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Graphic design in Republican Shanghai: a preliminary study

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fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis is a preliminary investigation into graphic design in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai. I will look at creations of designs on the covers of books and periodicals most closely linked to new literary groups, for that was where a distinctive new idiom of design emerged. I will concentrate on a few figures, including Lu Xun, Tao Yuanqing, Chen Zhifo, and Qian Juntao. Biographical information for each is given, followed by preliminary analysis on some cover designs. Topics covered include artistic characters, the principles of *tu'an* (a particular understanding of design), and influences from Japan and the West.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Print Culture in Shanghai	12
Publishing Houses	
Newspapers and Magazines	
Print Technology and Design	
Popular Literature and Cover Designs	
Chapter 2: Lu Xun and Graphic Design	33
Tao Yuanqing	
Chapter 3: Chen Zhifo and Tu'an	53
Rhythm, Balance, Harmony	
Tu'an and Xiesheng	
Chapter 4: Qian Juntao	82
Conclusion	100
Bibliography	109

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1 Wu Changshuo, *Plum Blossoms*.
Richard M. Barnhart et al., *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven: Yale, 1997), 302.
- Figure 2 Xu Beihong, *Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Retainers*
Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 36.
- Figure 3 Qian Juntao, cover of *Ai de Fenye*.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 34.
- Figure 4 Ding Yunxian, advertisement for Dechengxiang Textiles.
Zuo Xuchu, ed., *Lao Shangbiao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 1999), 107.
- Figure 5 Zheng Mantuo, poster for Nanyang Brothers Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 22.
- Figure 6 Hu Boxiang, poster for Hatamen Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 39.
- Figure 7 Wu Changshuo, frontispiece to *Orchids and Bamboo* by Zheng Xie.
Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 242.
- Figure 8 Illustration of constructing characters.
Yang Dekang, *Shiyong Meishuzi* (Beijing: Chaohua Meishu Chubanshe, 1964), 5.
- Figure 9 Illustration of characters.
Ni Nanshan, *Wanyong Meishuzi*. (Unknown: Wanguo Shushe, 1960), 1.
- Figure 10 Ding Cong, cover for *Libai Liu*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 1.

- Figure 11 Hu Boxiang, poster for Hatamen Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 39.
- Figure 12 Illustration of character forms
Qiu Yongfu, *Zixue* (Taipei: Yifengtang Chubanshe, 1991), 74.
- Figure 13 Illustration of basic character strokes.
Yang Dekang, *Shiyong Meishuzi* (Beijing: Chaohua Meishu Chubanshe, 1964), 4.
- Figure 14 Illustration of basic character strokes.
Geng Qiu, *Meishuzi Xinzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1957), 2.
- Figure 15 Zheng Mantuo, poster for Nanyang Brothers Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 22.
- Figure 16 Ni Gengye, poster for Hatamen Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 5.
- Figure 17 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Guxiang*.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 29.
- Figure 18 Qian Juntao, cover of *San Gongzhu*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 2.
- Figure 19 Lu Xun, cover of *Yuwai Xiaoshuo Ji*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* (Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 36.
- Figure 20 Cover of *Niehai Hua*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 1.
- Figure 21 Lu Xun, cover of *Nahan*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* (Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 1.

- Figure 22 Lu Xun, cover of *Huagai Ji*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 14.
- Figure 23 Lu Xun, cover of *Yinyu Ji*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 49.
- Figure 24 Lu Xun, cover of *Eryi Ji*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 30.
- Figure 25 Lu Xun, cover of *Benliu*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 54.
- Figure 26 Lu Xun, cover of *Jiwen*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 60.
- Figure 27 Lu Xun, cover of *Mingya Yuekan*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 55.
- Figure 28 Lu Xun, cover of *Wenyi Yanjiu*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 73.
- Figure 29 Lu Xun, cover of *Xiao Beide*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 21.
- Figure 30 Lu Xun, cover of *Taose de Yun*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 24.
- Figure 31 Lu Xun, cover of *Xin de Tanxian*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 52.
- Figure 32 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Kumen de Xiangzheng*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng*
(Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 37.

- Figure 33 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Panghuang*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 3.
- Figure 34 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Gongren Suihuiluefu*.
Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* (Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 74.
- Figure 35 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Fen*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 4.
- Figure 36 Tao Yuanqing, cover of *Guxiang*.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 29.
- Figure 37 Sun Fuxi, cover of *Yecao*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 11.
- Figure 38 Chen Zhifo, cover of *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*.
Li Youguan and Chen Xiufan, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Meishu Chubanshe, 1990), 71.
- Figure 39 Chen Zhifo, cover of *Wenxue*.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 54.
- Figure 40 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 13.
- Figure 41 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 22.
- Figure 42 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 23.
- Figure 43 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 22.

- Figure 44 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 22.
- Figure 45 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 23.
- Figure 46 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 30.
- Figure 47 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC* (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929), 30.
- Figure 48 Illustration of *tu'an* motifs.
Chen Zhifo and Wu Shan. *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1953), 102.
- Figure 49 Illustration of *tu'an* motifs.
Chen Zhifo and Wu Shan. *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1953), 337.
- Figure 50 Qian Juntao, illustration for *Dongfang Zazhi*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 6.
- Figure 51 Qian Juntao, illustration for *Funü Zazhi*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 13.
- Figure 52 Qian Juntao, illustration for *Xin Nüxing*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 12.
- Figure 53 Qian Juntao, illustration for *Xin Nüxing*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 12.
- Figure 54 Tsuda Seifu, illustration for *Shobijutsu*.
Zuan no henbo/Design in Transition: 1868-1945 (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1988) 17-18.

- Figure 55 Qian Juntao, cover of *Xinghuo*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 16.
- Figure 56 Qian Juntao, cover of *San Gongzhu*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 2.
- Figure 57 Qian Juntao, cover of *San Gongzhu*.
Qian Juntao, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963), 8.
- Figure 58 Ni Gengye, poster for Hatamen Tobacco.
Deng Ming, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 5.
- Figure 59 Ding Yunxian, advertisement for Dechengxiang Textiles.
Zuo Xuchu, ed., *Lao Shangbiao* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 1999), 109.
- Figure 60 Perfume advertisement.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 51.
- Figure 61 Poster for Rarität.
Steven Heller and Louise Fili, *Typology: Type Design from the Victorian Era to the Digital Age* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 62.
- Figure 62 Invitation Card
Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. by Ruari McLean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 69.
- Figure 63 Advertisement
Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. by Ruari McLean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 71.
- Figure 64 Qian Juntao, cover for *Wenxue Zhoubao*
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 60.

- Figure 65 Qian Juntao, cover for *Ten Years of the Shenshi Telegraphic Despatch Agency*.
Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 63.
- Figure 66 Qian Juntao, cover for *Zai Hei'an Zhong*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 21.
- Figure 67 Qian Juntao, cover for *Lian'ai zhi Lu*.
Zhongguo Xiandai Meishu Quanji, vol. 43 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1999), 22.
- Figure 68 Illustration of constructing characters.
Yang Dekang, *Shiyong Meishuzi* (Beijing: Chaohua Meishu Chubanshe, 1964), 5.
- Figure 69 Illustration of basic character strokes.
Yang Dekang, *Shiyong Meishuzi* (Beijing: Chaohua Meishu Chubanshe, 1964), 4.
- Figure 70 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Lu Xingchen, *Tu'anhua Chubu* (Tianjin: Tianjin Meishu Chubanshe, 1958), 6.
- Figure 71 Illustration of *tu'an*.
Lu Xingchen, *Tu'anhua Chubu* (Tianjin: Tianjin Meishu Chubanshe, 1958), 15.
- Figure 72 Drawing of a student in Kandinsky's class.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 8.
- Figure 73 Drawing of a student in Kandinsky's class.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 6.
- Figure 74 Illustration from Pestalozzi.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 7.

- Figure 75 Illustration from Rambauer.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 6.
- Figure 76 Illustration from Itten.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 47.
- Figure 77 Typeface for Universal.
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, eds, *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 6.

Introduction

This thesis is intended as a preliminary investigation into the practice and theorisation of graphic design in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai. More specifically, this is an investigation of a particular type of graphic design that emerged on the covers of books and periodicals that were mainly linked to new literary and to a lesser extent new artistic groups. Broadly speaking, what is in question is the graphic design and the associated designers most closely linked to May Fourth publishers and writers, including those with leftist as well as more cosmopolitan allegiances.

Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s had a flourishing visual culture. During this period, cover designs emerged as a distinctive visual idiom, one that was very different stylistically from traditional and modern works of art, as well as from commercially-oriented images and designs. I will briefly illustrate how distinctive cover designs of literary groups were in relation to other visual images of the period, in order to situate cover designs better visually. Formal or stylistic differences are not just the results of purely individual creative choices; they are closely related to the aesthetic demands of a given genre, the expectations of the viewer, or more mundane issues like the medium used, the techniques employed, or even the cost of production in the case of commercial imagery. Moreover, stylistic and formal differences can reveal fundamental differences in the conception of artistic practice: through the use of different units of artistic composition, such as the brush stroke or the line, or through the differing perspectives towards observation and creation, artistic practices can be articulated not only in terms of mimetic representation or abstraction but also in terms of sociopolitical positions.

First of all, cover designs differ significantly from traditional-style Chinese watercolours. Figure 1 shows a hanging scroll by Wu Changshuo 吳昌碩, entitled *Plum Blossoms* (1916). Produced using a brush, the brushstrokes reveal the smallest movements of the hand; from there, a graphological system can be erected, whereby (to put it very schematically) one can imagine the various resonances of the trace and the spirit (*qi*) of the writer/painter, of former masters (through graphic allusions), and of the moment of the trace, for once the brush lands on the surface of the paper, it leaves an indelible trace. Additionally, traditional-



Figure 1

style Chinese paintings are intimately related to poetry and calligraphy; the calligraphic inscription marks the painting within a literary, calligraphic, and social context.

Cover designs were also different from the new forms of Western visual imagery such as paintings in the Realist manner or in one of the many modernist art movements introduced to China at the time. Figure 2 is an oil painting, *Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Retainers* (1928-1930) by Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻. This painting is a good example of



Figure 2

Xu Beihong's style of Western academic Realism: using techniques that strive for mimetic representation, Xu depicts a historical tale of loyal righteousness. Formally speaking, the strokes of the brush are effaced in order to create plastic verisimilitude; there is also the limited use of chiaroscuro and perspective, which allows one to imagine viewing the scene from a fixed vantage point. In schematic terms, representational imagery is oriented towards the observation of nature and the faithful representation of nature; the frame of the painting is also the conceptual frame of a window through which one views the scene. In the Republican period, the articulation of such an artistic practice was bound up with lively debates concerning the role of aesthetics in China's modernisation, especially with respect to the different 'modernisms' entering China at the time. In Xu Beihong's painting, we see an attempt to use the techniques of Western Realism to recreate a historical reality from China's past.

Cover designs of the 1920s and the 1930s seem to be part of an anti-realistic artistic discourse. There is an insistent focus on the surface level of graphic manipulation

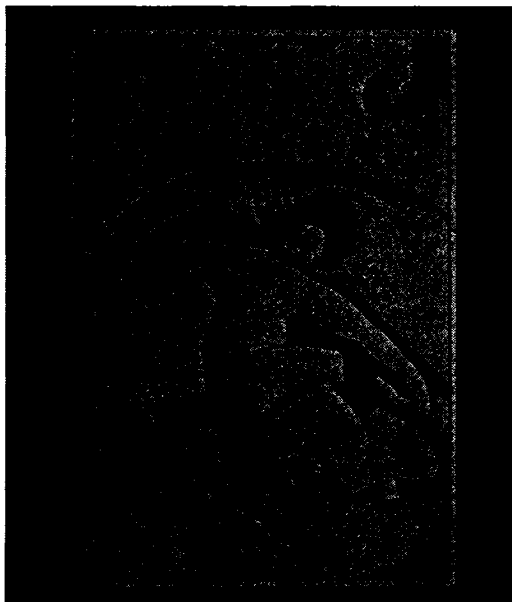


Figure 3

that at once is at variance with the notion of mimetic representation and with the traditional Chinese practices of the arts of the brush. Figure 3 is a cover design for *Ai de Fenye*, created by Qian Juntao in 1929. There are two abstracted female figures depicted here, both almost identical in form; the clear delineation of the female figures and the two spade shapes allow these elements to be seen as elements that can be arranged or

composed on the surface of the page. Such a technique of composition is fairly typical of the literary cover designs of 1920s and 1930s Shanghai. This tendency towards the simplification and abstraction of figures and imagery is probably derived from Arts and Crafts practices in Europe and America; historically, this trajectory leads towards the Bauhaus in the 1920s and to its articulation of a visual language that is applicable to various art practices. The idea of composing or arranging graphic elements on the surface of the page invokes an artistic creativity that seems to be quite different from that of mimetic representation. Indeed, the notion of observation is at times opposed to creation, the latter of which is then seen as the discovery and manipulation of elements (either geometric or conventionalised), as we shall see in the writings of Chen Zhifo, a designer of textile patterns and graphic imagery active in the 1920s and 1930s.

Cover designs borrowed a little from the techniques of commercial visual culture. As a type of imagery that serves not only to adorn book covers but also to attract the attention of the consumer, cover designs can be considered as an integral part of commercial visual culture. The mobility of books also meant the mobility of cover designs; in this way, cover designs are similar to imagery on commercial packaging and advertising material that circulate along domestic and global trade routes. The very notion of putting imagery on the cover of books may have come from the use of imagery on calendar posters (yuenfenpai 月份牌) and commercial packaging, as well as from Western and Japanese book covers.

The cover designs of literary groups show a marked tendency away from mimetic representation, especially the illusionistic depiction of female figures which are so common in the calendar posters of the period. Literary cover designs also show few traces



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

of any folk influences, such as the folk poster (nianhua 年畫), which were very common in many types of commercial imagery. Figure 4 is an advertisement for a textile firm in 1920; the image shows strong influences from folk painting in its use of colour and the use of auspicious symbolism. Figures 5 and 6 are more typical of the 1920s calendar poster; figure 5 is a calendar poster by Zheng Mantuo 鄭曼陀 for a tobacco company (1920s), while figure 6 was created by Hu Boxiang 胡伯翔, also for a tobacco company (1920s). Calendar posters were a particular genre of commercial imagery of the period; typically, they were produced by tobacco, textile, soap, or perfume companies and were distributed across a wide geographical range. Almost invariably, they depict female figures in various guises, which were a key part of their appeal. Formally, the female figures are generally portrayed in a illusionistic manner, though chiaroscuro or shading is generally subdued. There is usually a frame, outside of which an image of the product and other necessary information are displayed. This 'calendar-poster' style had strong connotations of commercialism and was consciously avoided by designers of literary book and magazine

covers: cover designs generally portrayed female figures in abstracted forms, if they are portrayed at all. This stylistic differentiation probably served to mark literary works as a different type of commercial product.

