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STUDIES ON ASIAN TOPICS NO. 9

CHINA IN THE 1980s –
AND BEYOND

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SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES ON CHINESE
JOKES AND CARTOONS

Christoph Harbsmeier

Editors' Introduction

The ability to view one's own cultural and social predicament with the smiling detachment of the joke is a hallmark of civilization. China has a rich tradition of jokes and these tell us something about how the Chinese react to their own culture. Christoph Harbsmeier follows the history of Chinese jokes from their beginning in the classical literature through various compilations of jokes from the third century down to our time, with digressions into Japanese and European jocular literature. In recent years, the jokes in China seem to have been driven so far underground that many Chinese will deny that they exist any longer. However, cartoons flourish in China today and the author follows the history of Chinese cartoons with a few examples of humorous paintings followed by a brief history of cartoon periodicals in the 1920s and 1930s. The latter half of the essay is an illustrated introduction to some of the leading cartoonists in China today, such as Hua Junwu, Liao Bingxiong, Ding Cong, and Fang Cheng. Christoph Harbsmeier arranged exhibitions of his cartoon collection at the Deichmann Library in Oslo, August 1982, at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, December 1982, and at Stanford University in May 1983.

Every joke is a little revolution, said George Orwell. By that token the Chinese have been a thoroughly revolutionary people for a very long time. Consider the history of the jest-book in traditional China. From the third-century *Xiaolin* (Forest of Laughter) down to the nineteenth-century *Xiaode hao* (Well Laughed) well over one hundred jest-books have come down to us.

It would not be funny but ludicrous to pretend to summarize such tremendous wealth of jocular folklore in a few pages. However, one thing needs emphasizing: the rich history of the Chinese joke provides sorely needed supplementary evidence on the *histoire de la mentalité chinoise*, offering, as it does, an irreverent counterpoint to the predominant public culture of traditional times. The jokes poke fun at the very authorities who were unassailable in real life. They deride the moralizing pomposity of public life. They defy many of the taboos that seem so rigidly enforced in traditional Chinese society.

For an understanding of the history of private consciousness and sensitivity in China - as opposed to public Chinese rhetoric - the jest books are invaluable sources. Jokes tell you something about what it felt like to be a Chinese. They tell you something about how the Chinese react to their own culture. It is important to realize that civilized people - past and present - are not just *representatives* of a culture, they also *react* to their own culture. After all, the ability to view one's own cultural and social predicament with the smiling detachment of the joke is a hallmark of civilization. Literary historians have neglected the popular joke at their own peril.¹

China's grand historian Sima Qian (145-c.76 BC), unlike his modern successors, honoured the jesters by according them a separate chapter of his *Shiji*. To the historian Sima Qian the test of a good jester was not so much whether he could tell a good joke but whether he could solve intractable political problems through the readiness of his wit. Here is a sample of the effective use of sarcastic wit from *Shiji*:

Once the First Emperor made it known that he intended to set up a great game-reserve all the way from Box Valley Pass in the east to Granary Store in Yong in the west.

'What a marvellous idea!' said jester Twisty Pole. 'You could let loose a whole mass of wild beasts and birds in it. And then, if there's an invasion, you can just let the gazelles and deer butt them with their horns. That'll send them packing!'

That was enough to make the First Emperor drop his scheme.²

CHINESE JEST-BOOKS

While historians were concerned with the political effectiveness of jokes and wit, philosophers were often more interested in their didactic use for moral enlightenment. The book *Zhuang Zi* is notoriously rich in profound humour and subtle jokes. The Han dynasty compilations *Shuo Yuan* and *Xin Xu* turn up surprising bits of Confucian humour. However, the first collection of jokes told for their amusement value dates from the time of the 'free discussions' (*qingtan*) in the third and fourth centuries AD. The *Xiaolin* (Forest of Laughter) of the third century AD, of which about 50 pieces with various pedigrees of authenticity survive today, is full of burlesque humour. It predominantly represents the sort of sneering humour

which caused Plato and Aristotle to consider superciliousness and disdainfulness to be constitutive elements of humour.³

The next famous jest-book that has come down to us is the *Qiyalu* (The Book of Smiles), reputedly by a scholar of legendary wit from the Sui dynasty, Hou Bo (fl. 581 AD). A collection of 41 stories under his name survives in a Dunhuang manuscript dated 723 AD, while 58 further pieces survive in various other compilations. Judging from the evidence we have Hou Bo must be regarded as a jester and a trickster, a learned Till Eulenspiegel of the Far East. Often Hou Bo uses his wit to solve political problems. Occasionally he will tell a joke. But basically he must be regarded as a man of the practical joke, the prank. Like his somewhat more vulgar successor Xu Wenchang (1521-1593) whose folklore continues to flourish to this day in Hong Kong, Hou Bo soon became a legend. Many good stories of varying origins have become attached to his name. Thus the tricksters Hou Bo and Xu Wenchang suffered much the same literary fate as their German cousin Till Eulenspiegel who died in 1350 and whose exploits were first published in Antwerp under the promising title *Ein kurtzweilig lesen von Dyl Vlenspiegel*.⁴

In the People's Republic today, *Afanti* (i.e. the legendary Effendi of the Turkish peoples) has taken over as the most popular jester and trickster.⁵ There have even been made films of *Afanti's* exploits in recent times, while Hou Bo and Xu Wenchang have receded into the limbo of arcane history.

The poet Su Dongpo (1036-1101) cultivated a very literary form of humour among his circle of friends. The collection *Ai Zi zashuo* (Miscellaneous Sayings of Ai Zi) consisting of 34 elegant literary pieces, is traditionally attributed to Su Dongpo, but this attribution was already doubted in Song times.⁶

The Ming dynasty scholar Lu Zhuo compiled a continuation of the *Ai Zi zashuo* entitled *Ai Zi houyu* (Later Sayings of Ai Zi) in 1576. In the introduction to this collection Lu Zhuo writes: 'From my youth I have always had a penchant for scurrilous tales. When I got hold of one I invariably noted it down.'⁷ The fifteen stories Lu Zhuo noted down, like the original *Ai Zi zashuo*, are indeed entertaining evidence of the humoristic sensitivity among Song and Ming scholars.

The Ming dynasty was undoubtedly the golden age of the Chinese jest-book. The folklorist and writer Feng Menglong (1574-1646), justly famous for his marvellous collections of short stories, also deserves great credit for collecting and systematizing traditional Chinese jocular folklore.

His monumental *Xiaofu* (The Realm of Laughter) contains about 720 jokes. Most of these are traditional, but true to his habits in other areas of folklore Feng Menglong has taken the opportunity to compose quite a few new jokes himself. In his characteristically plain introduction to his collection Feng writes:

The ancient as well as the modern world is one large realm of laughter. I myself and you my reader are within this realm, and we are both natural targets for gossip and ridicule. Without telling stories one does not become human. Without laughter one cannot tell stories. Without laughter and stories no world emerges. Oh Monk Budai! My master! My master!⁸

It seems that Feng Menglong attempts to define man as a fabulating and a laughing animal. He clearly attaches metaphysical and/or religious significance to laughter and dedicates his book to the memory of an inspired humorous Buddhist monk Budai (died 917).

The *Xiaofu* is thematically organized with separate sections on officials, degenerate Confucians, paupers, doctors and magicians, priests, eccentrics, loafers and cripples. There is also an interesting section on everyday matters, and a rich collection of erotic jokes.

