

## *The Impact of the Work of Miguel Covarrubias on the Artists of Shanghai*

### *El impacto de la obra de Miguel Covarrubias en los artistas de Shanghai*

Artículo recibido el 22 de abril de 2018; devuelto para revisión el 28 de agosto de 2018; aceptado el 23 de febrero de 2019; <http://dx.doi.org/10.22201/iie.18703062e.2019.mono1.2703>.

**Paul Bevan** School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London; [sinobevan@gmail.com](mailto:sinobevan@gmail.com); <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7469-4939>.

**Líneas de investigación** El impacto del arte y la literatura occidental en China durante el periodo republicano (1912-1949).

**Lines of research** Impact of Western art and literature on China during the Republican Period (1912-1949).

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

**Resumen** Miguel Covarrubias fue quizás el artista extranjero más importante que inspiró a un grupo de artistas en Shanghai, China, durante la década de los años treinta. La evidencia de los estilos artísticos de Covarrubias, vistos por primera vez por estos artistas en revistas como *Vanity Fair*, se puede encontrar en una variedad de revistas chinas, habiendo sido adaptadas por ellos para sus propios fines. Tales revistas las publicó su colega, el poeta Shao Xunmei, quien se hizo amigo de Covarrubias mientras estuvo en China y escribió dos artículos importantes sobre él para sus propias revistas. El trabajo de Covarrubias no sólo influyó en estos artistas, sino que también se interesó cada vez más en aspectos de la cultura china; demostrando así un intercambio intercultural entre tres culturas distintas: los Estados Unidos de *Vanity Fair*, el México de Covarrubias y la próspera metrópolis de Shanghai, lugar de la modernidad china en la década de los años treinta.

**Palabras clave** Covarrubias; China; Shanghai; Shao Xunmei; *Vanity Fair*; caricatura.

**Abstract** Miguel Covarrubias was perhaps the single most important foreign artist to have inspired a group of artists in Shanghai, China during the 1930s. Evidence of Covarrubias's artistic styles—first seen by these artists in magazines such as *Vanity Fair*—can be found in an array of

Chinese magazines, having been adapted by them for their own purposes. Such magazines were published by their colleague, the poet Shao Xunmei, who befriended Covarrubias while he was in China and wrote two important articles about him for his own magazines. Not only was Covarrubias's work influential for these artists, but he would become increasingly interested in aspects of Chinese culture himself; thereby demonstrating an intercultural exchange between three distinct cultures—the USA of *Vanity Fair*, Covarrubias's Mexico, and the thriving metropolis of Shanghai—locus of Chinese modernity in the 1930s.

**Keywords** Covarrubias; China; Shanghai; Shao Xunmei; *Vanity Fair*; caricature.

PAUL BEVAN

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

## *The Impact of the Work of Miguel Covarrubias on the Artists of Shanghai*

In 1919, a revolution in literature and the arts, which had begun as a major part of the so-called “New Culture Movement,” gained in intensity following negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference that were unfavourable to China. The student demonstrations that occurred as a result of this were the beginning of what is commonly known as the “May Fourth Movement”—named after the date on which the major demonstrations took place.<sup>1</sup> Famously, the main protests happened in Beijing, but a focus for much of the subsequent revolution in culture was in the centre of the publishing industry, Shanghai, where periodicals and magazines contributed greatly to the widespread adoption of *baihua*—the modern vernacular language that was now becoming increasingly used in both fiction and non-fiction.<sup>2</sup> The burgeoning magazine publishing industry and the rise of new printing technology allowed for widespread dissemination of the latest ideas in art, literature, politics, and the sciences, through the medium of the periodical magazine.

Perhaps the most influential magazine of this early period, which had played a major role in establishing the New Culture Movement in China, was

1. For more on the May Fourth Movement see Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-40, and Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions China from the 1800s to the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 198-201.

2. Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 123-145.

*Xinqingnian* (New Youth), whose founder and editor, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), was a major promoter of the *baihua* movement. This magazine was founded in 1915 and in it were published many articles, short stories, and poems that would be so influential for those seeking to promote the ideals of the New Culture Movement, a movement that would be instrumental in shaping the future of literature and the arts in China. With a major focus on Western literary models and the development of a new Chinese literature, the writers of the time sought a wholesale rejection of so-called “Confucian Society,” and the education system, which it had spawned and maintained, throughout much of imperial Chinese history.

It is as part of the legacy of this phenomenon that the focus on later Western artistic models explored in this paper should be seen; a phenomenon that would continue to be prevalent as the pictorial magazine publishing industry gained in popularity during the 1930s.

As one historian of the cartoon wrote shortly after this time:

much work by foreign artists was introduced to China. Chinese artists frequently were influenced by such-and-such an artist or such-and-such a school and took the same, or a similar path [as those artists]. This situation can [...] be seen in [the magazine] *Shidai manhua* particularly with regard to Covarrubias, Grosz and Sapajou.<sup>3</sup>

Miguel Covarrubias visited China twice, once for just a few days in 1930, when he was on his honeymoon, and later in 1933, when he stayed for a number of weeks, both times as stop-offs on his way to his final destination, Bali. At the start of his second visit (which is far better documented than the first) a caricature of Covarrubias, drawn by the cartoonist Georgii Avksent'ievich Sapojnikoff (d. 1949), appeared in *The North-China Daily News*, Shanghai's main English-language newspaper—a publication for which the White Russian had worked since 1925 under the name “Sapajou” (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>

3. Huang Mao 黃茅, *Manhua yishu jianghua* 漫畫藝術講話 (Talks on the Art of Cartoons) ([1943, Chongqing], Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1947), 30. Cited in Paul Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926-1938* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 95.

4. Sapajou [caricature of Miguel Covarrubias], in *The North-China Daily News*, October 2, 1933, 18. See also Sapajou with R.T. Peyton Griffith, in Richard Rigby, ed., *Shanghai's Schemozzle* (Hong Kong: China Economic Review Publishing, 2007), 8.



It was on this second trip that Covarrubias met with a number of Chinese artists, and, although he may never have realised just how influential his work would be for them, this was a major event for the history of art in Shanghai.

In 1936, a group portrait by the artist Wang Zimei (1913-2002) included some of the figures who had earlier been involved in what was nothing less than a Covarrubias mania. Having said this, it should be noted that Covarrubias was not the only foreign artist to appeal to Chinese artists at the time, and he should not be studied in isolation. Amongst the figures in the group seen here are those who became known as “The Chinese George Grosz” (Cai Ruohong) and “The Chinese David Low” (Te Wei), two foreign artists who were highly influential for many cartoonists, both in China and in other parts of the world (fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

### *American Magazines and Chinese Magazines*

It was in magazines that the Chinese artists first saw the work of Covarrubias. The artist Ye Qianyu mentions in his memoirs how, in the early 1930s, he and Zhang Guangyu bought all available issues of the magazines *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker* and *Punch* from the foreign-language bookshop Kelly and Walsh on Shanghai’s main shopping thoroughfare, Nanking Road.<sup>6</sup> Ye and Zhang were two of the most active artists in Shanghai at the time and the material they discovered inside these magazines would be used in their own work as

5. “Manhuajie Chongyang denggao tu 漫畫界重陽登高圖 (The Cartooning Circle Climbing the Mountains on the Double Yang Festival),” also known by the title, “Jinghu manhuajie 京滬漫畫界 (The Cartooning Circle of Nanjing and Shanghai),” *Shanghai Manhua*, no. 6 (October 10, 1936). David Low was a prolific cartoonist who, despite working for the London *Evening Standard*, a newspaper with a distinctly right-wing bent, was active in left-wing politics. See David Low, *Low’s Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1956). For David Low’s influence in India see Ritu Gairola Khandori, *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 137-138.

6. Ye Qianyu 叶浅予, “Xixu cangsang ji liunian 细叙沧桑记流年 (Trifling Talks on Times of Great Change and a Record of Fleeting Time),” Chapter 20, accessed August 17, 2017, <http://www.my285.com/zj/zgxd/xxcs/index.htm>. See also Huang Ke 黄可, Gan Zhenhu 甘振虎 and Chen Lei 陈蕾, eds., *Lao Shanghai manhua tuzhi 老上海漫画图志* (An Illustrated Record of Old Shanghai Cartoons) (Shanghai: Shanghai Kexuejishu Wenxian Chubanshe, 2010), 183. This is cited in Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 20.





2. Wang Zimei 汪子美, "Jinghu manhuajie 京滬漫畫界 (The Cartoon Circle of Nanjing and Shanghai)," in *Shanghai manhua* 上海漫畫 ("Shanghai Sketch"), no. 6 (10 October 1936).

cartoonists, as well as in their capacities as fashion designer and furniture designer, respectively (see fig. 2).