Historically, the interest in cover designs led to a growing interest in different types of graphic works of art, including etchings and woodcuts. Lu Xun's involvement in creating cover designs and woodcuts highlights this trajectory. In the 1920s, he was an instrumental figure in creating interest in cover designs and also in introducing foreign designs. Towards the late 1920s, this interest in cover designs and printing techniques gradually led to his involvement in introducing foreign graphic works, such as the works of the German graphic artist, Käthe Kollwitz. The political possibilities of woodcuts particularly interested Lu Xun, and he basically helped start the woodcut movement of the 1930s. Cover designs, in contrast, generally lacked a strong sense of a political message. The relation of cover designs to texts is generally not direct and appears almost arbitrary at times. Broadly speaking, the surface of the cover may have offered a space for visual experimentation, a fact remarkable in itself.

On another level, this new cover design was not purely a visual medium; it also engaged writing. Any cover design, by definition, had to include imagery and text (at least, the book title and the name of the author). Graphic designers necessarily manipulated images and writing together, and often in a similar way. One important aspect was the use of 'artistic characters' (*meishuzi* 美術字), which first emerged in commercial packaging but gained the attention of

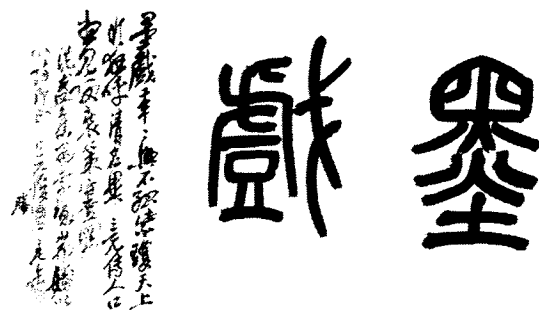


Figure 7

writers and artists. Artistic characters are distinguished from calligraphic characters in the use of the outline in shaping the characters: whereas a calligraphic character is produced with the brush and therefore has minute variations in the width and curvature of the strokes (see figure 7; calligraphy by Wu Changshuo, in the frontispiece to *Orchids and Bamboo* by Zheng Xie), artistic characters are drawn. When the basic skeletal form of the character is drawn, an outline of the character shape is created, after which the character shape can be filled in or manipulated into different shapes. Figure 8 is an illustration from a *meishuzi* manual (1964) that shows the steps in this process; figure 9 shows the various forms that a character can be manipulated into. Since artistic characters are drawn, the different strokes of a given character must harmonise with one another; for example, the rounding at the end of a stroke, once chosen, must be applied consistently. The shape of the character is also manipulated with optical illusion in mind. Artistic characters are therefore created according to a very different technique and principle from that of calligraphic characters.

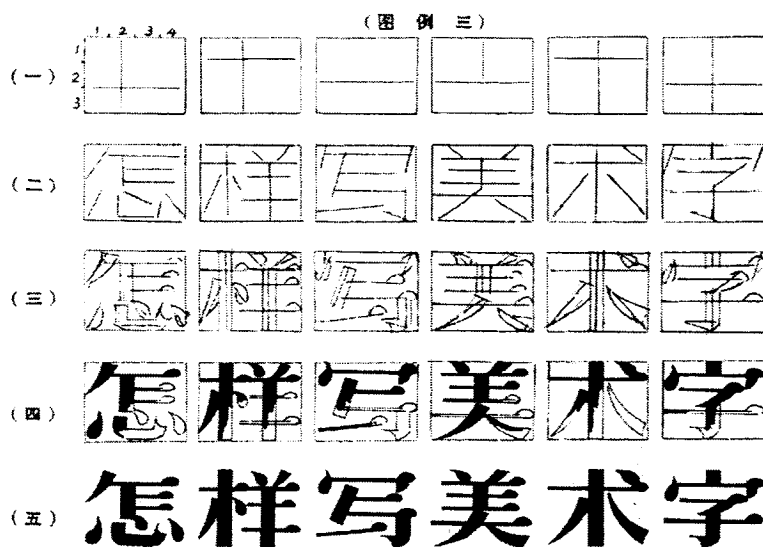


Figure 8

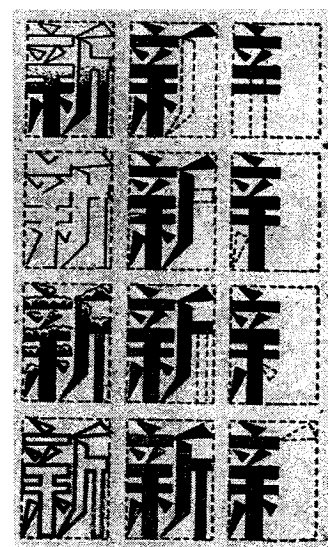


Figure 9

In a country where writing, especially in the form of calligraphy, had been such an important means of organising society and social relations, perhaps even structuring ways of thought in important ways, the emergence of new forms of characters is highly interesting. These artistic characters were not drawn with a brush; the strokes were not graphological, in the sense that they betray the trace of the hand, with all the connotations that it bears. These new character forms were drawn, designed, and shaped in order to create a particular outline, somewhat like the creation of images. Here is an important practical notion of characters and of writing that was at great variance from calligraphy. In an age where many intellectuals (like Lu Xun and many others) advocated drastic changes not only to literary idioms but also to the written language itself, where some even argued for changes to the Chinese script, the emergence of these new kinds of characters is highly notable, to say the least. Moreover, the somewhat similar principles in the creation of artistic characters and of abstracted or conventionalised forms point to a tendency towards a conception of creation that involves graphic manipulations on the surface level of the page.

The investigation of the emergence of a new graphic design in Shanghai also affords us a glimpse at a different way of thinking about design. Graphic design in the West often situates its moment of origin in the Bauhaus school of the late 1920s, especially in the formulations of Jan Tschichold (rather more than the slightly earlier Bauhaus practitioners of graphic design, such as Herbert Bayer and El Lissitzky). The questions raised about graphic design, until very recently in the West, have been concerned with the clarity of communication and the search of an elemental visual language or idiom that had universalist pretensions (hence the constant emphasis on

elemental geometric forms). Notably, this visual idiom, following Tschichold, was considered separate from writing. What is more, Bauhaus ideas on design, in its broadest sense, were extremely influential. The pedagogy of the Basic Course (Vorlehre) of Bauhaus art education has been adopted quite broadly in the West; this Basic Course introduces fundamental contrasts of visual elements in order to construct a distinctly visual language. The question of typography was in practice treated quite separately from visual forms. The difference of script in China, with the complex, shapely characters, perhaps lent to a slight but interesting difference to the relation of the written and the visual.

Such are the issues that drove my interest in analysing what we can tentatively call “graphic design” in 1920s and 1930s China. I have raised many points above, but I profess that I have not been able to progress beyond a preliminary analysis. While there have been some studies on visual culture in Shanghai, material for “design” is relatively scarce. Since almost nothing on Chinese graphic design exists in English, I have had to rely almost exclusively on Chinese sources. In Chinese, there are a few works that survey graphic design, but very few (or almost none) focus specifically on the Republican period (which I loosely mean to be from 1910s to the late 1930s, for the Sino-Japanese war basically halted all design, or else completely transformed design towards a folk/populist orientation). I have looked at catalogues, biographies, and memoirs in order to gain basic information. Fortunately, I have also located a few design manuals (for both images and for character design). Therefore, this thesis, while keeping in mind the issues raised above, has only been able to deal with preliminary issues.

Before I discuss the plan of my thesis, I also want to highlight the effects of the vicissitudes of Chinese history on the availability and range of material. Many of the designers became ideologically suspect in the Communist era, especially during the Cultural Revolution; many samples of design were probably lost. More importantly, there has been a substantial “Lu Xun bias” in the literature: Lu Xun is constantly taken to be the progenitor of modern graphic design, when the reality was probably much more complex. Furthermore, his designs are almost completely preserved. I have tried to remain aware of this, but it is entirely possible that my research will show a bias due to this.

I will start off, in chapter 1, entitled “Print Culture in Shanghai,” with a discussion of publishing activity, including a general overview of publishing houses, literary groups, translations, and newspapers and magazines. I will also deal with the changes wrought by new printing technology on the format of the book itself, in terms of its physical appearance—binding, typography, and the cover. I will end the chapter with a brief discussion of the influence of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school of literature, popular in the early years of the Republic, on cover designs. Designers of the 1910s drew from highly commercial media such as yuefenpai (calendar posters) and commercial packaging; more often than not, the designers of book and magazine covers in the 1910s were commercial graphic designers as well.

From chapters 2 to 4, I will focus on the design output of three key figures. In chapter 2, I will discuss the role of Lu Xun in introducing and forging a particular style of design, one that utilised characters and ancient motifs. I shall also look at one designer whom he worked with, Tao Yuanqing. In chapter 3, I take a close reading of a design

manual, *Tu'anfa ABC*, by Chen Zhifo. Chen Zhifo studied a kind of design called *tu'an* that was introduced from Japan. *Tu'an* originally emerged from a world of handicrafts, and has links with the Arts and Crafts movement; gradually, the field of *tu'an* broadened, covering mechanical or industrial arts, such as industrial fabric design and graphic design. Chen Zhifo lays out formal principles for design and emphasises the relations of elements within a design; he also deals in depth with *bianhua*, or conventionalisation, that allows the adaptation of various natural or art motifs. In chapter 4, I turn my attention to Qian Juntao, a renowned designer in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. His works are, to my mind, encapsulate well the principles that Chen Zhifo lays out. For the conclusion, I will take a look at the relation of image and text in light of 1920s and 1930s graphic design in China. I will try to suggest some linkages between the creation of designs and the creation of artistic characters, and from there, to revisit some Bauhaus assumptions concerning design.

Chapter 1: Print Culture in Shanghai

In the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was indubitably the centre of the Chinese publishing industry. Between 1927 and 1936, Shanghai published over 70% of all printed books in China, and this figure rises to 80% for periodicals and magazines.¹ While statistics on the total number of books published was not gathered at the time, the figures released by the Commercial Press show that the publishing house published a total number of 8039 works between 1897 and 1930 (this figure includes books and periodicals, with each periodical counted as one work regardless of the number of issues). Publications related to literature, art, and philosophy amounted to about 25% of all the publications of the Commercial Press.²

It is important to note the rapid growth of the publishing industry in the twentieth century, especially after 1911. We can see this more clearly in relation to translated works, where the relevant statistical information was gathered. In the second half of the nineteenth century, over seventy percent of the 500-odd translated works dealt with topics related to the natural sciences and practical technology; over half were translated from the English. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the pace of translation increased dramatically: from 1902 to 1904, over 500 works were translated, mainly from the Japanese (60% of all

¹ Lai Xinxia 來新嘯, *Zhongguo Jindai Tushu Shiye Shi* 中國近代圖書事業史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2000), 243.

² Li Zezhang 李澤彰, "Sanshiwu-nian lai Zhongguo zhi Chubanye 三十五年來中國之出版業," in *Zhongguo Tushu Lunji* 中國圖書論集, ed. Cheng Huanwen 程煥文 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1994), 398.

translated works). The proportion of texts also changed: almost half dealt with topics related to the social sciences and "History and Geography" (史地). In the Republican period, the brisk pace of translation continued, with a dramatic increase in translations of literary works: from 1912 to 1940, 5299 works were translated, 27% of which were literary works. Over half of the works were again translated from the English (primarily from Great Britain and the US). According to Chen Huanwen, the success of the Meiji Reformation greatly attracted the attention of Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century, but the increasingly aggressive position taken by the Japanese government towards China cooled that interest, and intellectuals took more of an interest in the US and Britain.³ By the 1920s, there were many publishing houses that were involved in translating literary works. According to one estimate, there were 48 publishers involved in translating literary works.⁴ Many publishing houses had direct or indirect links with important literary groups, or else had long-standing commitments to print the works of such groups.

It must be noted, nevertheless, that the size of the Chinese publishing industry throughout the Republican period remained very small compared to other countries. Whereas, in one year (1930), over 10 000 works were published in Germany, Japan, France, Britain, and the US each, in China, the figure was closer to 1000. This means that fewer books were published in China each year in the

³ Qian Cunxun 錢存訓, "Jinshi Yishu dui Zhongguo Xiandaihua de Yingxiang 近世譯書對中國現代化的影響," in *Zhongguo Tushu Lunji* 中國圖書論集, ed. Cheng Huanwen 程煥文 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1994), 307-313.

⁴ Li Zezhang 李澤彰, "Sanshiwu-nian lai Zhongguo zhi Chubanye 三十五年來中國之出版業," 395.

late 1920s than in Norway, Hungary, or Portugal.⁵ The small size of the Chinese publishing industry is reflected also in the number of employees: from 10 000 workers in 1920 to about 20 000 workers in 1931; these figures include workers in printing, publishing, editing, and bookstores (retail).⁶

Publishing Houses

Competition in the publishing industry in China had been strong since the late nineteenth century. Before 1911, for example, there were 110 publishing houses in Shanghai.⁷ Many of them were small in scale, however. Only with the establishment of the Commercial Press was there a larger publishing house in the industry. By 1911, with the establishment of the Zhonghua bookstore by Lu Feikui 陸費逵, a native of Tongxiang county, Zhejiang province, there came to be fierce competition. Lu Feikui set out to compete with the Commercial Press. Zhonghua bookstore sought to match every magazine and every series of books put out by the Commercial Press. Moreover, Zhonghua also exposed the commercial connections between the Commercial Press and Japanese merchants, using the

⁵ Li Zezhang 李澤彰, "Sanshiwu-nian lai Zhongguo zhi Chubanye 三十五年來中國之出版業," 400-401. This figure is extrapolated from the numbers provided by the Commercial Press, as complete information was not collected.

⁶ Song Yuanfang 宋原放 and Sun Yong 孫頤, eds., *Shanghai Chubanzhi 上海出版誌* (Shanghai: Shanghai Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe 上海社會科學院出版社, 2000), 880.

⁷ Li Zezhang 李澤彰, "Sanshiwu-nian lai Zhongguo zhi Chubanye 三十五年來中國之出版業," 225-226.

slogan “The Chinese people need to use Chinese textbooks” (“中國人須要用中國人教科書”).⁸

The role of the publishing industry was important for educational reform, and vice versa. The change of the educational system through the establishment of “New Schools” and the spread of “Western Learning” led to a great demand for new textbooks. During this period, the number of students in China increased from several tens of thousands in 1903 to over 150 000 in 1911.⁹ The publishing industry also got a tremendous boost with the spread of libraries through most of China after 1925. The increase in the number of libraries meant that publishers could afford to print books in larger quantities. Moreover, the bigger publishers could also compile large collectanea for libraries to acquire. The Commercial Press, for example, came out with the *Wanyou Wenku* 萬有文庫 that included over 1000 titles.¹⁰

Towards the end of the 1910s and throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, the number of bookstores grew substantially. There were large-scale bookstores and numerous smaller-scale bookstores that were crucial to the introduction of new literary and philosophical works. One such publisher was Shijie Bookstore 世界書局. Founded in 1917, Shijie focused on publishing educational material, especially for primary and secondary education in the 1920s. It was notable for its ABC collectanea, ABC 叢書, edited by Xu Funan 徐蔚南, that was an important

⁸ Ibid., 247-248.

⁹ Lai Xinxia 來新嘜, *Zhongguo Jindai Tushu Shiye Shi* 中國近代圖書事業史, 187-188.

