous calls from a pay-phone, asking the people on the other line for exhibitions, “I’ll take part in any exhibition you have,” he desperately pleads.

In “Act Six – You Betrayed Me” (Figure 3.18) an artist is discovered meeting with a rival critic, and the critic who he originally worked with accuses him of betrayal. Like in the opening act, Act Six once again conjures the metaphor of war, revealing that artists are forced to “choose sides” and demonstrate loyalty to vying factions within the art world. All of these acts illustrate the desperation of contemporary Chinese artists wishing to take part in international exhibitions and media platforms, while likening the role of the artist to that of a soldier going to war. Due to the increasingly global nature of the contemporary art world, the war Zhou Tiehai presents is not a civil war (although Shanghai may be vying with Beijing as capital of the Chinese art world), but an international one, with Chinese *soldiers/artists* subject to the whims of powerful foreign critics, and curators, as well as their guides and translators, who desultorily visit certain studios over others, leading to random selections of artists and artworks for exhibition inclusion.

²⁶⁰ The artists are called by letters (A, B, C, D, E, X, Y, and Z), which speaks to their relative anonymity, while further mocking the fact that non-Chinese art world professionals are often unable to properly pronounce or remember Chinese artists’ names.

In “Act Seven – You Only Have Traditional Chinese Medicine and Witchcraft,” (Figures 3.19-3.20) a group of four Chinese men, dressed in Imperial Chinese robes and hats, are gathered around a table with one foreign curator. The curator says, “You only have traditional Chinese medicine and witchcraft, but no art.” A fifth Chinese person enters the room and exclaims, “Nonsense! We do have art...Must our art live up to your standards?” This act raises the problem of the imposition of foreign criteria in evaluating contemporary Chinese art, an issue that created tensions between local and overseas artists and art world professionals throughout the 1990s-2000s, while also critiquing the way in which foreign art world professionals often seek out traditional Chinese motifs in the contemporary art made by artists in China.²⁶¹

Will's last two acts paint a dismal fate of contemporary Chinese art. In “Act Eight – The Godfather,” a weeping old man, presumably an older Chinese artist, laments, “There are so few outstanding new artists. I’m worried about the next generation...(The godfather holds the hands of two people)...you’re still quarreling. That makes me uneasy.” Here, Zhou Tiehai suggests that the fierce competition between artists to secure positions within an international art world has created a dearth of good art, and little hope for the next generation of artists. “Act Nine – The Raft of the Medusa” is a filmic re-enactment of French artist Théodore Géricault’s (1791-1824), *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819), an iconic painting of French Romanticism, which depicted the tragic, violent, and cannibalistic aftermath of a capsized naval ship. *Will*'s final act concludes:

Panorama: Ten or so people are huddled on a raft floating in the sea.
Close shot: Someone has died.

²⁶¹ Mainland Chinese art critic, Wang Nanming, for instance, criticized what he identifies as a “Chinatown Culture,” an artistic tendency, especially on the part of *Overseas Chinese* artists, to “appropriate simple motifs or symbols left behind by tradition...formulating these motifs into some ‘essential’ markers of Chineseness,” Wang Nanming, “The Shanghai Art Museum Should Not Become A Market Stall In China For Western Hegemony – A Paper Delivered At The 2000 Shanghai Biennale,” in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, edited by Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), 353.

Close shot: Someone is struggling.
Close shot: Someone is thinking.
Subtitle: We can't go forward. We can't go back either.
Panorama: They are all desperate and shout into the distance.
Subtitle: FAREWELL ART!

Zhou Tiehai's reenactment of *The Raft of the Medusa* not only expands the metaphor of the *artist as soldier* to that of *artist as victim*, but also intentionally concludes the film with a reference to a classical Western painting. *The Raft of the Medusa* reference subverted the expectation, often held by foreign critics and curators (as suggested in "Act Seven – You Only Have Traditional Chinese Medicine and Witchcraft") that contemporary art from China must be Chinese in its references. Furthermore, with the reference to this particular painting, which depicts the aftermath of a French frigate that was wrecked on its way to a Senegalese port that had been handed over from the British to the French, Zhou Tiehai ends *Will* with a subtle reminder of a tragedy linked to the seemingly "heroic" expeditions of Western imperialism.

While transgressing the trope of "East meets West" and any simple notion of cultural hybridity, *Will* also constructs a complex form of temporal hybridity, mixing a vast range of periodic references – the mid-1990s, when foreign curators and critics began gaining interest in contemporary Chinese art, the 1950s-70s, defined by Cold War politics and China's communist-era war strategies, the 1920s, when the black-and-white silent film era reached an apex in semi-colonial Shanghai, and the early nineteenth century amidst French and British imperialism. Through these mixed references, *Will* insinuates that the cross-cultural tensions that defined each of these periods are still very much present in the contemporary art world, which, in the mid-1990s, was becoming increasingly globalized.

Film – False Luxuries in Global Shanghai: *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest*

The Shanghai-based artist Yang Fudong has also created a number of films that address issues of globalization, not only of the art world, but of Chinese society more generally, and of Shanghai's urban sphere in particular. Yang's numerous film and photographic works from the late 1990s-early 2000s depict the swiftly rising culture of consumerism and privatization in Shanghai, and its impact on an increasingly alienated intellectual community.²⁶² These themes are most exhaustively attended to in *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2003-2007), an epic, 35 mm, black-and-white film. *Seven Intellectuals* is divided into five lengthy parts (ranging from twenty-nine to ninety minutes each). In 2007, each of the film's five parts were exhibited together in a multi-channel installation at the Venice Biennale, and again at the Asia Society in New York in 2009. The film was made slowly over the course of four years, with each segment taking roughly one year to create. Yang has attributed the slowness of this production to his desires to merge his own art and life, and provide a counterpoint to the fast pace of life in contemporary Shanghai.²⁶³

²⁶² Feelings of urban alienation and limited perspective are central in one of the artist's first works to tackle the city of Shanghai, *The First Intellectual* (2000), a photographic triptych. The protagonist of this work is a young man dressed in a business suit, carrying a briefcase in one hand and a brick, which has been hurled at and wounded him, in the other. He stands in the middle of the road in Shanghai's Pudong District, modern highrises framing his agitated body. Shocked and bloodied, this intellectual, the first to emerge in post-socialist China, finds himself in a state of crisis. He is ready to direct his pain and frustrations at anyone/anything by smashing him/her/it with the brick that was thrown at him. But, as the triptych shows, no one person or thing emerges as the intellectual's primary target. *The First Intellectual* casts light on the perceived breakdown of collectivity and historical understanding amongst urban intellectuals in post-socialist China. *The First Intellectual* was included in the "Fuck Off" exhibition, an exhibition curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi and held at Shanghai's East Link Gallery as an alternative to the 2000 Shanghai Biennale. "Fuck Off" included a plethora of explicitly subversive and disturbingly abject works. Surprisingly then, the Chinese Cultural Inspection Bureau singled out *The First Intellectual* for official removal. When choosing to remove *The First Intellectual*, officials may have recognized that this work, perhaps more than any of the others included in "Fuck Off," threatened to debunk the myths surrounding contemporary cosmopolitan Shanghai – myths that had been persistently constructed by events like the 2000 Shanghai Biennale, which promoted a positive image of the city, both at home and abroad." See Melissa Chiu, Preface to *Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (New York: Asia Society, 2009), 8.

