Chinese Modern Cartoon. *A transcultural approach to* Modern Sketch

<sp
by Martina Caschera

After the Opium Wars (1839-1984; 1856-1860) and the opening of the Treaty Ports, new printing technologies and new kinds of economic and cultural exchanges substantially modified Chinese society and revolutionized its media context, especially in the so-called *contact-zones* (i.e. colonial and semi colonial liminal spaces characterized by transcultural flows). In those years, the city of Shanghai stood out among the Treaty Ports, quickly becoming the Chinese capital of modern editorial print. As a result, it also became the cradle of the cartoon (single-panelled, mainly satirical vignette), a form of visual communication historically interwoven with the evolution of journalism and mass culture.

The Chinese modern cartoon, which emerged and flourished in the Treaty Ports at the turn of the twentieth century[1], represents a locus of re-negotiation of powers and reflects the process of bridging cultural boundaries through adaptive and integrative communication strategies. Being produced in the context of the contact-zones, we can say, borrowing Bhabha's words, that cartoons "also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity" (1994: 6). While contact-zones

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[1] The information regarding Chinese cartoon historiography is mainly drawn on Bi and Huang (2006).

have been central for critically re-considering colonialism and anti-colonialism as Western-centred discursive formations (Said 1978), a more recent postcolonial scholarship shifted the focus from unilateral dynamics to bilateral and pluralist processes so that (semi)colonialism can now be considered as "rather a multilateral, interlocking relation" (Volz and Lee 2010: 2). Such sites of exchange as Shanghai and Guangzhou can thus be understood according to Welsh's idea that "cultures de facto […] have […] assumed a new form, which is to be called *transcultural* insofar that it *passes through* classical cultural boundaries" (1999: 198).

The paradigm of *métissage* as envisioned by such French scholars as Glissant (1981; 1996), Gruzinski (1988; 1990; 1999), Laplantine and Nouss (1997) can be useful for theoretically framing the modern cartoon phenomenon.[2] This approach addresses the pivotal function of artistic production in the fabrication/deciphering of originating cultural contamination processes and underlines the importance of its "creative" component. Considering the birth and the evolution of Chinese modern cartoons as peculiar forms of *métissage* allows us to evaluate the importance of the Chinese production in the formation of the "transcultural" conception of cartooning as a fluid, ambiguous global process. Furthermore, while analysing cartoon communication strategies, imagology's critical tools can be useful to explain the dialectic mechanism at the root of cartoonists' expressive choices: approaching cartoons as national *autoimages* enables us to further understand to what extent the "Other" was involved in the modern process of discursive self-definition.

Section One of the present article provides an account of key aspects of the "satirical illustrated journalism", as defined by Harder and Mittler (2013), in East Asia, mainly focusing on the Chinese context. In fact, according to the scholars, the British *Punch* (1841-2002) and the American *Puck* (1871-1918), among the earliest and most popular satirical illustrated magazines of the XIX century, had a comparably relevant resonance in a global-sized publishing market and can be considered as landmark, albeit not archetypal, publications in the history of East Asian newspaper and magazine publishing (Harder and Mittler 2013). This section also addresses the legacy of the *Punch*/*Puck*-inspired format throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, to outline the growing Chinese participation in a global *imaginaire* and to further elucidate the question of the decline or, as I argue, the evolution of the format during the 1920s-1930s. The second and core part of this contribution focuses on *Modern Sketch (Shidai manhua* 时代漫画*)*, the longest-running and best-selling cartoon magazine of Republican China (1912-1937), regarded as a product of transcultural dynamics. The monthly magazine *Modern Sketch* was published from January 1934 to July 1937, when the *Shidai Books Company* (*Shidai Tushu Gongsi* 时代图书公司) was closed after the Second Sino-Japanese war had broken out. According to Crespi, it had a circulation of about ten thousand issues (personal communication 2015).

The analysis of selected textual and visual *exempla* addresses different expressive articulations of the interest of *Modern Sketch*'s editorial group in taking part in a global scenario, aiming to highlight the most significant aspects of the

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[2] About the "métissage" as a critical paradigm in French scholarship, see Contini (2009).

"trasculturality-as-a-practice" that characterizes, as I maintain, the evolution of Chinese cartoons. While "Studying the Other" retraces the editorial team's desire of educating the readership, "Joining the Other" investigates the will to visually communicate to the readers what it did mean to be part of a global-sized "transcultural" movement.