¹⁰ Li Zezhang 李澤彰, “Sanshiwu-nian lai Zhongguo zhi Chubanye 三十五年來中國之出版業,” 397.

collection of works, with many works by renowned authors and writers of the time.¹¹

Another important publisher was Guanghua bookstore 光華書局, which was founded in 1925 by Shen Songquan, Zhang Qinglu, and Lu Fang. It was dedicated to publishing books related to new literature and arts. It published the periodical *Huanzhou* 幻洲, which was alternately edited by Pan Hannian 潘漢年 and Ye Lingfeng 葉靈鳳, as well as *Gebi* 戈壁, also edited by Ye Lingfeng. Lu Xun also published his *Mingya* 萌芽 periodical at Guanghua.¹² Guanghua published over 200 titles by the Creationists and leftists writers. This was done at considerable financial (and occasionally judicial) risk: out of the 200 titles, over a fifth were banned by the Nationalist authorities.

There was also the Xiandai Bookstore 現代書局, founded by Hong Xuefan 洪雪帆 in 1927. It was notable for publishing many books and periodicals, including works by Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Tian Han 田漢, Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, as well as important literary periodicals such as *Xiandai Xiaoshuo* 現代小說 (edited by Ye Lingfeng 葉靈鳳 and Pan Hannian 潘漢年), *Xinliu* 新流 (edited by Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈), *Tuohuangzhe* 拓荒者 (edited by Qian Hancun 錢杏邨), *Nanguo Yuekan* 南國月刊 (edited by Tian Han 田漢), *Dazhong Wenyi* 大眾文藝 (edited by Yu Dafu 郁達夫), as well as *Xiandai* 現代 (Les Contemporains; edited by Shi Zhecun 施蛰存).¹³

¹¹ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 233-234.

¹² Ibid., 234-235.

¹³ Ibid., 237.

Many publishing houses had direct and indirect links with various literary groups, whose role cannot be ignored. Since the beginning of the May Fourth movement, there was a concerted effort among many Chinese intellectuals to introduce world literature to the Chinese readers. The Literary Study Society (*wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會), which included Mao Dun 茅盾, Zheng Zhenze 鄭振鐸, Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶, Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, not only published *Wenxue Xunkan* 文學旬刊, but also published the *Wenxue Yanjiu Hui Congshu* 文學研究會叢書, through the Commercial Press. This series included over 100 literary and non-literary works from China and abroad, published from 1922 to 1947.¹⁴ Moreover, Zheng Zhenze and Ye Shengtao edited the *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 小說月報, which was an important vehicle for new literary works.¹⁵

To cite another literary group: the "Creation" group (*chuangzao she* 創造社), which included Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Zhang Ziping 張資平, among others, published various periodicals related to the "Creationists," as well as a collectanea of books, *Chuangzao She Congshu* 創造社叢書.¹⁶ This collectanea included 42 titles, from 1926 to 1929, when the group was shut down by the authorities.¹⁷

By the 1930s, the publishing industry was dominated by three bookstores: the Commercial Press, Zhonghua, and Shijie. In 1936, for example, the

¹⁴ Ibid., 399-403.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1058

¹⁶ Cheng Huanwen 程煥文, *Zhongguo Tushu Wenhua Daolun* 中國圖書文化道論 (Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe 中山大學出版社, 1995), 387-388.

¹⁷ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 399-403

Commercial Press published 4938 works, Zhonghua 1548 works, and Shijie 231 works, accounting for over 70% of the 9438 works published in China (note that “works” include both books and periodicals).¹⁸ The small presses were also important, however, accounting for almost one-third of the market; the most important of these (in terms of literary and philosophical material) included Xinyue 新月, Xiandai 現代, Liangyou 良友, Shenghuo 生活, Kaiming 開明, and Beixin 北新.¹⁹ It is important to note that whereas the big three publishers often reprinted classical works, the smaller presses were usually dedicated to new literary, historical, and philosophical works. Many of the smaller presses appeared briefly and disappeared quickly, often due to financial difficulties as well as to problems with censorship from the Nationalist authorities.

Many of the smaller presses were hit hard by the series of publication restrictions on literary and social science material imposed by the Nationalist government in 1930. That year, a series of laws were passed to restrict publication of subversive material. By 1934, almost 900 titles were banned. Illegal methods were also employed, such as the arbitrary confiscation of books through the post office as well as the intimidation of writers and editors, some of whom were murdered. Between 1929 and 1933, many small presses were shut down, were made to close for a period, or had equipment and offices damaged.²⁰ The KMT government also established its own publishing houses and published periodicals

¹⁸ Lai Xinxia 來新嘯, *Zhongguo Jindai Tushu Shiye Shi* 中國近代圖書事業史, 294-295.

¹⁹ Ibid., 296.

²⁰ Ibid., 297-300.

in order to counter the perceived threat of left-wing and progressive publication.²¹ Kaiming Bookstore, for example, was forced to publish *Qianfeng Yuekan* 前鋒月刊, a periodical filled with pro-Nationalist articles.²²

The restrictive conditions of publishing in the 1930s created the phenomenon of book pirating. Much of the pirated material were works by left-wing writers. Furthermore, there was also a shift towards magazines in such a restrictive environment. Indeed, 1934 was called “Magazine Year” (*zazhi nian* 雜誌年): there were 300 new periodical publications, 80% of which were based in Shanghai. Growth in magazine sales was so significant in the mid-1930s that there was a publisher dedicated to publishing magazines, the Shanghai Magazine Company 上海雜誌公司.²³

Aside from restrictions imposed by the Nationalist Government, many publishing also suffered considerable damage during the Japanese raids on Shanghai in 1932. The Commercial Press, for example, suffered huge losses to its large collection of books (the Dongfang Tushuguan 東方圖書館); many small presses (not to mention many writers and artists, as well as the general population) suffered significant losses as well.

²¹ These included *Qianfeng Zhoubao* 前鋒周報, *Wenyi Yuekan* 文藝月刊, *Qianfeng Yuekan* 前鋒月刊, all of which promoted “Nationalist Art” (*minzu zhuyi wenyi* 民族主義文藝).

²² Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 237.

²³ *Ibid.*, 239.

Newspapers and Magazines

The first newspapers in the modern sense were started by non-Chinese, many of whom were missionaries, in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century.²⁴ By the early 1900s, there was a change in the perception of journalism due to reformist and revolutionary agitation in the press. Consequently, more of the educated classes took an interest in journalism and the quality of the writing improved.²⁵ The number of periodicals (*baokan* 報刊) circulating increased from 88 (between 1869 and 1900) to over 300. There was also a surge of literary periodicals in the ten years before the Republican revolution: *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說 (founded in 1902, in Yokohama, Japan), *Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo* 繡像小說 (1903-1906, by the Commercial Press), *Yueyue Xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (1906-1908) were among the most prominent. It is important to note that during this period, there was no concept of *zazhi* 雜誌, or magazine, distinct from “newspapers”; newspapers, magazines, journals were all called *bao* 報.²⁶

Periodicals dedicated to culture in its broadest sense and social-science-related research burgeoned from the turn of the nineteenth century to the late-1920s. According to Luo Xiaohua, the number grew from about 30 between 1905 and 1912 to about 100 in 1920. Between 1921 and 1927, more than 500

²⁴ Cheng Huanwen 程煥文, *Zhongguo Tushu Wenhua Daolun* 中國圖書文化道論, 377-378.

²⁵ Lai Xinxia 來新嘯, *Zhongguo Jindai Tushu Shiye Shi* 中國近代圖書事業史, 189-190.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 194-199.

periodicals existed.²⁷ This was related to the emergence of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school of literature (*yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派) before and after the founding of the Republic in 1911.²⁸ Over 2200 kinds of publications were printed, including over 100 affiliated magazines and 49 newspapers.²⁹ Butterfly-school periodicals were also quick to utilise images on their covers; most of the images were figures of ladies, inspired by the calendar poster (*yuefenpai* 月份牌). *Libai Liu*, one of the most popular Butterfly magazines, was illustrated by Ding Song 丁悚, who also illustrated *yuefenpai*.³⁰ Figure 10 shows one of the earliest cover designs of *Libai Liu*; Figure 11 shows a calendar poster from the 1920s.



Figure 10



Figure 11

²⁷ Luo Xiaohua 羅小華, *Zhongguo Jindai Shuji Zhuangzheng* 中國近代書籍裝幀 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1990), 2.

²⁸ The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school of literature was so called due to the prevalence of love stories, especially those in a traditional style.

²⁹ Lai Xinxia 來新嘜, *Zhongguo Jindai Tushu Shiye Shi* 中國近代圖書事業史, 237.

³⁰ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史 (Harbin: Heilongjian Renmin Chubanshe, 1984), 53.

Magazines came to be distinguished from newspapers from the Butterfly periodicals onward. With the use of images on magazine covers, as well as increased specialization in terms of subject matter, it was possible to distinguish magazines clearly from newspapers, which, on the whole, kept the same format of calligraphic or typographic inscription as the masthead.

Popular literature drove the introduction of magazines tremendously. The Butterfly school of popular literature in particular was an important force in the 1910s, not only for the sheer number of publications, but only for its innovative use of imagery on the covers of books and magazines.

Printing technology & design

A great variety of printing technology was introduced to China throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. As early as 1807, lead-type printing was introduced, and by 1876, lithography had been imported. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the changes in print technology did not dramatically affect the format of books, whether in terms of layout, paper, or binding.³¹

It was only with the introduction of double-sided printing, as opposed to the traditional practice of printing only on one side of the page, that the format of the book changed greatly. In terms of design, this meant that books were bound in a completely new way, whether in hardcover or soft cover format. Only in the late

³¹ Ibid., 49-50.

Qing were there the Western soft-cover and hard-cover books. In 1901, books printed in Japan with double-sided printing, Western-style binding were distributed for the first time for a book by a Chinese author.³² Double-sided printing only became truly prevalent in the early 1920s.³³ Printing technology affected a shift in typeface sizes as well. Gradually, character types became smaller and the size of books also gradually shrank, from a larger traditional size to around 20 by 14 cm.³⁴

Changes in book cover design came about slowly in comparison to printing technology. In the late Qing and the early Republican period, books published in Shanghai exhibited few differences from traditional-style books. The covers very often showed only the title and the author of the work. Gradually, there were minor changes in (cover) character forms, which led to the creation of “artistic characters” (*meishuzi* 美術字) as first seen in *Xin Qingnian* 新青年.³⁵ In the beginning of the twentieth century, a few publications started to adopt new book cover designs. Most of these were published in Japan, such as the first issues of *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 and *Yuwai Xiaoshuo Ji* 域外小說集, which used images of dragon, sun, and earth as a part of its cover design.³⁶ Under the competitive conditions in the 1920s, publishing houses became more aware of the visual and commercial possibilities of the book cover as a surface for images.

³² Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 826.

³³ Luo Xiaohua 羅小華, *Zhongguo Jindai Shuji Zhuangzheng* 中國近代書籍裝幀, 3.

³⁴ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 823-825.

³⁵ Luo Xiaohua 羅小華, *Zhongguo Jindai Shuji Zhuangzheng* 中國近代書籍裝幀, 4-5.

³⁶ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 53-54.

There were also substantial changes in layout, binding, and typography. The traditional format of larger upper margins and boxed text (that is, lines around texts or lines around every line) was abandoned. Western-style punctuation started to be used in the 1910s and was gradually adopted as the standard in the 1920s and the 1930s. Traditional *xianzhuang* 線裝 binding became rarer with mechanised binding; as a result, by the 1920s, most magazines were stapled, and book publishers adopted the Western division between soft-cover and hard-cover books.

Changes in typography were subtler. Improvements in printing technology affected how types were cast, and in turn this had an effect on the appearance of type. From the beginning of modern printing, improvements were gradually made in the appearance of character types; at first, the modern types were far inferior to traditional woodblock types, but towards the end of the nineteenth century, the precision and clarity of the character outlines in modern character types surpassed traditional types. Aside from the traditional *song* type³⁷ (*songti* 宋體; also called

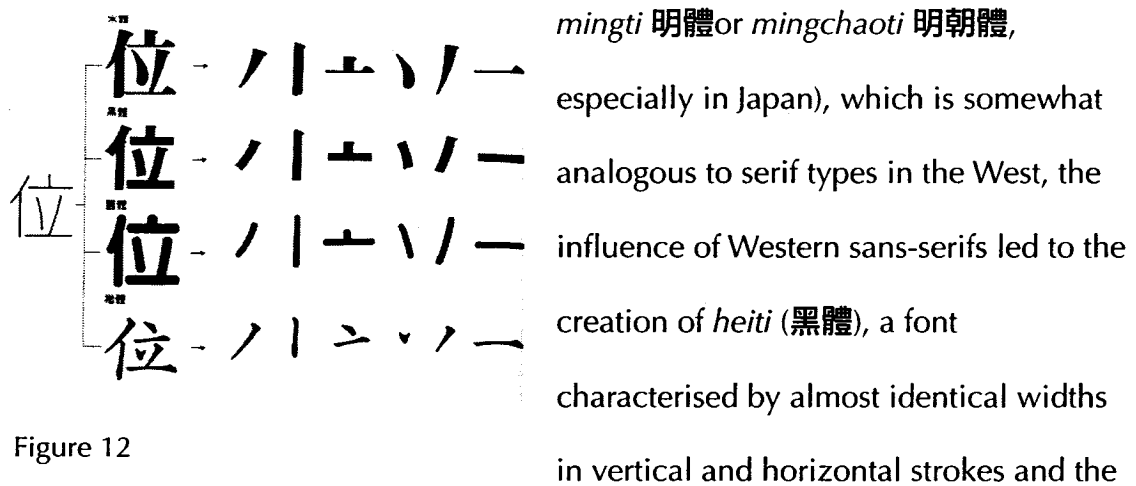


Figure 12

³⁷ I mean traditional-style *songti* that was recast according to modern methods. There were minor differences.

lack of modulation of width at the beginning or end of strokes. Figure 12 shows four typefaces: *Songti*, *Heiti*, *Yuanti* (rounded ends of strokes) and *Kaiti*, along with the constituent strokes. There was also the modern version of *Fangsongti* (仿宋體), created by Ding Fuzhi (丁輔之)³⁸ and Ding Shanzhi (丁善之) in 1916 after the calligraphy of Song calligrapher, Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修).³⁹ This was a slender version of *songti*, emphasising vertical height over horizontal width, and also has horizontal strokes slanting slightly upward. And lastly, there was *kaiti* (楷體), a print version of *kaishu* (楷書); this required a high technical quality of printing in order to show the fine distinctions of brush strokes, especially when characters are printed in their modern sizes rather than their larger, traditional sizes.

Songti (of which *fangsongti* can be considered a variation), *heiti*, and *kaiti* are really type families, with many variations within the particular types used by different printers and bookstores. Within each type family, the differences manifested themselves in different elements of the characters, such as the ratio of the width of vertical strokes to horizontal strokes, the different spacing of strokes to one another, and differences in stroke shapes themselves (especially with the

³⁸ Ding Fuzhi (1879-1979) was involved in establishing Xileng Yinshe 西泠印社. The *fangsong* was used by Zhonghua bookstore from 1921. There was a square format, a tall format, and a short format. The square was used to print 四部備要 whereas the long *fangsong* was used to print educational material or business cards. Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 1041.

³⁹ Wu Shoulin 吳壽林, ed., *Shukan Zhuangzheng Daxidian* 書刊裝幀大辭典 (Shanghai: Donghua Daxue Chubanshe, 2003), 194.

