

**SURREALISM
FROM
PARIS TO
SHANGHAI**

Lauren
Walden


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INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Surrealism’ was first coined by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 to characterise a ballet entitled *Parade*. Comprising set designs and costumes by Pablo Picasso, dancers metamorphosed into skyscrapers and other ciphers of modernity. This ballet and Apollinaire’s nascent musings on Surrealism were typified by ‘surprising analogies based on reality’.¹ In 1924, the Surrealist movement itself was founded in Paris by the writer and poet André Breton with a more robust philosophical orientation. Bretonian Surrealism adopted the ideas of both Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, aligning the politics of revolution with the psychology of dreams. The movement gradually gained a significant international following. Yet, China is not a country habitually associated with Surrealism’s worldwide expansion and is generally overshadowed by its neighbour Japan.

Several Japanese artists, including Taro Okamoto, were readily assimilated into Surrealist networks with their paintings on display at the key *International Surrealist Exhibition* (1938) that took place at the Galérie des Beaux-Arts in

1. Willard Bohn, ‘From Surrealism to Surrealism: Apollinaire and Breton’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36, no. 2 (1977): 201.

Paris which saw the group's contribution to the movement formally acknowledged by their Parisian counterparts.² Yet, in a disavowal of the colonialist Mercator projection, the infamous *Surrealist Map of the World* (1929) sized nations in accordance with their perceived cultural prowess, positioning China relatively prominently while Japan was completely omitted (Figure 1).

Moreover, in 1925, Breton spoke of plans to visit China in his 'Lettre aux Voyants' [Letter to the seers] describing a dream. He affirmed: 'It appears that I must go to China around 1931 and run great dangers there for twenty years'.³ This was a journey that Breton would never empirically make, perhaps owing to his superstitious reasoning surrounding the dream-escape. Rather, Breton asserted he could 'transport myself in thought to China much more easily than elsewhere'.⁴ Indeed, art historian Mitter's notion of a 'virtual cosmopolis',⁵ comprising contact with different nations through print media as opposed to travel, was thoroughly instrumentalised by Breton and his Surrealist coterie.

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2. Okamoto (1911–1996) was a Surrealist studying in Paris at the time. Later conscripted into the Japanese army, he became a prisoner of war in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Other prominent Japanese Surrealists include Fukuzawa Ichiro, credited with establishing the movement in Japan. In 1936, Ichiro painted the work *Oxen* in the Japanese-occupied territory of Manchuria in northern China, denouncing the conditions under which Chinese colonial subjects lived.
 3. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 201.
 4. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 201. Whilst I haven't found definitive proof of Breton's early textual engagement with China, it seems probable based on this statement that he was clearly interested in Chinese thought at this juncture.
 5. Keith Moxey and Partha Mitter, 'A "Virtual Cosmopolis": Partha Mitter in Conversation with Keith Moxey', *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 3 (2013): 381–92.

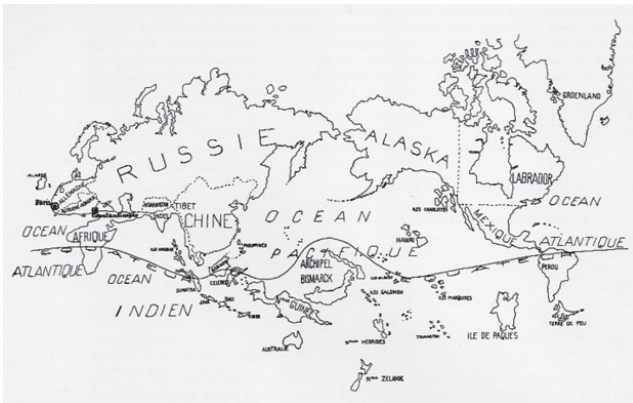


Figure 1. Anon. *The Surrealist Map of the World*, in *Variétés* (Brussels, 1929): 26–27.

Surrealism, although originally conceived in the West, often espoused views that jarred with the rationality of Western civilisation stemming from the enlightenment, a trajectory which was perceived to constrain the imagination. As such, I believe it is valid to question whether Surrealism can be canonised as solely a ‘Western’ movement while fundamentally opposing its core philosophical trajectory. Hereupon, in 1925, at the very beginning of the Surrealist movement, André Breton comments ‘it is as if doors were opening in the Orient, as if the echo of an all-enfolding agitation reached me, as if a breath, which might well be that of Freedom, suddenly makes the old chest of Europe, on which I had gone to sleep, resound’.⁶ Hence, the ‘Orient’ becomes

6. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 201.

synonymous with untrammelled liberty and a capacity for spiritual renewal which Europe can benefit from.