1. CONSTRUCTING A GLOBAL *IMAGINAIRE*: FROM THE *SHANGHAI PUCK* TO THE *MODERN SKETCH*

The essays included in the volume *Asian Punches* (Harder and Mittler 2013) represent a challenging starting point to investigate the twentieth-century satirical journalism as a complex system of cultural exchanges. Applying a transcultural approach to the research on *Punch's* presence in Asia, scholars produced a de-centralized/de-centralizing perspective on (semi)colonial encounters, aiming at theorizing the global-in-the-local and scrutinizing significant strategies of re-contextualisation. In his introductory essay to the collection, Harder, while highlighting the importance of both the British *Punch* and the American *Puck* as landmark publications and influential exempla, also concludes that "what was at the root was not always necessarily connected with *Punch*, or *The London Charivari*, but rather some common feature of the satirical periodical format" (Harder and Mittler 2013: 6).

In this perspective, focusing on and comparing the presence of this format in Japan and China is even more challenging and meaningful for their being part of a well-established and quickly developing "interliterary community".[3] According to scholars, in both countries the production of "satirical illustrated magazines" started off with the English-language magazines edited and distributed in the foreign enclaves. The *Japan Punch*, the "first satirical illustrated magazine" in Japan, was first published in Yokohama in 1862 while *The China Punch* and *Puck, or the Shanghai Charivari,* were issued only a few years later in Shanghai.[4] However, as Table 1 shows, Japanese editors and artists immediately adopted the format of the *Japan Punch* as a reference for an indigenous production (e.g. *E-shinbun Nipponchi* 絵新聞日本地, *Marumaru Chinbun* 團團珍聞, *Nipponchi* 日ポン地), while the Chinese publishing industry did not follow suit: there is no evidence, in fact, of overtly *Punch*/*Puck*-inspired magazines until 1918 (see Table 1).[5]

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[3] According to Ďurišin (1995), it is more productive to go beyond a monolithic distinction between cultures and to consider a new historiographical model, the "interliterary community", where cultural exchanges are bound to geographical and typological "affinities". These "affinities" are defined by geographical proximity and "analogy of the means of theoretical and artistic expression" (Gnisci 2002: 202). Considering these factors, the study of satirical illustrated journalism and cartoons in China and Japan sheds light on the role of power asymmetries in shaping the Eastern Asian "interliterary community".

[4] For a dissertation on the XIX century satirical illustrated journalism in Japan, see Duus (2013: 307-337) and Stewart (2001). As for the XIX century English-language satirical magazines in China, see Rea (2013: 389-422).

[5] According to Stember (2015: 117-118) in the first decades of the twentieth century, few magazines dedicated a considerable space to cartoons and political visual satire (especially "mosquito

Publication	Place	Author(s)	Term
Punch	London, UK	Henry Mayhew and Ebenezer Landells	1841–2002
Japan Punch	Yokohama, Japan	Charles Wirgman	1862-1887
The China Punch	Hong Kong, China	*The China Mail*	1867–1868 1872–1876
Puck	St. Louis and New York, US	Joseph Ferdinand Keppler	1871–1918
Puck, or Shanghai Charivari	Shanghai, China	F. & C. WALSH	1871-1872
E-shinbun Nipponchi (*Japan Land or Japan Punch)*	Tokyo, Japan	Kanagaki Robun, Kawanabe Kyosai	1874
Marumaru chinbun (*Blue Pencil News*)	Tokyo, Japan	Nomura Fumio	1877–1907
Nipponchi	Tokyo, Japan	Yamashita Shigetami, Shōkoku Yamamoto, Shunkō Nakashima	1904-1905
Kokkei shinbun (*Comical Record of Japanese History*)	Osaka, Japan	Miyatake Gaikotsu	1901
Tokyo Puck	Tokyo, Japan	Kitazawa Rakuten	1905
Osaka Puck	Osaka, Japan	Akamatsu Rinsaku	1906/1907
Poten	Kyoto		1908
Shanghai Puck (*Bochen Huaji huabao*)	Shanghai, China	Shen Bochen	1918

Table 1. *Punch and Puck Genealogies*. The table integrates Wu's (2013: 368) with additional information regarding the Japanese publications mentioned in this essay.

The first indigenous satirical illustrated magazine in China, the *Shanghai Puck* (or *Bochen huaji huabao* 泊尘滑稽报, 1918), not only retains historical value as the only example of the format in the 1910s, but also represents an intriguing locus for

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papers" as the *Jingbao* 晶报. However, on the basis of my personal research carried out in the Shanghai Library, no one of these magazines was specialized in cartoons or referred directly and explicitly to the *Punch/Puck* format.

analyzing an asymmetry spanning beyond the power relationship between China and the Anglo-American area.