The importance of *Vanity Fair* magazine, for them, and for many of their colleagues, cannot be overemphasized. *Vanity Fair* and other foreign magazines were obtainable in Shanghai, new and secondhand, from a variety of outlets, or by personal subscription through the mail. As a result of the popularity of *Vanity Fair*, a number of magazines began to be produced in Shanghai that showed marked similarities to it and other American magazines and it was in these that the work of the Covarrubias imitators appeared.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of Covarrubias's second visit the Shanghai English-language press reported: "[Covarrubias's] smart drawings from 'Vanity Fair' have been reproduced endlessly in the vernacular papers and magazines while aspirants from Canton to Peking strive to imitate the peculiar style that has won him an international reputation."<sup>8</sup>

7. Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 25-29.

8. "Mexican Artist Visitor—Mr. M. Covarrubias on Trip to East—Bound Eventually for

In fact, although Covarrubias did briefly visit both Peking and Canton (Guangzhou), the adoption of aspects of his work by Chinese artists, and the phenomenon that saw the modern Chinese cartoon emerge as a major part of the modern art scene, took place primarily in Shanghai.

Another report in *The North-China Daily News* announced:

An interesting visitor to Shanghai is Covarrubias, famous as a cartoonist in the United States. He and Mrs. Covarrubias are staying for a few weeks in Shanghai before proceeding to Bali, and while here are being entertained by a number of friends, among whom are Mr. and Mrs. Chester Fritz who are giving a series of cocktail parties in their honour. Of particular interest to residents of the Far East are Covarrubias's drawings which illustrate Chadbourne's [*sic*] book "China."<sup>9</sup>

In yet another newspaper report of the time it can be seen that some of the artists in question were invited to one of the cocktail parties thrown by the American socialite Bernadine Fritz (1896-1982). Fritz, who would later go on to run the expatriate "International Art Theatre" in Shanghai, regularly welcomed foreign visitors to China at her "salon", amongst the more famous of her guests being Anna May Wong and Charlie Chaplin.<sup>10</sup> Fritz was an old friend of Rose Covarrubias from America, and on both visits to Shanghai she acted as hostess to the couple. Amongst the regular guests at her parties was a figure central to this story, Shao Xunmei (1906-1968).

Shao had not yet made Fritz's acquaintance in 1930, at the time of the Covarrubias's first trip, but was introduced to her shortly before the second. It was through Fritz that Shao Xunmei was able to introduce Covarrubias to the Shanghai artists who were his friends and colleagues. Shao Xunmei, poet, publisher, and regular reader of *Vanity Fair*, happened to be the main figure behind the publication of a number of magazines, and it was he who wrote

---

Magic Bali," *The North-China Daily News*, October 2, 1933, 18. Cited in Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 117.

9. *The North-China Daily News* (September 30, 1933): 19. Covarrubias's visit was reported in just two of Shanghai's English-language newspapers—the British-backed *The North-China Daily News* and the American *The China Press*.

10. Correspondence: Letter from Mucia Chen to Sylvia Chen [c. 1936, summer]. Jay and Si-Lan Chen Leyda Papers and Photographs; TAM 083; box 28; folder 09; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. In 1936 Chaplin was passing through Shanghai on his way to Bali for the second time.



the two most important and substantial articles about Covarrubias that were published in China. These appeared in two of his own magazines *Shiritan* ("The Decameron") and *Shidai huabao* ("Modern Miscellany").<sup>11</sup> In addition, an English-language version of the former, which gives an abbreviated account of what Shao says in the article, appeared in the American-backed newspaper *The China Press*.<sup>12</sup>

### *Marc Chadourne's Chine*

It was on his first trip, in 1930, that Covarrubias gathered the material for his drawings for Marc Chadourne's book *Chine*, which was published in Paris the following year.<sup>13</sup> News of the publication soon reached China, at first through the expatriate community and the foreign-language newspapers, but before long, illustrations from the book began to be reproduced in Chinese publications, initially in a magazine with which Shao Xunmei was closely involved, *Lunyu* ("The Analects"), at this time edited by his friend and colleague Lin Yutang (1895-1976).

A caricature of a Chinese revolutionary heroine, which appeared on the front cover of Chadourne's book and was reproduced in *The Analects*, had clearly caused some sort of backlash amongst its Chinese readers, who no doubt thought Chadourne was belittling her in some way, and the passage quoted below was perhaps written by Lin Yutang in order to appease their wrath.<sup>14</sup>

11. Shao Xunmei, "Kefoluopisi 珂佛羅皮斯 (Covarrubias)," *Shiritan* 十日談 ("The Decameron"), no. 8 (October 20, 1933): 6-7, and "Kefoluopisi ji qi furen 珂佛羅皮斯及其夫人 (Covarrubias and His Wife)," *Shidai huabao* 時代畫報 ("Modern Miscellany") 5, no. 4 (December 16, 1933): 117-119.

12. "Chinese Poet Gives Praise to Noted Mexican Artist: Sinmay Zau Publishes Resume of Covarrubias' Work in Local Chinese Magazine, Together With Original Sketches by Caricaturist," *The China Press*, October 25, 1933, front page of Second Section, 9.

13. Chadourne visited China twice in 1930 and it is indeed possible that one of these trips coincided with that of Covarrubias. Chadourne certainly met with Shao Xunmei and a number of other young Chinese intellectuals, and they are mentioned (although not by name) in *Chine*. Chadourne went to Bali the following year and certainly met with Covarrubias there. See Paul Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 102-104. Marc Chadourne, *Chine avec 25 dessins dans le texte de Covarrubias* (China with 25 illustrations by Covarrubias) (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1931) and Marc Chadourne, *China*, trans. Harry Block (New York: Covici Fiedel, 1932).

14. Chadourne, *Chine*, 121.

Apart from anything else, this shows just how little known both Covarrubias and Chadourne were in China at this early date.

[The depiction of Xie Bingying] which appeared in issue sixteen is not mocking of her. It is the work of the Hungarian [*sic*] artist Miguel Covarrubias, originally seen on the cover and in a critique about Xie Bingying in the French book by Marc Chadbourne [*sic*]. This gentleman's [Covarrubias's] pen work is most excellent.

In fact, any criticism of Chadourne's book that the publishers of *The Analects* might have received from its readers was most certainly not without foundation. Although Chadourne clearly didn't set out to entirely belittle the Chinese, the way in which he presents them in his book may well have caused offence. As the reporter Emily Hahn (girlfriend of Shao Xunmei) put it when writing about *Chine*: "[Chadourne's] style is breezy, cocky, and has that faint tinge of amused superiority with which a Frenchmen usually regards any country but his own."<sup>15</sup>

What is more, according to one of Shao Xunmei's articles, Covarrubias himself was apparently aware that the book might cause offence. Speaking of his meetings with Covarrubias in October 1933, Shao wrote: "We gradually got to know each other. In an atmosphere of friendship, national boundaries were entirely broken down, although he did frequently express his discomfort about the illustrations he had drawn for that book on China by Chadourne."<sup>16</sup>

### *Sketches 1930/1933*

Several of the illustrations to *Chine* were based on sketches Covarrubias had drawn in 1930 during his first visit.<sup>17</sup> For example, a picture of two young women dancing together in a Shanghai dancehall found in *Chine* is based on several surviving sketches<sup>18</sup> and a full-colour version on the same theme—bearing

15. Emily Hahn, "The China Boom," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* [c.1937], China Heritage Quarterly, accessed August 13, 2017. [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=o22\\_boom.inc&issue=o22](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=o22_boom.inc&issue=o22).

16. Shao, "Kefoluopisi," 6.

17. Others were copied from photographs. See Bevan, *Modern Miscellany*, 102.

18. Chadourne, *Chine*, 69. See "Taxi Dance Hall Girl" I and III in Adriana Williams and Bruce W. Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches: Bali — Shanghai*. ([Indonesia]: Red and White Publishing with Island Arts, 2012), 96-97.

much resemblance to these sketches as well as to the illustration in Chadourne's book—can be found in the March 1931 issue of *Vanity Fair*.<sup>19</sup>

On his second trip Covarrubias again drew portraits of dancehall hostesses and fashionable young women. The strong impression these women, and the latest fashions they wore, made on Covarrubias, can be seen in many of his surviving sketches. The *China Press* reported Covarrubias as having said:

I didn't know the costume of a people could change so quickly. The dresses of the Chinese women — ah, they are so graceful and yet so dignified. It is a costume that the women of no other country in the world could wear [...] It is a compromise between style and comfort [...] there is a harmony of line and of color that gives an impression of great refinement. And the modern touch is not forgotten, for they have that split up the sides. Yes, the costume is elegant.<sup>20</sup>

In his essay Shao reports that Covarrubias had taken a particular liking to a certain “Miss Wang”, and a portrait of her appeared in both of Shao Xunmei's articles: in *Shiritan*, as *Mou nüshi* (A Certain Lady), and in *Shidai huabao* as *Wang xiaojie xiang* (A Portrait of Miss Wang). The portraits are the same but printed at slightly different angles.<sup>21</sup> The following short account, found in the latter magazine, recounts how Covarrubias came to draw the portrait: “The portrait of a woman was executed after being in the Ambassador Dancehall for just twenty minutes, and was completed after he got home. In fact, it should be seen as being a portrait of Miss Wang.”<sup>22</sup> Shao goes on to relate what Covarrubias had to say to him about Miss Wang: “I like her, she is really beautiful, but I never like to show a complete stranger that I want to draw them, it would probably make them feel I was being rude—just looking at a subject a few times is enough.” He added, “the way I go about drawing caricatures has become something of habit. I almost never approach a subject

19. Illustration entitled “The Yaller Sea Blues,” *Vanity Fair* 36, no. 1 (March, 1931): 53.

20. “Caricaturist Covarrubias’ First Impression of Change in China is the Split Skirt,” *The China Press*, October 3, 1933, Front page of Second Section, 9-11.

21. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 7, and Shao, “Kefoluopisi ji qi furen,” 119.

22. The Ambassador (*Dahua wuchang* 大華舞場), situated on Shanghai's Avenue Edward VII, was described in a local gazetteer published that very same years as: “the newest and most luxurious cabaret.” See Zhou Shixun 周世勳, ed., *Shanghai shi daguan* 上海市大觀 (“The Greater Shanghai in Pictures”) (Shanghai: Wen Hwa Fine Arts Press, 1933), n.p.

and look at them face on. Someone sitting upright and still, waiting for me to draw them would make me feel very uncomfortable indeed.”<sup>23</sup>

Many of the sketches Covarrubias did during his time in China survive to this day. A number can be seen in the Archivo Miguel Covarrubias at the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, and in the “Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias” in the Art Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Examples from the latter also appear in the biography of Covarrubias written by Adriana Williams, and, in addition, a small number can be found in *Miguel Covarrubias: cuatro miradas/Four Visions*, a volume that was published to accompany four exhibitions of his work in 2005.<sup>24</sup> Forty-four sketches on Chinese subjects, together with a selection of those Covarrubias did in Bali, have also been published together in *Sketches: Balin-Shanghai*, edited by Adriana Williams and Bruce W. Carpenter. The Chinese sketches in this book are mostly untitled, or carry generic titles such as “Sing Song Girl,” or “Facial Study,” although a small number do carry more specific titles. An example of this is a sketch of a Peking Opera artist with the title *Shan Shao Yun in Tung An Chan Shi Theatre*. This is of Shang Xiaoyun 尚小雲 (1899-1976), a well-known actor, who, together with Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961)—undoubtedly the most famous Chinese opera star of the time—became known as two of the four great male exponents of the female lead role “*dan*” in Peking Opera during the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> By the time he arrived in Shanghai Covarrubias will have already known the name of Mei Lanfang, not least because a photograph of him by the American photographer Edward Steichen (1879-1973) had appeared in the April issue of *Vanity Fair* shortly before he and Rose left the USA on their honeymoon at the beginning of May 1930.<sup>26</sup> It is also certainly possible that Covarrubias had already seen Mei Lanfang perform, as he had visited New York for five weeks on a highly successful American tour earlier that year, and had become

23. Shao, “Kefoluopisi ji qi furen,” 119.

24. UDLAP—CIRIA: Archivo Miguel Covarrubias, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias in the Art Collection at the Harry Ransom Center. Adriana Williams, *Covarrubias* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 79; *Miguel Covarrubias: Cuatro miradas/Four Visions* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2005), 199-[200]. Many of the images identified in this book as “Chinese” are in fact Japanese (pages 198-199 nos. 77, 79, 80).

25. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 115.

26. *Vanity Fair* 34, no. 2 (April, 1930): 40.

something of a celebrity in the USA.<sup>27</sup> Even if, for some reason, Covarrubias had not managed to see the Chinese actor in New York, he was later to meet him in person at a welcoming party thrown by Bernadine Fritz shortly after he arrived in Shanghai in 1933. By this time Mei Lanfang had clearly already made an impression on him, as one of his illustrations in *Chine* shows a caricature of the Peking Opera star on a poster of an office wall that clearly identifies him by name.<sup>28</sup>

Figures of Peking Opera performers drawn by Covarrubias also appear in the March 1931 issue of *Vanity Fair*. One of these shows a lone male “dancer” with the somewhat unfortunate and decidedly old-fashioned title: “Oriental Dancer as the Spirit of Chop Suey.” The other shows an example of a male actor playing a female role, in the company of another male actor, entitled: “Chinese Actress (Male) Luring on Chinese Actor (Human).”<sup>29</sup> The drawing of the female impersonator here bears more than a passing resemblance to the aforementioned pencil sketch of Shang Xiaoyun.<sup>30</sup> This, and many other sketches in the book, can be firmly dated to Covarrubias’s first trip through direct comparison with related examples such as those published in *Vanity Fair* and *Chine*.

Another scenario, almost certainly showing an audience in a Peking Opera theatre, can be found in two drawings of a group of young Chinese women sitting in a row. One of these appears in Williams’s book and the other can be found in the Covarrubias archives in the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla (fig. 3).<sup>31</sup> In both examples three levels of seats can be seen in an auditorium,

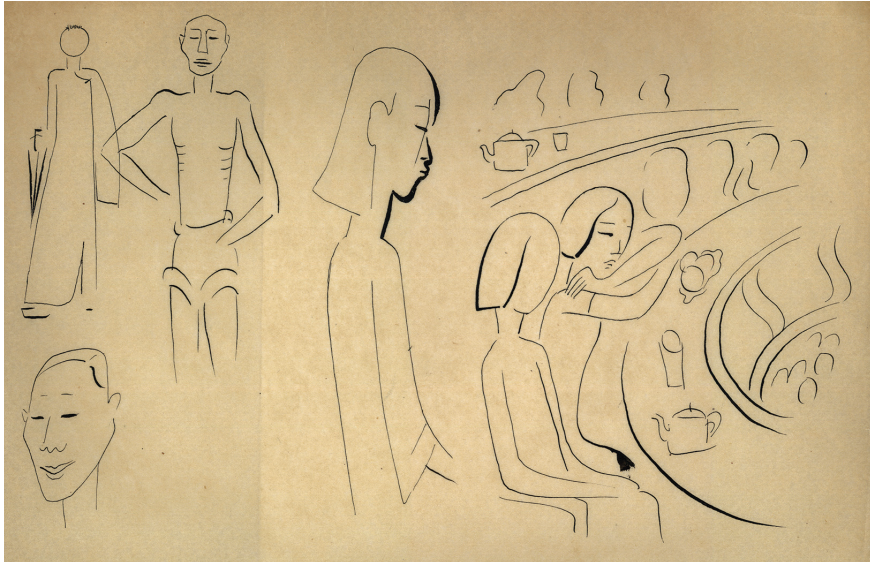
27. Mark Codson, “‘Introducing Occidentals to an Exotic Art’: Mei Lanfang in New York,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 175-189.

28. Chadourne, *Chine*, 102. This is the office of the Du Yuesheng 杜月笙 (1888-1951)—gangster and leader of the Green Gang of Shanghai.

29. This implies that the *dan* 旦 role, played by a male actor, looks like a female, while the male role played by another male actor, looks hardly human at all in the flamboyant costume of the *jing* 净 painted-face role.

30. “The Star-spangalization of the Orient as seen by a traveller; and by the artist Covarrubias.” Found as illustrations on the same pages as Charles T. Trego, “The Red White and Blue Peril,” *Vanity Fair* 36, no. 1 (March, 1931): 52-53 and 84; “Chinese Actress (Male) Luring on Chinese Actor (Human),” 53; “Oriental Dancer as the Spirit of Chop Suey,” 52. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 115. The sketch that appears next to the female impersonator in Williams’s book is also likely to be of Shang Xiaoyun.

31. Exposición UDLAP, carpeta 1, no. 31081: *China Scene. Dibujo — a la izquierda tres personajes masculinos en diferentes planos, a la derecha una escena, al parecer en un restaurante o café [sic], con tres personajes femeninos*, in *Caricatures and Photographs on Chinese subjects in the Archivo Miguel Covarrubias*, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. See also Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 92.