²⁶³ Yang Fudong, interview by author, 13 September 2008, Shanghai, audio recording, Shanghai, China.

The film draws its title and thematic concept from “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,” the legend of a group of seven scholars said to have lived during the third century CE, under the tumult of the early Six Dynasties Period.²⁶⁴ This period and those following it were marked by civil strife, war, and political chaos, and it is believed that many of the era’s artists and intellectuals self-exiled themselves, rejecting civilization, and retreating into secluded mountains and forests. Amongst such figures, the Seven Sages were said to have retreated to a bamboo grove to carry out their intellectual pursuits – drunkenly engaging in Daoist-influenced philosophical discourse, creating poetry, and making music – all in a natural environment, far from the political and social turmoil of the day. Yang’s reference to the Seven Sages illuminates the crises facing intellectuals in China’s post-1989 milieu, a period characterized by tremendous urbanization, the rise of state-sponsored global capitalism, the aggressive solidification of one-Party rule, and increasing restraints placed on personal liberties.

The film, presumably set in the present-day (although it includes numerous historical references that cloud this, the men, for instance, wear 1940s-style Western suits that are mixed with more contemporary accessories, like one little hoop earring), follows a group of seven intellectuals (five young men and two young women) as they move back and forth between the Chinese countryside, most notably Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) in Anhui Province, where the film begins, and urban Shanghai, where the film concludes. Whether these intellectuals are talking (though dialogue is minimal), bathing, kissing, eating, reading, watching a cabaret style performer dance (Figure 3.24), working in a restaurant, or playing baseball on a rooftop in

²⁶⁴ As detailed in an essay on the Seven Sages published in a catalog featuring Yang Fudong’s project, “For generations in China, there have been men who served or should have served in public office but faced moral dilemmas that caused them to turn away from official service. This rejection was a way to respond to the corruption that developed after the Confucian bureaucratic system of government was institutionalized in China during the Han dynasty (206BCE-220CE). Withdrawal from public life was interpreted as a rejection and condemnation of the corrupt system,” Adriana Proser, “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove: Chinese Models of the Unconventional,” in *Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Miwako Tezuka (New York: Asia Society, 2009), 25.

Shanghai (Figure 3.27), they are almost always depicted as bored and listless, symptoms, for Yang, of the young intellectuals' spiritual detachment and disillusionment with the ideological movements of previous generations.²⁶⁵

Like Zhou Tiehai's *Will*, *Seven Intellectuals* contains a far reaching mixture of references: 1920-30s Shanghainese cinema (Yang cites Yuan Muzhi's *Street Angel*, discussed in Chapter One, as an important influence), Jim Jarmusch's films, classical Chinese scroll paintings, Cultural Revolution-Era emphases on collective rural training, and a present-day Shanghai street life overwhelmed by towering skyscrapers. These multiple stylistic and temporal references produce a palimpsestic portrait of contemporary life in China, and Shanghai in particular, that refuses to add up to any coherent whole. Part Two and Part Five, set in Shanghai, depict numerous surreal scenes, such as men in business suits with briefcases slowly promenading around a fountain in a neo-classical interior (Figure 3.23) or riding a steam engine (Figure 3.25), which, strung together to make viewers feel as if they are slipping from one dream sequence to the next, create a picture of Shanghai as a fantasy world of seductive consumer culture, or what Yang Fudong has referred to as world of "false luxuries."²⁶⁶

Part Two of *Seven Intellectuals* is set in Shanghai's former French Concession, and almost entirely inside an early twentieth-century, semi-colonial style townhouse, which all the intellectuals share. The extensive time spent in interiors, a device that recurs throughout the film's Shanghai segments, suggests that urban individuals have become estranged from their

²⁶⁵ Yang Fudong offers this ambiguous definition of the term, intellectual: "The spirit of intellectuals is the dream you have for yourself and the sensation of chasing a dream in dreams. In other words, being an intellectual means imposing the status of being an intellectual upon oneself," Yang Fudong cited in Molly Nisbet, "Wild Shanghai Grass," in *Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest*, (Beijing: Office for Discourse Engineering, 2008), 40.

²⁶⁶ Yang Fudong, "Interview: The Power Behind" (2007), interview by Zhang Yanxuan, in *Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest*, 175.

rapidly developing environment, and that intellectual life has become increasingly privatized.²⁶⁷ Throughout Part Two, the camera frequently fixates on the intellectuals' blank stares and discussions about sex (one man tells another of his predilection for older women), life (growing old), and idyll chitchat, betraying both longing and indifference. One of the part's earliest scenes is a close-up, fixed shot of a young man caressing and erotically licking a young woman's chest. She writhes in pleasure. "What are you writing?" She asks. (He appears to be using his tongue to write Chinese characters). He replies, "Meishu." (*Art*). "I know... Anyway, I know," the woman whispers. The brief exchange offers a moment of intimacy rarely found amongst the *Young Intellectuals*, while the act of writing (and art making) is exposed as attached to fleeting desire, and one that is ultimately ephemeral; *art* disappears as the saliva fades from the young woman's chest. Even when the intellectuals are pictured together – having sex, dancing, eating, singing and playing guitar – they appear as if in isolation, communicating with verbal and bodily restraint. Through these scenes, Yang argues that the collective political action and ideological commitment that characterized China's intellectual climate since at least the 1920s, if not earlier, had, by the turn of the twenty-first century, given way to individuals living detached lives in quiet bourgeois interiors.²⁶⁸

Part Five, the final part of *Seven Intellectuals*, is also set in Shanghai. The intellectuals have returned to the city after spending time in a rural landscape, and on a desolate island, where

²⁶⁷ In describing Part Two of *Seven Intellectuals*, Yang writes, "No matter what city you inhabit, you understand nothing better than your own family, your home, those private spaces that truly belong to you...A lot of times, the things in an individual's residence have nothing to do, in fact, with bustling...Everybody is quietly living in some corner of this city," Yang Fudong, "Interview: The Power Behind," 119.