As a matter of fact, strong evidence proves that the "immediate model" (Wu 2013: 367) for the magazine's editor, Shen Bochen 沈泊尘 (1889-1920) was Kitazawa Rakuten's 北澤楽天[6] *Tokyo Puck*, thus reinforcing the thesis of an essential asymmetry in cultural exchanges between the two countries in the first decades of the twentieth century. Since Rakuten's colourful and eye-catching *Tokyo Puck* had already given rise to the Japanese "color cartoon humour magazine boom" (Stewart 2006: 84) by the time Bochen visited Japan in 1917, it is reasonable to infer that this trip contributed to persuading the Chinese cartoonist to launch a new editorial venture. Additionally, an important asymmetrical connection between the *Shanghai* and the *Tokyo Puck* may be due to the bilingualism (English and Chinese) of the Chinese magazine, which followed Rakuten's practice of providing texts and captions in Japanese, English and even Chinese. In this sense, although chosen for and subjected to different contextual limitations,[7] both the *Tokyo* and the *Shanghai Puck* "multilingual" editorial policies were much more transcultural than their English-language versions, even though they spurted out from an asymmetrical need of being internationally acknowledged.

But how were the *Punch/Puck* legacy and the overall transcultural practice envisioned in the decades that followed this publication? Whatever importance the *Shanghai Puck* might have had for visual revolutionary propaganda, I maintain it was only through the "golden age of illustrated magazines" and the "New Literary and Design Movement"[8] of the 1920s that Chinese cartoons rose to a higher level in the "global history of the dissemination of the visual grammars of cartoon and caricature" (Rea 2013: 390). According to our approach, this means, at the same time, departing from the *Punch/Puck* format and acknowledging its role as archetype and ancestor.

By that time, lithography had been replaced with copperplate etching, a more expensive yet more reliable and eye-catching printing technique,[9] and the social and economic position of the commercial artists – modern illustrators and graphic designers – had been decisively legitimized. In such a flourishing editorial market, the *Shanghai Sketch* (*Shanghai Manhua* 上海漫画, 1928) appeared as a new kind of

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[6] The role of the editor and cartoonist Kitazawa Rakuten (1876–1955) was pivotal "in introducing and popularizing a modern and international style of cartoon" (Stewart 2006: 84) in Japan, and, based on the influence it had on the Chinese production, in East Asia too. See Duus (1999); Miyamoto (2002); Stewart (2006).

[7] We have to keep in mind that Rakuten's project came out in a flourishing editorial market fostered by political enthusiasm, which accompanied (and followed) Japan's victories against China and Russia. Two years after the "Second Republican Revolution" (1916), the socio-political chaos was still influencing Chinese political discourses, alimenting the rhetoric of both revolutionary passion and political disillusionment.

[8] For a dissertation on the stages of Chinese modern graphic design see Minick and Ping (2010: 26-83).

[9] The *Illustrated Times* (*Tuhua shibao* 图画时报), the first "photographic" pictorial. First published in 1920, it was immediately followed by several magazines published in Beijing and Tianjin (Zhou, 2011: 6-10). During the Republican Era (1912-1937), photography replaced lithography "as the principal means of producing illustrations" (Hay, in Kuo 2007: 128).

"cartoon magazine" that inherited some traits from the *Punch/Puck*-format and echoed the experimental urge of such ventures as the *Comic News* (*Kokkei Shinbun* 滑稽新聞).[10] As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, this Japanese magazine had already given rise to a new type of satirical illustrated journalism, characterized by a "rather artistic approach" modelled on the "newly rising global art movements such as Art Nouveau or Expressionism" (Hotwagner 2013: 353)[11]. In this perspective, Shanghai Sketch represents a decisive step for Chinese modern culture towards the most up-to-date "global imaginaire" that had been already gradually harmonizing with the aesthetical and rhetorical needs of a new era. The visual appeal of old yet re-fashioned magazines, such as the American *The Judge* (1881-1947) and the French *La Vie Parisienne* (1863-1970), and of new magazines, like the American *Vogue* (1892) and *Vanity Fair* (1913-1936)*,* as well as its international edition, the *British Vogue* (1916), mirrored and influenced the artistic and fashion trends of the time. Although relatively late, in 1928 the Chinese *Shanghai Sketch* aimed at taking part in the "modernization project" [12] that involved every aspect of the Chinese cultural production by drawing on the same, transcultural visual grammar. The synergies between literary and artistic elements of the *Shanghai Sketch*'s editorial staff (i. e. the members of the first *Shanghai Cartoon Society* and the New-sensationalist authors) produced "startling, sometimes lurid, images unparalleled in any other Republican era pictorial" (Laing 2010) inspired by European Art Nouveau and Avant-garde.

From the *Punch/Puck* formats, the *Shanghai Sketch* took only the centrality of the visual component and the humorous role of a social and political commentary: this experiment with the "artistic approach to satirical journalism" resulted in a magazine appealing to the metropolitan, middle-class Chinese-speaking readership, unique in its features. *Shanghai Sketch* sold approximately three thousand copies (ibid.), quite a reasonable circulation for the editorial visual market of that time, but it lasted only two years. In 1930, in fact, the magazine merged with the more popular *Shidai Pictorial* (*Shidai Huabao* 时代画报) edited by artist Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1907-1995), changed its name in *Shidai* 时代, and it was not until the mid-1930s that China would witness a proper boom in cartoon magazines publishing.