Not surprisingly, the *Xiaofu* became a resounding success. So much so that Feng was inspired to add two more collections: *Guang xiaofu* (The Realm of Laughter Enlarged), and *Gujintan'gai* (General Tales, Old and New).

Among the Qing dynasty collections of jokes Shi Chengjin's *Xiaode hao* (Well Laughed) is notorious for its persistent attempt to use the joke as an instrument of progressive social criticism. *Xiaode hao* has therefore become a happy hunting-ground for compilers of modern Chinese jest-books since 1949.

More popular than *Xiaode hao*, both in Qing times and afterwards, was Cheng Shijue's *Xiaolin guangji* (The Forest of Laughter Extended), a veritable gold-mine of traditional Chinese joculography.

On the other hand *Xiaolin guangji* did come in for some heavy criticism from the journalist writer Wu Jianren (1867-1910). Wu Jianren wrote a collection of jokes entitled *Xin xiaolin guangji* (New Forest of Laughter Extended), and in the preface he wrote:

It is my humble opinion that among literary works serious prose is not as readily received as humorous talk. That is why collections of jokes are so well received. But Chinese joke collections are extremely stale. They all follow the same pattern and do not

give you any new insights or any new flavour. Among these collections there is the *Xiaolin guangji* with which even women and children are familiar. Regrettably the contents of this collection are vulgar and undignified. They are all of them dirty jokes from the lower strata of society. They bring their readers no gain. On the contrary they are designed to provoke improper desires. In order to improve on this situation I have written the *Xin xiaolin guangji*.⁹

Traditionally, literary critics in China have indeed taken a very dim view of jest books. Liu Xie (465-522) points out disparagingly that *xie* 'humorous' is related to *jie* 'all'. Jokes, Liu Xie complains, use shallow language and are vulgar in conception.¹⁰ Indeed, the earliest jokes we have are all written in a mercifully plain and easy style that contrasts sharply with Liu Xie's convoluted and defiantly obscure prose.

Liu Xie finds it scandalous that the historian Sima Qian should have condescended to devote a whole chapter of his History to the jesters, and he hastens to explain that this is because the jesters 'in spite of their extravagant one-sidedness were ultimately aiming for righteousness and just principles.'¹¹ Thus already Liu Xie explicitly declares the conformist political purpose of the jesters as a necessary excuse for accepting their humour. Cao Pei's (188-227) practice of telling jokes for the fun of it is disparaged by Liu Xie. And what makes things worse, in Liu's eyes, is that 'hundreds of people have followed this path of vulgarity.'¹²

Attitudes like Liu Xie's must have played their part in preventing the transmission of most of the early Chinese jokes. In a way it is quite surprising that so many jest-books have survived in such a climate of élitist literary taste.

The editors of the many modern selections of ancient jokes invariably make it plain in their docile and innocent introductions that jokes are important for their moral (revolutionary) content, and not because they are simply funny and enjoyable. But in their *selection* of ancient jokes for reprinting, most modern editors, while studiously avoiding all the erotic pieces, show an almost disconcerting total tolerance for scatological detail. They most certainly include many a good joke that cannot possibly have recommended itself to them on ideological grounds.¹³

Here we have a modern phenomenon with a long and distinguished cultural history. Traditionally, the prefaces of popular books very often provide the excuse for publication, but not the real reason. The prefaces explaining that *Jin*

Ping Mei is a moralistic novel reinforcing the conventional notion of divine retribution are not very good evidence that this is how the novel was perceived by the writers of the prefaces, let alone by the reading public. The case of the modern jest-books is closely similar.

CHINESE, JAPANESE AND WESTERN JOCULOGRAPHY

Even the briefest survey of the Chinese joculographic tradition would be grossly incomplete without a note on the history of the Chinese jest-book in Japan. The Japanese, for all their sustained interest in graphic humour and caricature through the ages, first began to recognize the humorous story or joke as a proper form of literature during the Keicho period (1596-1614). During the seventeenth century 20 collections of Chinese jokes were published in the original Chinese. The golden age of the Chinese joke in Japan came during the Anei period (1771-1781). Within that glorious decade no less than 90 such collections were published, often with Japanese transliteration added to the Chinese characters.

The *Seisuishō* (Wake-Sleep-Laughter) published between 1624 and 1643 contains 990 jokes and counts as a model for the host of Japanese joke collections that were to follow. In any case it remained unsurpassed in size.

R.H. Blyth's eccentric *Oriental Humour* contains a rich and inspired anthology of Japanese jokes.¹⁴ He rightly devotes a special section to the relation between Chinese and Japanese jokes.¹⁵ The overall impression is clear enough. What the Japanese did was to refine and polish the Chinese jokes and to produce inspired jokes of their own that came to possess a very strong specifically Japanese flavour.

Working mostly from the Japanese, Blyth has also produced a brief anthology of Chinese jokes through the ages. More reliable translations are available in Giles 1925 and in Levy 1974 and 1964. The latter is to be particularly recommended for its bibliography.

I am painfully aware that this brief survey of Chinese joculography falls miserably short on examples. On this score I hope to make ample amends in another place, but let me insert at least one illustrated joke, *THE WORTHY NEO-CONFUCIAN* (see No. 1):

A worthy Neo-Confucian was walking along in his dignified slow manner when it happened to start raining. The man began to run for shelter. Then he developed a bad conscience and said to himself: 'It is quite undignified to run wildly. Now when a gentleman has made a mistake he must not be afraid of making amends.' Then he braved the

rain again to return to where he had started to run and proceeded forward with well-measured steps.¹⁶

Before I turn to the graphic joke in China, a brief comparison with Western jocularography is in place. The only collection of jokes that has come down to us from Greek and Latin antiquity is the *Philogelos* compiled around the fifth century AD,¹⁷ and as far as I know this remained the only joke collection in Europe until the nineteenth or possibly eighteenth century.¹⁸ Since the nineteenth century there has been an explosion of interest in jocular folklore in the West.¹⁹

In China there has been a rich flora of often Western-inspired joke collections from the 1920s onwards.²⁰ Lin Yutang played an important part in propagating literary forms of humour in journals like *Lunyu*.²¹

Since 1949, the political joke has been driven so far underground that many candid Chinese will deny that it exists any longer. On this point there is a striking contrast with the Soviet Union.²² In the Chinese underground movements, on the other hand, it naturally plays an important part.

THE GRAPHIC JOKE IN TRADITIONAL CHINA

Consider now the history of the cartoon in traditional China. While the joke has been recognized as a literary genre in its own right since at least the third century AD the cartoon did not exist as an art genre until the end of the Qing dynasty.

This does not mean that there was no humour in traditional painting or that there were not certain isolated works that may plausibly be described as cartoons in traditional times. Bi Keguan and Li Chan²³ describe and reproduce fascinating examples of Chinese graphic humour dating from the fifteenth century onwards. Moreover, already during the thirteenth century the Buddhist painter Liang Kai came pretty close to cartooning when he portrayed the Zen patriarch tearing up a Zen-Buddhist sutra in his justly famous painting, *HUI NENG TEARING UP THE SUTRA* (see No. 2). Learned doubts concerning the authenticity of this painting need not concern us here.