²⁶⁸ In further contemplating recent social changes, Yang Fudong writes, "To me, the great change that is happening today in society can be seen and perceived in various forms. This transformation relates to people's mental attitude, the many changes in their way of thinking and their ideology. Numerous factors come into play, which concern the loss of traditional values and even the concept of tradition. In this sense, there is a loss. At the same time, the arrival and assertion of the new sometimes creates a sort of selfish existence, an existence that doesn't have much meaning. What is lost is the idea of living together, a collective search for a better way of life...Many young people – I'm referring above all to the generation subsequent to mine – don't take the past into consideration at all. They don't even need to forget it, since they didn't know it in the first place," Yang Fudong quoted in Molly Nisbet, 40.

they roamed about aimlessly over the fields, and rocky seaside terrain. The intellectuals return to Shanghai, seemingly after having failed to communally connect with nature, or with each other. They proceed to get drunk in lavishly decorated bars, hang out on a rooftop surrounded by gleaming skyscrapers (Figure 3.22), and take up odd jobs, such as working at a demolition site, or cooking in a restaurant (Figure 3.26). The unfolding of surreal scenes, which include some of the intellectuals wandering with oxygen tanks amidst fish and coral underwater, drifting aimlessly through an antiques/oddities shop, riding horses across the path of an oncoming steam engine, and playing pool outside amidst the rubble of a demolished building presents Shanghai as a dreamscape, full of illusions. As these men and women wander aimlessly throughout the nonsensical city, they appear incessantly plagued by ennui, suggesting that a sense of purposelessness plagues young intellectuals living in contemporary urban China.

Part Five's final segment concludes in Xian Qian Fang (Figure 3.28), an art deco theater from the 1920s-30s, which has been transformed and revamped into a swanky restaurant, in which some of the male intellectuals took up cooking jobs. As in the Shanghai Tang advertisement (discussed in the first section of this chapter), the figure of the cook is used in *Seven Intellectuals* to symbolize the reemergence of a class-based society, and the redevelopment of a service economy in post-socialist Shanghai. In *Seven Intellectuals*, however, the cook is not juxtaposed against a successful, superior urbanite (i.e., Gong Li in the Shanghai Tang advertisement), rather, the intellectual urbanites, unable to find any position in society, are left to join Shanghai's recently reemerged under class. While this hybridization of the intellectual and worker was state-imposed during the Cultural Revolution (when artists, for example, were forced to produce in collaboration with workers as discussed in Chapter Two), in 1990s-2000s Shanghai, Yang suggests, the hybridization emerges as a consequence of a growing capitalist

society, in which cultural capital becomes increasingly equated with, or subservient to, economic capital.²⁶⁹

In Part Five's final scene, the camera travels down a tiled, dark, wood-paneled corridor, softly illuminated by dozens of small lamps fixed to the walls, and into the grand art deco dining hall/ballroom of Xian Qian Fang. The ballroom is outfitted with a half dozen, large, round tables, mirrored panels, a diamond-patterned carpet, white drapes hanging decoratively around rectangular columns, chandeliers, and smaller, cubic lamps hanging from the ceiling. The camera hovers in to reveal the seven intellectuals, joined by a few other men, sitting around the room's center table, eating and drinking in silence. There is no one else in the restaurant. Two screens in the background play identical footage, seemingly from other parts of the film, those set in the countryside, where the struggling intellectuals tried, but failed to find fulfillment. This contrived setting in an old colonial theater calls viewers' attention to the artificiality of the lives of these cosmopolitan urban dwellers.

Two of the intellectuals – a young man and a young woman – silently get up from the table and begin to dance – a hybrid of ballroom dancing, tango, and contemporary club grooving. Two other male intellectuals rise from the table and begin wrestling with one another, knocking into the couple, and bringing the dancing man into their rumble. A fourth male intellectual joins in, so that two pairs of twisted fighters tumble about violently on the ground, while the woman retreats to the table, dropping a napkin into the fight, in a bullfighting-like gesture. The last male intellectual, meanwhile, arises from the table and dances by himself, stripping off his clothes as he does. Simultaneously, nearly a hundred men wearing cooks' uniforms and tall white hats enter single file, to form a semi-circle around the periphery of the hall. The men who were fighting separate, each lying sprawled out on the floor, as if dead. The cooks, meanwhile, begin to clap in

²⁶⁹ See Li Xu's comments on Tobacco Project in art section of this chapter.

unison. Their clapping provides a rhythm to which the last male intellectual, now shirtless, continues to dance. This surreal scene, in which the intellectuals turn on each other in violence and end up in isolation (evidenced by the lone dancer), intimates that Shanghai – with its luxurious, revamped art deco facades – is an empty dream world. Luxuries, which have replaced the poverty of China’s socialist years, offer false promises of contentment and spiritual fulfillment. *Seven Intellectuals* aims to reveal that the city’s luxuries generate an intellectually vapid environment, leaving alienated individuals to dance only with themselves.

In thinking through what he calls the “false luxuries” of Shanghai, Yang discusses the city in this way:

...Everyone imagines that things are happening in some place where they have never been....I think that the city has a lot of this kind of thing: descriptive delusions...a lot of people can give an extravagant description of Shanghai or another big city, in 3-D, up and down, left and right. Let someone start talking, and the place comes to life. You ask, has he been up there? Maybe he hasn’t been anywhere. In other words, there’s a kind of rumor in cities that produces fantasies, and those rumors create delight. This delight is false, but it influences a lot of people. Saying this brings us to a topic that I’ve been especially interested in: the capacity of rumors – and here’s the main point – delusion. Image also has this power, like the power of rumors to delude...²⁷⁰

Here, Yang critiques the “worlding” of Shanghai, arguing that hyperbolic description (we might think of the city’s reputation as China’s most “East meets West,” modern metropolis) as well as striking images (recall Gu Wenda’s *Heavenly Lantern Project* and *Gong Li for Shanghai Tang*) delude people by projecting a delightful fantasy of a city as a unified entity. However, projects like *Seven Intellectuals* reveal that contemporary life in Shanghai is characterized not by cohesion, but by a collision of realities and temporalities that ultimately obscure, rather than clarify young denizens’ conceptions of the past, while throwing individual subject positions, and especially the role of the intellectual, into crisis.

²⁷⁰ Yang Fudong, “Interview: The Power Behind,” 175.

While aiming to connect Shanghai's present to its pre-socialist and/or socialist pasts, the fashion and print media, artworks, and films discussed throughout this chapter have also illuminated key ways in which the city's current processes of globalization diverge from historic cross-cultural exchanges. Recent developments in contemporary Chinese art, for instance, parallel the change Shanghai's global economy has undergone, from being a major importer of foreign goods during the semi-colonial period to becoming the financial capital of China – today the world's chief exporter of domestically produced goods – with a highly sophisticated service economy. While a number of artists working in 1920s-30s Shanghai sought to import Western art styles and strategies towards the shaping of Chinese modernity, Chinese art was widely exported in the 1990s-2000s (by foreign and Chinese art institutions, curators, critics, artists and collectors, as well as by the Chinese state) in a struggle to define a contemporaneity that is both local and global. Furthermore, China's current economic and cultural circumstances are defined less by Western/Chinese dichotomies and more by overseas/Mainland Chinese collaborations and, in some cases, conflicts. Many of the artists and designers discussed in this chapter are themselves transnational figures, who maintain practices both locally in China and abroad; their work and its circulation and reception stands as testament to the allures, rewards, pressures, and difficulties that come with crossing cultural boundaries.