三 基本笔划

正楷华笔划 比 较	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
宋体美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
长宋体美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
扁宋体美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
等线宋体美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
等线方头字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
黑体美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ
圆笔美术字 笔 划	一	丨	ノ	ㄣ	ㄥ	ㄨ	ㄩ	ㄣ	ㄩ

Figure 13

strokes of *dian* 點, *pie* 撇, and *na* 捺).⁴⁰ Figure 13 shows eight different typefaces, with the constituent strokes. Note in particular how within each typeface, the shape of a stroke, especially the beginning and the end, needs to be similar to other strokes.

The typography of texts (rather than cover characters indicating the titles of books) was not a major concern for Chinese designers, for two major reasons. Firstly, the sheer technical and logistical difficulty of designing a font for thousands of Chinese characters meant that few could accomplish such a task without considerable financial and technical support; this meant that character design was usually relegated to specialised printers, unlike in the West, where individual designers could design different fonts in a (relatively) short period of time.

⁴⁰ See Geng Qiu 耿秋, *Meishuzi Xinzuo* 美術字新作 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1957), 2-20; Yang Dekang 楊德康, *Shiyong Meishuzi* 實用美術字 (Beijing: Chaohua Meishu Chubanshe, 1964), 3-4, 22; Wang Rusong 王如松, *Meishuzi Xiefa* 美術字寫法 (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Chubanshe, 1962), 1-3; Qiu Yongfu 丘永福, *Zixue* 字學 (Taipei: Yifengtang Chubanshe, 1991), 19, 22-25. Also Wu Shoulin 吳壽林, ed., *Shukan Zhuangzheng Dacidian* 書刊裝幀大辭典, 187-228.

Secondly, the nature of Chinese writing caused fewer aesthetic issues in the layout of texts. The square shape of characters, the lack of word spacing, and the fact that punctuation in Chinese texts usually occupied a square space of its own meant that there were fewer issues to resolve when a text is laid out. Unlike Western typographers, Chinese typographers did not have to worry too much about the spacing between letters within a word, the spacing between words, and the placement of punctuation—all of which, it must be added, were major concerns of the later Bauhaus typographers (such as Tschichold) in the 1920s and the 1930s. This is not to say that there was nothing to decide: the spacing of margins as well as the ratio of spacing between characters within a line to the spacing between lines had important effects on the appearance of the page. But overall, the invisible square grid of Chinese texts meant that layout of texts was not as much of a problem as in the West.⁴¹ Most designers devoted their attention only to the design of covers.⁴² The division between the inside text and the cover was more distinct than in the West: the inside text was usually a technical concern related to printing technology, whereas the cover was usually designed by hand (and only afterwards given to the printers). Moreover, there was little association between the use of any one type of font (for texts) and a particular idea of design, as there was in Bauhaus,

⁴¹ The issue was similar in 1910s and 1920s Japan. Richard S. Thornton, *The Graphic Spirit of Japan* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 54-55.

⁴² Wu Shoulin 吳壽林, ed. *Shukan Zhuangzheng Dacidian* 書刊裝幀大辭典, i, 206.

where sans serifs represented the new typography of modernity, clarity, and progress, especially in the formulations of Tschichold.⁴³

I have talked about the typography of texts on the inside. On covers, however, character forms were manipulated for various effects. Titles of books and magazines were of three varieties: calligraphic inscriptions, print-type fonts, or hand-drawn/hand-designed 'artistic characters' (*meishuzi* 美術字). *Meishuzi*'s characteristic was that it was designed by hand each time: one had to draw the outline of the characters and then fill them in. Figure 14 shows the different

adornments that could be added

to a character after one has

created the basic shape; that is,

after the outline has been filled

in. Aside from this, *meishuzi*

showed vast variation: some

meishuzi utilised geometric

shapes (circles, triangles, even

squares) as elements within characters, while other *meishuzi* adapted mannered

curves that betrayed Art Nouveau influences. Still others distorted the character

forms dramatically, sometimes incorporating character forms completely within the

rest of the cover design.

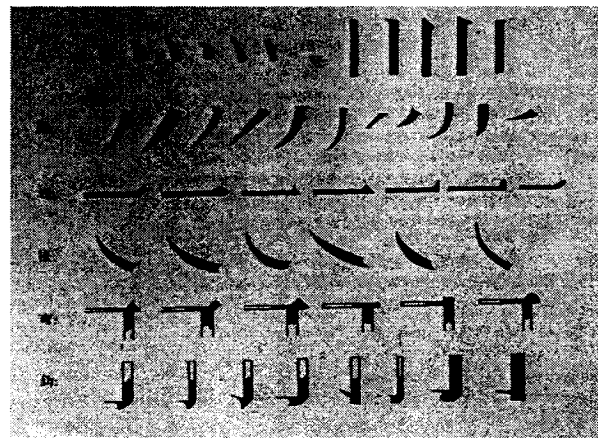


Figure 14

⁴³ Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. By Ruari McLean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). First published in 1928 in German.

Popular Literature and Cover Designs

Popular literature, especially the Butterfly school of literature, was important in the introduction of imagery to the covers of books and magazines. Under the influence of religious (missionary) publications and Western commercial matter (commercial packaging, tobacco advertising, medical advertising), book publishers placed attractive imagery on book and magazine covers in order to attract customers. Many Butterfly publications had covers that showed female figures in various guises. Often, the cover image had nothing to do with the content.⁴⁴

Many early designers of book covers, in the 1910s, were designers of *yuefenpai* (or calendar posters) and of commercial packaging. The most important included Ding Song 丁悚, Zheng Mantuo 鄭曼陀 (see figure 15), and many others.⁴⁵ These designers often worked for tobacco companies or pharmaceutical companies which were important in introducing imagery on products and advertising. A company that used imagery extensively in its advertising was the British-American Tobacco Company. It set up an advertising department in Shanghai as



Figure 15

⁴⁴ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 826.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 828.

early as 1902.⁴⁶ Its success was partly due to the importance it placed on having Chinese painters and designers working on its calendar posters; the adoption of Chinese themes in the earliest *yuefenpai* led to widespread popularity. There were also many other tobacco companies that used the calendar poster as a marketing device, including the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company, the Huacheng Tobacco Company, Hatamen Tobacco, among others. Pharmaceutical and other consumer products companies also produced many *yuefenpai* posters.

There were various styles of *yuefenpai* posters, but in terms of pictorial style, one style, a combination of Western-style sketching and water-color techniques (*cabi shuicai huafa* 擦筆水彩畫法) came to dominate. Zheng Mantuo is credited with using this technique first in 1914. The artist “first drew the outlines of the subjects, then laid a light layer of translucent water colors, used dried color to create texture, and applied a final coat of water coat over the entire painting, which gave the painting its final lifelike results.”⁴⁷ This technique allowed a sense of illusionistic three-dimensionality but did not over-emphasize chiaroscuro “especially as facial features were required to be in an even and mild tone, in order to satisfy the aesthetic standards/habits of Chinese people.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史 (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社, 2002), 56.

⁴⁷ Deng Ming 鄧明, ed., *Lao Yuefenpai Nianhua: Zuihou yi pie* 老月份牌年畫：最後一瞥 (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe 上海畫報出版社, 2003), introduction.

⁴⁸ Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史 (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社, 2002), 50. (「尤其是人物面部要求均勻柔和，以符合中國人的審美習慣。」)



Figure 16

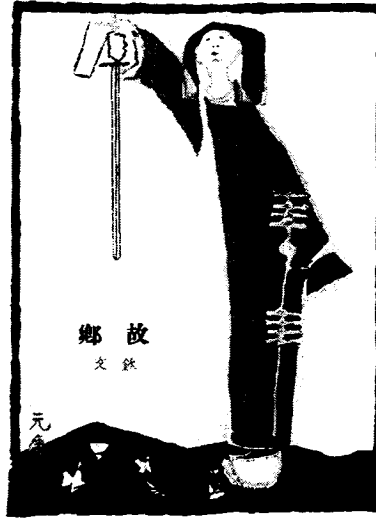


Figure 17



Figure 18

The practice of *yuefenpai* is the backdrop against which many designers of book covers in the 1920s worked. Especially with May Fourth literary publications, one sees a remarkable shift in style away from the *yuefenpai* and Butterfly style of design. Lines and colour schemes were simplified, and there was a move away from representational images. From figure 16 (a calendar poster by Ni Gengye 倪耕野)(1920s) to figures 17 (a cover design by Tao Yuanqing 陶元慶) and 18 (a cover design by Qian Juntao 錢君匋), we can notice a vast difference: rather than an illusionistic representation as in figure 16, there is a drastic reduction of colours and a simplification of the outline. Contrasts of colour and of shapes are used more consciously, and are stronger and more startling in figures 17 and 18. Cover designs became less of a drawing or a painting on a cover, towards a different style of imagery where the interrelation of lines, shapes, and colours were thought through the prism of attracting attention as well as through the need to articulate a

national modernity. From the late 1910s, beginning with Lu Xun, Feng Zikai, Chen Zhifo, through to Qian Juntao, Zhang Guangyu and others in the 1930s, design on book and magazine covers underwent significant changes.

Many, if not most, designers were not trained as designers. For example, Lu Xun was a writer first and foremost; Tao Yuanqing was a Western landscape painter; Feng Zikai was an illustrator (and writer); and so on. There were no courses on graphic design as such,⁴⁹ though there were courses on *tu'an* (圖案; roughly equivalent to 'design'; it can also refer to 'ornamentation,' 'decoration'/'decorative art,' and 'craft of design'). Chen Zhifo, Qian Juntao, and (to a lesser degree) Feng Zikai were the designers who had the most exposure to the field of *tu'an*, which was heavily influenced by Japanese design (*zuan*) and Japanese decorative arts. What is now called 'graphic design' (*shuji zhuangzheng* 書籍裝幀) was not, therefore, a unified discipline. Before the 1950s (at the earliest), those who wished to study 'design' usually studied *tu'an*, a larger field of decorative art with a focus on analysing and creating motifs, patterns and decorative images. This was probably the influence of Japanese practice: before the 1950s, 'design' (of books, magazines, posters, packaging, among others) as an area of inquiry was usually called *zuan*.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The first specialised course of study in graphic design was established in 1956, at the Central Applied Arts Academy 中央工藝美術學院. Wu Shoulin 吳壽林, ed., *Shukan Zhuangzheng Dacidian* 書刊裝幀大辭典, 424-425.

⁵⁰ Richard S. Thornton, *The Graphic Spirit of Japan*, 62.

Chapter 2: Lu Xun and Graphic Design

Lu Xun's first documented cover design was *Yuejie Lüxing* 月界旅行, which was distributed in China after having been published in Japan in 1903.¹ He also created the cover for *Stories from Abroad* (*Yuwai Xiaoshuo Ji* 域外小說集)(figure 19), published in March 1909.² It was published with Lu Xun's own funds in Japan.³ The design involves a Western book illustration (i.e. *chatu* 插圖) at the top, with the title written in the small-seal calligraphy of Chen Shizeng (陳師曾), printed on a dark olive-green background.⁴ The use of a book illustration on the cover was unusual for the period; more commonly, cover designs were in the traditional style, or involved



Figure 19

¹ Song Yuanfang 宋原放 and Sun Yong 孫頤, eds., *Shanghai Chubanzhi* 上海出版誌 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe 上海社會科學院出版社 2000), 828; Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史 (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社 2002), 66.

² According to Yang Yongde, Lu Xun had designed a cover of *New Life* (*Xinsheng* 新生) magazine in 1908, but it was not published. The cover purportedly included only a reprint of a painting called "渴望" (*Kewang*). See Yang Yongde, "'Minzuxing' yu Shuji Zhuangzheng," *Luxun Studies Monthly* 6 (1998): 52.

³ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史 (Harbin: Heilongjian Renmin Chubanshe, 1984), 53-54. Cheng Huanwen cites an account that reports a low number of sales for this anthology of translated works, in the region of 50 copies sold; Cheng Huanwen 程煥文, *Zhongguo Tushu Lunji* 中國圖書論集, (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1994), 316.

⁴ Yang Yongde. "Lu Xun, Xiandai Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu, Gongxian," *Luxun Studies Monthly* 2 (1997): 48. For the reprint of the cover design, see the collection put out by the Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀 (Shanghai: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1981), 36.

western binding with a calligraphic inscription.⁵ (There were, however, book covers with paintings as illustrations: the second edition (1909) of Zeng Mengpu's *Niehai Hua* (figure 20), for example, had a coloured drawing of the sea on the cover, and periodicals affiliated with the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature, such as *Libai Liu* and the early *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*, had female figures in various attire.)⁶ Yang Yongde also mentions a 1914 *Huiji Jun Gushu Zaji* (會稽郡故書雜集), bound in the traditional



Figure 20

xianzhuang style ("Line-Stitched"; 線裝書), with the title again in the calligraphy of Chen Shiceng. Other than these examples, it appears that Lu Xun, at this stage, was not personally involved in designing book or magazine covers. From 1923 onwards, however, Lu Xun became much more active in cover designs. He designed a substantial number of covers for periodicals and books—almost all of which are books he authored, translated, or edited/compiled—between 1923 and his death in 1936.⁷ One must also take into consideration other publications where he was closely involved in the design in

⁵ See Ding Shouhe 丁守和, *Xinhai Geming Shiqi Qikan Jieshao* 辛亥革命時期期刊介紹 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1982), vol. 1.

⁶ Jiang Deming 姜德明, *Shuyi Baiying* 書衣百影 (Beijing: Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 1999), 2-3. Also Denise Gimpel's *Lost Voices of Modernity: A Chinese Popular Fiction Magazine in Context* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 29-33.

⁷ Approximately 50 cover designs. See Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀.

cooperation with others, especially at Beixin She and Weiming She (北新社; 未名社).

One of first designs by Lu Xun after the start of the May Fourth Movement is *Nahan* (吶喊; or *Call to Arms*)(figure 21).⁸ The first edition, printed by Xinchao she (新潮社) in August 1923, has a pale background, with a red box near the top that contains the title of the book and the author printed in type.⁹ The second and the third editions, printed by Beixin Bookstore (北新書局) in 1926, are printed on light and maroon backgrounds respectively, with a similar design as the first edition, only that the characters are carved in a style inspired loosely by seal engraving. *Nahan's* design has been



Figure 21

commented on frequently due to its importance as the first collection of Lu Xun's works. The historian of Chinese graphic design, Qiu Ling, for example, sees a resonance between the powerfully carved characters and the immense sense of struggle Lu Xun conveys in the preface where he creates the image of suffocating iron house.¹⁰ In his recollections, the designer (and later painter and calligrapher),

⁸ The very first cover Lu Xun designed in this period was the cover for the first issue of the *Guoxue Jikan* 國學期刊, published by Beijing University. See Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀, 61, 85.

⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 70.

Qian Juntao, recalls how this design was at the same time impressively new and elegant, and he relates Lu Xun's explanation for designing the cover himself:

Books published in the past had for their covers some inscription by renowned figures, or else used print type. These are all old-fashioned. I wanted to change this a little, so I designed it myself.

過去所出的書，書面上或者找名人題字，或者採用鉛字排印，這些都是老套，我想把它改一改，所以自己來設計了。¹¹

Lu Xun contrasts his design with old-fashioned designs, thus emphasising its newness. Yet compared to how he later articulates graphic art and especially woodcuts, he still seems to treat cover design as a type of decoration.