3. Miguel Covarrubias, *Theatre Scene with women seated in a row*, 1930. Exposición UDLAP, carpeta 1, no. 31081. Archivo Miguel Covarrubias. Sala de Archivos y Colecciones Especiales, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla.

with the outline of additional audience members in front and behind. The Puebla example shows slightly more detail than the published drawing, and may have been the first stage in a transformation from sketch to finished artwork. The details of teapots and a bowl of fruit are the same in both pictures, but the execution is notably different—the first uses a soft pencil and is more hastily and sketchily drawn; the second, a pen and ink sketch, demonstrates a more deliberate attention to line. The latter also includes facial detail in one of the women, as well as the addition of another larger, detailed figure of a woman to the left.<sup>32</sup>

There is no doubt that Covarrubias was much taken with Peking Opera—with both the movements of the actors and their costumes—as such themes can be seen in several other surviving sketches.<sup>33</sup> For example, a hastily drawn

32. There are also three unrelated studies of male figures that appear on this same piece of paper: a man in a *changpao*, what appears to be a rickshaw puller, and a head study.

33. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 110–119.



sketch entitled “Piggy” (i.e. Zhubajie from the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*) drawn on a piece of notepaper from the Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, shows attention to detail, with the colours of the performer’s stage costume specifically indicated.<sup>34</sup> In one of Shao Xunmei’s articles, a small-scale drawing of a male Peking Opera performer appears. With direct reference to this, Shao quotes Covarrubias as having said: “I haven’t been to the Chinese Opera many times, but the movements of the performers are so uncomplicated, so transparent (*touming*), that, even if you were to watch it only once, you would never forget it.”<sup>35</sup>

### *More Sketches*

At least two sketches of Shao Xunmei by Covarrubias exist, both done in 1933. These both show Shao’s distinctive elongated facial features and his high-colored *changpao* gown seen in left profile. One is drawn with fine delicate lines, while the other is bolder in its execution and slightly more detailed.<sup>36</sup> As with the above sketches of a row of women in a theatre, it is likely that these represent different stages of production following the portrait sitting mentioned by Shao in his article. In the article he records the process by which Covarrubias arrived at his finished artworks: first making many rough sketches, and later, at his leisure, arriving at a more detailed finished drawing or painting. This was the case with the sketches he drew of Shao. Having made many sketches on the spot, the day after the sitting, Covarrubias presented two finished portraits to Shao, one in black and white and the other in colour. The black-and-white example appears as an illustration to both his articles.<sup>37</sup>

34. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 116. Zhubajie 豬八戒 is best known in the West as “Piggy” from the translation by Arthur Waley of *Xiyouji* 西游記 (The Journey to the West) as *Monkey*, as well as in the popular 1970s television series of the same name.

35. Shao, “kefoluopisi ji qi furen,” 118.

36. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 100, and “Our Host Soochow Picnic Sinmay Lau” [head profile of man with beard] in the Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias in the art collection of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, box 4.16, Accession Number 2007.12.41. See Williams, *Covarrubias*, 79.

37. The black-and-white example shows Shao standing with his hands behind his back and the colour version has him holding a cigarette. The two-stage creation process is also noted in the passage concerning Miss Wang above (see page 23).

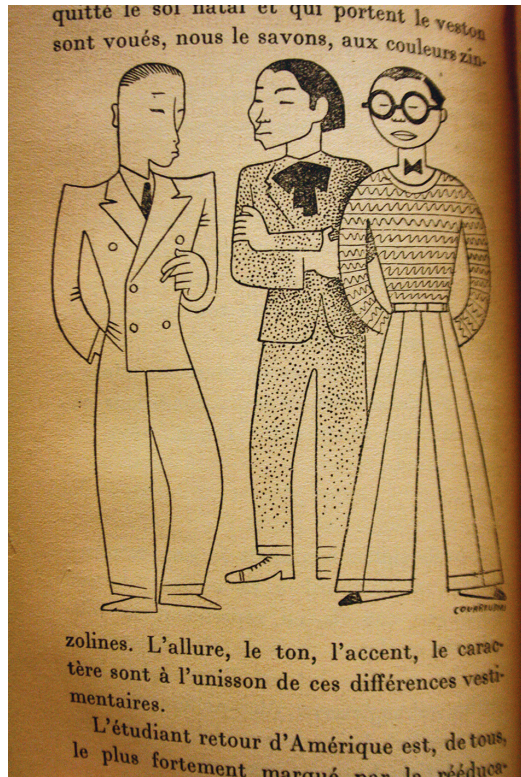


4. Anonymous copy of a drawing by Covarrubias, (*Three Chinese students*), *The Analects*, January 1, 1931.

Another surviving sketch, a caricature of a “Laughing man” is almost certainly a depiction of Shao Xunmei’s friend and colleague, Lin Yutang, who Covarrubias first met in 1933 when they were both among the party that went on a sight-seeing trip to Suzhou organised by Shao. Also present on the trip were Lin Yutang’s wife Lin Cuifeng, Bernadine Fritz, Zhang Guangyu and his brother Zhang Zhenyu (1904-1976), and Ye Qianyu.<sup>38</sup> Lin Yutang was well-known for his preoccupation with humour which he explored in such publications as *The Analects*, and several photographs of the time can be found showing him laughing in a similar fashion to that seen in the published Covarrubias sketch.

38. Rosa Covarrubias and Adriana Williams, eds., *The China I Knew* [type-written MS], n.p. Also published as Rose Covarrubias, *The China I Knew* (San Francisco: Protean Press, 2005). Type-written manuscript kindly supplied by Adriana Williams. Zhang Zhenyu 張振宇 later changed his name to Zhang Zhengyu 張正宇.

5. Miguel Covarrubias, *Three Chinese Students*, *Chine*, 1933.



### *More on Chadourne's Chine*

Several of the sketches from the earlier trip served as studies for Covarrubias's illustrations to Chadourne's *Chine* and some of these illustrations were later reproduced in Chinese publications such as *The Analects*. In a number of issues of *The Analects* during 1933 the drawings of the cartoonist Chen Jingsheng dominate, and he was clearly highly thought of by his peers.<sup>39</sup> Examples of Chen's work in this magazine, as well as in Shao's "Decameron," clearly

39. Chen Jingsheng's cartoons can be found in *The Analects* together with a number of other minor artists, including Hu Tongguang 胡同光 (dates unknown) and Huang Jiayin 黄嘉音 (1913-1961), as well as with those of more famous figures such as Zhang Guangyu, Ye Qianyu and Feng Zikai 丰子恺 (1898-1975).

use Covarrubias's drawings from *Chine* as a model and many show evidence of straightforward copying, with certain elements being transferred directly from Covarrubias's work into his own.

The appearance of Covarrubias's illustrations for *Chine* in *The Analects* has been previously discussed by other scholars, notably by Charles A. Laughlin,<sup>40</sup> but one crucial fact that had not been addressed, before it was introduced in this writer book *Modern Miscellany*, is that the reproductions of the Covarrubias illustrations in *The Analects* are not mechanical "reproductions", but are all re-drawings of the originals—almost certainly hand-copied using pencil and tracing paper, with the detail later filled in by hand—copied by an artist working for the magazine, possibly even Chen Jingsheng himself.<sup>41</sup> For example, direct comparison between Covarrubias's original drawing of three students as it appeared in *Chine*, and the copy as it found in *The Analects*, reveals many clear differences in detail, as can be seen from the images shown here (figs. 4 and 5).<sup>42</sup> Such unsophisticated methods of reproduction were almost certainly the direct result of the restrictions in printing technology available to the magazine at the time of publication. Any problems with print quality would be gradually redressed in Shanghai publishing circles after Shao Xunmei's purchase of a state of the art German printing press in 1931, with which he was able to print his own magazines, and those of others. Although these particular reproductions in *The Analects* are still rather crude, the print quality of both art work and photographic images in Chinese magazines such as *Shidai huabao* and *Liangyou* (which even at the time was significantly more advanced than that found in *The Analects*) would soon compare favourably with those in magazines such as the French publication *Vu*, and indeed, in *Vanity Fair* itself.<sup>43</sup>

Chen Jingsheng's copying of Covarrubias's drawings, as appropriated for use in his own work, is blatant and unashamed, but a series of more subtle, and indeed, more artistically accomplished borrowings from Covarrubias, can be seen in the work of Zhang Guangyu, whose popular series "Folk Love Songs"

40. Charles A. Laughlin, "The Analects Group and the Genre of Xiaopin," in *Literary Societies of Republican China*, eds. Denton and Hockx (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2008), 207-240.

41. Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 118-122.

42. *Lunyu* ("The Analects") no. 8 (January 1, 1933): 265.