The Ming painter Zhu Jianshen (1448-1477) has left us a unique work which must qualify as a profound literary cartoon, *SPIRITS UNITED* (see No. 3). It refers to a legendary visit by the poet Tao Yuanming (365-427) and the Confucian Lu Xiuqing to the devoted Buddhist Hui Yuan (333-416). These three people of opposing philosophical convictions greatly enjoyed each other's company and quite thoughtlessly Hui Yuan violated his strict monastic rules of conduct by sending his friends off in the traditional way. When the three men discovered

this breach of monastic discipline they broke into laughter. If one looks more closely at the cartoon one realizes that what looks like one laughing person is in fact composed of three faces. This is easily discovered by covering up one half of the cartoon and looking at the rest. Zhu Jianshen's cartoon celebrates the transcendent understanding symbolized by laughter.

There clearly are humorous works among traditional Chinese paintings. None the less, the contrast with Japan is striking. The Japanese can look back on a millennium of advanced cartooning by many of their finest artists. Netto and Wagener²⁴ reproduce and interpret over 250 humorous drawings from Japan, and a similar book could never have been published on Chinese humour even with the much greater scholarly resources at our disposal today.²⁵

THE MODERN CHINESE CARTOON

As far as I know, the earliest set of ideological cartoons were the broad-sheets directed against the missionaries. Aleksejev 1966:145-153 and especially Garanin's fascinating article from 1960 entitled *Kitajskij antikristianskij lubok XIX veka* (The Chinese anti-Christian cartoon in the nineteenth century) are standard works on this subject. The style and technique of these anti-missionary works are entirely traditional and closely similar to that of the New Year pictures.

In China the strictly political cartoon first emerged in places with a strong Western influence. Personal satire was a Western-inspired innovation. A cartoon from the Tokyo-based Chinese *Minbao* dated 25 April 1907 entitled *THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRAITORS* depicts the politicians Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang and Li Hongzhang (see No. 4). The cartoonist's personal attack on political opponents does not have deep roots in China.²⁶

The first specialized collection of cartoons was published in 1916 by the *Shishibao* (Journal on Current Affairs) in Shanghai as volume 20 of *Wushen quannian huabao* (Complete Pictorial of the Year Wushen). The cartoon *STEALING BELLS* from this collection satirizes the traitors who try to sell out China without the Chinese people noticing (see No. 5).

The first collection of cartoons by an individual artist was the *Guochi huapu* (A Picture Book of National Shame) published in 1916 by Dan Duyu (1896-1972). (One recalls that 9 May, 1915, the day when Yuan Shikai accepted the 21-point treaty, was declared 'a day of national shame'). *OPENING THE DOOR TO THE DEVIL* is a representative cartoon that attacks pro-Japanese traitors prostituting national dignity (see No. 6).

Already in 1918 the first specialized journal of cartoons was published, the legendary *Shanghai Poke* (English subtitle: *The Shanghai Puck*). However, the *Shanghai Puck* remained a marginal phenomenon in the rich publishing world of Shanghai at the time.

In the wake of the May Fourth Movement the educational and propagandistic mobilizing potential of the cartoon as a mass medium was increasingly recognized. The humanist Feng Zikai (1898-1975) was the first artist to cultivate the cartoon as an independent lyrical art form which won wide acclaim in both artistic and literary circles. The modern Chinese word for cartoon *manhua* was first used for Feng's work (in 1924/5). Feng became the father of the artistic lyrical cartoon in China.²⁷

However, Feng was in a way a political outsider, a Buddhist individualist. It was the task of his more politicized colleagues like Zhang Guangyu (1900-1965) and Lu Shaofei (born 1903) to transform the cartoon into an important satirical and propagandistic force. During the thirties there came a wave of cartooning periodicals with titles like *Shidai Manhua* (Modern Sketch), *Manhua Shenghuo* (Cartooning Life), *Panguanzhe* (The Onlooker), *Zhongguo Manhua* (Chinese Cartoons), *Manhuajie* (The Cartooning World), *Shanghai Manhua* (Shanghai Cartoons). In all, there were at least 17 such cartooning periodicals.

By far the most important of these was *Shidai Manhua* of which 39 issues were published between 1934 and 1937. The more left-wing *Manhua Shenghuo* (Cartooning Life) was closed by the Guomindang government after only 4 issues, and some of the other periodicals were even more short-lived.²⁸ Although the cartooning periodicals of the thirties were predominantly 'progressive' in outlook and tended to oppose Guomindang repression, they were essentially commercial ventures. In order to attract a sufficient readership they did not shrink from sexy covers as well as lurid comic strips. Indeed, many art critics of the thirties and forties complained about the artistic shallowness and commercialized vulgarity of all too many cartoons.²⁹

Another obvious way of attracting a permanent readership was the serialized comic strip (*lianjuan manhua*) which was introduced in the late twenties. Lu Shaofei (born 1903) created a Dr. Reform (*Gaige boshi*) who was intensely popular around 1929. Ye Qianyu (born 1907) introduced his Mr. Wang in 1928, and this figure remained hugely popular until 1937.³⁰

Ye Qianyu stopped publishing comic strips in 1937. During the forties Zhang Leping's *San Mao* became the legendary hero of the comic strip scene. *San Mao liulangji* (An Account of San Mao's Wanderings) was a resounding success for many years. It was succeeded by the increasingly propagandistic



1. THE WORTHY NEO-CONFUCIAN



2. HUI NENG TEARING UP THE SUTRA, by Liang Kai (13th cent. AD)



一团和气
明·朱见深(成化皇帝)画

3. SPIRITS UNITED, by Zhu Jianshen (15th cent. AD)

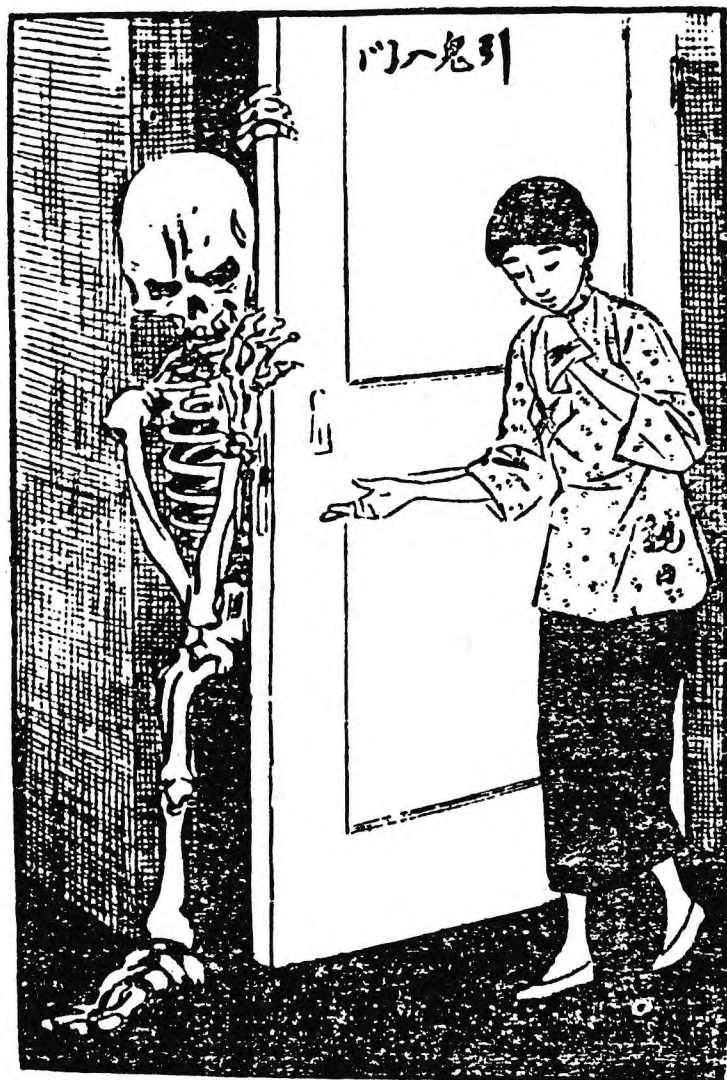


过去之汉奸变相图(指曾国藩、左宗棠、李鸿章)

4. THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRAITORS, Anonymous (1907)



5. STEALING BELLS, Anonymous (1916)



6. OPENING THE DOOR TO THE DEVIL, by Dan Duyu (1916)

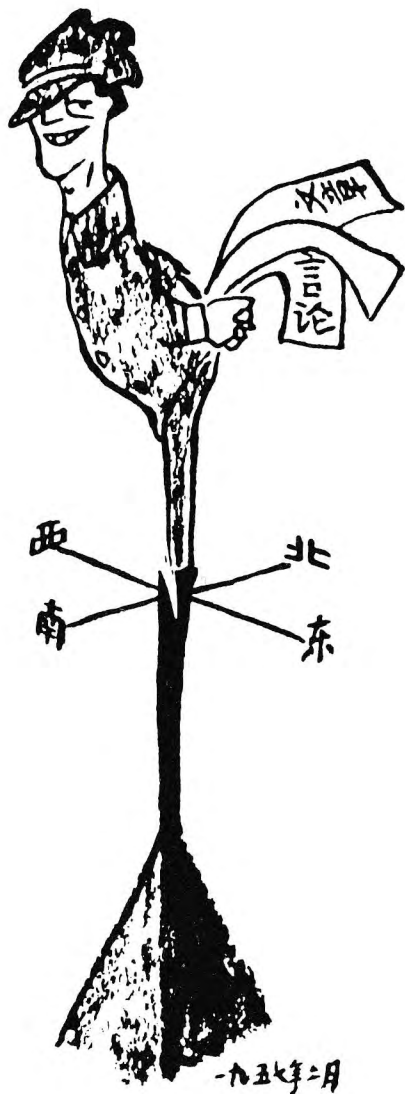


三毛今昔

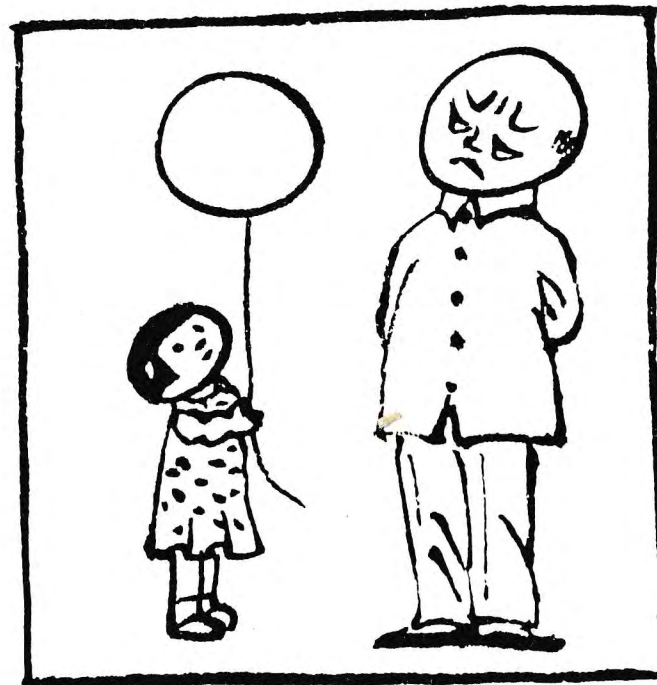
7. SAN MAO PAST AND PRESENT, by Zhang Leping (1979)