Lu Xun started publishing many of his works at Beixin Book Store and Weiming She from 1924 onwards. He had close connections with both of them: the Beixin Book Store was founded, with Lu Xun's help, by Li Xiaofeng, an editor of *Yusi* (語絲);¹² the Weiming She (which included many of the same people that were involved with *Mangyuan* 莽原) was an even more closely knit group, and played a "major role in introducing Russian literature in translation to China."¹³ Lu Xun discussed designs closely with the editors at Beixin Book Store, and at the Weiming She he was deeply involved with editorial work as well; it is very likely,

¹¹ Qian Juntao 錢君匋, "Yi Lu Xun," *Qian Juntao Yishu Lun* 錢君匋藝術論 (Beijing: Xianzhuang Shuji, 1999), 247.

¹² Lu Xun was also closely involved with *Yusi*. See Howard Goldblatt, "Patterns of Literary Sponsorship," in *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, edited by Leo Ou-fan Lee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 204-205.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 205.

therefore, that Lu Xun had greater control over the design of his books at these two organisations than at other publishers.

Before looking more closely at other cover designs, it is important to consider Lu Xun's attention to layout, printing methods, and costs. Lu Xun was dissatisfied with the layout of many of the newly published books for not having an inside cover page nor adequate margins at the top and the bottom, noting that:

[if you] wanted to add a comment or anything else, there is not enough space. Opening the book, all you see is a density of text; along with the awful smell, one experiences a sense of cramped-ness. Not only is there very little of a 'joy of reading,' but one feels that there is a sense of 'very little left in life'....In such an atmosphere, such an environment, the human spirit would surely be compressed.

想要寫上一點意見或別的什麼，也無地可容，翻開書來，滿本是密密層層的黑字；加以油臭撲鼻，使人發生一種壓迫和窘促之感，不特很少“讀書之樂”，且覺得彷彿人生已沒有“餘裕”，“不留餘地”……在這樣“不留餘地”空氣的圍繞裡，人們的精神大抵要被擠子的。¹⁴

Specifically, Lu Xun made sure that at the beginning of each passage, there would be a gap of five lines between the title and the text. In the main text, characters would not be placed immediately adjacent to one another; there would be a gap of a quarter-character. Moreover, punctuation would never begin a line, and every chapter or section would begin on a new page. According to Qian Juntao, these

¹⁴ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1982), vol. 3, 11; quoted in Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 68. The passage comes from “Huran Xiang dao 忽然想到” in *Huagai Ji* 華蓋集 (1925).

series of layout reforms gradually became a general trend among literary and cultural printed material, and “must be considered together with what he [Lu Xun] was doing with cover design.”¹⁵

Lu Xun’s cover designs can be categorised into five major categories in terms of their formal composition: 1. Covers in the manner of traditional-style (*xianzhuang*) books; 2. Plain covers (i.e. Western-style soft covers) with recognizably calligraphic inscriptions; 3. Designs that involve a play or manipulation of the script in the manner of “artistic characters” (*meishuzi* 美術字; characters with a new style that is not recognisably calligraphic); 4. Designs with decorative or figural elements derived from or inspired by ancient stone rubbings; 5. Designs utilising woodcut illustrations.¹⁶ Except for the later designs involving woodcut illustrations, where the designs quite evidently reflected the content, the relationship between the cover design and the content or even genre of the work is not a simple, straightforward one (for example, Lu Xun used ancient stone rubbings as an element of design for a translated work). (I will not comment much on the *xianzhuang*-style books and the plain covers with calligraphy inscriptions, as they differed little from other such books of the period, though they often were the result of the detailed attention Lu Xun gave.)

¹⁵ Qian Juntao, “Yi Lu Xun,” 248.

¹⁶ There were also about five cover designs that only use typed characters. See Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀.

A good number of his cover designs include playful elements that draw on his knowledge of calligraphy and seal engraving. *Huagai Ji Xupian's* (華蓋集續篇; Beijing Beixin She, 1927)(figure 22) cover has “xupian” designed as a slanted seal.¹⁷ A little later, the cover of *Yinyu Ji* (引玉集, a collection of Soviet woodcuts; Sanxian 三閑, 1933)(figure 23) contains a hand-carved title-diagram, evoking the



Figure 22

almost tactile quality of woodcuts.¹⁸ There are also several cover designs where Lu Xun created stylised, artistic characters: *Eryi Ji* (而已集; Shanghai Beixin She, 1928)(figure 24), *Benliu* (奔流; Beixin, Issue 1, 1928)(figure 25), *Jiewen* (接吻; Chaohua 朝花, 1929)(figure 26), *Mingya Yuekan* (茗芽月刊; Guanghua 光華, Issue

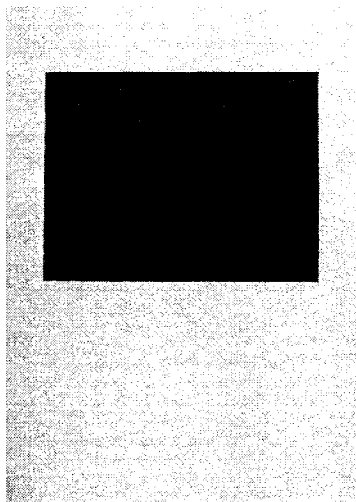


Figure 23

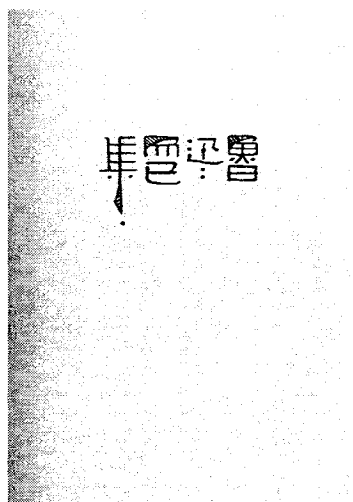


Figure 24

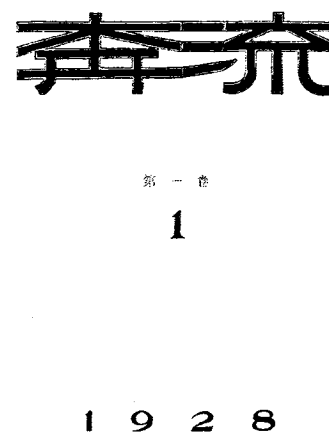


Figure 25

¹⁷ Qiu Ling believes that the cover typeface for “*Huagai Ji*” was hand-drawn, conveying a sense of liveliness on the level of typeface. Qiu Ling, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi*, 70.

¹⁸ Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀, 49, 84.

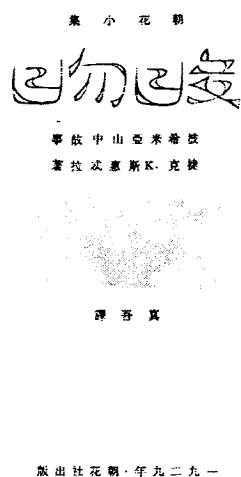


Figure 26



Figure 27

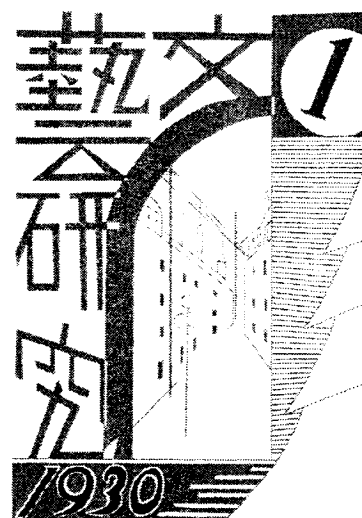


Figure 28

1, 1930)(figure 27), *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文藝研究 (figure 28), *Yishulun* (藝術論; Chaohuashe), *Xiao Beide* (小彼得; Chunchao 春潮, 1929)(figure 29), among others.¹⁹

Yang Yongde and Qiu Ling argue that the designs of Lu Xun's *meishuzi* ("artistic characters") resulted from his training in calligraphy and in inscription studies (*jinchixue* 金石學).²⁰ Lu Xun was knowledgeable about calligraphy, and extremely passionate in the case of ancient inscriptions; he even planned to

compile a *History of the Changing Forms of Chinese Characters* (*Zhongguo Ziti*



Figure 29

¹⁹ Ibid., 75-87.

²⁰ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 70; Yang Yongde, "Lu Xun, Xiandai Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu, Gongxian," 53.

Bianqian Shi 中國字体變遷史) in 1922.²¹ Yet, considering the variety of character forms used in the print design of the period, whether on books, packaging or posters, it is perhaps premature to draw an immediate link between his antiquarian interests and his artistic characters.

Lu Xun appears to be familiar with the process of designing *meishuzi*. The characters on the cover of *Benliu*, for example, show an outline that surrounds the body of the character. *Jiwen* even shows the outlines of the characters before they are filled in, as they are, for example, on the cover of *Mingya Yuekan*. These artistic characters are obviously not written with a brush but rather carefully designed with a pencil outline. Moreover, special attention must be paid to the shapes of different strokes: similar strokes of a character must have similar forms, though of course, the size of the shapes must vary depending on their position within the character. In *Mingya Yuekan*, we see the *dian* 點 stroke represented by five triangular wedges, two shorter and three slightly longer. Other stroke-shapes also have a coherence with another: corners are sharp on the outside and curved on the inside, and strokes thin out to a bare line between corners. There is also a delicate interplay of white space and colored space (of the strokes), where the space is not created mechanically in straight lines but bend ever so slightly. If we look at the *yue* element 月 in the characters *ming* 萌 and *yue* 月, we can see that the elements and positioning has to be adjusted ever so slightly. The four characters here are meticulously designed.

²¹ According to Xu Shouhang. See Shirley Hsiao-ling Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*, (Stanford University, Ph.D., 1974), 20.

The cover of *Wenyi Yanjiu* (figure 28) shows a more geometric style of *meishuzi*. The beginnings and ends of horizontal and vertical strokes are square in shape, as though created with a ruler. This is counterbalanced by the slight thinning of diagonal strokes, as in the last two strokes of *wen* 文, the *yuan* 丸 element in *yi* 藝, the triangular shape (云) at the bottom of *yi* 藝, and the *jiu* 九 element of *jiu* 究. These, in addition to minute variations in the size of stroke elements, give an oddly innovative form to the characters, a form that seems to be influenced by geometric shapes and possibly sans serif fonts, giving a calculated impression of unpolished roughness. Yet another style of *meishuzi* is found on the cover of *Yishulun* (figure 12), where the outlines of the characters are not closed to form a shape but rather moved slightly to create an effect of doubled lines.

Lu Xun certainly did not invent *meishuzi*, which existed on other books, magazines, and on commercial products. Lu Xun's *meishuzi* are, however, well designed compared to many others; moreover, while his *meishuzi* showed influence from Art Nouveau and Constructivist lettering, he did not copy the style. His *meishuzi* showed the possibilities of manipulating shapes of character elements in order to form a coherent design.

Lu Xun's antiquarian interests also influenced certain designs. Between 1912-1926 (to a lesser extent even until his death in 1936), Lu Xun obsessively collected rubbings of ancient bronze and stone inscriptions, as well as rubbings of

tomb art from the Han to the Tang and of early Buddhist art.²² Before the mid-1920s, he seemed to be more interested in the literary and calligraphic aspects of the rubbings;²³ he did, however, collect design motifs around the texts of stone inscriptions and considered them as an important tradition.²⁴



With *Taose de Yun* (桃色的云; Xinchao, 1923)

雲 的 色 桃

譯 迅 · 魯 作 阿 光 雁 受

(figure 30) and *Xin de Tanxian* (心的探險; Beixin, 1926)(figure 31), Lu Xun utilised motifs from stone and tomb rubbings respectively; apparently Lu Xun directly copied complete elements and used them as cover designs.²⁵ Certainly, the use of rubbings in art is not new, but they were usually calligraphic texts or bronze objects; Lu Xun was employing what was then relatively marginal elements from ancient rubbings. This appeared to

Figure 30



Figure 31

²² Shirley Sun finds that, according to Lu Xun's diaries, he collected over 1500 types of rubbings between 1915-1924. Those he could not buy he would borrow and copy by hand. Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*, 23-26.

²³ According to Xu Guangping, Lu Xun's later wife. Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 65.

²⁴ Cai Yuanpei says that Lu Xun was the only one who was interested in these motifs and actually studied them in detail. Xu Shoushang relates how Lu Xun thinks antique styles can be drawn on as a resource for artists. Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*, 19-20.

²⁵ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 70; Shanghai Lu Xun Jinian Guan 上海魯迅紀念館, *Lu Xun yu Shuji Zhuangzheng* 魯迅與書籍裝幀, 79, 82.

have been popular; perhaps this influence could best be gauged by the adoption of Han tomb art on the covers of *Wanyou Wenku* (萬有文庫) and *Zhonghua Wenku* (中華文庫) in the late 1920s.²⁶



微象的悶苦

譯述者 蕭明白 川野

Figure 32

Tao Yuanqing (陶元慶 1892-1929) was an artist whose designs were influenced by Lu Xun's interest in rubbings. Before entering the Shanghai Normal Art School (*Shanghai Meishu Zhuanke Shifan Xuexiao* 上海美術專科師範學校), he illustrated for *Xiaoshibao* 小時報 at the Shanghai Shibao Company.²⁷ A native of Shaoxing, Tao was a fellow student of Xu Qinwen (許欽文) who was part of the Weiming She in Beijing and was a student of Lu Xun. Xu Qinwen first suggested Tao Yuanqing's

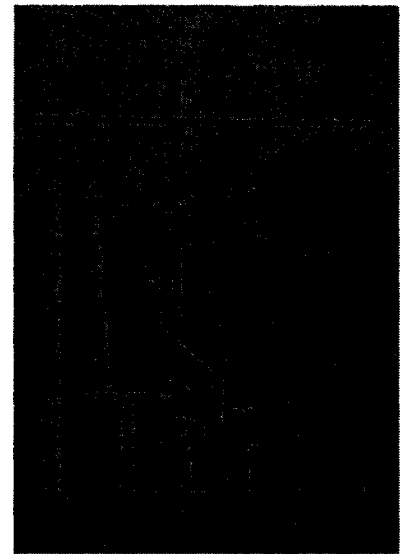


Figure 33

design for the cover of *Kumen de Xiangzheng* (苦悶的象征; Weiming She, 1924; this was Lu Xun's translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's work)(figure 32); Lu Xun

²⁶ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 74.

²⁷ Song and Sun, *Shanghai chubanzhi*, 1056; Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史 (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社, 2002), 67

liked the design a lot and asked Tao to create another cover design for *Chule Xiangya zhi Ta* (出了象牙之塔; Weiming She, 1925).²⁸ Lu Xun was also very pleased Tao's design for *Panghuang* (彷徨; Beixin, 1926)(figure 33) especially, admiring its forcefulness and the irregularity of shapes. As a foreword to an exhibition of Tao Yuanqing's paintings and designs, Lu Xun writes:

He uses new forms and especially new colours to paint his world, and yet still has a certain Chinese spirit. Another way to put this—so as not to be too mystical or abstract—is national character....He is Chinese...and he is also modern.²⁹

Lu Xun wanted to encourage Tao Yuanqing, as well as other artists, to study ancient pictorial motifs from rubbings as a way to create a new graphic art. Qian Juntao, a friend of Tao Yuanqing and a designer as well, recalls going to Lu Xun's house to discuss art and design. Lu Xun enthusiastically showed them his collection of rubbings and exhorted them to learn from them: "only then will China have its own design, with its own traditionally inspired national character (*minzuxing* 民族性) design."³⁰ Lu Xun believes that Japanese designers and artists have been able to

²⁸ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 75-77; Luo Xiaohua 羅小華, *Zhongguo Jindai Shuji Zhuangzheng* 中國近代書籍裝幀 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1990), 20.