Yet, Surrealism's somewhat idealised, orientalist visions do not preclude engagement with the empirical realities of China during the 1920s and 1930s. Breton also pens another dream in 1926 revolving around 'a city near Shanghai'. This location is couched as the site of an indigenous uprising against colonialism.⁷ Indeed, Shanghai had been partially occupied by imperial powers, including France, since the signing of unequal treaties after China's defeat in the First Opium Wars (1839–1842). Shanghai is oneirically reified as a battleground for Surrealism's anti-colonial fervour. Moreover, the Surrealists roundly condemned French colonial enterprise, culminating in the movement's anti-colonial exhibition, mounted in conjunction with the French Communist Party in 1931.

As we shall discover, despite these potent philosophical resonances, the lack of reciprocal involvement between European Surrealists and the Shanghai avant-garde of the 1930s has unfortunately discouraged transnational research in this domain. In fact, Surrealism was highly influential among avant-garde circles in cosmopolitan Shanghai despite their inability to fully penetrate Surrealist spaces in Europe.

7. André Breton, 'Je me trouve en Chine' [I find myself in China]. Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, Fonds André Breton 02.03.1926: BRT 38.

In particular, the Shanghainese ‘Storm Society’ [Juelanshe],⁸ established by artist Pang Xunqin⁹ and artist-critic Ni Yide, specifically credits Surrealism in their founding manifesto of 1932,¹⁰ proclaiming: ‘Since the beginning of the 20th century, the European art world has witnessed the advent of new phenomena: the cries of the Fauvists, the deformations of Cubism, the vehemence of Dada and the desires of the Surrealists.’¹¹ Furthermore, in 1935, a journal called *Yifeng* [Art winds], published a 104-page special edition on Surrealism including a translation of Breton’s 1924 *Manifesto* by the Shanghai painter Zhao Shou.¹² This was associated with the Chinese Independent Art Association (1934–1935),¹³ whose founders were returning students who had initially encountered Surrealism in Japan. Its founding members were Li Dongping, Liang Xihong, Zhao Shou, Zeng Ming, and French artist André Bessin. Members of this group, such as Zhao Shou and Zeng Ming, formally identified themselves as Surrealists.

Further to these avant-garde groupings which focused on painting, photomontage was also deployed by cartoonists

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8. According to the recollections of group member Yang Taiyang: ‘We came up with the name [*Storm Society*] together. *Storm Society* expresses the idea of a stormy wave, something very strong and progressive. This stormy wave came from the sea crashing down on this era. A stormy wave, a very powerful one, had been formed.’ See ‘Yang Taiyang: The Storm Society Interview’, in *Shanghai Modern 1914–1945*, ed. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Ken Lum, and Shengtian Zheng (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 242.
 9. Pang Xunqin is explored in greater depth in a case study on pp. 24–46.
 10. The full manifesto of the Storm Society is reproduced in Appendix I.
 11. *Yishu Xunkan* [Art trimonthly] 1, no. 5 (1932): 8.
 12. Chinghsin Wu, ‘Reality Within and Without: Surrealism in Japan and China in the Early 1930s’, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 26, no. 1 (2016): 189–208.
 13. The Chinese Independent Art Association is explored in a separate chapter on pp. 64–79. The group’s name is henceforth abbreviated to CIAA.

in a more political idiom to satirise the semi-colonial cityscape of treaty port Shanghai and serve as a brutal reminder of mounting Japanese aggression. Fine art photography also flourished, artists such as Lang Jingshan utilising experimental Surrealist techniques to embellish the nude female form. While this text focuses on Chinese Surrealism in an art historical context, Surrealist-inspired literature could be found in the work of the new sensationalist writer and essayist Shi Zhecun. According to Chinese literature scholar Rosenmeier, the New Sensationalists ‘most famous works reflect, the speed, chaos and intensity of the metropolis . . . they saw themselves as an avant-garde that rejected the tenets of realism and social engagement’.¹⁴ Shi had composed short stories such as *At the Paris Cinema* (1931) and *Demon’s Way* (1931), which interrogated Shanghainese contradictions between a cosmopolitan, yet resolutely colonial modernity, enmeshed with explorations of the city’s urbanites via Freudian psychoanalysis.