風信雞

有些思想懶漢，今朝東瓜臉朝東，
明朝西瓜臉朝西。八零年重摹



8. THE POLITICAL WEATHERCOCK, by Hua Junwu (1957, redrawn 1980)



9. EXTREME SUSPICION, by Hua Junwu (1980)



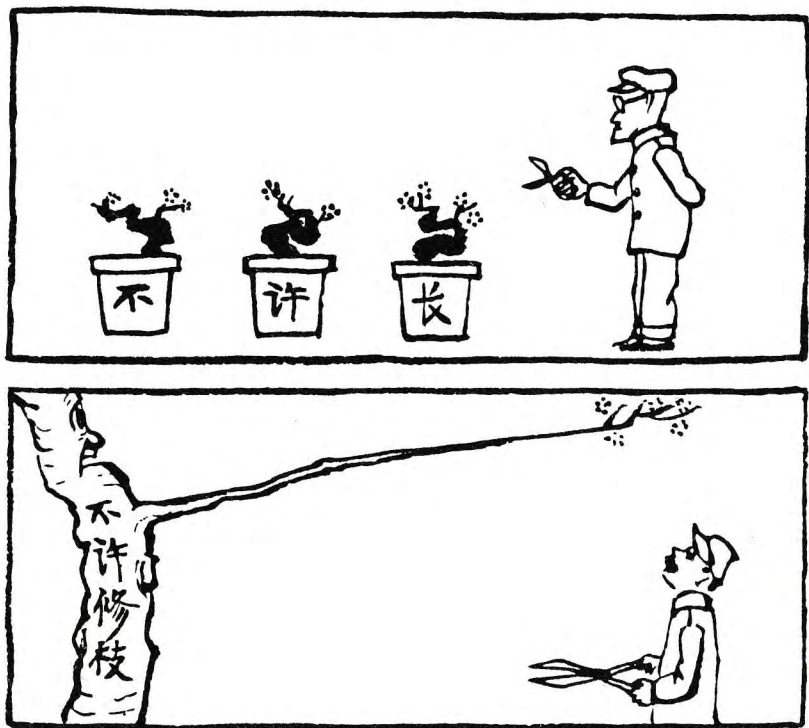
皇帝的新衣

10. THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES, by Hua Junwu (1980)



曹雪芹提抗议

11. CAO XUEQIN HAS SOME OBJECTIONS, by Hua Junwu (1980)
'Why do you count how many white hairs I have got?'

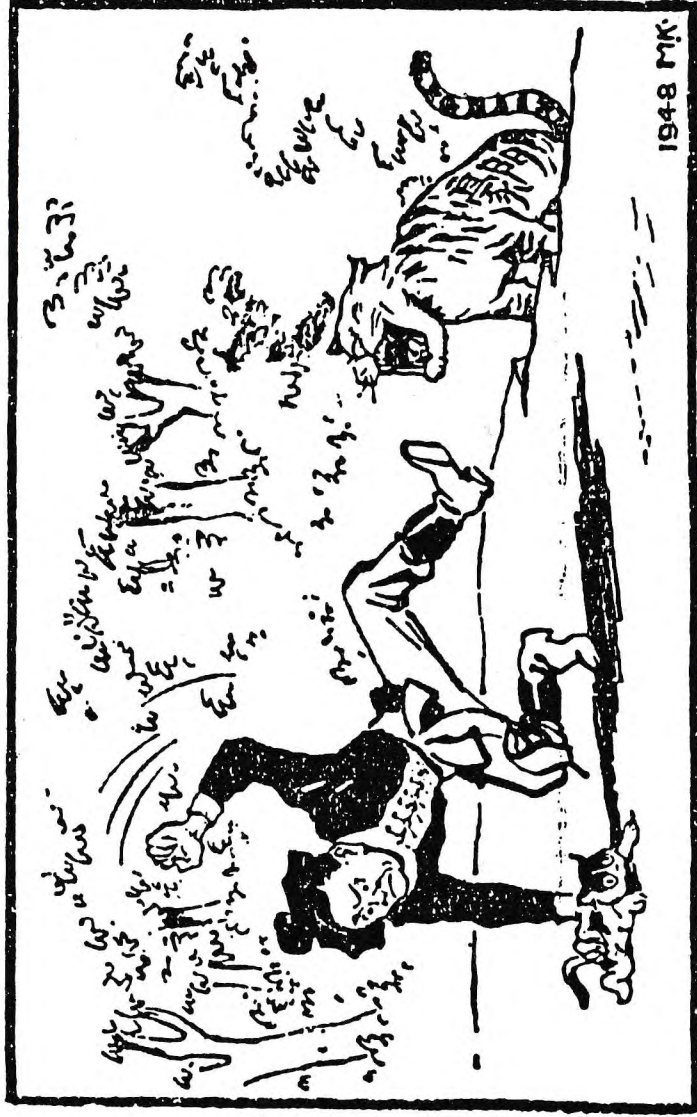


病梅

12. A SICK PLUM TREE, by Hua Junwu



13. ANOTHER SICK PLUM TREE – A COMMENT ON HUA JUNWU'S CARTOON, by Liao Bingxiang

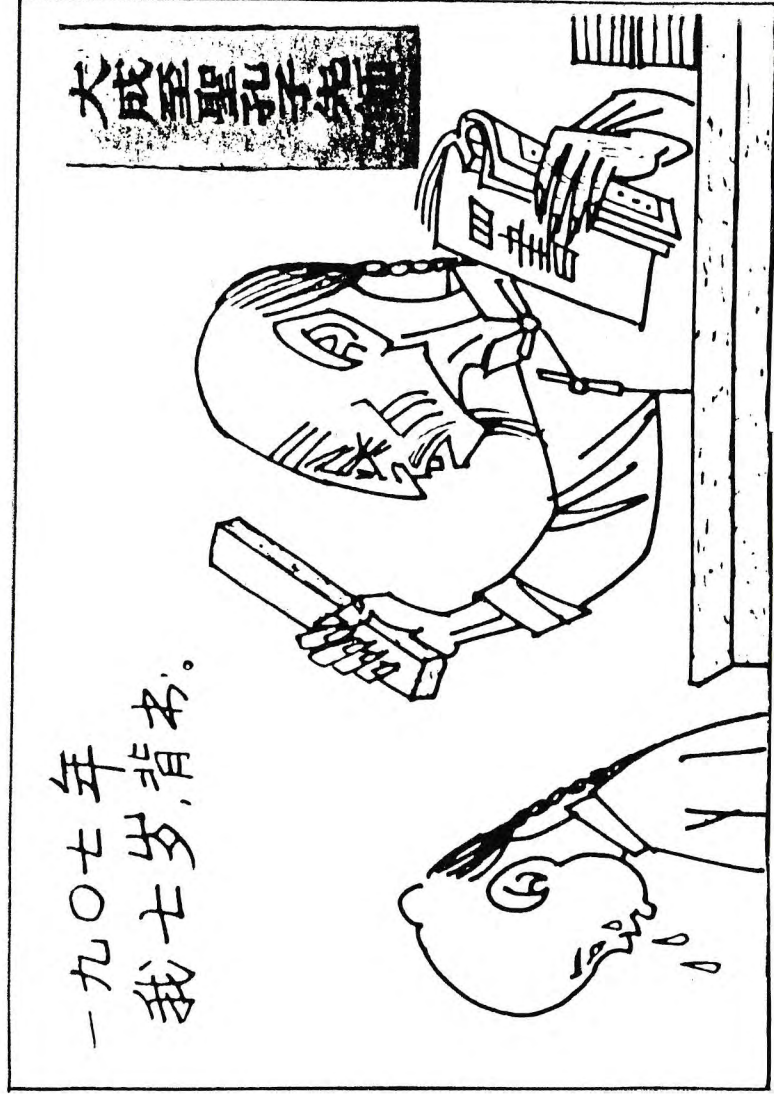


也是武松?

14. ALSO A WU SONG?, by Mi Gu (1948)



15. ALSO A WU SONG?, by Liao Bingxiang (1981)



16a. IN 1907, AGED SEVEN, I WAS LEARNING BY HEART (see 16b)



16b. IN 1967, AGED 67, I WAS STILL LEARNING BY HEART, by Liao Bingxiang (1980)



廖冰兄

17. AFTER THE TOPPLING OF THE FOUR EVILS, I HAVE DRAWN THIS IN SELF-CRITICISM AND IN CRITICISM OF THOSE WHO ARE LIKE MYSELF, by Liao Bingxiong (1980)



余悸病患者的噩梦

18. PORTRAIT OF SOMEONE RIDDEN BY A NIGHTMARE OF LINGERING FEAR, by Ding Cong (1979)



武松打？

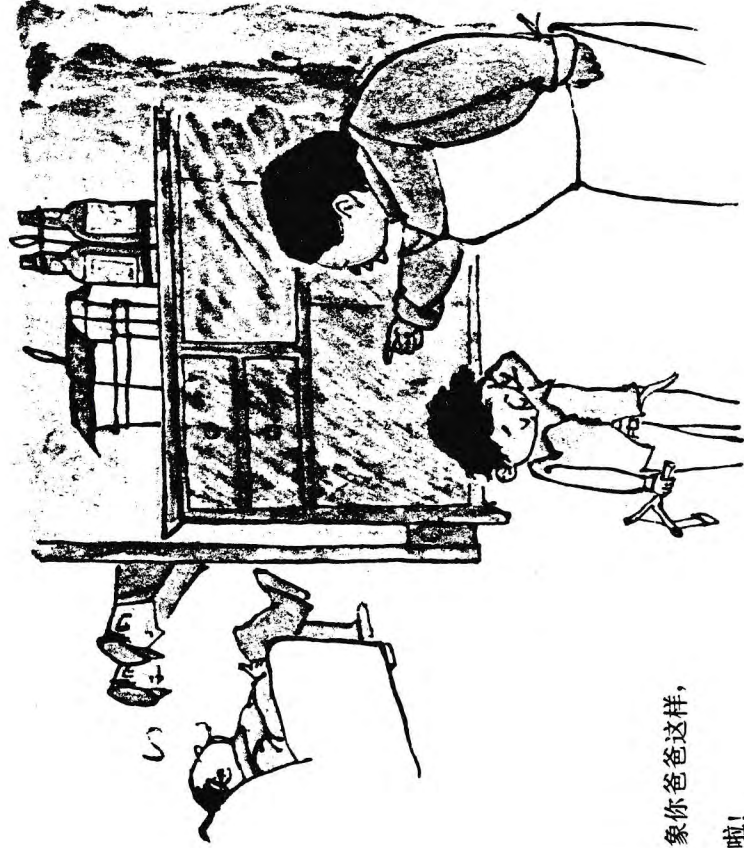
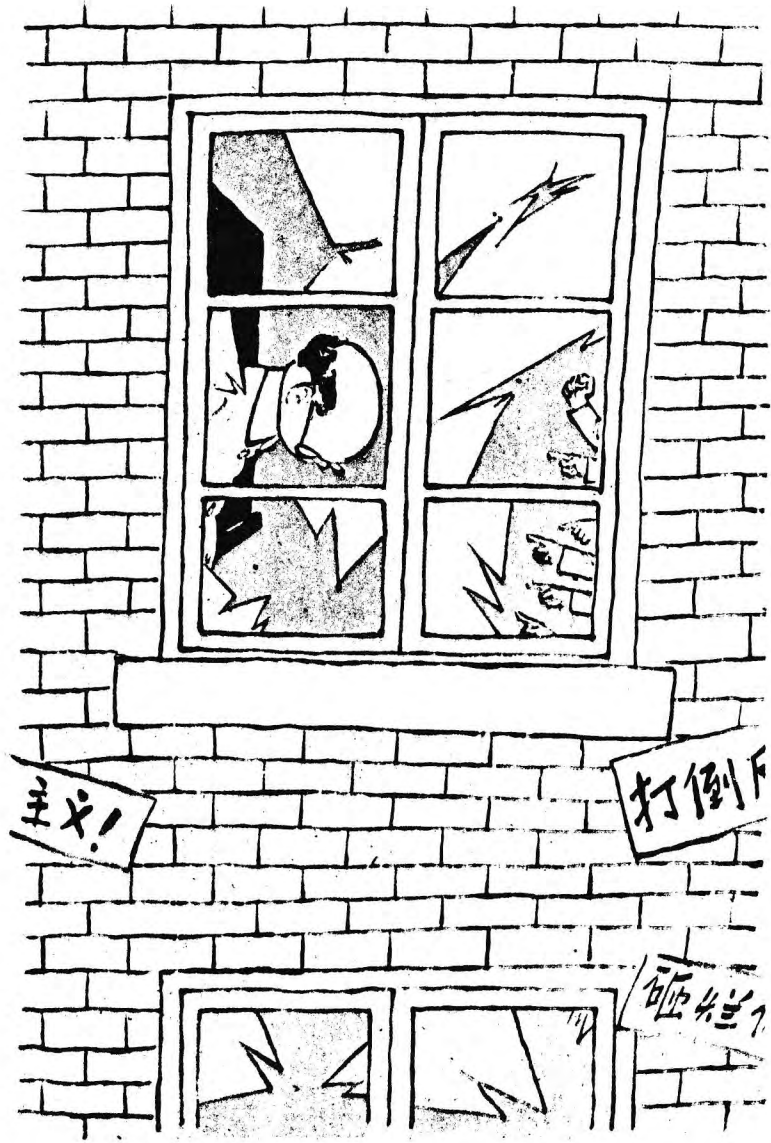
19. WU SONG STRIKING OUT?, by Ding Cong (1979)