43. For more on the printing press see Wang Jingfang 王京芳, "Shao Xunmei he tade chuban shiye 邵洵美和他的出版事业 (Shao Xunmei and his Publishing Career)" (Ph. D. diss., Huadong Normal University, 2007). *Vu* magazine was published in France from 1928-1940.

appeared over the years in a variety of Chinese magazines with which he was involved.<sup>44</sup> In the drawings to this series Zhang arrived at his own style, ultimately derived from Covarrubias's work in both *Chine* and in Frank Tannenbaum's *Peace by Revolution: An Interpretation of Mexico*.<sup>45</sup>

### *Artistic Imitation in a Traditional Context*

Such imitations should best be seen in the light of the traditions of painting and calligraphy in East Asia. Training in both these skills was through close copying of the work of historical masters. In the case of calligraphy, this meant imitation of the work of such figures as Wang Xizhi (AD303-361), whose work has been copied by anyone who has ever picked up a calligraphy brush in China or Japan since the time of the Tang dynasty (AD618-907) more than a thousand years ago. The imitation of the work of modern Western artists such as Covarrubias was both a sign of sincere respect, and an attempt by the copyist to find their own feet through close study of the master.

### *Impossible Interviews*

Covarrubias's "Impossible Interviews" series in *Vanity Fair* had been a major inspiration for Zhang Guangyu from at least 1932—that is, right in the middle of Covarrubias's two China visits. Before he had even met Covarrubias, Zhang had produced his own version based on this theme, entitled "if" or, in Chinese, *Nande pengtou* (Rare Meetings). Through channels unknown, this came to the attention of the publishers of *Vanity Fair* in the USA, who expressed some amusement at what they found within the pages of their magazine. This

44. Zhang Guangyu's *Minjian qingge* 民間情歌 (Folk Love Songs) appeared in, amongst other places, the following magazines: *Shidai manhua* ("Modern Sketch") (1934-1937), edited by Lu Shaofei; *Duli manhua* ("Oriental Puck") (1935-1936), edited by Zhang Guangyu; and *Shanghai manhua* ("Shanghai Sketch") (1935-1936), published by Zhang's "Independent Press."

45. Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution: An Interpretation of Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933). A reproduction of Covarrubias's "Soldaderas in the Revolution" appeared as "Moxige canjia gemingjun de nüren 墨西哥參加革命軍的女人 (Mexican Women of the Revolutionary Army)," *Shidai manhua* no. 2 (February 20, 1934): n.p. This will certainly have served as a model for artists who contributed to the magazine, including Zhang Guangyu.



was without knowledge of the popularity of Covarrubias's work in China even at this early time, or of the importance of Zhang Guangyu as a respected artist in his field. "The Shanghai Miscellany's [i.e. *Shidai huabao*] erudite editors, stole, pirated, shanghai'd, or borrowed ... [the] idea of the Impossible Interviews ... [and] ... hired an artist to imitate Miguel Covarrubias."<sup>46</sup>

A small reproduction of Zhang Guangyu's depiction of Chiang Kai-shek and Mussolini was illustrated in this report, which appeared in the "Editor's Uneasy Chair" section of *Vanity Fair*. Although a meeting between these two figures was indeed unlikely, the individuals themselves were not so different in the eyes of the artist, and what is written in the caption, in the form of a dialogue between the two leaders, indicates just how similar Zhang considered them to be.<sup>47</sup> According to this short editorial report, it was the appropriation of this feature by this Chinese magazine that finally encouraged the editors to launch a second series of "Impossible Interviews" after a break of more than one year.<sup>48</sup>

Wang Zimei, who drew the group portrait "The Cartooning Circle of Nanjing and Shanghai" already seen (see fig. 2), was amongst many other artists who took inspiration from "Impossible Interviews." In one of many examples of his work on this theme can be seen the unlikely meetings of Anna May Wong with Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin with Maxim Gorky, Bernard Shaw with Lin Yutang, and Joseph Stalin with Franklin D. Roosevelt. By the time this magazine was published Wong, Chaplin and Shaw had all visited Shanghai, and, contrary to the intended message of the original series in *Vanity Fair*, Lin Yutang—in the company of Shao Xunmei—had actually greeted George Bernard Shaw off the boat on his brief visit to Shanghai in 1933.<sup>49</sup>

### *Group Portraits*

Group portraits became one of Covarrubias's trademarks and appeared in a number of American magazines throughout the 1930s.<sup>50</sup>

46. "Piracy" in "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Vanity Fair* 43, no. 6 (February, 1935): 9, *Shidai huabao* 3, no. 1 (September 1, 1932): n.p.

47. *Shidai huabao* 3, no. 1 (September 1, 1932): n.p.

48. "Piracy" in "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," *Vanity Fair* 43, no. 6 (February, 1935).

49. See "Students 'Welcome' Shaw," *The North-China Herald* (February 22, 1933): 294.

50. "Radio Talent," *Fortune*, 1938; "New York's Favourite Opening Nights," *Vogue* (June



Historically, in China, group portraits had not been common, one notable exception to this might be the pictorial gatherings of Peking Opera performers, famous courtesans of Shanghai and other groups, found in popular *Nianhua* (New Year Prints) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>51</sup> The inclusion of group portraits in magazines published in Shanghai at this time, however, was certainly done in direct imitation of Covarrubias's examples in American magazines.

Covarrubias's "Hollywood Stars at the Beach," became a direct model for a number of similar examples by Chinese artists, including an early work by the youthful Ding Cong, an artist who would later cite Mexican art as a major influence on his work.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the most notable example of this imitation, though, is "Chinese Hollywood" by Yan Zhexi (1909-1993), cartoonist, and latterly prolific writer of popular songs that are still remembered in China today.<sup>53</sup> This is a true Chinese version of Covarrubias's original, with all the film stars involved in Shanghai's flourishing film industry depicted.

It was not just in the close imitation of his drawing style and the adoption of specific themes that Chinese artists took inspiration from Covarrubias. The sketching of Ye Qianyu owed much to what he had learned from Covarrubias, specifically in his adoption of the practice of carrying a sketchbook with him at all times.<sup>54</sup> As Ye stated with regard to how his own work and that of his

---

1940); and an illustration for an article entitled, "Our changing tastes ... in 1938," *American Vogue* (May 15, 1938).

51. See for example "Shanghai mingji shi mei tu 上海名妓十美图 (Ten famous courtesan beauties of Shanghai)" (1900) by Zhou Muqiao 周慕桥 (1868-1922), accession no. 41, and "Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu xiju 景陽崗武松打虎戲劇 (The Chinese Drama Wu Song Wrestles with a Tiger on Jingyang Ridge)," accession no. 34. soas Digital Collections. [https://digital.soas.ac.uk/d\\_chn](https://digital.soas.ac.uk/d_chn), accessed October 2, 2017.

52. Marcia R. Ristaino, *China's Intrepid Muse - The Cartoons and Art of Ding Cong* (Warren CT: Floating World Editions, 2009), 22-23.

53. Ding Cong 丁聰, *Yinhe xingyu tu 銀河星浴圖* (Stars of the Silver Screen Bathing) (1935). For an image of this caricature see Huang, Gan and Chen, eds., *Lao Shanghai manhua tuzhi*, 172; Yan Zhexi 嚴折西, "Zhongguo haolaiwu 中國好萊塢 (Chinese Hollywood)," *Manhuajie 漫畫界*, no. 7 (November 5, 1936): n.p. This issue of *Manhuajie*, published to commemorate the First National Cartoon Exhibition, "Chinese Hollywood" by Yan Zhexi, was printed on the same page as Wang Zimei's "The Cartooning Circle of Nanjing and Shanghai," both in black-and-white.

54. Hao Zhihui 郝之輝 and Sun Yun 孫筠, eds., *Ye Qianyu renwuhua jiangyi 叶浅予人物画讲义* (Studies on the Figural Painting of Ye Qianyu) (Tianjin: Tianjin Shuji Chubanshe, 2010), 36, cited in Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 105-106.

colleague Zhang Guangyu changed following Covarrubias's visit to Shanghai: "Guangyu was attracted by his method of exaggeration and I studied his sketching skills."<sup>55</sup> If by "studying his sketching skills" he meant anything other than the adoption of his habit of carrying a sketchbook with him, then it can only be after meeting Covarrubias in person, and seeing him at work with sketchbook in hand that he could have learnt anything about his methods of sketching. Ye could not have physically studied Covarrubias's sketches directly from concrete examples at any other time than when he was in Covarrubias's presence, as, by all accounts, Covarrubias kept his unfinished sketches very close to his chest. It was only Covarrubias's ultra-refined and well-honed designs, based on his preliminary sketches, that actually made their way into *Vanity Fair* and other magazines. The sketches themselves, although widely known today, were never seen in publications of the time. Covarrubias's sketches were a means to an end, whereas those of Ye Qianyu became the finished article. It is certainly the fact that Covarrubias carried a sketchbook with him that most caught the imagination of Ye Qianyu, encouraging him to do the same, and indeed, this is mentioned by him several times in his memoirs.<sup>56</sup> Even though Ye Qianyu's adoption of technical aspects of Covarrubias's art work might have been limited, the art of sketching became central to Ye's output. The sketching techniques that he developed would prove central to the development of modern art in China into the second half of the twentieth century. Likewise, Zhang Guangyu's drawings for his "Folk Love Song" series, which had been so closely inspired by Covarrubias's illustrations, were the precursor to the line-drawing caricatures and cartoons that became so widespread following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

In recent years, Shao Xiaohong, in an account of how the cartoonist Huang Miaozi (1913-2012) remembered her father Shao Xunmei, has pointed to the impact of Covarrubias's work on Zhang Guangyu and its central importance to the future of the cartoon in China:

The influence of Covarrubias on Zhang Guangyu's style of drawing was immense. In his cartoons, Guangyu walked the same road as Covarrubias. This new style has

55. Ye, *Trifling Talks on Times of Great Change and a Record of Fleeting Time*, chap. 20. <http://www.my285.com/zj/zgxd/xxcs/index.htm>, accessed August 17, 2017.