As Chinese Studies scholar Schaefer reveals, Shi turned down an offer by the American Surrealist poet Eugène Jolas to dedicate a special issue of *Xiandai* [Les Contemporains] magazine to Surrealism, believing that it would attract criticism as fantastical escapism, something that had previously been said of his own work.¹⁵ In the text ‘Miró’s painting’, Shi recollects that he had several links with Chinese artists who had studied abroad, several of whom had nevertheless produced front covers for *Xiandai* in a Surrealist style such

14. Christopher Rosenmeier, ‘The New Sensationalists: Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiyong, Liu Na’Ou’, in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Ming Dong Gu (Oxford: Routledge, 2018).

15. William Schaefer, *Shadow Modernism: Photography, Writing, and Space in Shanghai, 1925–1937* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 257.

as Zhou Duo, incongruously displacing Surrealism's iconic fish amid an urban environment. Hence, these images will be analysed as part of Surrealism's artistic environment in Shanghai. Moreover Shi Zhecun, describes the work Pang Xunqin brought back from Paris as 'almost all Surrealist',¹⁶ testifying to the range and reach of the movement in Shanghai. Yet, one of the most evident omissions relating to Surrealism's reception in the city are its three-dimensional forms.

Surrealism's theorisation of the object was only formalised in 1935, its sculptural oeuvre reaching its apogee in the 1930s. Consequently, the three-dimensional aspects of Surrealism most likely peaked too late for Shanghainese artists to digest before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Nevertheless, Surrealism in Shanghai became a multi-faceted movement that had a buoyancy and sphere of influence which has not been sufficiently explored.

The overarching historical context naturally shaped Surrealism's reception in the city. Undoubtedly, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, sparked off by a protest against China's response to the Treaty of Versailles was of primary significance. Here, in the wake of the First World War, imperial powers ruled that the former German Concession of Shandong be ceded to Japan by the Chinese government, a request that was complied with by the fledgling Beiyang government whose primary aim was to suppress internal strife amidst competing warlord factions.¹⁷ As such, the May Fourth

16. Shi Zhecun, 'Milo de hua' [Miró's painting], in *Shi Zhecun qishinian wenxuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 336.

17. The Beiyang government (1912–1928) was established after the fall of the Qing dynasty and its monarchy. It was initially run by military general Yuan Shikai until his death in 1916. Due to an ensuing power vacuum, the Beiyang

Movement responded to this national humiliation, catalysing the rejection of traditional Confucian values pertaining to obedience and a blossoming of individual rights enshrined in Western philosophy since the European Enlightenment. Whilst Surrealism itself did not conform to the values of the enlightenment, in the artistic domain, a small but significant number of Chinese artists began to study abroad, particularly in Paris and Japan where modernist currents including Surrealism were encountered directly.¹⁸

According to Huajing Xiu's PhD thesis, around 200 Chinese students studied abroad between 1912 and 1937, their primary destinations being Japan, France, the UK, the US, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland.¹⁹ This seems to be a primary route for Surrealism's emergence in Shanghai; students who had studied abroad founded avant-garde groups such as the aforementioned Storm Society and Chinese Independent Art Association upon their return to the city. Warlordism was largely eradicated in 1928 and China was ruled under Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party, the *Guomindang*, in a decade of relative freedom which allowed for an expansion of culture despite the insipient threat of Japanese aggression.

Amid this historical backdrop, the idiosyncratic status of Shanghai was particularly conducive to artistic endeavour. As Zheng and Danzker, curators of the exhibition 'Shanghai Modern' in Munich (2004) put it:

government was beset by clashes between warlord factions before Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party led the Northern Expedition between 1926 and 1928 ousting warlords and unifying China.

18. Most Japanese Surrealist artists had anti-establishment tendencies therefore it was not viewed as a contradiction to learn about Western avant-garde artistic movements from them.
19. Huajing Xiu, 'Shanghai-Paris: Chinese Painters in France and China, 1919-1937' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2000), 74.

One of the first global cities of the modern era: in the first decades of the 20th century a whirlpool of revolutionary ideas, conflicting nationalist aspirations, unrestrained commercial expansion and military occupation. A glittering *fata morgana*, by 1930 the fifth largest city in the world. Shanghai seduces and entices the imagination of the time.²⁰

Shanghai became a breeding ground for cross-cultural influences primarily due to the enforced cosmopolitanism of two major trading ports leased to the imperial powers under duress, the Shanghai International Settlement and the French Concession, the latter becoming the cultural nexus of the city. Shanghai's French Concession (*La concession française de Shanghai*) was established as a treaty port in 1849 following China's defeat in the Opium Wars in 1842, in which the Qing dynasty tried and failed to ban the trading of this illicit and harmful substance that had cost many Chinese lives and livelihoods. During the 1920s and 1930s, the French Concession undoubtedly became the cultural epicentre of Shanghai, boasting the Shanghai Art College where nude drawing and Western painting were taught.