²⁹ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1982), vol. 3, 550. Here is the full passage in Chinese: 「以新的形，尤其是新的色來寫出他自己的世界，而其中仍有中國向來的靈魂—要字面免得流于玄虛，則就是：民族性。。。但我并非將歐化文來比擬陶元慶君的繪畫。意思是在說：‘他并非之乎者也’，因為用的是新的形和新的色，而又不是‘Yes’，‘No’，因為他究竟是中國人。所以，用密達尺來量，是不對的，但也不能用什么漢朝的慮尺或清朝的營造尺，因為他又已經是現今的人。我想，必須用存在于現今想要參與世界上的事業的中國人的心理的尺來量，這才懂得他的藝術。」

³⁰ Cheng Tianliang 程天良, *Qian Juntao ji qi Shiyou Biezhuan* 錢君匋及其師友別傳 (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998), 62.

draw on their tradition, especially motifs like those in Han rubbings, to great effect and with great acclaim from the West, “when in fact it came originally from China.”³¹ The central concern of Lu Xun is to have a national art form that is national and modern, and he seemed to see a way through this problematic with ancient rubbings and design.

Tao Yuanqing’s designs in 1927 utilise motifs from ancient rubbings in a noticeable way. Lu Xun wanted this style to be used not just for Chinese-related books (such as *Tales from the Tang and the Song; Tang Song Zhuanqi Ji* 唐宋傳奇集; Shanghai Beixin, 1927) but also foreign materials, such as his translation of a Soviet novel, *Gongren Suihuiluefu* (工人綏惠略夫; Beijing Beixin, 1927)(figure 34).



Figure 34

In fact, *Gongren Suihuiluefu* had been published in 1922 by the Commercial Press of Shanghai, with the cover filled with vines and angels, designed with the obvious influence of Art Nouveau.³² The 1927 edition is completely different in style, though it is by no means a simple reproduction of ancient motifs. The forms are adapted to more geometric shapes; different shapes are repeated to create a sense of interrelation.

Lu Xun respected Tao Yuanqing’s designing skills and consulted frequently with him when requesting his designs. He also gave him much autonomy. With

³¹ Qiu Ling 邱陵, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi* 書籍裝幀藝術簡史, 65.

³² Ibid., 77.

Fen (墳; Beijing Weiming, 1927)(figure 35), for example, Lu Xun asked if Tao could make a design completely unrelated with the idea of ‘cemetery’; Tao’s designs ended up using elements that draw on the idea of ‘cemetery,’ albeit in a playful and not altogether obvious way. Lu Xun also pays attention to printing quality: knowing that *Mangyuan*’s quality would not do justice to Tao Yuanqing’s design, he recommended the design for Xu Qinwen’s *Guxiang* instead (故鄉; Beixin, 1926)(figure 36). This design is based on a scene of traditional theatre Tao saw. The use of colours is quite restrained but effective: the red contrasts sharply with the blue, both of which stand out all the more against a mainly white background.

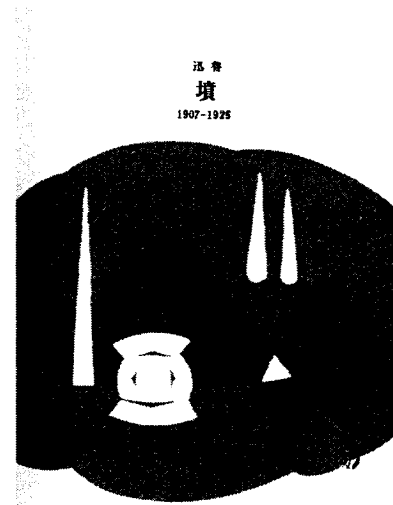


Figure 35



Figure 36

Tao Yuanqing himself was a reluctant designer. Qian Juntao, a friend who once shared a room with Tao, recalls that he hated being called a “graphic designer.” Tao thought of himself as a painter first and foremost, taking deep inspiration from nature. For Tao, making design was “just a way to make a living.”³³ Indeed, in 1928, Tao proclaimed that he would not create any more designs, and thereafter he focused

³³ Cheng Tianliang 程天良, *Qian Juntao ji qi Shiyou Biezhuan* 錢君匋及其師友別傳, 36.

solely on painting, despite Lu Xun's repeated requests. Tao simply passed all such requests on to Qian Juntao (who found Tao's actions remarkable, which perhaps suggests a certain idiosyncrasy in Tao rather than a general disdain for graphic designers). Tao Yuanqing died an early death, in 1929. Lu Xun and Xu Qinwen built a memorial museum in memory of Tao, but it was unfortunately destroyed during the Sino-Japanese War.

Tradition and Woodcuts

Lu Xun also involved himself in designing *xianzhuang* (traditional-style) books. Two titles, *Beiping Jianpu* (北平箋譜; 1933) and *Shizhu-zhai Jianpu* (十竹齋箋譜; 1934) were printed at the Beijing Banhua Congshu (北京版畫叢書; both co-edited with Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, who was also an editor at *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* in the late 1920s).³⁴ Both works are collections of traditional woodcuts: the former includes woodcuts based on the works of Chen Shizeng and Qi Baishi, the latter is a reprint of a rare Ming collection of woodcuts. Lu Xun and Zheng Zhenduo both paid meticulous attention to the paper used, the appropriate binding, design, and format, in an attempt to be faithful to a tradition of craftsmanship.³⁵ At the time, Lu Xun was very involved with the modern Chinese woodcut movement, and he saw these two works as both an attempt to maintain the relics of tradition and a way to

³⁴ Ibid., 93.

³⁵ Shirley Hsiao-ling Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*, 151-156. Lu Xun was not the first to introduce graphic art to China, however; Li Shutong was probably the first, according to Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of twentieth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 80.

look forward to the future. Indeed, he also organised the printing of the first issue of *Muke Jicheng* (木刻記程; 1934), which united traditional binding with an etched title reminding one of woodcuts; however, the beginning started on the left, as in Western books.³⁶

Lu Xun had become very involved with introducing overseas graphic artists from the late 1920s. According to Sun, it was at first a matter of Lu Xun being very exacting with the selection of cover designs and appropriate illustrations to go into certain magazines he was involved with. He often had to look abroad for graphic works of high quality and he gradually acquired a collection.³⁷ In December 1928, Lu Xun formed the Chaohua She (朝花社) with the stated aim to introduce literature from Northern and Eastern Europe and to import foreign woodcuts. Chaohua She produced five volumes of the series *Yiyuan Chaohua* (1929-1930) which compiled diverse artists. To illustrate the diversity of the artists, I list the titles of the series and the artists covered within:

- Vol. 1: Selected Modern Wood Engravings I* (Jan 1929)(the works of C.C. Webb, Stephen Bone, E. Fitch Daglish. S. Magnus Lageranz, and Benvenuto Disertori)
- Vol. 2: Selected Drawings of Hukiya Geiji* (Jan 1929)
- Vol. 3: Selected Modern Wood Engravings II* (Feb 1929)(the works of Arthur J. Deakin, Robert Gibbings, E. Fitch Daglish. Charles Corlegle, William Zorach)
- Vol. 4: Selected Drawings of Aubrey Beardsley* (April 1919)
- Vol. 5: New Russian Prints* (May 1929)(included the works of Favorsky)³⁸

³⁶ Yang, "'Minzuxing' yu Shuji Zhuangzheng," 53.

³⁷ Shirley Sun, *Lu Hsun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*, 47-48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-58.

In the forward of the first volume, Lu Xun frames, with irony, the import of foreign woodcut as woodcut's return to China.³⁹ Sun outlines how Lu Xun moves towards the advancement of a modern Chinese woodcut movement as a means to articulate the role of art in the difficult relation between nationalism and modernism, as well as the role of art in enacting social change.

Lu Xun was involved with numerous small publishing houses and bookstores throughout the 1920s and 1930s, where he helped with editorial work in at least ten journals⁴⁰. For a few publishing houses, Lu Xun played a crucial role. The Beixin Bookstore 北新書局, for example, was founded in Beijing in 1925 with the support of Lu Xun; the first book published was *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦悶的象征 by Lu Xun. He followed Beixin in moving to Shanghai after it was forcibly shut down by the warlord Zhang Zuolin in 1927. There, Lu Xun edited *Benliu* with Yu Dafu; the monthly periodical concentrated on Russian literary and art theory as well as translations of Russian short stories, for which Lu Xun chose the

³⁹ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanjì*, vol. 7, 319-320. The passage reads: 「雖然還沒有十分的確証，但歐洲的木刻，已經很有幾個人都說是從中國學去的．．．中國古人所發明，而現在用以做炮竹和看風水的火藥和指南針，轉到歐洲，他們就應用在槍炮和航海上，給本師吃了許多虧．．．木刻的回國，想來決不至於像別兩樣的給本師吃苦的。」

⁴⁰ Howard Goldblatt, "Lu Xun and Patterns of Literary Sponsorship," in *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, ed. by Leo Ou-fan Lee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 199-215.

illustrations.⁴¹ In Shanghai, he also edited *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文藝研究, a quarterly periodical that was published by Dajiang Bookstand 大江書鋪, founded in 1928.⁴² That same year, Lu Xun founded Chaohuashe 朝花社 with Rou Shi 柔石, Xu Guangping 許廣平 (his second wife), and others. As mentioned, this press was devoted to introducing graphic artists and writers, especially those from Northern and Eastern Europe.

At Beixin and Weimingshe, Lu Xun worked often with another designer (and painter) Sun Fuxi 孫福熙 (1898-1962), who was also a native of Shaoxing. Sun Fuxi studied drawing and painting in France from 1922 to 1925; upon his return to China, Sun assisted his brother Sun Fuyuan 孫伏園 in editing the supplement (*fukan* 副刊) of *Jingbao* 京報. Sun created quite a few cover designs and illustrations for some publications of Beixin Bookstore 北新書局, Xinyue Bookstore 新月書店, as well as Weimingshe 未名社.⁴³ His cover designs tend to be line drawings. One variation is his cover design for *Yecao* 野草 (figure 37).

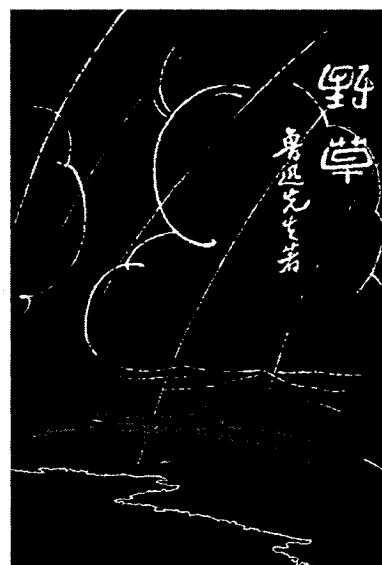


Figure 37

Lu Xun's love of books and book publishing led him to establish the Sanxian Bookstore 三閑書店 in 1931. This was Lu Xun's personal bookstore, under

⁴¹ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 235; Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 80.

⁴² Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 238.

⁴³ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 1071.

whose name he published works with his own funds. The publications were notable for the detailed attention Lu Xun invested, with regards especially to the design and printing processes. Lu Xun and his wife Xu Guangping were heavily involved in all the major stages of editing, designing, printing and distribution. It was under the Sanxian name that he published works introducing graphic works, such as *Yinyu Ji* 引玉集, *Collection of Käthe Kollwitz Prints* 凱綬·珂勒惠支版畫選集, and 梅斐爾德木刻士敏士之圖. This last was notable for its traditional Chinese binding and printing, though the book opens from left to right in the Western manner.

Chapter 3: Chen Zhifo and Tu'an

I will now try to examine how what can be called 'design' was thought of and explained; in other words, how a particular understanding of 'design' emerged in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai. While 'graphic design' itself was not taught as a subject in art schools and institutions until the 1950s, there were nevertheless a number of designers, artists, and scholars who tried to elaborate the basic concepts that were relevant to this emerging field. Notable among this group was Chen Zhifo, a figure active in textile design and generally decorative arts/crafts (*gongyi* 工藝). His interest was first focused towards textile design, with a view to transforming and modernising China's textile industries, as well as helping Chinese textiles compete better with foreign imports. From improving the quality of Chinese textile designs, he turned to teaching 'design' (specifically *tu'an* 圖案 or *tu'anxue* 圖案學), creating decorative patterns for textiles (*ranzhi wenyang* 染織紋樣) as well as 'decorative images' (*tu'an*) more generally. He also created covers for various books and magazines throughout the 1920s and 1930s. From the 1930s onwards, Chen also created *gongbi*-style 'flower-and-bird' paintings.

Chen Zhifo was born in 1896 to a poor gentry family in Xushanzhen 澉山鎮, near Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. After studying industrial textiles (*jizhike* 機織科) at the Zhejiang Technical School (*Zhejiang Gongye Xuexiao* 浙江工業學校) in Hangzhou, where he was exposed to a fairly comprehensive curriculum including general courses such as Chinese, English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Painting, as well as more specialised courses dealing with different

aspects of textile manufacture, Chen started teaching there in 1916. He was interested in one of the courses offered (and one that he taught), a course on *tu'an*, taught by a Japanese instructor.¹ *Tu'an* 圖案, roughly 'decoration,' 'decorative image,' or 'design,' was a new subject in China at the time, and the textbooks used, if any were used, were Japanese textbooks.² In 1917, Chen created a textbook on *tu'an* for the school, called *Tu'an Jiangyi* 圖案講義.

Tu'an, in the sense of decoration or decorative image, was in high demand in China at the time. The decline of traditional crafts and the rise of mechanised textile production created a new need for specialised textile designers; however, very few such designers were trained in China at the time. Chinese factories would often have to buy the necessary designs from Japanese companies at relatively high prices. Chen realised this as a problem, and also realised the necessity for *tu'an* programs in China. Foreign companies were active in the Chinese textile industry, and with their focus on technical quality, efficient advertising techniques, and most crucially, attractive designs, they threatened the livelihood of traditional craft-based textile producers, with calamitous effects on local economies. As Chen notes, much later, in 1936,

The people do not idolise foreign products, but rather are attracted by the cheap prices and attractiveness of

¹ Li Youguan 李有光 and Chen Xiufan 陳修範, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu 陳之佛研究* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Meishu Chubanshe, 1990), 6-16.