56. See for example Hao and Sun, eds., *Studies on the Figural Painting of Ye Qianyu*, 36, and Bao Limin 包立民, *Yishu dashi zhi lu congshu: Ye Qianyu* 艺术大师之路丛书 • 叶浅予 The Path of the Great Artists Series—Ye Qianyu (Wuhan: Hubei Meishu Chubanshe, 2002), 15-17.

continued ever since, and the new school of cartooning in China was indeed passed down to us from Guangyu.<sup>57</sup>

### *Chinese Art and Covarrubias*

Aspects of Chinese art left a deep impression on Covarrubias too. In her memoirs, Rose Covarrubias recalled that when the couple visited Guangzhou in 1933, after their Shanghai sojourn, they had time to go “to see how jade was carved.”<sup>58</sup> In an account of the Chinese cartoonists of the 1930s, as remembered by Yu Feng (1916–2007), she tells of the visits Covarrubias made, in the company of Zhang Guangyu, to the stalls at the Chenghuangmiao (Temple of the City God)—Shanghai’s antiques quarter. It was in such markets in Shanghai, Suzhou, Beijing, and Guangzhou that Covarrubias may have acquired jade pieces for his own collection.<sup>59</sup> Covarrubias’s passion for jade is attested to in Shao Xunmei’s first article.<sup>60</sup> Here, Shao tells both of Covarrubias’s liking for Chinese jade, and of the collection of Mexican jades he had back home, noting that he had even brought some of these along with him on his journey.<sup>61</sup> Shao reports that Covarrubias told him he wasn’t concerned whether or not a jade piece was real or fake, what was important to him was its form and the skill of the carver.<sup>62</sup> How much truth there is in this is uncertain, but indeed, much of what was for sale in Chinese antique markets at the time of Covarrubias’s visit, will certainly have been of dubious provenance, despite no doubt having been copied very convincingly by modern carvers. Even so, such fakes could still be very attractive pieces and display tremendous carving skill, and it is certainly possible that Covarrubias would have found them interesting.

57. [Shao] Xiaohong [邵] 绍红, “Huang Miaozi tan Shao Xunmei 黄苗子谈邵洵美 (Huang Miaozi on Shao Xunmei),” 2006. <http://book.people.com.cn/GB/69362/4805974.html>, accessed September 24, 2017.

58. Rosa Covarrubias and Adriana Williams, ed., *The China I Knew* [type-written ms], n.p.

59. Yu Feng 郁风, “Shanghai de manhua shidai 上海的漫画时代 (Shanghai’s Cartoon Era),” in *Yu Feng sanwen jingxuan* 郁风散文精选, Selected Essays of Yu Feng (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2010), 180.

60. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 6.

61. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 6.

62. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 6.

Shao continues his account by telling his readers that Covarrubias believed it was with jade that the common denominator linking Chinese and Mexican art could be found.<sup>63</sup> With this in mind, Covarrubias is reported as having said that in the past there were those who thought that the green jade known in China as *feicui* had originally been brought to Mexico from China. These are the people that in his book *Mexico South* are described as “those who believe the importation into America of a ready-made culture from Asia.” In this study, published in 1946, Covarrubias points to the similarities that can be found between jades of China and the Americas:

There are, in fact, so many points of similarity between the use, manner of carving and polishing, art style, and magic lore of jade in China and in ancient Mexico that it would not be hard to share the belief in stronger and more direct ties with the East, were it not for basic differences of structure, of style, and of symbolism and for the fact that jade [...] is found all over the world.<sup>64</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting in Shao’s article is his opinion that “much of the clarity and vigour of line” in Covarrubias’s artwork, came directly from his passion for line-carving on jade and this ties in well with his observation that Covarrubias’s artwork in general laid “most emphasis on line.”<sup>65</sup> When speaking of Covarrubias’s black-and-white caricatures in *Vanity Fair* Shao eulogised: “This line is extremely simple, but from just a curve in the face, or a twist in the body, one can appreciate the variations in the psychology of the subject.”<sup>66</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Covarrubias also learnt something from the Chinese artists he met while he was in China. When Yu Feng wrote of Zhang Guangyu and Covarrubias visiting the antiques market together, she also mentions how Zhang taught him about Chinese art, and indeed, it does seem to be the case that Covarrubias picked up some understanding of traditional Chinese painting theory while he was in China. In fact, this could have been learned from any number of sources: from Zhang Guangyu, or any of the other artists he

63. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 6.

64. Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (London, New York, Sidney, and Henley: KPI, 1986 [1946]), 107. With regard to differences in structure, Covarrubias points to scientific work carried out by Norman and Johnson (1941), the bibliographic details of which do not appear in his bibliography.

65. Shao, “Kefoluopisi ji qi furen,” 119.

66. Shao, “Kefoluopisi ji qi furen,” 118.

met (through an interpreter), from Shao Xunmei, or indeed from Lin Yutang, who, years later would write books dedicated to the subject, in English, for an American audience.<sup>67</sup> Without actually mentioning the name of Su Dongpo (1037-1101),<sup>68</sup> it is clear that Covarrubias had come across some of the ideas on art that had been propounded by this highly influential poet, painter, philosopher, and statesmen centuries before, namely, that the aim of the “scholar painter” should not be merely to represent the outer form of a subject through realistic representation. As a proud “amateur” painter—distancing himself from the professionals who painted for money—Su Dongpo had striven for what he saw as a more truthful representation of a subject by exploring its inner meaning through the utilization of a form of ink painting that used spontaneous calligraphic strokes of the brush. It would seem from what Shao Xunmei wrote that Covarrubias had picked up on at least some of this and expressed it in the following words:

The “pure art” approach of Chinese painting, is what I admire most about it, not even a single line is complicated by thoughts of gain or advantage (*mingli*). Chinese painting wastes no effort on form: as soon as the brush touches the paper, the artist gives over his spirit entirely to his own hand—a mysterious way of guiding the subconscious. In this regard, Chinese artists have achieved the greatest success.<sup>69</sup>

Shao goes on to report Covarrubias as having said that he saw the spontaneity of Chinese painting as having much in common with the composition of poetry, again calling to mind Su Dongpo’s theory that “within painting there is poetry, and within poetry there is painting.”<sup>70</sup> This is not to say that Covarrubias had any profound understanding of Chinese painting, but it is interesting to note that the ideas of spontaneity—and the expression of emotions and the psychological state of a subject through the use of just a few well-chosen lines, which are often apparent in his own work—had much in common with traditional approaches to painting in East Asia.

67. Many years later Lin Yutang would write in English about Su Dongpo’s theories on art. See Lin Yutang, *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 90-95. See also Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* [Su Dongpo] (London: Heinemann, 1948), 240-249.

68. Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101), also known as Su Shi 蘇軾.

69. Shao, “Kefoluopisi,” 6.

70. Lin, *The Chinese Theory of Art*, 95.

Amongst Covarrubias's surviving sketches can be seen several examples that further demonstrate an interest in Chinese culture. As well as his apparent fascination with Peking Opera, jade and Chinese painting, Covarrubias appears to have had an interest in the Chinese writing system.<sup>71</sup> There are at least three examples of sketches that show his attempts at writing his own name. One of these can be seen on a page of sketches that record fashionable young Chinese women in various poses, together with—rather incongruously—a selection of studies of water buffalo. This attempt at writing his name, here in the ancient form of Chinese writing known as seal script, must have been directly copied from someone else's example, as this writing system was not in everyday use and not widely understood by anyone other than specialists.<sup>72</sup> Another similar example, again showing a variety of unrelated subjects that had caught his interest—modern tubular furniture, two camels, and a gateway through an ancient city wall—can be seen together with repeated attempts at writing his name, this time using a standard form of script. This is immediately followed by his rather poor attempts at copying a selection of other Chinese characters.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note that in the chapter on Beijing in *Chine* a typical local scene of camels by a city wall can be seen.<sup>74</sup> Although it is possible that the sketch in question was done after his first visit and served as a study for the *Chine* illustration, it is perhaps more likely that it was done during or after his brief trip to Beijing in 1933. In the third example of Covarrubias's attempts at Chinese writing, found in the archives in Puebla, Covarrubias's name in Chinese appears written vertically down the right-hand side—*Kefoluopisi* 珂佛羅皮斯 “Ke-fo-luo-pi-si” (fig. 6).<sup>75</sup> It is most likely that all three examples were drawn and written during his second trip, and probable that the latter two inscriptions were directly copied from the title of Shao's first essay—which uses Covarru-

71. Mention of an interest in Chinese architecture is also reported in one newspaper: “Mr. Covarrubias is particularly interested in seeing classical examples of Chinese architecture first-hand in Peiping [Beijing]” in “Caricaturist Covarrubias' First Impression of Change in China is the Split Skirt,” *The China Press*, October 3, 1933, front page of Second Section, 9-11.

72. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 108.

73. Williams and Carpenter, *Miguel Covarrubias Sketches*, 109.

74. Chadourne, *Chine*, 266.

75. Caricaturas 1, no. 6911: Caricature of a man (*Caricatura - hombre de perfil con traje, en la parte posterior incluye una leyenda en chino en forma vertical: Kefoluopisi - [Ke-fo-luo-pi-si].*).



6. Caricaturas I, no. 6911.  
 Archivo Miguel Covarrubias.  
 Sala de Archivos y Colecciones  
 Especiales, Dirección de  
 Bibliotecas, Universidad de las  
 Américas, Puebla.



bias's Chinese name for its title—or from another source that Covarrubias might have been in a position to mimic at the time.<sup>76</sup>

### *A Lull in the Popularity of Covarrubias in China*

While a veritable explosion of “magazine culture” was taking place in Shanghai in the 1930s, China's neighbour, Japan, had its sights set on the forced expansion of its empire. A year after the so-called Manchurian Incident of 1931, when the Japanese staged a scene that enabled the military to make signifi-

76. What is perhaps Covarrubias's earliest attempt at mimicking Chinese characters dates from 1929 and appears in a scenario in a Chinese restaurant in New York China Town. Here can be seen an attempt at writing Chinese characters by someone who clearly has no knowledge of the writing system. See *Vanity Fair* 32, no. 5 (July, 1929): 53. Covarrubias's attempts in the 1930s are marginally more successful.

cant encroachments into Chinese territory in the north, the Japanese attempted a similar manoeuvre in Shanghai. On this occasion it failed, but tensions persisted throughout the 1930s until full-scale war between the two countries finally broke out in 1937.

It was with the prospect of full-scale war with Japan that the widespread popularity of the art of Miguel Covarrubias began to wane. Notwithstanding the fact that Covarrubias had already been responsible for steering several artists in directions that would never be forgotten in China, by the middle of the decade, Chinese artists were stepping up their production of political art and anti-Japanese propaganda. The vehemently anti-war art of George Grosz (1893–1959) became widely imitated, ironically, at a time when the German artist's own political feelings had long since mellowed, and he was no longer active in political circles following his move to the USA in 1933. Nevertheless, the Chinese artists viewed Grosz as a political artist and Covarrubias had now become simply a “decorative artist” at this time of national crisis.<sup>77</sup>

In the years 1934–1936 Grosz became just as influential as Covarrubias had been before him, and some of the very same artists who had imitated the Mexican's work now began to draw in styles that took inspiration from the German artist. Since his arrival in the USA Grosz had contributed regularly to *Vanity Fair* and artists in Shanghai will certainly have known of his work there through reading the magazine.<sup>78</sup> Amongst Grosz's work that appeared in *Vanity Fair* was a reproduction of a montage/collage entitled “American Landscape.” It can be no coincidence that a Chinese version of this, “Shanghai Landscape”—a clear imitation of this otherwise little-known example by Grosz—appeared in *Shidai manhua* (“Modern Sketch”) in 1934, so soon after it had been published in *Vanity Fair*.<sup>79</sup>

77. Huang Miaozi 黄苗子, “Lun manhua 論漫畫 (On Manhua),” *Liangyou huabao* 良友畫報 (“The Young Companion”) no. 121 (October, 1936): 52–53, and Jack Chen, “Xie zai ‘touqiang’ zhi qian” 寫在『投槍』之前—所亞漫畫集序 (Written Before ‘The Spear’: Preface to the Collected Cartoons of Suoya),” *Dagongbao* 大公報 (“Ta Kung Pao” also known as “L'Impartial”) (December 29, 1938): 8. *Touqiang* 投槍 (The Spear) was a collection of the cartoons of Yu Suoya 余所亞 (1912–1991) published in Hong Kong in August 1939.

78. See the examples of his work that appeared in *Vanity Fair* 39, no. 2 (October, 1932): 18; *Vanity Fair* 40, no. 6 (August, 1933): 10–11; and *Vanity Fair* 41, no. 3 (November, 1933): 34–35.

79. George Grosz, “American Landscape,” *Vanity Fair* 41, no. 3 (November, 1933): 35; and Anon., “Shanghai Landscape,” *Shidai manhua*, no. 1 (April 15, 1934): 23. See Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 158–161 and Paul Bevan, *Intoxicating Shanghai. An Urban Montage: Art and Literature in Pictorial Magazines during Shanghai's Jazz Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 237–241.

The introduction to China of Grosz's earlier, brutal, vitriolic work was largely the responsibility of just one man, the hugely influential writer and polymath Lu Xun (1881-1936), who had collected Grosz's work in print and book form since the late 1920s. Lu Xun had been a major figure in the New Culture Movement and would later be responsible for the publication of reproductions of Grosz's prints in literary and art magazines, as well as their display in a number of small-scale exhibitions in Shanghai.<sup>80</sup> It was this early work by Grosz, from the First World War period and immediately after, that appealed most to the Chinese artists, and beginning in 1934, a Grosz craze—based largely on his early work—took off in Shanghai.

In complete contrast, Covarrubias's colleague, the American cartoonist Russell Patterson, who specialised in drawing sexy women of the flapper era in his work for magazines such as *Ballyhoo* and *Life*, had his imitators in China too, notably Zhang Yingchao, an artist who worked on the periphery of the group in question. Zhang's caricatures, heavily inspired by Patterson's work, can be seen in such magazines as *Shidai manhua* ("Modern Sketch") and *Furen huabao* ("The Women's Pictorial") and often make direct reference to features that had recently appeared in *Ballyhoo*.<sup>81</sup>

If Miguel Covarrubias and Russell Patterson were products of the Jazz Age in the USA—both having begun contributing to American magazines while the 'Roaring Twenties' were in full swing—then the Chinese artists and writers who were so heavily inspired by their work, and contributed to the many pictorial magazines published in Shanghai following Covarrubias's 1933 visit, should be seen as products of a full-blown Chinese Jazz Age.

This jazz age, with which many of the Chinese figures thus far mentioned were fully engaged, encompassed innovations in music—in the form of jazz and popular music; dancehall culture—with the vast number of clubs and ball-

80. See for example *Deguo Chuangzuo banhua zhanlanhui* 德國創作版畫展覽會 (Exhibition of German Creative Prints), which took place from June 4-25, 1932 at the Zeitgeist Book Company on Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai. See Ma Tiji 馬蹄疾 and Li Yunjing 李允经, eds., *Lu Xun yu xinxing muke yundong* 鲁迅与新兴木刻运动 (Lu Xun and the New Woodcut Movement) (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1985), 284.

81. See for example Zhang Yingchao 張英超, "Yijiusansi nian de qiji: 'Huifu ziran' de bairehua 一九三四年的奇蹟:『回復自然』的白熱化 (Turning the "Return to Nature" White Hot: The Marvel of 1934)," *Shidai manhua* (March 20, 1934): [11-12], and how it relates to *Ballyhoo* 5, no. 3 "Nudist Number" (October, 1933), and to the "Mae West Number" (February, 1934). See Bevan, *Intoxicating Shanghai*, 215-219.

rooms that sprung up during the first decades of the twentieth century; a fascination with foreign film—with a full engagement with Hollywood, as well as with Chinese domestic cinema; architecture—in the form of the many “art deco” buildings found in Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Hangzhou; and fashions in clothing—from the latest Parisian styles, to the development of a distinctly modern Chinese style of dress, in the form of the *qipao* as well as the hugely fashionable fur-trimmed overcoat, notably as designed by Ye Qianyu and his colleagues, and appearing in the pages of pictorial magazines.

Highly influential figures associated with magazine culture include *Vanity Fair* favourites such as Covarrubias and Paul Morand (1888–1976) and for a time they were as popular amongst a group of artists and writers in Shanghai as they were in the West. Here could be seen the results of foreign and domestic pictorial magazines as major vehicles for the dissemination of “jazz-age culture” in 1930s China.