This emergence of Chinese cartooning in Shanghai can be inscribed in a more general flourishing of periodical and humor-related printing. In the thirties, artistic production, although already influenced by strong left-wing, anti-Japanese and nationalistic discourses, still benefited from the expressive freedom granted by a climate of unprecedented political appeasement, to the point that 1934 was called "the year of the magazines" (Bi and Huang 2006:105). Furthermore, since 1932 the

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[10] For a complete chronology on Japanese publishing from the 1860s to the 1930s, see Clark (2000). In the same volume, see also Sato (2000), whose essay focuses on Mass Magazines in 1920s Japan.

[11] This forerunner publication anticipated the "erotic, grotesque, nonsense" wave that interested Japan from the 1920s onward. See Silverberg (2006).

[12] According to Waara (2007), 1920s Chinese art pictorials participated in the widespread "modernization project" that involved the cultural agents in a western-oriented and global-sized political discourse.

literary movement started by the prominent writer, translator and intellectual Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895-1976) with the fortnightly *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语), had favored the production of humor-related forms and contents. Therefore, during the first half of the 1930s, Chinese artists could freely feast upon the global-sized visual market, which they had access to in the foreign enclaves, and creatively translate the visual grammar of cartoon and caricatures for a wide range of communicative purposes. The most important feature of the "new wave" of cartoon magazines, which connects them to their *Punch/Puck* ancestor, is "the multi-faceted nature of its visual and textual humour, and commentary on social and political issues" (Duus 2013: 304).

Although growing distance separated stylistically the *Punch/Puck* model from these magazines, the transcultural flow still represented one of their main features, as shown in the following section.

In 1934, cartoonist Lu Shaofei 鲁少飞 (1903-1995), backed by Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968), the "wealthy, charismatic, and influential writer, poet, translator, book collector, socializer, editor, and publisher" (Laing 2010), started the publication of the most influential and long-lasting cartoon magazine of Republican China. Among the around twenty *manhua zazhi* 漫画杂志 (cartoon magazine) circulating in the mid-1930s, Lu's *Modern Sketch* is exemplary of the cartoonists' interest in constructing multi-layered discourses that addressed the economic, social, political, cultural as well as aesthetic issues of the modern "shidai 时代" (epoch)[13] as an inherently transcultural trope. Furthermore, the analysis of relevant discursive strategies addresses and highlights the conscious will of its editorial staff to project the magazine – and its readership – into a global-sized scenario.

2. APPROACHING THE "OTHER": THE TRANSCULTURAL DIMENSION OF *MODERN SKETCH*[14]

The "momentum of Asian *Punch*es abates towards the middle of the twentieth century" (Harder, 2013: 7), and, in many cases, the humorous and satirical verve of these magazines is replaced with the serious and unambiguous tones of rising nationalism. As inferred from an overall analysis of the discursive evolution of *Modern Sketch*, a similar process affects the Chinese visual culture too: textual and pictorial evidence proves the approaching of the Sino-Japanese war to be the main cause of a gradual shift in the interests of Chinese cultural agents. Although apparently in contrast with this mainstream trend, *Modern Sketch*'s steady determination in feeding the "transcultural" dialogue within the satirical journalism network, even in those politically crucial years, is actually aimed at Chinese self-empowerment. Therefore, it

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[13] The term "shidai" literally means "era, epoch, times". However, during the 1920s-1930s it was used to refer to "modernity" itself, thus becoming interchangeable with the term "*modeng* 摩登" (modern). See Lee (1999), Shen (2013).

[14] Unless indicated differently, images in this paper are from *Modern* Sketch (Shanghai, 1934-1937), courtesy of the Special Collections and University Archives, Colgate University Libraries. In the captions, *Modern Sketch* will be abbreviated with MS.

Altre Modernità / Otras Modernidades / Autres Modernités / Other Modernities
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does not contradict but contributes to the formation of a more nuanced nationalistic discourse.

I will clarify this aspect of *Modern Sketch*'s transcultural enterprise from two different yet complementary perspectives. Firstly, I will investigate the direct/explicit – mostly educational- references to the foreign model (explanatory notes, articles and columns, and reprints of foreign cartoons). Then, I will analyse the use of "satirical universals" (layout and graphic details), visual "quotes" and specific *nom de plume* as inherent/hidden homages to foreign models.

2.1 Studying the "Other"

In *Modern Sketch*, the foreign/*Other,* whether symbolizing the corrupted/aggressive enemy or epitomizing modernity, stands as the official parameter to evaluate the *Self*. For this reason, the editorial staff consciously and regularly referred to the foreign model as a discursive Other to bridge with, in their mission of popularizing cartoons and their significance in Chinese modern society. Meanwhile, they did also acknowledge themselves as part of the global-sized satirical illustrated journalism.