Among the central case studies presented in this chapter, the advertisement for Shanghai Tang, *Tobacco Project*, *Will*, and *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest*, have each, in some way, turned to Shanghai's semi-colonial, and socialist pasts while reflecting on, and/or critiquing the city's post-socialist, globalized present. This present has spawned new hybrid forms of economic and cultural capital, as seen, for instance, in projects like Gu Wenda's *Heavenly*

Lantern, which powerfully “world” Shanghai, fashioning a fantasy with the power to delude. As works like *Tobacco Project* and *Seven Intellectuals* reveal, consumer desire in 1990s-2000s Shanghai, perhaps even more so than during the city’s semi-colonial period, is not imposed by a single super power or foreign influence, but is instead generated through endless cultural exchanges and negotiations, as well as the persisting mythology of a thoroughly cosmopolitan place – a city *above sea*.

Conclusion: *A New Heaven on Earth?*

Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night...But looked back on after thirty years on a rough road, the best of moons is apt to be tinged with sadness.

- Zhang Ailing, *The Golden Cangue*, 1939

Recently, there has been much talk over the need to include *non-Western*, or *alternative modernities* and *contemporaneities* within the Western European and North American-dominated field of modern and contemporary art history.²⁷¹ In aiming to contribute an account of diverging models of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity (conceived of as existing apart, though not entirely independent from their Western counterparts), I found it necessary to look back to Republican-Era Shanghai, where some of the earliest theorizations of aesthetic modernity first appeared. Writing in 1940s Shanghai, author Zhang Ailing defined Chinese modernity in relationship to modern fashions that shed the past by removing the superfluous details that defined China's traditional dynastic garb, and by adopting Western styles.²⁷² Zhang Ailing thus theorized Chinese modernity as operating on multiple levels – maintaining an insistence on the condition of the present, a stance against Chinese tradition (defined through the lens of Imperial China), and an entanglement with Western influences. Significantly, Zhang Ailing's descriptions of Chinese modernity also relied on the unique urban terrains from which they sprung, and she pictured her own Republican-Era Shanghai, like most all of her countrymen, as China's most fashionable, Western influenced, and thus modern city.

²⁷¹ For recent attempts made at introducing and theorizing *alternative modernities* and *contemporaneities*, see Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

²⁷² Zhang Ailing, "Chinese Life and Fashions," 66, 70. See Chapter One of this dissertation for further discussion of this essay.

In light of this example, I wonder if the recent discussions over the integration of nation-based, *non-Western modernities* (and *contemporaneities*) might be missing an important point.²⁷³ While remaining inseparable from their national contexts, models of modernity, as conceived of in relationship to art and visual culture, are above all else, as Zhang Ailing intimated, tied to their urban specificity.²⁷⁴ Since modernity grows from modern cityscapes, shouldn't one of the most pressing tasks for the historian of modern and contemporary art be the analysis of those *non-Western modernities* and *contemporaneities* vis-à-vis the specific urban environs in and on which they act? This point seems all the more salient today under the conditions of globalization, in which "world cities" foster transnational flows of cultural capital.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ That nationally distinct concepts of modernity exist is not what I'm contesting, and each of my chapters account for Chinese specificity (e.g., modernity in the 1920s-30s as a condition of China's *New Culture Movement* and nation building, new culture in the 1960s-70s as a condition of Maoist collectivization, and nationalized socialism, and contemporaneity in the 1990s-2000s as condition of the convergence of localized Chinese communism and globalized capitalism.) Further attesting to the important role national identity plays in these conditions of modernity and contemporaneity, the fashion and print culture sections that open each chapter include examples produced outside of Shanghai, namely Beijing during the 1960s-70s and Hong Kong during the 1990s-2000s, to reveal the prominent role other Chinese centers have had in determining Shanghai's visual culture.

²⁷⁴ To further support this point, we might return to Charles Baudelaire's nineteenth theorization of modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable," which shared much with subsequent articulations of modernity around the world. Baudelaire's conception of modernity is inextricably linked to modern Paris, as he convincingly describes the *painter of modern life's* most significant work not as that done on paper or canvas, but as that embarked upon as a *flâneur*, a dandy wanderer, on Paris' urban stage. See Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 12-13.

Within Chinese intellectual thought, critics have spoken of the *modernity*, and more recently, of the *contemporaneity* of *new culture* (referring to currently produced art, literature, opera, fashion, film, and so on) by its ability to directly engage the current social, economic, and political circumstances of China. Despite recent theorizations of modernity in terms of spatial politics within Western academic discourse, cultural critics working on and in China still maintain that the Chinese concept of modernity departs from its Western counterpart in a fundamental way; while Western modernity is primarily framed temporally, they argue, Chinese modernity is always understood both temporally and spatially, and in relation to national identity. For further theorization of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity in relationship to modern and contemporary Chinese art, see, Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

²⁷⁵ For discussion of *world cities*, or *global cities* under globalization, see, Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Of course, by the early twentieth century, Shanghai, a center of colonial expansion and a primary destination for émigré refugees, was already conceived of as a “world city.”²⁷⁶ Because of Shanghai’s unique cosmopolitan identity, both real and imagined, my analyses of examples of fashion, art, and film connected to the city have allowed me to consider formulations of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity not only in terms of national identity, but also through transnational movements (I have looked at works by local, foreign-trained, *Overseas Chinese* and non-Chinese artists, designers, and filmmakers) and cross-cultural encounters. In doing so, I aimed to deconstruct the tropes of “East meets West” and “cultural hybridity,” which are ubiquitously used, but seldom critically assessed, in the discourse both on Shanghai and modern and contemporary Chinese art.

In addition to all formulating diverging notions of Chinese modernity and contemporaneity vis-à-vis Shanghai, many of this dissertation’s case studies are further locationally connected through a particular neighborhood in the city’s former French Concession. A microcosm of Shanghai, this neighborhood, bound by the alleys around Huaihai Lu (formerly Avenue Joffre), was once a bastion of revolutionary activity, avant-garde art, design, and film, and a site of cross-cultural meetings and collisions. In 1921, this neighborhood hosted the first communist congress, in which young revolutionaries, including Mao Zedong, secretly met to plot a project of Chinese modernity defined through Marxist communism and set against both foreign colonialism and Chinese Imperialism.