### *Diego Rivera*

Covarrubias was not the only Mexican artist to spark the imagination of Chinese artists. Diego Rivera (1886–1957), was also known to them; partly due to his left-wing political stance, but specifically because of the reports that found their way into Chinese magazines concerning the removal of Rivera’s *Man at the Crossroads* mural from the Rockefeller Centre, in 1934.<sup>82</sup> That year, in the magazine *Wanxiang*—perhaps the Chinese magazine closest in many ways to *Vanity Fair*—can be seen a photograph of Rivera together with several examples of the earlier frescoes he had made for the Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP, in Mexico City (1923–1928). One of the frescoes found in that building, *La noche de los pobres* (Night of the Poor) had been introduced to China by Lu Xun, three years earlier than the *Wanxiang* examples, within the pages of the magazine *Beidou*.<sup>83</sup> In his short introductory article Lu Xun points to the fact that Rivera believed the mural/fresco to be the perfect art form for the masses, as it could “most effectively fulfill the responsibilities of society,” being avail-

82. “Lifeila bihua de gushi 李費拉壁畫的故事 (The Story of Rivera’s Murals),” *Wenyi huabao* 1, no. 1 (October 10, 1934): 45, and “Diyage Lifeila zhi bihua 第亞戈·李費拉之壁畫 (The Murals of Diego Rivera),” *Wanxiang* 1, no. 1 (May 20, 1934): n.p.

83. “Pinren zhi ye 貧人之夜 (The Night of the Poor) [*La noche de los pobres*],” *Beidou* 1, no. 2 (October 20, 1931). My thanks to Zheng Shengtian for bringing this article to my attention.

able for all to see. Of course both Rivera and Lu Xun were right in this and its function as a form of art for the people was well established by this time. That said (to play devil's advocate just for a moment) the particular mural Lu Xun was writing about, although theoretically available to be viewed by the public, is situated in a place only accessible to those with permission to enter the building complex, cross the wide courtyard and ascend to the third floor cloister. Furthermore, it is somewhat ironic to note, the fact that this mural was painted directly onto a wall in Mexico was the very reason Lu Xun and most of his readers would never have had the opportunity to see it in person. Suffice to say, murals were the perfect form of art for the masses to enjoy and gain instruction from—if the masses were given access to them. Before long Rivera's murals would become highly influential in China, when the mural as an art form joined the pictorial magazine to become the two ideal forms of public art in the decades following the founding of the People's Republic of China.<sup>84</sup>

In the 1930s, the many Chinese artists who had not been abroad to study relied almost exclusively on books and magazines to see examples of major foreign art works. There were, of course, many art exhibitions mounted in Shanghai and the display of the work of modern Chinese traditional masters, Chinese art associations, and local expatriate artists, was common.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, exhibitions of modern foreign artists, or even of domestic art produced in modern Western styles, were few and far between.<sup>86</sup> Rare exceptions of the

84. For more on the mural in China see the work of Zheng Shengtian, "Mexico/China Exchange in the 1950s." <https://www.haudenschildgarage.com/supported-programs/mexico-china-exchange-in-the-1950s>, accessed August 17, 2017.

85. Such exhibitions included: those by both new and established artists: "Zhang Daqian shuhua zhan 張大千書畫展 (The Opening of an Exhibition of the Painting and Calligraphy of Zhang Daqian)," *Shenbao* 申報 ("The Shun Pao"), (February 15, 1933): 12; exhibitions of chosen students returned from their studies abroad, for example, "Zhang Chongren yishu zhanlanhui 張充仁藝術展覽會 (Zhang Chongren Art Exhibition)," *Shenbao* 申報 ("The Shun Pao") (February 21, 1936): 12; and exhibitions in venues such as department stores: "Nühuajia Zhou Lihua gezhan 女畫家周麗華個展 (Solo show by the woman artist Zhou Lihua)," *Shenbao* (November 12, 1936): 13, and "Another Art Show at Sun Company," *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury* (November 14, 1936): 2.

86. For example, the well-known annual exhibitions of modern art by the *Juelanshe* (Storm Society) took place only from 1932-1935. Exhibitions such as those mounted from 1934-1939 by the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* (Batavia Art Circle) in Java, included paintings from the collection of the paint factory magnate Alexandre Regnault. In the 1939 exhibition, paintings of Marc Chagall, Giorgio de Chirico, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Pablo Picasso were shown. Exhibitions of paintings by such major figures never made their way to China. See Simon Soon,

former were the exhibitions of the eminently portable woodcut, as promoted by Lu Xun, in which the work of European artists such as Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), Carl Meffert (1903-1988) and Frans Masereel (1889-1972), were indeed shown in China. Exhibits from Lu Xun's own collection seen in these exhibitions had been sent to him by mail from his contacts in Germany and Russia, or ordered through local firms such as the Commercial Press.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast, magazines like *Vanity Fair*, which contained examples of artworks specifically designed for the medium of the magazine by artists such as Covarrubias and Grosz, provided the rare opportunity in China to readily view Western artworks in the context for which they were originally designed—artworks produced specifically for publication in magazines and not designed for exhibition. The foreign pictorial magazine became a prime resource for the Chinese artists who have been explored in this paper, and furnished them with material by foreign artists that would be instrumental in shaping their own future work.

### *Conclusion*

Since the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911), and particularly from the time of the New Culture Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, newspapers and magazines served as important source material for artists and writers in China, and the material they found in those mediums was used as models for some of the most influential Chinese literary and artistic creations of the period. During this time, some artists and writers had been abroad to study, and the first-hand knowledge and inspiration they gained in the West (as well as in Japan) was something acquired through personal experience. Others, such as the group of artists discussed in this paper, relied on what they could learn from those who had returned from abroad, but also, and perhaps most crucially, from books and magazines published both domestically and abroad. Covarrubias's work, particularly in *Vanity Fair*, was a huge inspiration to these artists and to Shao Xunmei—the person who is most likely to have been responsible for introducing the magazine to them in the first place.

---

"When was East Asia and Southeast Asia's Modernism in Art? Comparisons and intersections," in Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren, eds., *The Modernist World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 82. My thanks to Adrian Vickers of the University of Sydney for bringing this to my attention.

87. Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe: 1981), vols. 14 and 15.



The huge popularity that Covarrubias's work enjoyed in the first half of the 1930s waned as war approached, but despite this, as indicated by Shao Xunmei's own daughter, the legacy of Covarrubias in China lived on through influential artists such as Zhang Guangyu and Ye Qianyu, both of whom adopted aspects of his art when they met him in Shanghai in 1933.

Although after 1933 Covarrubias never visited China again, his interest in the country persisted; manifesting itself in both his political engagement with Mao Zedong's "New China", and in a number of artworks he produced in the years before his death in 1957,<sup>88</sup> notably in the illustrations he drew for Pearl Buck's part-translation of the great Ming dynasty novel *Shuihu zhuan* (published in 1948 as "All Men are Brothers" with an introduction by Lin Yutang).<sup>89</sup> Here can be seen Covarrubias's concrete response to what he had learned about Chinese art from those he met in Shanghai—notably from Zhang Guangyu and Shao Xunmei—revealing itself in his drawing of colour illustrations heavily inspired by traditional Chinese book illustration.<sup>90</sup> This might well be seen as the culmination in Covarrubias's own work, of the short-lived, hands-on, cultural exchange that had taken place during his brief visit to Shanghai in 1933. On the other hand, artists such as Zhang Guangyu and Ye Qianyu, their colleagues and successors, were responsible for the dissemination of a "new style" of cartooning, developed by them out of the work of Covarrubias and other Western artists before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This laid the foundations for trends that became highly influential in the Chinese modern art world; trends that would endure well into the second half of the twentieth century. ❀

88. See for example the portrait in oils of Mao Zedong as illustrated in *Miguel Covarrubias: Cuatro Miradas/Four Visions*, 83. For information on his political engagement with the People's Republic of China see Williams, *Covarrubias*, 202.

89. Shi Nan'an, *All Men Are Brothers*, trans. Pearl Buck (New York: The Limited Edition Club, 1948).

90. Covarrubias first introduction to Chinese woodblock illustration might have been the responsibility of Shao Xunmei. In his essay, Shao mentions having shown Covarrubias a Song dynasty (960-1279) edition of the book *Lienüzhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women) with illustrations by the artist Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (344-406 AD). Shao, "Kefoluopisi," 7. It is interesting to note that the female figure representing China in Covarrubias's map mural "Art Forms of the Pacific Area" for the "Pageant of the Pacific" of 1940, bears much resemblance to the style in which female figures are represented in Gu Kaizhi's paintings. See for example, *Nüshi zhentu* 女史箴圖 (The Admonitions Scroll) in the collection of the British Museum (BM1903,0408,0.1). For a reproduction of the map see *Miguel Covarrubias: Cuatro Miradas—Four Visions*, 128-129.