20. PORTRAIT PRESENTED TO DING CONG, by Fang Cheng (1982)

教育

21. EDUCATION, by Fang Cheng (1980)



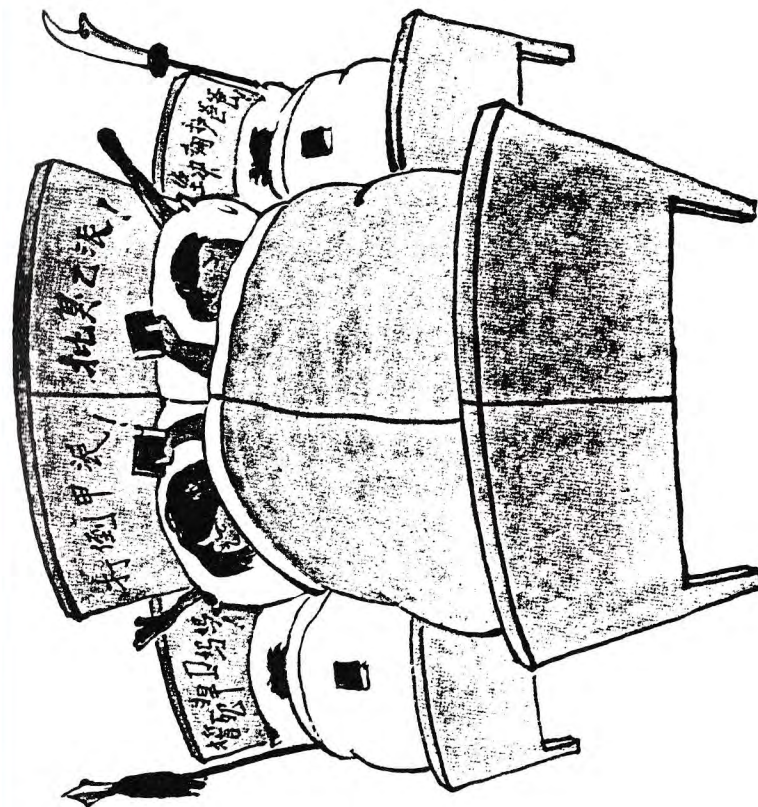
好好听话，长大了象你爸爸这样，
当了公仆，就什么都有啦！

22. 'NOW YOU LISTEN TO ME: IF YOU DO AS YOU ARE TOLD YOU WILL BECOME A PUBLIC SERVANT LIKE YOUR FATHER AND YOU'LL BE JUST FINE!'; by Fang Cheng (1980)



文艺创作

23. ARTISTIC CREATIVITY, by Fang Cheng (1980)



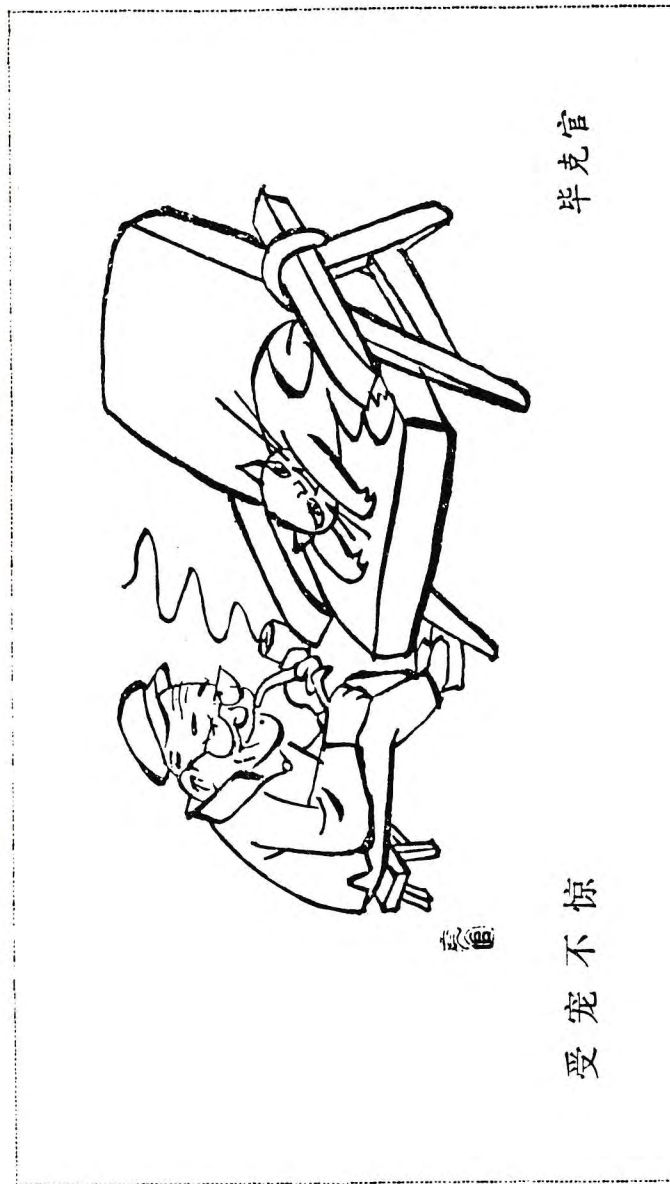
24. 'LET US TAKE THE CLASS STRUGGLE INTO THE FAMILIES!',
by Fang Cheng (1980)



武大郎开店

——我们掌柜的有个脾气，比他高的都不用。

25. A BIT OF A DWARF, by Fang Cheng (1980)



毕克官

受宠不惊

26. TOO LOVED TO BE DISTURBED, by Bi Keguan

San Mao congjunji (San Mao Follows the Army), *San Mao ying jiefang* (San Mao Welcomes Liberation), and in most recent times by *San Mao xue kexue* (San Mao Studies Science). Zhang Leping's cartoons after 1949 retain little of the freshness and the humour that made him famous in the forties. See *SAN MAO PAST AND PRESENT* (No. 7).