The founding of the Shanghai Art College (1913–1952) was strongly supported by the artist Liu Haisu whose pedagogical stance advocated that 'rejuvenating China's fine arts required engaging with and assimilating foreign trends of the time'.²¹ As the detailed monograph by Shanghai studies scholar Jane Zheng reveals, the college was a private art

20. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Ken Lum, and Shengtian Zheng, *Shanghai Modern: 1919–1945* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 18.

21. Paul French, 'The Shanghai Academy of Art: The School that Gave the City Its Early 20th Century Aesthetic', *South China Morning Post*, 15 April 2021.

school with programs in both Western art and *guohua*.²² Hence, hybrid interactions inevitably occurred between the two. Indeed, the Shanghai Art College hosted many teachers (Zhang Xian, Ni Yide, Pang Xunqin) and graduates (Zhou Duo, Duan Pingyou, Fu Lei) from the Storm Society who would utilise Surrealism in Shanghai.²³

The college is perhaps best known for the fiasco surrounding the ‘nude model incident’. The Shanghai Art College incorporated life drawing into the syllabus in 1920, which provoked moral controversy, the apotheosis of which was Liu Haisu’s ‘pen battle’ with warlord Sun Chuanfang in 1926.²⁴ Conservative ideologies and those attributable to the relative social liberalism of a semi-colonial concession were pitted against each other. The nude features heavily among Shanghainese Surrealist-inspired artwork of the 1930s and would continue to incite debate. That said, the genre gradually became more accepted and regularly featured in the periodical press. It would seem that the gradual dissemination of the genre can be traced back to these debates of the 1920s held at the Shanghai Art College.

Shanghai’s French Concession was also the home of numerous artists’ studios and the French Jesuit L’Université de L’Aurore [Zhendan Daxue] where degree courses were taught in French alongside French language preparatory courses for study abroad. Moreover, burgeoning publishing houses and their pictorial magazines were abundant in this enclave due to relaxed rules surrounding censorship and the provision of a safe haven for political dissidents. Indeed, the French

22. See Jane Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art: The Shanghai Art College, 1913–1937* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016).

23. Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art*, 134.

24. Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art*, 106–7.

Concession was also home to the infamous gangster and leader of the ‘Green Gang’, Du Yuesheng, who ran illegal businesses such as prostitution and protection rackets in cahoots with the administrators of the French Concession while cooperating with them on the opium trade.²⁵ Furthermore, the first ever meeting of the Chinese Communist Party took place in Shanghai’s French Concession in 1921. Among the delegates was a young Mao Zedong.

French historian Marie-Claire Bergère notes that in 1910 the population of the French Concession amounted to 116,000 inhabitants, 1,500 of these were foreign residents, the majority of whom were not French.²⁶ As such, the Concession formed a cosmopolitan convergence point of many cultures. Yet, in terms of architecture, the oft-cited nomenclature describing Shanghai as the ‘Paris of the East’, may well stem from what Bergère denotes as an ‘exercise in urban planning and beautification, an exotic extension of the Haussmannian restructuring of Paris’.²⁷ Indeed, the Concession was renowned for its public parks, tree-lined streets, and wide avenues. In terms of governance, Bergère states that universal Jacobin values were promoted with Chinese citizens being granted access to most spaces which was more ahead of its time in comparison to the international concession.²⁸ The Concession was also synonymous with nightlife, parties, and leisure, home to the renowned

25. Zheng reveals Du was also on the school board of the Shanghai Art College! Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art*, 125.

26. Marie-Claire Bergère, *Histoire de Shanghai* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

27. Bergère, *Histoire de Shanghai*.

28. Bergère, *Histoire de Shanghai*.

Cercle Sportif Français, the French Club.²⁹ In short, the French Concession commingled the sordid with the sublime.