² *Tu'an*, or rather, in the Japanese, *zuan*, referred roughly to 'design' or the 'craft of design' in Japan prior to the 1950s. *Zuan* originated in the study of textile and interior design, but by the 1910s and 1920s, referred quite generally to commercial art (posters, book and magazine design, packaging design) as well as decorative objects. Richard S. Thornton, *The Graphic Spirit of Japan* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 62.

foreign wares. The attitude of liking something beautiful is something everyone shares. To pay less and yet get a better product is completely reasonable.³

Encouraged by the principal of the Zhejiang Technical School, who envisioned starting a program in 'industrial design' or 'applied arts design' (*gongyi tu'an ke* 工藝圖案科),⁴ and by a scholarship (worth 40 yen a month) from the Zhejiang Education Department, in 1918, Chen went to Japan to study *tu'an*. He was accepted to the Applied Arts department of the Toyko Art School 東京美術學校: he was the first foreign student in the department and the first Chinese student to study *tu'an* in Japan.⁵

At the Tokyo Art School, Chen Zhifo was exposed to various areas of art and applied arts, including the history of ornaments/motifs (模樣), *nihonga* (日本画), sculpture, Japanese art history, Western art history, and Western painting. By no means did Chen concentrate just on textile design; for his graduating work in 1922, for example, Chen produced a decorative mosaic. He also met other Chinese students, such as Guan Liang 關良 and Feng Zikai 豐子愷, who took courses in *tu'an* as well, and Shen Duanxian 沈端先 (Xia Yan 夏衍) whom Chen had met in Hangzhou. During his stay in Japan, Chen practiced sketching from life

³ 「人們不是偶像崇拜地愛外貨，完全是被外貨的“價廉物美”所蠱惑住了，愛美的觀念是人人所同具的，出較低代價，得較優的貨品，這完全是合理的，單靠空泛的挽回民族繁榮的呼聲，如何敵得過這“事實”的敵人呢！所以在“提倡國貨”的原則下，非加一番“改良國貨”的實際革新不可。」 Li Youguan 李有光 and Chen Xiufan 陳修範, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu* 陳之佛研究, 132-135.

⁴ *Gongyi* referred to both traditional crafts as well as certain industrial/applied arts such as textiles, even if their production is mechanised.

⁵ Hu Guanghua 胡光華, "Chen Zhifo Gongyi Sixiang Yanjiu 陳之佛工藝思想研究," *Nanjing Yiyuan Meishuban* 南京藝苑美術版 3 (1996): 75-79, 75.

(*xiesheng* 寫生) a lot,⁶ which helped his overall artistic skills and allowed him to collect many ornamental and decorative designs. One of the instructors, an instructor of *tu'an* (or *zuan* 圖案 in Japanese), professed an admiration for Chinese *tu'an* and encouraged Chen Zhifo not just “to focus on the arts of other countries, but also to absorb and develop China’s traditional arts and crafts.”⁷

In 1923, Chen returned to Hangzhou, ready to work at the Zhejiang Technical College. Unfortunately, the new principal decided against setting up a *tu'an* department. Turning down an editorial position at the Commercial Press, Chen went to teach at the Shanghai Eastern Art School (*Shanghai Dongfang Yishu Zhuanmen Xuexiao* 上海東方藝術專門學校) as an instructor of *tu'an*. He would go on to teach at a succession of art schools, colleges, and institutions throughout the 1920s and 1930s, such as the Shanghai Art College (上海藝術大學; from 1925-28), the Guangzhou Municipal Art School (廣州市立美術專科學校; from 1928-1930), the Shanghai Normal Art School (上海美術專科師範學校; 1930), and the National University (中央大學; in Nanjing from 1931-1937, and in Chongqing from 1937-1944). He taught courses in colour theory, aesthetic education, art history, and, of course, *tu'an*, often establishing the first courses or the first programs in *tu'an*. In the late 1920s, he had also taught some courses at the Lida Xueyuan 立達學園 where Xia Minzun 夏丏尊, Xia Yan 夏衍, and Feng Zikai 豐子愷 also taught.

Chen realized that there was a severe lack of qualified *tu'an* designers at the time, which was aggravated by the unwillingness of many Chinese companies

⁶ According to Feng Zikai; Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 21.

⁷ Ibid., 20.

to hire designers. In 1923, Chen started the Xiangmei Tu'an Guan 尚美圖案館 with the aim of training (often by himself) a group of designers on the various aspects of design relevant to the production of applied art objects. This included the design of *tu'an* and of patterns, the technicalities of mechanised production, commercial communication and advertising. The Xiangmei Tu'an Institute was surprisingly popular: Chen was able to promote the designs of his students, attract the attention of businesses, and spur many art institutions to establish *tu'an* courses and *tu'an* programs.⁸ Unfortunately, the Institute ran into financial problems and closed by 1927.

While teaching and creating *tu'an*, Chen was also involved in book design. Between 1925 and 1935, Chen Zhifo created covers for numerous issues of the *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌, *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 小說月報, and *Wenxue Yuekan* 文學月刊. Chen also designed the book covers for several series (or collectanea) for Tianma Bookstore 天馬書局, as well as the covers for his own *tu'an*- and art-related books at Kaiming Bookstore.⁹ His designs for *Dongfang Zazhi*, *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*, and *Wenxue Yuekan* differed in style. For *Dongfang Zazhi*, he created designs inspired by his study of Chinese and foreign motifs and decorative arts; for *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (figure



Figure 38

⁸ Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 22, 71.

⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

38), his designs featured different female figures; and for *Wenxue Yuekan*, he adapted geometric designs and motifs that reference some elements of Russian Constructivism (see figure 39).¹⁰ These designs had the common feature of not being *xiesheng* (illustrations or drawings from life); they were usually adaptations of his *tu'an* designs, mostly using simplified or conventionalised shapes, flat colours within outlines, and careful use of contrasting colours and patches of color.



Figure 39

From the late 1920s onwards, Chen Zhifo published various works relating to *tu'an*, study of color (*secaixue* 色彩學), drawing, and art history. In particular, he published *Tu'an* (in two volumes) in 1929 (Kaiming Bookstore), which collected various *tu'an* images, patterns, and designs he had designed. At the time, some people thought that *tu'an* did not exist in China and instead was imported from outside China.¹¹ He had also been collecting samples of *tu'an* from Chinese folk art and traditional crafts, but unfortunately his collection was destroyed during the 'Jan 28th' incident in 1932 (and later, a new collection was also destroyed during the fall of Nanjing in 1937).¹² In 1930, he published *Tu'anfa ABC* 圖案法ABC, in

¹⁰ *Wenxue Yuekan*, started in 1935, was the successor to the *Xiaoxue Yubao*.

¹¹ Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 73.

¹² Only in 1953 was Chen able to publish a collection of *tu'an* images. See Chen Zhifo, *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* 中國圖案參考資料 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1953).

which he explained the principles and the practice of *tu'an*. Chen developed a reputation as a designer, or *tu'anjia* 圖案家.

In the 1930s and the 1940s, Chen developed an interest in *gongbi* paintings. During and after the war, Chen exhibited his *gongbi* paintings many times, a few times alongside Fu Baoshi, Qi Baishi, Xu Beihong, Lu Fengzi.¹³ But he still continued to work on *tu'an* and *gongyi* (工藝); in 1953, Chen published *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* 中國圖案參考資料, a collection of ornamental motifs from bronzes, ceramics, stone carvings, jade, and lacquerware, intended as a resource for *tu'an* designs.¹⁴

Before looking more closely at how *tu'an* was explained in *Tu'anfa ABC*, I will briefly explore his understanding of *gongyi*. *Gongyi* can refer to traditional crafts, such as lacquer, carving, ceramics, cut paper, textiles, but also to commercial packaging, decorative arts, modern (machine-produced) textiles, and designs used on books, on furnishings and other everyday objects. Chen writes, "Anything we need in our daily lives—clothes and objects—is the target of *gongyi*."¹⁵ (*Gongyi* is distinguished from art (*meishu*) on the basis of practicality.) Chen Zhifo was very concerned with the state of artisanal crafts/industry. He

¹³ Fu Baoshi in particular was also very interested in *tu'an*. He had read *Tu'anfa ABC* and was much influenced; later in the 1960s, Fu wrote a work on *tu'an*. Fu Baoshi 傅抱石, *Jiben Tu'anxue* 基本圖案學 (Hong Kong: Taiping Shuju, 1963).

¹⁴ Chen Zhifo 陳之佛 and Wu Shan 吳山, *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* 中國圖案參考資料 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1953).

¹⁵ 「凡是我們日常生活所需要的衣服用具一切，都是工藝的對象。」 Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 68.

argued that to promote 'national products' (國貨), China needed 'not just to focus on the [technical] quality of goods, but also to try hard to beautify products.'¹⁶ He argued that the traditional master-disciple system was no longer suitable to modern needs, and so, in order to revive China's craft industry/applied arts (*gongyi* 工藝) and China's economy in general, educational institutions specializing in design and crafts must be set up.¹⁷ Aside from training new designers, Chen also aimed to retrain artisans in new methods of production; he did not believe in restoring traditional crafts but rather helping artisans transform their own crafts.

The concept of *tu'an* itself originated in Japan. The Japanese term, *zuan* 圖案, a translation of "design," emphasises the distinction between the processes of designing and of production. In Chinese, *tu'an* referred narrowly to decorative patterns; more broadly, it referred to "Industrial Art," "Applied Art," "Minor Art," or "Decorative Art," according to Li Puyuan.¹⁸ *Zuan* was the term used in pre-1945 Japan to translate what would now be called "design." Japanese ideas of *zuan* were very influential in China, since the Tokyo Art School, which now exists as the Art Department in the Tokyo Art University, was an institute where many Chinese practitioners of *tu'an* studied in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, "modern art design education in China developed through the study of *tu'an*."¹⁹ (What was to be

¹⁶ Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 70.

¹⁷ 「因為中國的工藝品，向來是在徒弟制度下產生的。因為是徒弟制度，產品也一代不如一代。」Hu Guanghua 胡光華, "Chen Zhifo Gongyi Sixiang Yanjiu," 78.

¹⁸ Quoted in Li Puyuan 李樸園, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishushi* 中國現代藝術史; 7.

¹⁹ Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史, (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社, 2002), 234.

called *tu'an* in pre-1949 China would, from the 1980s onwards, be called *sheji* 設計.)

Chen was by no means the only writer and practitioner of *tu'an*. There were quite a few other figures during the 1920s and 1930s. Yu Jianhua, an art historian and painter, published *The New Art of Design* (*Zui Xin Tu'anfa* 最新圖案法 in 1926. Li Yishi 李毅士, who illustrated for advertising, stage design, and book illustrations while studying in England, established the Shanghai Meishu Gongyingshe 上海美術供應社 in 1925. This was a company that provided designing services for advertising and commercial packaging; this was also a site where Li trained future designers in the practice of design.²⁰ There was also the White Goose Art Association (*bai'e huahui* 白鵝畫會), founded by Pan Sitong 潘思同, Chen Qiucao 陳秋草, and others. Aside from being an association for painters, they also provided designing services for book covers, commercial advertising, and calendar posters.²¹

Another figure was Pang Xunqin 龐薰琿 (1906-1985), a painter who studied in France. He created different designs during his stay in Paris and was exposed to various design movements such as Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and to a lesser extent, the Bauhaus. In 1930, upon returning to Shanghai, he established the Gongyi Meishushe 工藝美術社. Pang accepted projects for advertising and commercial designs and he also organised the "Industrial and Commercial Art Exhibition" (*Gongshang Meishu Zhanlan* 工商美術展覽) at the Shanghai Guohuo

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 57.

Company 上海國貨公司.²² (Pang is in fact better known as a painter; while in Shanghai, in 1931, he started the Storm Society (*Juelanshe* 決蘭社) with Ni Yide, which was a society dedicated to promoting modern art.²³) There was also Lei Guiyuan 雷圭元 who also studied in Paris after studying *tu'an* at the National Beiping Art School 國立北平藝專. He taught design at the Hangzhou Art Academy after 1931.²⁴ Both Pang Xunqin and Lei Guiyuan would write several works on *tu'an* after 1949.

In 1931, Chen Zhifo published *Tu'anfa ABC* 圖案法ABC, one of many books dedicated to diverse topics in the ABC Collectanea (ABC叢書). It appears to be aimed at high school and university students, as well as the general interested public.²⁵ The aim of *Tu'anfa ABC* is to “describe the general knowledge of and methods of [creating] *tu'an*” (「本書內容，敘述關於圖案一般的知識和方法。」).

Before taking a closer look at the formulation of *tu'an*, which can tentatively be called ‘design,’ it should be noted that he drew substantially from

²² Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林. *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi* 中國現代藝術設計史, (Changsha: Hunan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe 湖南科學技術出版社, 2002), 57, 74, 234.

²³ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of twentieth-century China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 47.

²⁴ Chen Ruilin 陳瑞林. *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu Sheji Shi*, 235.

²⁵ The preface for the series states:

「第一 正如西洋A B C書籍一樣，就是我們要把各種學術通俗起來，普遍起來，使人人都有獲得各種學術的機會，使人人都能找到各種學術的門徑．．．A B C叢書是通俗的大學教育，是新智識的泉源

第二 我們要使中學生大學生得到一部有系統的優良的教科書或參考書」

Written in June 29, 1928, by Xu Funan (徐蔚南). Chen Zhifo 陳之佛, *Tu'anfa ABC* 圖案法ABC (Shanghai: ABC Congshu She, 1929).

the works of Ernest Batchelder (*Design in Theory and Practice*) and several Japanese art historians of *tu'an* (or *zuan* in Japanese), including Ishii Hakutei 石井栢亭 and Komuro Shinzo 小室信藏.²⁶ Batchelder can be grouped as part of the American Arts and Crafts movement, notably creating designs for tiles and teaching the fundamentals of design. Unlike the practitioners of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, Batchelder was not averse to the idea of machine production but rather to the brutal aesthetics that he saw as the results of a single-minded obsession with cost-cutting measures.

The concept of *tu'an* (or *zuan* in Japanese) corresponds roughly to 'design' in Batchelder. For Batchelder, the notion of 'design' refers not just to the (ornamental) image(s) used in the sundry types of arts and crafts but also to an overarching aesthetics of making (or designing) that is linked intrinsically to functionality and beauty. Design is not something extrinsic to the object; it is very much a part of object in question, contributing to its beauty or attractiveness, as well as its functionality. Thus, 'design' covers not just the designs, ornaments, or motifs on the surfaces of objects, but includes the organization of structural elements and the consideration of all relevant technical aspects of making. Accordingly, Batchelder insists that "the term *ornament*, if properly understood,

²⁶ See Ernest A. Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930). Chen Zhifo cites Batchelder's book in *Tu'anfa ABC*. Batchelder had published the whole book as articles in the journal *The Craftsman*. Batchelder also published in 1906 on the principles of design, described in a similar way to the 1930 book. Ernest A. Batchelder, *The Principles of Design* (Chicago: Inland Printer Company, 1906). Chen also cites Ishii Hakutei: Heibonsha henshu, *Zuan-hen* 図案編 (Tokyo: Heibonsha 平凡社, 1932).

implies an enrichment of this construction, not as an afterthought but as an integral part of the whole.”²⁷

In a similar way that Batchelder’s “design” refers to the surface images or patterns as well as the principles of creating craft objects, *tu’an* covers all kinds of designs, whether it be on textiles, ornamental objects, vessels, cutlery, as well as printed matter such as posters and book/magazine covers, while *tu’anxue* covers the study of *tu’an*, especially the fundamental aesthetic principles. Chen Zhifo explains,

“[many people think that *tu’an*] is only something that floats on the surface of objects; this is a wrong understanding! In fact, while decoration is not determined before construction, it is surely not added after construction: it is something that must need be accomplished at the same time.”²⁸

Both Batchelder and Chen Zhifo realised that design or *tu’an* was a new field resulting from the industrialisation of artisanal crafts and the concomitant dismantling of guilds or master-discipline systems. Whereas in the past, “those who created ornamental objects [or objects of applied art] invented the designs themselves and applied them to objects,” now the designs themselves have “specialised creators.”²⁹ In other words, “design” or “*tu’an*” could envelop any

²⁷ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 59.