²⁷⁶ Popular English-language guidebooks of the day, described Shanghai as a “world city.” See, for instance, *All About Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook* (1935) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), an English tour book, which opens: “Shanghai! Shanghai, the sixth city of the World! Shanghai, the Paris of the East! Shanghai, the New York of the West!” Some intellectuals, however, warned against such characterizations. In writing on Republican-Era Shanghai, sociologist, Fei Xiaotong, for instance, argued, “Modern metropolises are the products of industrialization [but] a country which has not been industrialized cannot have urban centers like New York or London. The treaty port brought about the invasion of an industrialized economy into an economically inferior area...creating a peculiar community which should not be classed with modern urban centers,” Fei Xiaotong, “Village, Town, and City” in *China’s Gentry* (1948), ed. Margaret Park Redfield (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 105. See Chapter One of this dissertation for further discussion.

A decade later, the French-trained, surrealist-influenced artist, Pang Xunqin, set up his Storm Society studio just a few blocks away, in a building that also housed the League of Left-Wing Filmmakers' rehearsal space, and a revolutionary bookstore, and which would thus become one of the city's most intensely monitored sites in 1930s Shanghai.²⁷⁷ In Chapter One, I showed how activities and works spawned from this studio, especially the watercolor, *Such is Shanghai* (1931), formulated a cosmopolitan model of modernity that maintained an ambivalent stance to Shanghai's semi-colonialism and imported capitalism. I also showed how Pang Xunqin crafted here what he called "art for life's sake dreams," which imagined modern design as the key to a modern China, and a way to achieve the avant-garde goal of uniting art and life.²⁷⁸ Located a few blocks north, Avenue Joffre, the French Concession's high street, would become the main subject of social critique in artist Cai Ruohuong's 1937 cartoon. In Chapter One, I revealed how the cartoon, *Avenue Joffre*, helped establish an anti-imperialist model of modernity that hybridized media (epitomized in the League of Left-Wing Artists' concurrent woodcut movement) towards the denunciation of Republican-Era Shanghai's social and class inequalities, and a nationalist stance guided by communism.

During the Cultural Revolution, this former French Concession neighborhood was transformed, covered in protest posters denouncing Shanghai's semi-colonial and bourgeois past. In 1968, on Avenue Joffre, which had by then changed its name to Huaihai Lu, Red Guard art students from the nearby Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop erected a mural of Mao Zedong. *Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages* (1968), as discussed in Chapter Two, utilized Soviet socialist realism to help articulate a new model of Chinese modernity based on Maoist socialism, set squarely against its Western counterparts. Four years later in 1972, the Italian

²⁷⁷ Pang Xunqin, *Jiu shi zhe yang*, 136.

²⁷⁸ Pang Xunqin, *Wen Xuan Lun Yishu*, 6.

director, Michelangelo Antonioni, visited the site of the first communist congress, and ruminated on Maoist socialism and collectivity as alternatives to Western capitalism and individualism. As detailed in Chapter Two, the subsequent official rejection of Antonioni's documentary, *Chung Kuo Cina*, marked a striking instance in which "East" clearly failed to meet "West" in this seemingly peaceful Shanghainese neighborhood.

Today, this neighborhood houses the retail and entertainment complex, *Xintiandi* (translated as *New Heaven on Earth*) (built 1997-2002), said to epitomize contemporary, cosmopolitan Shanghai, and its persistent "East meets West" identity.²⁷⁹ Developed by Hong Kong developer, Shui On Land, and designed by American architectural firms, Wood and Zapata, and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, and Singaporean firm, Nikkei Sikken International, the outdoor mall houses global chains, such as Starbucks, and upscale fashion boutiques, including Shanghai Tang (discussed in Chapter Three), all in reconstructed *shikumen* (the semi-colonial, "stone gate" homes commonly found in Shanghai's foreign districts since the early twentieth century). A product of Shanghai's rapid post-1990 urbanization, the development of *Xintiandi* destroyed hundreds of original *shikumen* homes and displaced over 8,000 inhabitants. *Xintiandi* is today celebrated for its "East meets West" and "Old meets New" architecture – hybrids, I argue, that cloud an underlying conflict between socialist memory and rampant consumerism.

Xintiandi sits adjacent to the site of China's first communist meeting, which is now memorialized as a museum. This arrangement might seem, especially to outside observers, to mark an obvious paradox; a memorial to the origins of Chinese communism stands amidst a center of unabashed capitalism and cutthroat development. For many Chinese intellectuals,

²⁷⁹ Critic Paul Goldberger describes Xintiandi as epitomizing contemporary Shanghai in "Shanghai Surprise: The Radical Quaintness of the Xintiandi District," in *The New Yorker* (December 26, 2005).

however, the co-existence of free market capitalism and China's Communist Party-rule is not thought of as inherently paradoxical, but as the reality of a new global order.²⁸⁰ *Xintiandi* exemplifies this new order. While the Chinese Communist Party continues to pay lip service to China's socialist past, it simultaneously promotes and participates in capitalist development projects, such as *Xintiandi*. In fact, the entire impetus for the construction of *Xintiandi*, and the clearing out of the site's rundown collective housing, was said to have arisen from a planned ceremonial visit to the site of the first communist congress by Chinese Communist Party officials, including President Jiang Zemin, for the fiftieth year anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (1999).²⁸¹ *Xintiandi*'s development was officially approved at the local level on the stipulation that the developers "beautify" the area surrounding the site of the first communist meeting as an act of "social responsibility" and before the ceremonial visit would take place.²⁸² Thus, the capitalist development of *Xintiandi* was made possible through Communist Party power, and Communist Party power was enforced through the capitalist development of *Xintiandi*.

Such anecdotes suggest that *Xintiandi*'s hybridity exists not only in its "East meets West" or "Old meets New" character, but in its production of a space in which the Chinese Communist Party's autocratic state power blends together with local development, and global capitalism.

Through a "beautification" project that helped transmit a positive image of the site of the first

²⁸⁰ Prominent Beijing-based scholar and cultural critic, Wang Hui, for instance, has described China's, and the world's, post-1989 situation in this way, "Two worlds became one: a global-capitalist world. Although China's socialism did not collapse as did the Soviet Union's or Eastern Europe's, this was hardly a barrier to China's economy from quickly joining the globalizing process in the arenas of production and trade. Indeed, the Chinese government's persevering support for socialism does not pose an obstacle to the following conclusion: in all of its behaviors, including economic, political, and cultural...China has completely conformed to the dictates of capital and the activities of the market," Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, translated by Ted Hutters and Rebecca Karl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 141.

²⁸¹ Benjamin Wood (architect for *Xintiandi*), interview by author.