How then did Surrealism, an intrinsically anti-colonial movement, survive in an imperialist outpost? Firstly, it should be noted that with the threat of Japan's totalitarian form of imperialism on the horizon, the foreign concessions were generally looked upon as a lesser evil, though all forms of colonialism are, of course, inherently racist and exploitative. Secondly, the French Concession had the ability to subsume dissent much like mainland France itself. The original Parisian Surrealist groupings were notorious for their subversion of the French state. On 2 July 1925, the Surrealists infamously attended a banquet in honour of the Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux. The gathering was largely comprised of the conservative literary elite. Here, the Surrealists distributed pamphlets against the French ambassador to Japan, Paul Claudel, who had attacked the movement.³⁰

29. For more information on the Cercle Sportif Français, see my short article, L. Walden, 'Elite Cosmopolitanism in Shanghai's Former French Concession: The Cercle Sportif Français', *Visualising China*, University of Bristol, 2021, accessed 1 May 2024, <https://visualisingchina.net/blog/2021/02/10/guest-blog-the-cercle-sportif-francais-elite-cosmopolitanism-in-shanghai-former-french-concession/>.

30. Olivier Belin, 'Quand Le Banquet Tourne Mal: Les Surréalistes Contre Paul Claudel en 1925' [When the dinner didn't go down well: The Surrealists versus Paul Claudel in 1925], *Bulletin de La Société Paul Claudel* 225 (2018): 43–60. Claudel stated, 'In terms of recent movements, none will lead to any actual transformation or new creation, neither Dada nor Surrealism, which have only one meaning: pederasty', 45. Claudel was a staunch Roman Catholic and French Nationalist. Moreover, in the tract the Surrealists distributed they state: 'We hope with all our being that the colonial revolutions, the wars and the insurrections will destroy Western civilization . . . We take this opportunity to publicly break with everything that is French, in words and deeds.' Irene Albers, 'The Surrealists' Anti-Colonialism', in Tom Holert, Franke Anselm, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present c. 1930*, trans. Kevin Kennedy (Berlin: HKW Diaphanes, 2018), 244–47.

The Surrealists drew attention to the colonial enterprises Claudel was complicit in. Subsequently, a quarrel ensued between the guests and the Surrealist writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris shouted out of a window ‘Long Live China’ before affirming ‘Down with France’.³¹ This led to a street brawl with Leiris ironically only being saved from a lynching by the police.³² Moreover, the expression of anti-colonial sentiment itself was not illegal in Shanghai’s foreign concessions, both English- and French-language newspapers published such viewpoints as it was ultimately the official stance of the ruling Nationalist Party, despite their pragmatic alignments with the foreign concessions on numerous occasions.

Furthermore, it is possible that avant-garde art became an unintentional tool in reflecting the laissez-faire attitude of the French Concession towards prostitution, gambling, and opium smoking. While many artists intended to critique such an atmosphere, the visual reification of desire did little to attenuate the lure of a liberal enclave. These vices were tolerated in return for Du’s Green Gang controlling Chinese citizens in the concession.³³ In short, the pluralism of the French Concession could countervail critique, including that of Surrealism. In fact, the *Journal de Shanghai* (1927–1945), the ‘organ of French interests in the Far East’ published the work of Storm Society painter Pang Xunqin in 1932 lauding

This adds weight to my argument that Surrealism should not necessarily be perceived as a Western movement, despite its Western origins.

31. Irene Albers, ‘The Surrealists’ Anti-Colonialism’, 245.

32. Irene Albers, ‘The Surrealists’ Anti-Colonialism’, 245.

33. Olivia Hunter, ‘Crime and Security in Shanghai’s French Concession 1919–1937’, *Earlham Historical Journal* 9, no. 2 (2017): 114.

the fact that he had studied in Paris³⁴ in a fervent expression of ‘Soft Power’.³⁵

Despite the enforced nature of its establishment, Cinquini, a French art historian based in Shanghai, notes the cosmopolitan characteristics of the French Concession led to artistic experimentation during the Republican era (1911–1949),³⁶ stating: ‘One should insist upon the particular features of the Shanghai French Concession as a space catalysing cultural relations between France and China as if Shanghai was playing the role of a melting pot, even a magic cauldron for Chinese artists searching for foreign influences to aid in national renewal.’³⁷ Indeed, following the impetus of the May Fourth Movement, the intention of certain Chinese artists was to pragmatically utilise Western iconography as a springboard to forge a new national identity at a time of political turbulence. Many artists who utilised Surrealism in China seem to align with the premise of ‘grabbism’ (*nalaizhuyi*) proposed by the modernist writer Lu Xun (1934).³⁸