In January 1934, Lu Shaofei launched his new project, the *Modern Sketch*, with the aim of "catching the era" (*zhuazhu shidai* 抓住时代) through cartoons (MS1: 34). According to his editorial view, the authors were free to choose any means and style to "criticize each detail of the human life", while never forgetting to "smile" (*ibid*.). To refer to "cartoons", they adopted the term "manhua", a choice that further clarifies the "transcultural" mission of the magazine. In the words of Wang Dunqing 王敦庆 (1899-1990)[15]:

> We have taken the term "man" from *langman* 浪漫 [romantic], to contrast the conventional [art world]. Don Quixote is romantic.[16] At the same time, we receive the influences of Okamoto Ippei's theories in Japanese cartoon, therefore we chose the Japanese term [manga]. (Bi 2002: 129)

He thus explains both the choice of the term "manhua", which is preferred to the traditional *fengci hua* and *huajihua*, and the coineage of *katun* 卡吞, thus introducing the semiotic context of the magazine's logo (fig. 1). The Japanese cartoon world constitutes here a core reference from a theoretical as well as a practical standpoint. In fact, the word "manhua" itself, connects the Chinese cartoonists to their Japanese colleagues. The other reference is to Don Quixote, a particularly suitable literary character to symbolize their dissident (and in this sense "romantic") quest for the freedom of speech. Even the magazine's logo, the knight "unyielding in the face of

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[15] This short biography is based on the information retrieved by Bi (2002); Bi and Huang (2006); Huang and Gan (2010); Huang (2015).

[16] "Don Quixote" was a recurring symbol in modernist rhetoric of the 1920s-1930s. See for example: Zhang Kebiao, "Modeng" (Modern), *Shidai* 6, cit. in Shen (2013: 140).

force" (*weiwu buqu* 威武不屈), creatively translates the adventures of the romantic hero in the modern Chinese cartoon world

Fig. 1. MS 1, Zhang Guangyu 张光宇. Cover art and Logo (Jan. 1934).

The most prominent cartoon theorist in *Modern Sketch* was Wang Dunqing, also called the "expert" (*zhinang* 智囊). Wang studied at St. John's University in Shanghai and was introduced to the world of illustrated magazines by writer Bi Qihong, with whom he worked for the *Shanghai Pictorial* (*Shanghai Huabao* 上海画报) where he translated English-language articles and illustrated the magazine, along with famous cartoonists of the likes of Ding Song 丁悚 (1891-1972) and Huang Wennong 黄文农 (1903-1934). Meanwhile, Wang also worked as a teacher of English language and Fine Arts. He was one of the founders of the first Cartoon Society (1926), and in this function, he introduced his colleagues to the history and theory of foreign cartoon production. His main reference was Okamoto Ippei 岡本一平 (1886-1948), the eminent cartoonist who is known to be, together with Kitazawa Rakuten, father of the Japanese comic strips.[17] Following in Okamoto's footsteps, Wang intended to introduce foreign comic art to the Chinese readership. For this reason, in the 1930s, besides working for *Modern Sketch*, he also wrote a number of articles for *Independent Cartoons* (*Duli Manhua* 独立漫画). In 1936, his commitment to cartoon theory led him to co-found the *Cartoon Research Society* (*Manhua yanjiu hui* 漫画研究会), with Ye Qianyu. Wang strongly believed in the political and social power of cartoon

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[17] Okamoto Ippei was to first cartoonist to popularize the American strips *Bringing Up Father* and *Mutt and Jeff* in Japan, reprinting the strips in his *Asahi Newspaper* (*Asahi Shimbun* 朝日新聞) (Shodt 1988: 44-45).

communication and, therefore, launched the cartoon magazine *National Salvation Cartoons* (*Jiuwang Manhua* 救亡漫画) immediately after *Modern Sketch* had ceased its publication due to the war.