The 1930s were undoubtedly the crucial years in the formation of the modern Chinese cartoon. Of the grand old men, Feng Zikai and Zhang Guangyu are no longer alive, but the third grand cartooning man of the thirties Ye Qianyu is today head of the Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and continues to inspire the younger generation. The leading active cartoonists today all belong to the generation that made their debut during the thirties: Hua Junwu, Fang Cheng, Ding Cong, Liao Bingxiong, Jiang Yousheng, Zhang Ding, Zhang Wenyuan, Wang Yisheng, Shen Tongheng. All these leading cartoonists learned their trade during the thirties, became increasingly politicized in the late thirties and forties and have worked with Chinese newspapers and magazines since 1949.

The main division was between those who joined the communist propaganda teams in the liberated areas at an early stage and those who fought the battle for a New China within the area dominated by Guomindang forces. The former have tended to become political cadres responsible for the arts, the latter have tended to remain in positions of lesser administrative and ideological responsibility. Each of these two courses of action involved its own burdens and opportunities for the artists concerned.

Take the case of China's most publicized cartoonist today, Hua Junwu. He speaks with the polished, quiet authority of a high official, and that is indeed what he is: one of the most powerful figures on the Chinese artistic scene. As a member of the Communist Party since 1940, vice-president of the Chinese Artists Association in charge of daily administration you would have thought that he must be an apparatchik and a conformist. But one cannot fail to notice the naughty glint in his eye and the smooth irony lurking underneath his speech. In fact, Hua Junwu is the sharpest and the most cerebral satirist of that very hierarchy in which he holds an elevated position. One might call him the state jester at the communist court. Being at the court he has the courage to articulate what others quietly think, and being so close to the centre he knows how far he can go.

Of all modern Chinese cartoonists, Hua Junwu is by far the most popular. Certainly *not* because he is a spokesman of the party. Moreover, since he draws often provocatively clumsy and ugly pictures, it cannot be the graphic beauty of his work that makes him so popular, either.

Hua Junwu likes to insist that he is an amateur. His mother told him to study mathematics, he reminisces with a smile, and one has little doubt he has the analytical intelligence to become a mathematician. But like many mathematicians he has an indomitable sense for buffoonery and the grotesque.

Since 1930, he says, he submitted cartoons in the tradition of nonsense-humour to various journals. And if one has not seen much of his early work in those journals, he submits, the reason is simple: almost all of his cartoons were rejected!

From 1934, however, he got his breakthrough in Lin Yutang's humoristic journal *Lunyu*, in *Shidai Manhua* and in *Shanghai Manhua*. Today, Hua takes a dim view of many of these early efforts.

Between 1938 and 1945 Hua worked for the communists at the Lu Xun Academy in the liberated Yan'an area. His cartoons from that period were either used as propaganda posters or they were published in the Party paper *Jiefang Ribao*.

In 1941 he organized a cartoon show in the liberated area, and in the summer of that year he was called up to Mao Zedong and told to dampen his satirical fervour. And would he make sure he was enjoined, that his satire was not understood to apply to the *whole* situation in Yan'an.³¹

From 1945 to 1949 Hua worked in *Dongbei Ribao* and drew mostly cartoons attacking American support for Chiang Kaishek. From 1949 he was employed as a journalist and cartoonist on the *People's Daily*, and he became already then an official in the Chinese Artists Association. Hua in 1954 gives an interesting survey of his production. Very little of his work from that period is of lasting value.

In 1957 Hua came forward with some of the most daring pieces of socialist self-criticism of the time, among which *THE POLITICAL WEATHERCOCK* (see No. 8). In 1958 he apparently had to make amends with a collection of anti-rightist cartoons.³²

Hua's artistic breakthrough came in the mellower climate between 1959 and 1962. His collection of social cartoons from 1963 shows him at the height of his satirical powers.

Hua continued as editor in chief of the literature and art section of the *People's Daily* until 1966, disappeared - like most of his colleagues - and re-emerged in 1977 as the director of the Research Institute for Literature and Art under the Ministry of Culture, a position which he still holds today. His current satirical work seems to me to be every bit as lively and biting as anything he has done before the Cultural Revolution. In his cartoon *EXTREME SUSPICION*, for instance (see No. 9), could that little girl

be satirizing her cadre-father? *THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES* (see No. 10), shows the literary sycophants imbued with blind adulation. The subject of their absurd flattery is in fact full of flaws and faults. This cartoon applies naturally also to Western subservient literary criticism on modern writers. Finally, in No. 11, *CAO XUEQIN HAS SOME OBJECTIONS*, note the Westernized glasses of the mindless academic busy-body - and his thoughtful wrinkles. Anyone who knows Hua Junwu will suspect that this is not a cartoon on *Hongloumeng* scholarship. (Cao Xueqin, born 1763 or 1764, author of the novel *Hongloumeng*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*.)

Very occasionally, Hua Junwu drifts off into somewhat schoolmasterly socialist didacticism, as in his cartoon *A SICK PLUM-TREE* (see No. 12). This cartoon provoked an acid response from the fearless old cartoonist Liao Bingxiong: *ANOTHER SICK PLUM-TREE - A COMMENT ON HUA JUNWU'S CARTOON* (see No. 13). In his original cartoon Hua Junwu had criticized both crippling censorship under the slogan 'Things must not grow' (written on the flower-pots in the upper half of the cartoon), and unbridled wild cultural growth under the slogan 'Trees must not be pruned' (on the trunk of the tree below). Liao Bingxiong points out wryly that there is a third and perhaps even more relevant danger in China today: over-enthusiastic guided orthodoxy brought about by grotesque ideological over-gardening.

Liao Bingxiong (born 1915) is perhaps the most controversial and irascible cartoonist today. Like his colleague Hua Junwu he is concerned not with artistic virtuosity but with the explosiveness of the message in his cartoons. Liao Bingxiong is indeed a very explosive person to meet: fiery in his enthusiasm and ferocious in his hostility towards what he regards as the feudalistic authoritarian mentality pervasive in Chinese society. In 1948 the cartoonist and woodcut-artist Mi Gu had attacked a cosmetic propaganda drive against corruption in a most memorable cartoon, *ALSO A WU SONG?* (see No. 14).³³ In 1981 Liao Bingxiong produced an up-dated version of this cartoon attacking cosmetic anti-leftist campaigns which caused considerable controversy, *ALSO A WU SONG?* (see No. 15).

IN 1907, *AGED SEVEN, I WAS LEARNING BY HEART*. IN 1967, *AGED 67, I WAS STILL LEARNING BY HEART* (see No. 16, a-b), is a moving comment on the continuities of Chinese intellectual history; and if you wonder what Liao Bingxiong feels like in 1980, there is a more up-dated self-portrait: *AFTER THE TOPPLING OF THE FOUR EVILS I HAVE DRAWN THIS IN SELF-CRITICISM AND IN CRITICISM OF THOSE WHO ARE LIKE MYSELF* (see No. 17).