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34. ‘Quelques oeuvres du Peintre Chinois Hiunkin Pang’ [Some works by the Chinese painter Pang Xunqin], *Le Journal de Shanghai*, 25 September 1932.
35. Political scientist Joseph Nye believed ‘Soft Power’ reflected the fact that ‘proof of power lies not in resources but the ability to change the behaviour of states’. Joseph S. Nye, ‘Soft Power’, *Foreign Policy* 80 (1990): 153–71, 155.
36. The term ‘Republican era’ refers to the period between 1911 and 1949 after the overthrow of the last monarchical dynasty, the Qing, in 1911, until the Communist takeover of China in 1949.
37. Philippe Cinquini, ‘Les artistes chinois en France et l’Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris à l’époque de la Première République de Chine (1911–1949): pratiques et enjeux de la formation artistique académique’ (Thesis, Université Charles-de-Gaulle – Lille 3, 2017), 33.
38. Lu Xun, ‘Nalaizhuyi’ [Grabbism], in *Zhongguo ribao* [China Daily], 7 June 1934. The phenomenon of ‘grabbism’ however, was clearly being practised by modern artists in Shanghai earlier than 1934 when Lu Xun first wrote about it. It should be stated that Lu Xun tended to favour left-wing socialist art rather than modernist works, but he wrote widely for magazines and newspapers

Lu Xun described China as isolated from other countries, espousing ‘closed-ism’ (*biguanzhuyi*). Instead, he demands a relationship of reciprocity between East and West, citing the fact that several Chinese antiquities have made their way to French museums,³⁹ therefore China should reciprocate by selectively extrapolating ideas from the West as opposed to passively receiving them. Lu Xun states that if ideas from the West are not ‘grabbed’, then Chinese culture will remain in a state of stagnation rather than becoming ‘modern’. Several forms of cultural exchange in Republican China could be read as ‘grabbism’ due to their hybridity among which recourse to Surrealism seemed to be one of the most prominent choices amid several competing modernist currents.

Certainly, copious Shanghainese journals make mention of Surrealism as an aesthetic phenomenon and knowledge of the movement became widespread among well-informed artists. The earliest article dedicated to art-historical Surrealism, to my knowledge, appeared as a short column of the daily newspaper *Shenbao* [The Shun Pao] published on 4 June 1931.⁴⁰ In 1933, Ni Yide wrote a much more comprehensive article based on his understanding of Breton’s

that most modernist artists would be acquainted with. Lu Xun actually criticised the modernist journal *Wenyi Huabao* [Literature and arts pictorial] which often featured Surrealist front covers. The journal editors stated they wanted to give the reader free rein rather than educate the masses. For more information on Lu Xun’s critique of *Wenyi*, see Paul Bevan, *Intoxicating Shanghai: An Urban Montage: Art and Literature in Pictorial Magazines during Shanghai’s Jazz Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 143–57.

39. Some of course were illegally pillaged.

40. Xie Haiyan, ‘Surrealist Painting’, *Shenbao*, 6 April 1931. This assertion is predicated on a database search. References to numerous Shanghainese journals which acknowledged Surrealism (these are just examples) are woven throughout this text.

Le Surréalisme et la Peinture [Surrealism and painting].⁴¹ Much later, as previously mentioned, a special edition of *Yifeng* magazine (1935) by the CIAA focused exclusively on Surrealism including the translation by Zhao Shou of the *Surrealist Manifesto*. It is clear therefore that artists who studied abroad and either read Japanese or French would have likely been acquainted with the manifesto much earlier. In the case of Zhao Shou, fellow CIAA member Liang Xihong reveals that he became interested in the *Surrealist Manifesto* around 1930,⁴² when he was still a student in Guangzhou before studying abroad in Japan in 1933.⁴³ Indeed, the special edition talks about Surrealist concepts in significant depth.

The most lucid writing on Surrealism in China is ostensibly penned by CIAA member Li Dongping. For example, his article in *Yifeng* entitled ‘Shenme Jiaozuo Chaoxianshizhuyi’ [What is Surrealism?] discussed the movement in relation to