²⁸² Ibid.

communist congress, and by extension, a positive image of the Chinese Communist Party, *Xintiandi*'s development eliminated all traces of China's failed socialist project, namely the overcrowding and squalid conditions of the neighborhood's pre-existing communal-style housing. In post-1989 China, the Chinese Communist Party no longer stands in support of socialism, despite the rhetoric of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," but in full support of capitalism, constituting a new and powerful hybrid form.²⁸³

Xintiandi's "East meets West" and "Old meets New" design further suppresses China's socialist history by promoting the contemporary "spirit of Shanghai" as tied to the city's pre-socialist, semi-colonial past. Towards this goal, *Xintiandi*'s developers established the Shikumen Open House Museum on the site's premises. Located in a reconstructed *shikumen*, the small museum displays wall plaques detailing how dilapidated the *shikumen* homes had been before *Xintiandi*'s construction began, and praising the development project for restoring the neighborhood to its 1920s-30s glory.

The museum's interior is designed to look like the private home of a bourgeois family who might have lived in Shanghai's French Concession in the 1920s-30s.²⁸⁴ In contrast to most of the home's lavishly decorated bedrooms, there is one small chamber set at the staircase's bend, which contains nothing more than a modest bed, a chair, and wooden desk with all the necessary tools for writing: brush, ink, and paper. A wall plaque tells visitors that, beginning in the early

²⁸³ For further discussion on the relationship between Chinese Communist Party Power and current capitalist development, see Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy, eds., *Worlding Cities*.

²⁸⁴ The interior is staged with photographs, furniture and daily household items, many of which are originals from the 1920s-30s. One room is set up to look as if it had belonged to a young Shanghainese woman. On her vanity sit numerous makeup containers and jewelry boxes, photographs of smiling young girls, a Western-style oil painting of birds, and a Western-style lamp. A magazine featuring a Chinese cover star is laid out just beneath an issue of *Photoplay*, an American film magazine featuring a Hollywood starlet. This display conjures the cosmopolitan modernity of 1920s-30 Shanghai, as it was defined through the figure of the young, modern woman, and through modern fashions set against Chinese tradition and in relation to Western influence. But unlike the many watercolors, cartoons and woodcuts made in 1930s Shanghai (and discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation), this display fails to reveal the underside of this modernity; there are no references to class inequality, corruption, or impending war.

1920s, many of the writers associated with the *New Culture Movement* rented out and worked in these small rooms.²⁸⁵ While modestly decorated, the little room/studio is presented as the perfect private space for unencumbered creative expression. Nowhere is there any acknowledgement of the relentless dangers such young leftist writers would have faced while hiding out in Shanghai's foreign districts. Through the creation of such idealized scenes, the Shikumen Museum, and *Xintiandi*, suppress the site's immediate socialist history, while promoting a picture of 1920s-30s Shanghai that leaves out the site's violent struggles and complex cultural histories. *Xintiandi* erases all signs of the bloody fights and arrests young leftist writers, artists, and filmmakers were made to endure in 1920s-30s Shanghai, and gives no trace of the fierce climate of the 1960s-70s, when many artists labeled as bourgeois, including Pang Xunqin (discussed in Chapter One), were forced to destroy their works by their own hands.

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown that this sort of cover-up, in which cultural hybridity masks social, political or economic tensions, is not new; such obfuscations have existed within Shanghai and have persisted throughout its history since at least the 1920s. It has been the aim of this dissertation to unearth the conflicted cross-cultural histories of twentieth and twenty-first century Shanghai. I hope that in doing so, I might retrieve the long repressed promises of the "art for life's sake" dreams that still lie buried amidst the ruins of Shanghai's *New Heaven on Earth*.

²⁸⁵ Wall plaque, Shikumen Museum, *Xintiandi*, visited November, 2010.



Figure 1.1: Cover featuring actress, Anna May Wong, *Liang You/Young Companion*, no. 34, January 1929.



Figure 1.2 (above left): “Exquisite Beauty Reflects the Health of Sport-Loving Girls,” *Liang You/Young Companion*, no. 85, February 1934.



Figure 1.3 (above right): “Intoxicated Shanghai,” *Liang You/Young Companion*, no. 85, February 15, 1934.



Figure 1.4 (above left): “Outline of Shanghai,” *Liang You/Young Companion*, no. 87, April 1934.



Figure 1.5 (above right): “Ruci Shanghai,” *Liang You/Young Companion*, no. 89, June 1934.



Figure 1.6: Pang Xunqin, *Such is Shanghai (Ruci Shanghai)*, or *The Riddle of Life (Rensheng de Yami)*, 1931. (destroyed). (Image courtesy Changshu Art Museum.)



Figure 1.7: Cai Ruohong, *Avenue Joffre (Xia Fei Lu)*, 1937. Reproduced in *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, vol. 5, no. 2, September 1937.



Figure 1.8. Li Hua, *Roar, China!*, (*Nuhou ba, Zhongguo!*), 1935. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.



Figure 1.9: Käthe Kollwitz, "Sacrifice," from the series, *War*, 1922. (Cover image for the Chinese journal, *Beidou*, 1931.)



Figures 1.10-1.18 (clockwise from top left): Yuan Muzhi, *Street Angel (Malu tianshi)*, 1937. (Film stills from opening montage/credit sequence.)



Figures 1.19-1.25 (clockwise from top left): Yuan Muzhi, *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*), 1937. (Film stills.)



Figure 2.1: Cover featuring Jiang Qing, *Fine Arts War News* (*Meishu Zhanbao*), no. 3, May 1967. (Chinese Cultural Revolution collection, Box 6, Hoover Institution Archives.)



Figure 2.2.: Painting Group of the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop, *Portrait of Chairman Mao Throughout the Ages (Mao zhuxi gege shiqi de xiaoxiang)*, 1968 (destroyed). Photograph of mural reproduced in Shi Dawei, ed., *Shanghai Zhongguo Huayuan 1956-2004* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshi, 2005).



Figure 2.3 (above): Newspaper bulletin with images of individuals accused of counter-revolutionary activities being denounced while holding *dazibao*, *Beijing Workers Paper*, 1967 (Chinese Cultural Revolution collection, manuscript box, Hoover Institution Archives.)



Figures 2.4-2.5 (above): “Stage Photographs of the ‘Shanghai Festival of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers,’” *Chinese Literature* no. 9, 1967.



Figure 2.6: Creative Group of Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Workshop, *Trees of Fire and Flowers of Silver Under a Brilliantly Lit Night Sky* (*Huo shu yin hua bu ye tian*), 1971. Photograph of painting reproduced in Shi Dawei, ed., *Shanghai Zhongguo Huayuan 1956-2004* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshi, 2005).