Compare the more Westernized self-portrait by another grand old man of Chinese cartooning, Ding Cong (born 1916),

PORTRAIT OF SOMEONE RIDDEN BY A NIGHTMARE OF LINGERING FEAR, from 1979 (see No. 18). Fortunately, Ding Cong does not in the least strike one as a nightmare-ridden person when one meets him: he is a cheerful, jovial round man with a boisterous and infectious sense of humour. His tiny flat near Beijing University is so full of Western and Chinese art books that there is hardly room for him let alone a visitor. Ding Cong is probably the closest to a professional cartoonist you can find in China today. He also works as a graphic designer, and this shows in the graphic quality in his cartoons. A very fine series of them may be found in the literary journal *Dushu* (Reading Books) which regularly carries his work. *WU SONG STRIKING OUT?* (see No. 19) is Ding Cong's subtle satire on the contrast between propaganda and fact.

Fang Cheng (born 1918), the chief political cartoonist and journalist with *Renmin Ribao* since 1949, has produced a warm portrait of Ding Cong, *PORTRAIT PRESENTED TO DING CONG*, 1982 (see No. 20). Fang Cheng is a very mild and affable man. He is an artist at heart, an aesthete, technically brilliant and thoroughly familiar with traditional brush techniques, constantly learning from his artist friends. His home is full of marvellous Chinese brush paintings, his own exercises and other artists' presents. Until recently, Fang Cheng has published mainly international political cartoons as required by his paper, the *People's Daily*. Since 1979, he has come forward with remarkable fresh humorous cartoons that have been exhibited with great success throughout China. Currently, Fang Cheng is writing a monograph on the concept of humour, and although he is well versed in Chinese tradition he has taken a considerable interest in Western things. A lavish two-volume edition of Wilhelm Busch's collected works in German holds pride of place in his study.

Having begun this very sketchy and impressionistic survey of Chinese cartooning with Liang Kai it is only natural to end with a florilegium of the gentle and profound cartoons by Fang Cheng.

Let us begin with *EDUCATION*, a self-portrait by Fang Cheng (see No. 21). Another comment on the realities of socialist education is No. 22, *'NOW YOU LISTEN TO ME: IF YOU DO AS YOU ARE TOLD YOU WILL BECOME A PUBLIC SERVANT LIKE YOUR FATHER AND YOU'LL BE JUST FINE!'* In the next cartoon, *ARTISTIC CREATIVITY*, No. 23, the musician is reproducing the enthusiastic posture of the revolutionary on his score of musical notes. The inspired and more daringly original painter adds a shovel in a flourish of the impressionistic revolutionary imagination. The creative writer, out of respect for the correctness of the revolutionary stance, produces a poem in the shape of his model. The two figures in the background are

also deeply immersed in true revolutionary creativity. In 'LET US TAKE THE CLASS STRUGGLE INTO THE FAMILIES!' (see No. 24), the aims of the members of the family are stated over their heads. In their dreams, the mother and father are thinking: 'We must fight the X-Faction' and 'We must fight the Y-Faction', respectively. The firm resolve of the child next to the mother is: 'I solemnly swear to support my mother', while that of the child next to the father is: 'I resolutely support my father'. The parents have sticks with which to beat the class enemy within the family, should the need arise. In their sleep they uphold orthodoxy by holding up orthodox books. Finally, No. 25, *A BIT OF A DWARF*, is accompanied by the following explanation, offered to the customer by the small waiter: 'You see, our master is a bit of a dwarf. After retiring from his career as a peasant revolutionary he opened this teashop, but he refused to employ anyone who surpassed him'. An inscription in the background says: 'The important thing for man is not to be tall, it is to be powerful'.

I have briefly introduced a few of the most prominent Chinese cartoonists of the older generation. Fortunately, there are some fine younger artists who have developed their own styles, men like Bi Keguan from Beijing, Yu Huali from Tianjin and Zhan Tongxuan from Shanghai. I cannot help seeing in these younger artists the torch-bearers of the old Chinese jesting tradition. They are in any case truly heart-warming people to meet. The last work to be presented here is a conciliatory cartoon, *TOO LOVED TO BE DISTURBED* (No. 26) by the leading historian of Chinese cartoons, Bi Keguan, whose friendship and advice has sustained me in my all too desultory excursions into the realm of Chinese humour.

1. Cf. Kao 1946 and Wells 1971 for interesting surveys of humour in traditional Chinese literature and art.
2. Cf. Dolby 1974, 177.
3. In *Laws* 816c Plato argues that although laughter leads to pride and vulgarity, the comic may be justified as a foil of the serious. Cf. also Plato's *Philebus* 48c ff. and Aristotle's *Poetics* 1449a.
4. For the role of the jester in Europe cf. Lefebvre 1968 and Deufert 1975, both of which contain outstanding bibliographies on mediaeval jocular subcultures.
5. Cf. the fascinating monograph Spies 1928.
6. Cf. Wang Liqi 1981, 70. Wang Liqi 1981 must be regarded as the standard reference work on Chinese traditional jocularography and is the source for most other collections of jokes published in the People's Republic of China.
7. *Ibid.* p. 151.
8. *Ibid.* p. 300.
9. Cf. Wu Jianren 1981, 109.
10. Cf. *Wenxindiaolong, Sibubeiyao* ed. vol. 3, p. 18a.
11. Cf. Wang Liqi 1981.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Cf. Yan Hengbao 1980.
14. Cf. Blyth 1968, 199-564.
15. *Ibid.* p. 213-27.
16. Cf. *Jiuchou yezi*, published during the Wanli period 1574-1619, apud Wang Liqi 1981, 15.
17. The best text-critical edition of this outstanding collection is Thierfelder 1968. I hope to publish a detailed comparison between the *Xiaolin* and the roughly contemporary *Philogelos* in the near future.

18. For a brilliant survey of carnivalistic and humoristic subcultures of other kinds see Bakhtin 1968, 59-144.
19. Cf. the tightly printed bibliography in Röhrich 1980, 301-30.
20. Cf. Xu Zhuodai, no date, Zhang Genfa, no date, Anonymous (a), and Chen Xiaomei 1937.
21. Cf. Lin Yutang 1937.
22. For the history of graphic humour in the Soviet Union cf. Stykalin and Kremenskaja 1963. The published cartoons clearly bear no relation to the rich subversive folklore of the Russian joke.
23. Cf. Bi Keguan 1981, 8ff, Bi Keguan 1982, 1ff, and Li Chan 1978.
24. Netto and Wagener 1901.
25. Cf. Blyth 1968, chapter 17, and Wells 1971, 86ff.
26. Cf. Ye Qianyu 1982.
27. Cf. Harbsmeier 1983.
28. Cf. Bi Keguan 1982, 65.
29. Cf. Chen Wangdao 1935, 146 *et passim*. Erling 1978, 23 reproduces an extreme example where *Shidai Manhua* displays two bulging naked women on its cover.
30. Cf. Ye Qianyu 1981 for a rich selection of comic strips and contemporary cartoons.
31. Cf. Ai Zhongxin 1981.
32. Cf. Hua 1958.
33. Wu Song became a popular hero in the novel *Shuihuzhuan* because he slayed a dreadful tiger tyrannizing the people.

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