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41. Ni Yide, ‘Chaoxianshizhuyi de huihua’ [Surrealist painting], *Yishu* [L’Art] 1 (1933). The text is referred to in more depth in the chapter ‘Chinese Interpretations of European Surrealist Works’.
 42. Liang Xihong, ‘Chaoxianshizhuyi huajialun’ [Theories of Surrealist painters], *Yifeng* [Art winds] 3, no. 10 (1935): 27–28.
 43. Interestingly the fascinating article by Chen Qing, ‘Yijie de lujing yu yiyi de zhuanhuan: lun Zhao Shou fanyi “Chaoxianshizhuyi xuanyan” Zhong de ji ge wenti’ [Changing meanings through the process of translation: Discussing issues relating to Zhao Shou’s translation of the Surrealist Manifesto], *Wenyi Yanjiu* 6 (2016): 122–31, argues that it is more likely Zhou Shou learnt some French while a student in Guangzhou and translated Breton’s original manifesto rather than the Japanese version, particularly given none of the CIAA members complimented the Japanese school of Surrealism, a tendency attributed to fervent anti-Japanese sentiment at the time. While I do not believe enough concrete evidence is given to assert Zhao Shou definitely translated from the original French, what is certain is that Zhao Shou focused his translation on issues that resonated with Chinese traditional art. There is also the possibility that Zhao Shou translated the Surrealist Manifesto from a combination of the French and Japanese versions.

reality and dream. For Li Dongping, it is the porosity between these two phenomena which typifies the painterly expression of the movement. He comments that Surrealism ‘freely distorts the object, eschewing the rules and constraints of the painting process, through the imagination, balancing consciousness with instinct, to take its current form’.⁴⁴

Later, in 1936, an even more informed article is written by the same author for *Haibin Wenyi* [Seaside culture] entitled *Chaoxianshizhuyi qianqian houhou* [Surrealism before and after]. The article explores Surrealism in contradistinction to Dada which is criticised for its nihilistic, aloof approach to society. Freud is described as the ‘scientific background’ [*kexue beijing*] to Surrealism and an explanation of automatism [*zidongzhuyi*] is given.⁴⁵ However, no mention is made of Hegel, Marx, or the revolutionary, anti-nationalist aspects of the movement in any art journal to my knowledge. The only significant mention of the revolutionary aspects of Surrealism comes in 1932 through *Xiandai*, edited by Shi Zhecun. Here, in a piece entitled ‘Faguo wenyi zazhi’ [French literature and art periodicals], the author Gao Ming cites *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924–1929) and *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (1930–1933). He notes in relation to the latter that the group had turned towards Communism.⁴⁶ Chiang Kai-shek brutally purged communists from Shanghai

44. Li Dongping, ‘Shenme Jiaozuo Chaoxianshizhuyi’ [What is Surrealism?], *Yifeng* [Art winds] 3, no. 10 (1935): 27. Interestingly, the Chinese term for Surrealism literally means ‘exceed reality-ism’.

45. Li Dongping, ‘Chaoxianshizhuyi qianqian houhou’ [Surrealism before and after], *Haibin Wenyi* [Seaside culture] Issue 2 (1936): 31–35.

46. In *Xiandai* [Les Contemporains] 4 (1932). For further detail, see Xu Jun and Song Xuezi, ‘Chaoxianshizhuyi zaizhongguo de yijie’ [The translation and introduction of Surrealism in China], *Dangdai waiyuyanjiu* [Contemporary foreign language research] 2 (2010): 36–41.

in 1927 in cahoots with the authorities of the foreign concessions in an incident known as the Shanghai massacre.⁴⁷ As such, it was dangerous to show any form of sympathy with communist tendencies. For example, Shi Zhecun noted that during the two years he studied at L'Université de l'Aurore, his friend the author Dai Wangshu was arrested on suspicion of being a communist.⁴⁸ Therefore, many authors and artists may have chosen to self-censor the revolutionary aspects of Surrealism even if they were aware of them.

Despite this substantial evidence base, the negative views of certain scholars regarding Surrealism's influence in Shanghai such as art historian Ralph Crozier are difficult to overturn. He comments: 'It did not catch on in Shanghai, the centre of the Chinese art world.'⁴⁹ Crozier asserts that members of the Storm Society were 'experimenting in an effort to reach their own individual style, one could almost say ransacking the field of European Modernism'.⁵⁰ While there were several forms of modernism in the air in Shanghai at this juncture, many Chinese cultural and iconographic idiosyncrasies blended with Western techniques to catalyse a hybrid, cross-cultural form of artistic exchange. Moreover, in

47. Before the Shanghai Massacre of 1927, the Communist Party and Nationalist Party held a formal alliance, even receiving aid from the Soviet Union. Nationalist party leader, Chiang Kai-shek, concerned the Communist Party was gaining too much influence, having recently created a workers' commune in Shanghai, joined forces with the Foreign Concessions to stage a brutal massacre. This would lead to the ruralisation of the Chinese Communist Party.