In *Modern Sketch*, Wang's primary contribution was to inform the "transcultural" mission of the magazine with his knowledge of foreign production. Therefore, from September 1934 to June 1937 he regularly provided the magazine with a two to four-page article, missing just a few issues. In his articles, he mainly discussed cartoonists' life and career. From November 1934 to April 1935, *Modern Sketch* published articles on the French caricaturist Honoré Daumier, the German painter and caricaturist George Grosz, the British cartoonist and *Punch* contributor John Tenniel and the famous 12th-Century Japanese 'cartoonist' monk Toba Sōjō 鳥羽僧正. In 1936 Wang also wrote about the leftist artist Masamu Yanase 柳瀬正夢 (Nov.) and the caricaturist Phil May (Dec.). Besides foreign cartoon historiography, he was also interested in popularizing cartoon theory. In his first article (Sept. 1934), Wang presented "sequencing" as a popular, comprehensible and even educational way of making cartoon art. Other contributors participated in building *Modern Sketch*'s self-reflexive discourses: in January 1934, two articles on the significance of cartoons were published, both signed by Lin Yutang and by the multitalented editor Liang Desuo 梁得所 (1905-1938). In May 1934, the magazine featured the translation of an essay by Tomoyuki Ishihama 河出書房 (1895-1950), about the social value of cartoons. The author pondered on the new trends of modern Japanese cartoon, wishing for a more accurate theoretical reflection on cartoons in general. Virtually responding to this call, Lu Shaofei reassures Ishihama Tomoyuki of his personal "commitment to cartooning" (*congshi manhuade zhizuo* 从事漫画的制作) in a short note following his article.

Wang was also interested in comparing *Modern Sketch* to the foreign models from a media perspective. In August 1935, he provides an analysis of the American humoristic magazines *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Americana* and *Ballyhoo*. For instance, the structure of the article, he states, is itself "inspired" by a piece published in *Vanity Fair* in 1933.

Besides offering a global historical context onto where to project Chinese modern cartoon, *Modern Sketch*, like many other pictorials of that time, regularly reprinted foreign cartoons (*Cartoons from a Journey to the West*, *Cartoons on Western Society, Comics strips from The Punch*), thus providing its readership with significant *exempla* against which to compare the national production. Among such publications, the collection *Erotic Cartoons* (Feb. 1936) stands out for its particularly provocative quality, which is further strengthened by Wang's article on the aesthetic appreciation of the erotic visual genre. In conformity with the progressive discourse concerning the representation of "objective bodies" as symbols of societal modernization and revitalization (Waara 2007), this publication clearly positions *Modern Sketch* against *tout-court* moralism, a trend that had growingly monopolized the literary and artistic sphere from 1930 onwards.

2.2 Joining the "Other"

A first example of *Modern Sketch*'s "structural" transculturality is the – attempted – bilingualism, abandoned in June 1934 since the editorial staff did (or could) not provide any foreign-language content. As a matter of fact, the editors provided the first issues of the magazine with two versions of the title (English and Chinese) and the pricing on the cover in Chinese currency and dollar cents. Such practice, most likely meant to attract the foreign or, at least, the western-oriented readership in the enclaves, also establishes a connection with the magazine to its "multilingual" predecessors (e.g. *Tokyo Puck*, *Shanghai Puck*).

The main evidence of *Modern Sketch*'s transcultural project, however, consists in the visual articulations of the magazine's dialectic approach to mainstream discourses, which consciously acknowledge the need for a recognizably intertextual visual semiology.

Fig. 2. First page of *Modern Sketch* 3 (March 1934). Detail: the "ink-bottle knight".

In this respect, one of the most appealing features of the *Punch*-format to draw on was the Shakespeare-inspired "narrator figure" *Mr Punch*, "a kind of trickster, who maintained the outsider position" (Harder and Mittler 2013: 9). Although such a "narrator" was nowhere to be found in *Modern Sketch*, it nonetheless constituted a literary reference for the creation of the "Don Quixote-ish" ink-bottle logo featured in many issues of the magazine, whether in the cover art or in the inner pages (fig. 2). Implicitly referring to modern Western literature, the small character also graphically synthetized the encounter of traditional Chinese and imported western-styled artistic tools: he is holding a setsquare, while riding a brush-tailed scroll.

The editors' use of "satirical universals" is further exemplified by the layout of the first page of every issue (fig. 3), which closely imitated the *Punch* exemplum by placing the illustration in the middle of the page. This arrangement, however, is visually and physically separated very sharply from the rest of the magazine and relegated to one page out of forty. Rather than a fully embrace practice, it does signal a distanced aestheticization of and a conscious tribute to a format.

Fig. 3. The first page of *Modern Sketch*, MS 3.

The most effective attempt to project the magazine and its authors into a global scenario surely consists in an overall adoption of a global visual grammar of cartoons and caricatures, which led to the creative translation of both the style and contents of European and American magazines for the Chinese media context.