Figures 2.7-2.10 (clockwise from top left): Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *On the Docks (Haigang)*, 1972. Photographs printed in Shanghai Peking Opera Group, *On the Docks: A Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera*, January 1972 script (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1973).





Figures 2.11-2.14 (clockwise from top left): Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *On the Docks* (*Haigang*), 1972. Photographs printed in Shanghai Peking Opera Group, *On the Docks: A Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera*, January 1972 script (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1973).

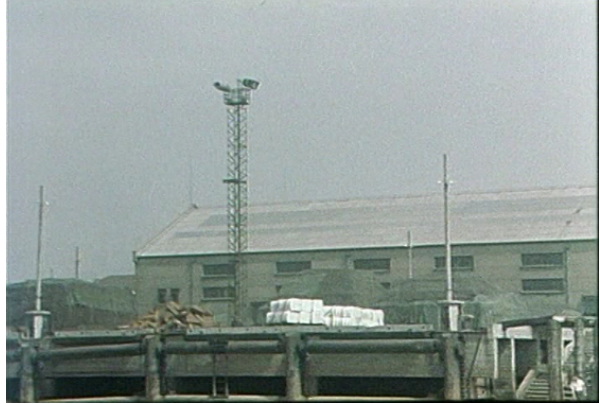


Figures 2.15-2.20 (clockwise from top left): Michelangelo Antonioni, *Chung Kuo Cina (China)*, 1972. (Film stills.)
Figure 2.21 (below): Michelangelo Antonioni, *Chung Kuo Cina (China)*, 1972. (Film stills.)





Figures 2.22-2.27 (clockwise from top left): Michelangelo Antonioni, *Chung Kuo Cina (China)*, 1972. (Film stills.)



Figures 2.28-2.33 (clockwise from top left): Michelangelo Antonioni, *Chung Kuo Cina* (China), 1972. (Film stills.)

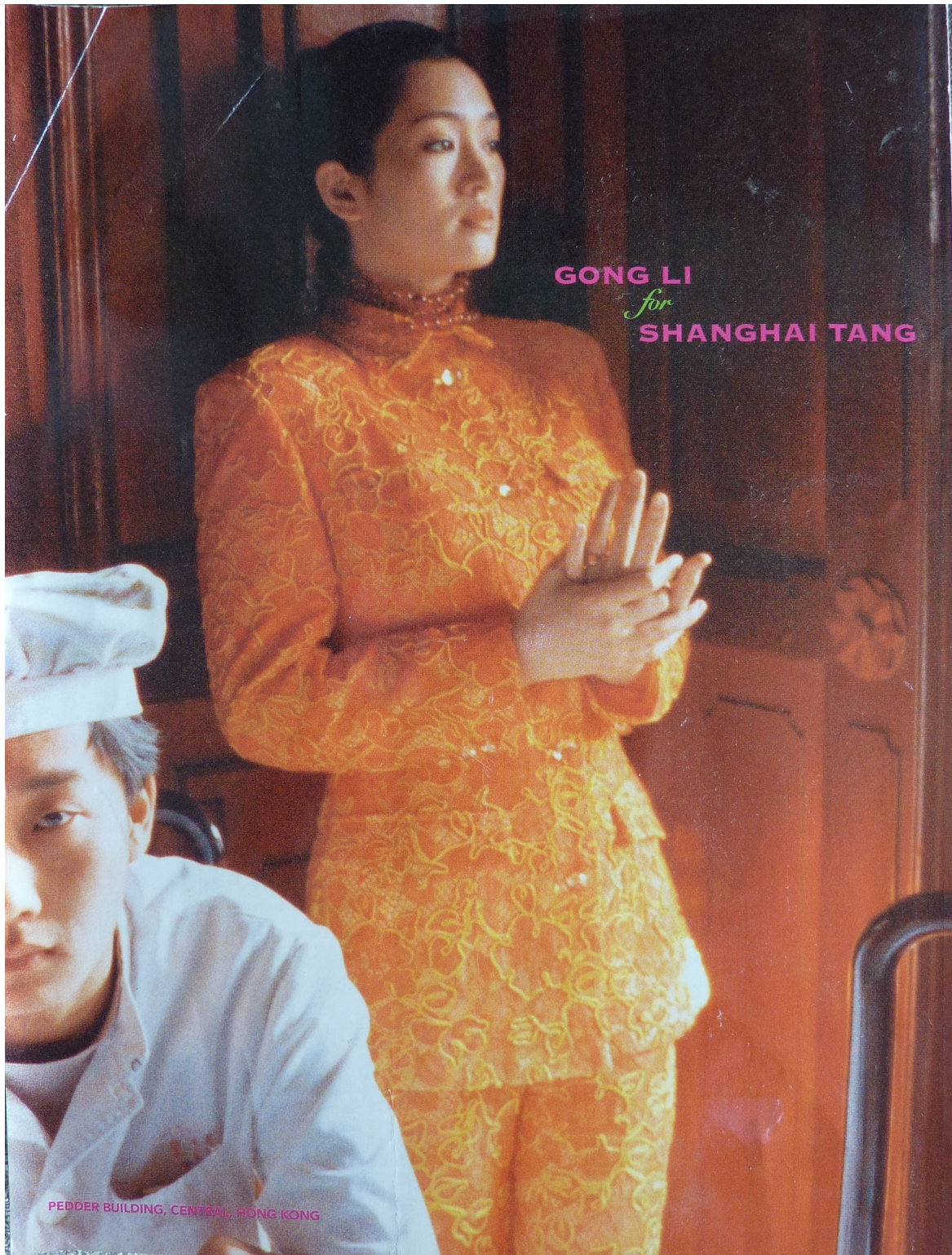


Figure 3.1: Advertisement for Shanghai Tang featuring actress Gong Li, *TIME Asia*, 1997. (Back cover of Special Souvenir Issue: "Hong Kong 1997.")