48. See Shi Zhecun, 'Zhengdan liangnian' [Two years at Aurore University], in *Shi zhecun Qishinian wenxuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1996).

49. Ralph Crozier, 'Post-Impressionism in Pre-war Shanghai: The Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China', in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), 149.

50. Crozier, 'Post-Impressionism in Pre-war Shanghai', 146.

CONCLUSION

The pervasive presence of Surrealism in Shanghai during the mid-1930s can be attributed to a wide-range of social, cultural, and political factors; a yearning for national renewal, the stagnancy of the *guohua* genre, anti-colonial protest, the rise of Western individualism, desire, circumnavigating censorship, and perhaps most universally, the steadfast search for artists' own unique voices, which could be attained through the intertwining of Chinese and Surrealist iconography. Surrealism, more than any other modernist movement, could provide a Chinese artist with such a toolkit through its core ideological bedrock of Freudian psychoanalysis, which provided a catalyst for self-reflection and expression. At its height, the Surrealist dreamscape combined individual and collective concerns, being used to manifest political dystopia as we see in the case of photomontage artists and Pang Xunqin, while other artists used notions such as automatism, incongruous juxtaposition, assemblage, appropriation, and the marvellous to dialectically blur the lines between dream and reality in the resoundingly contradictory city of Shanghai where everyday existence was torn between tradition and modernity, colonialism and feudalism.

Shanghai's French Concession formed a geographic locus where all of these different elements came into play, a haven for returnee Chinese students who had studied abroad in both France and Japan to put their training in Western art into practice. In turn, Surrealism, at its core, contains elements of Chinese thought, particularly the Daoist concept of *wuwei* or 'non-action', the movement advocating a revolution of the mind as a means to a revolution in society. Indeed, Girard, a French Surrealist artist and critic, points out that Daoism has been significant in Chinese social history, catalysing many peasant revolts.¹ Moreover, the tension in Surrealism between collective revolution and individual desire is reified by Shanghainese elaborations of the female nude. Lang Jingshan first introduced classical female beauty into Shanghai print culture in 1928 through the genre of photography and its indexical relation to reality before experimenting with Surrealist techniques. Anathema to Chinese artistic tradition, the nude could be – as in Western Surrealist practice – distorted, debased, and dismembered in an expression of rising political tension displaced onto the deeply personal realm of desire as per the predilections of *manhua* artists. A testament to its global appeal, Surrealism is not a culturally specific movement and has been adapted and assimilated in many diverse nations and cultures, from Egypt to Peru and Japan.

Despite its Parisian origins, it is in no way 'French' but a cosmopolitan hybrid, buoyed by the innovations of émigré artists. In turn, Shanghai, carved up into foreign concessions,

1. Guy Girard, 'Taoism', in *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism* edited by M. Richardson, D. Ades, K. Fijalkowski, S. Harris and G. Sebbag (Bloomsbury Visual Arts: London, 2019): 308–311.

was viewed by many citizens as distinct from being 'Chinese'. Of course, Surrealism was not alone in appealing to Chinese artists, increasingly trained in all forms of modern and realist Western painting. Cubism and its reassembling of fragmented parts, the vivid and non-representational colour palettes of Post-Impressionism and Fauvism along with Dadaism's irrationality all left an indelible mark on Shanghai, despite the fact their zenith of influence had already passed in Europe. These movements were also 'grabbed' in Shanghai at the same time as Surrealism during the 1930s. However, the interdisciplinarity of Surrealism as a movement encompassing literature, poetry, painting, photography, psychoanalysis, and politics arguably enjoyed one of the most widespread presences among the pictorials and periodicals of the era, whether formally acknowledged (as was the case of the Storm Society and CIAA) or otherwise. Moreover, it is perhaps Surrealism that best expresses the idiosyncrasies of Shanghai, an uncanny city where everyday reality was at once resoundingly strange yet familiar. Surrealism was also a highly active movement in the West during the 1930s, and as such, the most modern of all cultural borrowings.

Ultimately, both the European and Chinese Surrealist factions suffered the same fate, dispersal at the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 which merged into what we know in the West as the Second World War from 1939. Shanghai fell to the Japanese early in the conflict in November 1937. While Surrealism appeared sporadically until the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, Chinese modernism was largely limited to clandestine underground activities during the Mao era, with only fellow travellers of Communism such as Mexican muralists and Picasso allowed to be shown. Surrealism, however, was thoroughly resurrected after