A number of authors moulded their style and rhetoric on the exempla of Western artists/cartoonists, in some cases even making the reference explicit in their *nom de plume*, like the "Chinese Grosz" Cai Ruohong 蔡若虹, and Sheng Gongmu 生公木, who, transliterating the name of the famous British cartoonist David Low, signed his later works as "Te Wei 特伟".
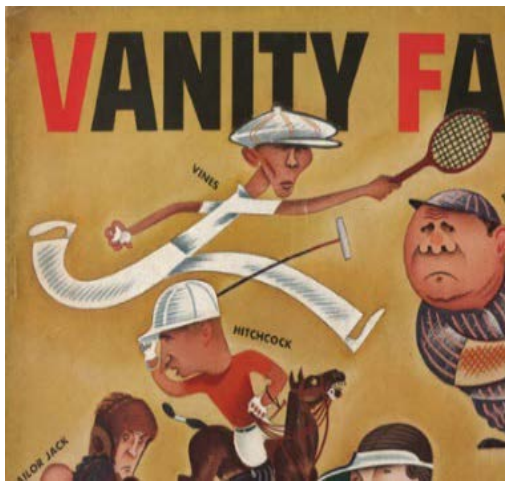
Fig. 4. Constantin Alajalov, front Cover (detail). *Vanity Fair*, Aug. 1933. Courtesy of Condé Nast Collection.

Fig. 5. Huang Miaozi, front cover. MS22, Oct. 1935.

The main references were, however, the illustrators and cartoonists who worked for such American magazines as *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. By comparing *Modern Sketch's* with *Vanity Fair*'s 1930s covers, it is possible to explore the different modes of the Chinese artists' re-interpretation and re-contextualization of the American model's visual mood and vocabulary. For instance, a striking resemblance of the characters in Huang Miaozi's cartoon to Alajalov's sheds light on two focal issues (fig. 5 and 4). The first one is related to the apparent delay in the Chinese reception/translation of American magazines' aesthetics. Visual evidences confirm that it took from one to two years for *Modern Sketch*'s cartoonists (see also Lu's and Jiang's covers in Aug. and Sept. 1935) to "translate" *Vanity Fair*'s aesthetics for the Chinese visual market. As suggested by Lee with regards to foreign literary magazines and books (1999: 126), this was most probably due to practical reasons such as the cartoonists' access to mostly second-hand publications. A further remark can be made about the verbal component of cartoons. While Alajalov (1900-1987), the author of the first one (fig. 4), considered appropriate to include the names of the celebrities he depicted, Huang Miaozi 黄苗子 (1913-2012) did not, and even the editorial notes do not provide any additional explanatory content. This could signify Huang's tight grip on *Modern Sketch*'s readership, the latter being considerably smaller than *Vanity Fair*'s.

Among *Vanity Fair*'s visual artists, a recurring model for *Modern Sketch*'s cartoonists was Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957), the Mexican artist known as the cover illustrator and cartoonist for American magazines like *Vanity Fair*. When called to caricaturize Chinese celebrities and politicians, cartoonists' preference went to Covarrubias' dynamic linear style. It is most likely that his illustrations for Marc Chadourne's *Chine* (1931) directly influenced the aesthetics of many Chinese graphic designers and illustrators, chief among them being Ye Qianyu, who confirms Covarrubias's referential role in his autobiography (Ye, 2012:483).
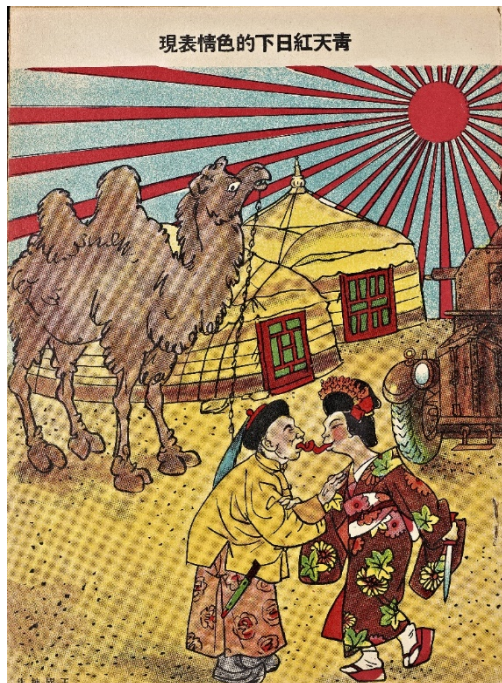
Fig. 6. Wang Guodong, *Pornographic behaviour under the blue sky and the red sun* (Qingtian hongrixiade seqingbiaoxian 晴天红日下的色情表现). MS26, Feb. 1936.
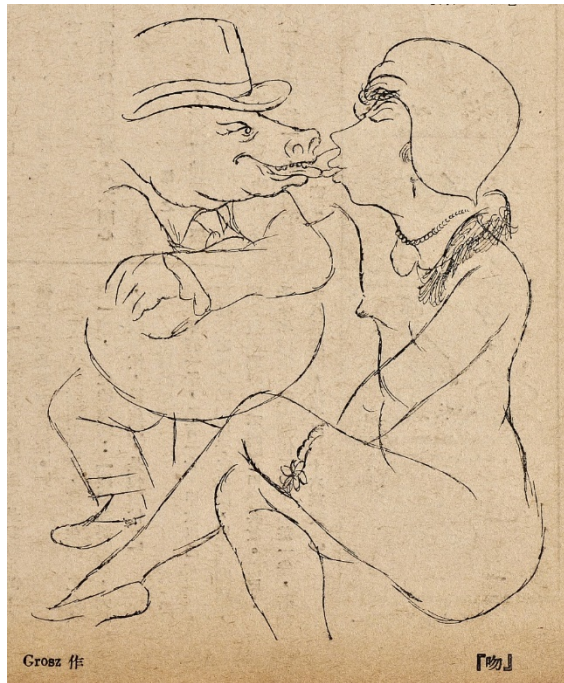
Fig. 7. George Grosz, *The Kiss*, Reprinted in MS26, Feb. 1936.