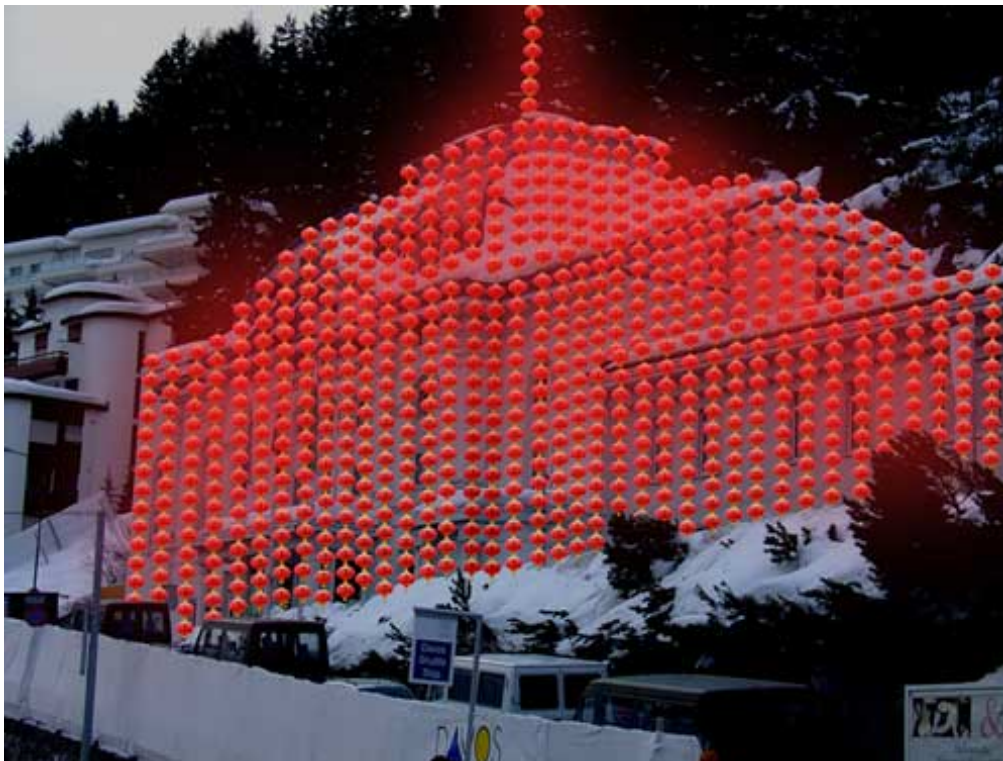


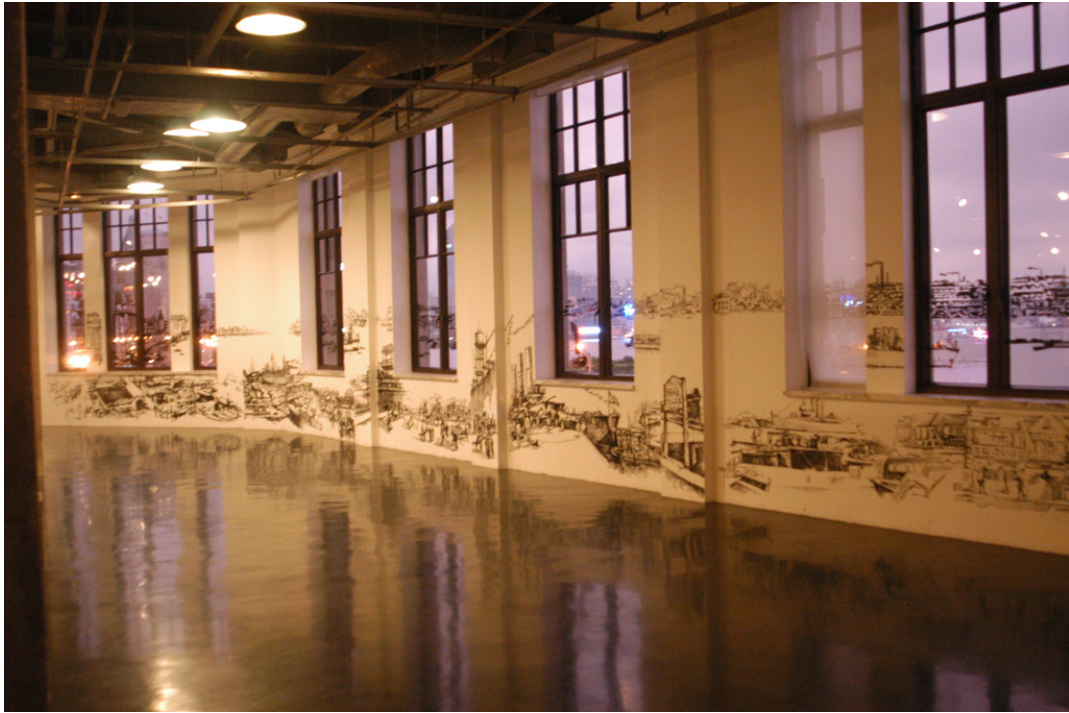
Figures 3.2-3.3 (above left to right): Gu Wenda, *Heavenly Lantern (Tiantang hongdeng)*, mock-ups for Shanghai Jin Mao Tower, 2003-Present. (Images courtesy the artist.)
Figure 3.4 (below): Gu Wenda, *Heavenly Lantern (Tiantang hongdeng)*, mock-up for Hong Kong, 2003-Present. (Image courtesy the artist.)





Figures 3.5-3.6 (top to bottom): Gu Wenda, *Heavenly Lantern (Tiantang hongdeng)*, mock-ups for Davos project, 2003-Present. (Images courtesy the artist.)





Figures 3.7: Xu Bing, *A Window Facing Pudong*, installation in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004. (Image courtesy the artist.)



Figures 3.8-3.9 (from left to right): Xu Bing, *Traveling Down the River*, installation in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004. (Images courtesy the artist.)



Figure 3.10-3.12 (clockwise from top): Xu Bing, *Honor and Splendor*, detail, and installation in assembly, installation in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004. (Images courtesy the artist.)

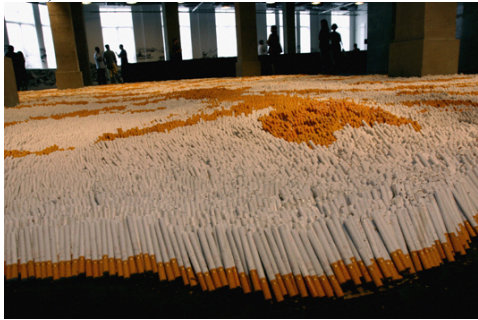


Figure 3.13: Xu Bing, *Tobacco Book*, installation in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004. (Image courtesy the artist.)



Figure 3.14-3.15 (left to right): Xu Bing, installation view with *Match Flower*, in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004, and Xu Bing, *The Invention of Tobacco*, *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)*, separate installation exhibited in abandoned warehouse, Shanghai, 2004. (Images courtesy the artist.)



Figure 3.16: Xu Bing, *Rounding Up/Rounding Down*, included in glass case installation in *Tobacco Project (Yancao jihua)* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2004. (Image courtesy the artist.)



Figure 3.17-3.21 (clockwise from top): Zhou Tiehai, *Will (Bixu)*, 1996. (Film stills.) (Images courtesy the artist and ShanghART Gallery.)





Figures 3.22-3.26 (clockwise from top): Yang Fudong, *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest (Zhulin qi xian)*, 2007. (Film stills.) (Images courtesy ShanghART Gallery.)





Figures 3.27-3.28: Yang Fudong, *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (*Zhulin qi xian*), 2007. (Film stills.) (Images courtesy ShanghART Gallery.)



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