Another way of "joining the Other" was by offering the reader clear-cut tools to gouge the extent of the "appropriation" of foreign visual elements. While the reference to Covarrubias had to be detected by scanning different sources, it is the editorial team itself that suggested the following comparison[18] (fig. 6 and 7) by placing the two cartoons in the same issue. With explicit reference to Grosz, Wang Guodong 王国栋 links the Chinese critical situation on the eve of the Sino-Japanese war to the domestic evils of the German society satirized by the painter. The "pornographic behaviour" of the Manchurian and Japanese characters in the frame also addresses the question of "erotic cartoons", commonly deemed inappropriate under those dramatic circumstances. Here, Wang exemplifies a satirical use of eroticism, legitimizing it by drawing on a global *imaginaire*. At that time, major challenges urged the world to seek unity, and cartoons could actively take part in the endeavour.

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[18] For this comparison, I am indebted to Crespi (2012).

3. Conclusions

The present contribution focuses on the discursive role of the *Other* in the construction/evolution of Chinese satirical journalism, diachronically addressing the different approaches that Chinese cartoonists adopted to acknowledge and exploit their participation in the global scenario.

Drawing on the most up-do-date research on the topic, the first section retraced key moments (i.e. cultural artifacts) in the evolution of the Chinese production in the global network from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, with particular emphasis on Japan-China asymmetrical relationships. Analyzing key steps in the development of satirical illustrated journalism and, more in general, of cartooning in the wider context of cultural exchanges within an "interliterary community" contributes to proving the pivotal role of Japan as a handy exemplum for the reformation of the Chinese media context. The considerable gap between the two countries in acknowledging the communication power of cartoons and satirical illustrated journalism is informative of the limits of both Chinese editors and the authors' agency within the late Qing-early Republican editorial market.

The embraced transcultural perspective on the cartoon-related media reveals that Chinese cultural agents were negatively influenced by the particularly unstable (especially as compared to the Japanese reference) social and political circumstances in producing "creative translations". In fact, the success of the *Shanghai Sketch* in the late Twenties not only bears witness to the growing eagerness of Chinese media to fit into a more dynamic global scenario, but also reveals their ability in adapting to the context by inscribing the evolution of this visual language in an all-inclusive literary and artistic national discourse, which provided a "safer" space for cartoonists in which to operate.

In this perspective, the magazine *Modern Sketch* represents an even more confident approach to transculturality in which the relationship with the Other becomes systematic and is analytically addressed. A clear manifesto of the cartoonists' intentions emerges since the magazine's first issue, despite its uneven implementation throughout its publishing history. Except for some details in the layout, *Modern Sketch* claims the right to creatively re-elaborate the "satirical universals" and, in general, the visual grammar of both the classical and recognized models (*Punch/Puck*) and the contemporary ones. The result is a recurring but inconsistent reference to the foreign model and never, in any case, a slavish copy. Another element that emerges from the visual and textual analysis is the peculiar relationship between the cartoonists and the magazine's readership: both, in fact, seem to know exactly what the cultural milieu was, and self-confidently exploit and enjoy a consolidated westernized taste.

By employing the transcultural approach to a 1930s case study, the present contribution offers new elements both for the understanding of a pivotal era in the development of Chinese visual culture and for the foundation of future investigation of modern and contemporary satirical journalism and publishing.

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Martina Caschera was born in Naples (Italy), in May 1986. She holds BA and MA degrees in Chinese Language, Literature and Culture (University of Naples, L'Orientale). She spent two academic years in China, the second funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Scholarship for researching in Visual Arts. Before and after defending her PhD thesis on Chinese cartoon as a media phenomenon in 1920s-1930s China (currently under translation for publication) in March 2016, she took part in several international conferences (Zurich, London, Milan). The publication of the paper "Women in Cartoons – Liang Baibo and the visual representation of Women in *Modern Sketch*" in the *International Journal of Comic Art* is forthcoming. Dr. Caschera teaches Chinese Literature at the University of Chieti-Pescara.

martina.caschera@gmail.com