²⁸ 「圖案只是在物體上面浮蓋著的一種東西，這是何等錯誤的見解！其實裝飾雖然不是在構造之先預定的，也決不是在構造完結之後才附加的，這完全非同時進行不可的事情。」Chen Zhifo 陳之佛, *Tu’anfa ABC*, 18.

²⁹ 「在古代工藝品的製作者，大都自己意匠圖案，施於物品。以後事業進步，多行分業，圖案亦有專門的作家。」Ibid., 18.

applied art—including interior decoration, furniture, fashion/textiles, stage design, public parks, urban planning, and all types of transportation.³⁰

Tu'an contains two elements: 'beauty' (*mei* 美) and 'practicality' (*shiyong* 實用). 'Beauty' includes "shape, color, and decoration/ornamentation," whereas 'practicality' covers "safety, convenience, suitability, pleasure" in the use of the object, and "the excitement in the desire for use"³¹ 'Beauty' here is defined in terms of formal qualities such as shape, color and 'decoration.' However, Chen argues that 'beauty' and 'practicality' ought not be separated or even distinguished in practice: the designer "must proceed on the basis of a tight relation between the aesthetic and the practical."³² Chen writes, that, in the process of creating *tu'an*,

"One must first have an idea—an idea that arises from the necessity of making a given object. After the idea, the general shape and size, as well as various conditions of practicality and surrounding are decided."³³

³⁰ 「現代美術工藝是把全體擁抱著—室內裝飾，家具，服飾，舞台裝置，街市公園等都市的美觀，以及各種交通工具等等，一切都包含在裡面。」 Li and Chen, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu*, 68.

³¹ 「美的要素：形狀、色彩、裝飾。實用的要素：使用上的安全、使用的便利、使用上的適用性、使用的快感、使用慾的刺激。」 Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 3.

³² 「如果我們在意匠的時候，專門以美為目標，不在實際的本分上著想，則這種作品，不過是一種紙上的圖案，仍然不可成立的。故實際上製作圖案，非從審美的和實際的密切的關係上著手不可。然實際製作圖案的時候，製作者的心中，決不能有意去區別這審美的和實際的兩方面的種種關係，而且沒有區別的必要。這兩者的關係，彷彿鳥和羽毛一樣，因為美所以有羽毛，去了羽毛就不成其為鳥。」 Ibid., 17.

³³ 「在這圖案構成的次序上講來：最初必先發生一種觀念——從所要製作某種東西而發生的觀念，觀念發生之後，大體的形狀大小等以及實用和周圍的諸條件依次決定。」 Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 17. Much of this is taken from Batchelder. See Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 17-18.

One can then move on to choosing the basic elements and materials, and thereafter, on the basis of the given elements, create the necessary ornamentation.

Rhythm, Balance, Harmony

Following Batchelder, Chen Zhifo emphasizes the elements of “tone, measure, and shape” and the principles of “rhythm, balance, and harmony.”³⁴ “Tone” refers to the manipulation of brightness, black and white, saturation, and the differences in color; “measure” refers to size, length, width; “shape” refers to the outlines, whether they are curved or straight, round or angular.³⁵ These three basic elements, used rather extensively throughout the work, form the basis by which the principles of “rhythm,” “balance,” and “harmony” are understood.

“The principle of rhythm,” according to Chen Zhifo, is “a certain stimulus, something that repeats according to a given gap; one can also say it is the interrelated or continuous motion of parts.”³⁶ Batchelder calls it “joint section or movement.” By “rhythm,” neither Chen nor Batchelder is referring only to the regular repetition of shape, though that is a manifestation of rhythm. The “principle of rhythm” can also cover “measure rhythm” (“the interrelation of details in an

³⁴ 「色調（Tone）、分量（Measure）、形狀（Shape）三個約束。節奏（Rhythm）、均衡（Balance）、調和（Harmony）三種原理。」Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 3.

³⁵ 「所謂色調，就是明暗黑白濃淡之度，或赤綠黃青等色彩的差別。分量就是大小表短闊狹的意味。形狀就是曲直圓角等外形的意味。」Ibid., 3-4.

³⁶ 所謂節奏的這一種原則，就是一定的刺激，依一定的間隔相反復的事情，也可說一部分一部分互相關聯或連續的動作運動。Ibid., 5.

increasing ratio of measure from small to large”), “tone rhythm” (“the gradation of values from light to dark”), the creation of curves.³⁷ Curves, in particular, show the tension of the forces of rhythm and balance. Whereas the perfect circle is a “finite curve” (定曲線), an “infinite curve” (不定曲線) can be created by increasing measure at a constant ratio. The principle of rhythm is manipulated in a design to give direction to the eye.³⁸ It is, fundamentally, the “interrelation of parts that the details hold together as a unity.” One can perhaps say that rhythm is the relation of difference, whether in tone, measure, or shape (or any combination of the three), of different elements.

Rhythm alone is not enough, however; “balance” is also needed.

“Balance” (均衡) can mean symmetry (均齊 or 對稱) or a subtler type of balance (which Chen names 平衡). This subtler type of balance, *pingheng* 平衡, refers to an effect of symmetry; that is, “a type where the left and right of the shape do not have to be identical, but where the measure of the shapes are similar.”³⁹ The latter type of balance, *pingheng*, can be more pleasing as the elements are bound more closely into a unity than radial symmetry, which can lead to a “pulling apart of

³⁷ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 37-39. Also Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 5-7.

³⁸ Speaking about rhythm, Batchelder writes that the designer “may emphasize the movement, check it, or subordinate it to other demands, divert it to or concentrate it in any portion of the design to which it may seem desirable to give dominant interest.” Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 40-41.

³⁹ 「平衡就是左右的形體不必相同，而左右形體的分量卻是相等的一種形式」。Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 7.



Figure 40

contending forces.”⁴⁰ Following Batchelder, Chen refers to the laws of physical balance in finding balance between unequal elements.

Aside from this balance of measure, there can also be a balance of tone. Whereas one could have recourse to mathematics with the balance of measure, with tone, this must give way to judgement. Figure 40 is presented in both Batchelder and Chen.⁴¹ The diagram on the left is an example of the balance of two tones, which is similar to the balance of measure. The diagram on the right, on the other hand, is the balance of value contrasts: the black and the white are equally contrasted against a middle ground, the gray.

“Harmony” is an overarching term that denotes the unity of elements in a given composition. It can encompass rhythm or balance, or both. Chen writes,

In a given *tu'an*, when the tone, measure, and shape of different elements exist in equal, it can certainly be said as complete harmony. But people's eyes, while hoping for harmony, also wants contrast. So the question of when harmony is necessary and of when

⁴⁰ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 42-43.

⁴¹ Plate 4, in Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 46; Figures 10 and 11, in Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 13.

contrast is desired should be investigated by the designer.⁴²

Harmony can be used to think about proportions (相稱). Good proportion is reached when “the measure of different elements are in a suitable ratio to each other, in a close and unified relationship to each other.”⁴³ However, while the square is proportionate and harmonious, in “such a symmetrical shape, one cannot feel the pleasure of harmony; only when opposing elements with variety are unified does one have the pleasure harmony.”⁴⁴

Tu'an and xiesheng

The importance of the formal elements and principles mentioned above becomes clear when *tu'an* is contrasted with *xiesheng* (寫生), or sketching/drawing from life. While Chen Zhifo states that '*tu'an* is the expression of the power of creation; *xiesheng* is what results from the expression of the power of observation,'⁴⁵ *tu'an* and *xiesheng* are not completely exclusive. Rather, the aim of

⁴² Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 14. 「一種圖案上各部分的色調、分量、形狀，平均存在著的時候，當然可說是完全的調和。但人們的眼，雖希望調和的，同時也一定希望變化。所以在怎樣情形之下非調和不可，在怎樣情形之下要求變化，圖案家便應該考究了。」 cf Batchelder: “Uniformity of details in tone, measure, and shape might be defined as a perfect harmony. But uniformity is assuredly not the most pleasing manifestation of harmony. The eye craves contrast, variety; how far to go, where to stop, is the problem of the designer.” Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 47.

⁴³ Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 15. 「各部分的分量，比例適當，有親密的關係而得到統一的時候，就是叫做相稱。」

⁴⁴ 「但是我們卻以為這一種均齊形狀的東西，總不能感受調和的快感，有變化的反對的東西去統一，才覺得有調和的快感。」 Ibid., 15.

⁴⁵ 「圖案實在是創造的才能的表現，寫生是觀察的能力的表現的結果。」 Ibid., 3.

making *tu'an* lies in the creation of an image that conforms to the formal principles mentioned earlier; taking into consideration the constraints of practicality, the *tu'an* can then be used for the design object in question. Of course, the formal principles of rhythm, balance, and harmony only provide a guide to the designer, who ought to make designs creatively.

In the creation of *tu'an*, therefore, the focus is on the creation of (a particular kind of) beauty, a beauty that manifests the dynamic and creative interplay of tone, measure, and shape. Batchelder states, in relation to his conception of design,

Whether one prefers a naturalistic treatment in design or a formal, geometric treatment is immaterial. The essential point is that it is necessary to alter, rearrange, or in some way adapt the lines and forms here shown before they are suited to our purpose.⁴⁶

Like Batchelder, Chen presents many examples of geometric manipulation in designs, whether they be primitive or exotic. The use of motifs or elements derived from nature is understood to have occurred much later than most examples of geometrical patterns. But the point is that it matters little whether geometric designs or naturalistic designs are used: what is important is the designer's creative search for beauty. Chen writes,

Applying the delightful combination of particular lines and shapes on a natural object to *tu'an*, one can certainly

⁴⁶ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 175. Cf 「圖案製作者從自然選擇適合於某種圖案的形態，不論寫生的，簡便化的，或者是想像的，其結果必給他一種特性，這種特性，就是所謂創意。」 Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 20.

express a particular type of beauty in *tu'an* as well.⁴⁷

Nature is considered a resource; through the inventiveness of the designer, a particular type of beauty can be achieved.

The transitory beauty of nature—the transitory conditions of light, shade, etc—cannot fulfill the true meaning of *tu'an*. Nature only furnishes the designer [maker of *tu'an*] with a resource; to use this resource to express a beauty other than the transitory beauty of nature, one would need the power of artifice [or human effort]. This human effort is called *bianhua*.⁴⁸

One can have the “transitory beauty of nature,” or one can achieve another type of beauty that is achieved through human effort, through human manipulation. This is called *bianhua* (便化), or what Batchelder calls (with reservation) *conventionalisation*.

Conventionalisation, or *bianhua*, is the means by which nature motifs can be manipulated into useful *tu'an*. For Batchelder,

To conventionalise Nature is to adapt a nature-derived motif to the structural demands of a problem, to the space and position which it is to occupy, to the tools, materials, and processes of execution.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ 「把自然物上的一種線和形的美妙的配合應用於圖案，在圖案上當然也可以表現一種美的狀態。」 Ibid., 26.

⁴⁸ 「自然之瞬間的美——光、影等瞬間的現象，不能滿足圖案的本義，自然不過供給製作圖案者的一種材料，把這種材料來表現瞬間的美以外的他種的美，還須藉人工的力量，這人工的力量，就是所謂便化。」 Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 171.



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43

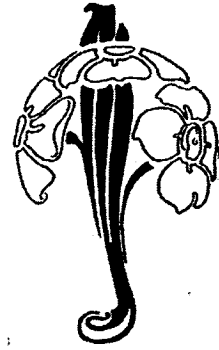


Figure 44

In explaining conventionalisation, Chen borrows heavily from Batchelder, both in terms of images cited and the explanations themselves. Figures 41-45 are: (1) a *xiasheng* of a lily (figure 41); (2) one possibility of a *bianhua tu'an*, where the details are reduced slightly, but the overall image is framed in a square that exhibits the balance of black and white elements (figure 42); (3) two other possibilities of *bianhua*, where the original shape of the lily is transformed, through the manipulation of the lines and shapes, in order to give emphasis to rhythm (figure 43) and balance (figure 44); (4) three figures of a lily, where A is a *xiasheng*, B a *bianhua* using curved lines, and C a *bianhua* using straight lines (figure 45).⁵⁰

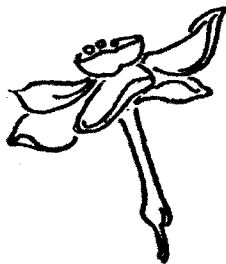
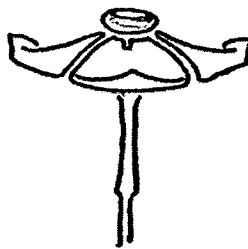
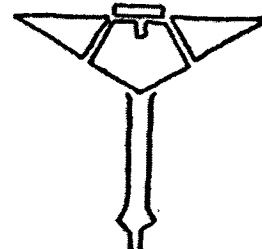


Figure 45: A



B



C

⁵⁰ Figures 13-16; *ibid.*, 22-23. Reproduced from figures 94-98; Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 174-178.

The overall idea of *bianhua* is, I repeat, to facilitate the adaptation of natural elements through the play of surface elements.

The process of conventionalisation involves much experimentation and practice. Chen offers specific advice as to how one should proceed in conventionalisation, taking as his example, a flower:

For example, when we take a flower for dissection (in choosing the flower, one should choose petals that has charming curves), first draw the outlines and see if it is appropriate. Fill in the shape of the flower; then draw it in different positions for analysis, and [analyse] the relation of the petals and the centre as well as the relation of petal to petal. Observe from different aspects.⁵¹

Different manipulations of the flower are presented, exhibiting different emphases on rhythm, balance, and harmony. Chen stresses the importance of not just choosing the right form of conventionalisation of the flower itself but also how this flower element works within the overall design. In other words, after this stage of conventionalisation, the designer also has to consider how this flower element will interact with other elements that will occur in the design—a harmonious relation of parts and whole.

Chen lists different types of conventionalisation: reductive conventionalisation (*shenglue de bianhua* 省略的便化), additive conventionalisation (*tianjia de bianhua* 添加的便化), and imitative conventionalisation (*mufang de bianhua* 模仿

⁵¹ 「譬如我們拿一朵花（此時所用之花，當選擇其花瓣有妙味的曲線的）來解剖的時候，先把這花的輪廓線描出來看，研究他是否適宜的，再將花形全體塗之，又描出各種不同的位置來研究研究，又花瓣和中心的關係以及花瓣和花瓣的關係等，從各方面而審察之。」 Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anfa ABC*, 26-27.



Figure 46

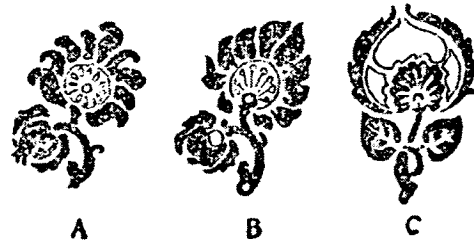


Figure 47

的便化). The previous examples (figures 42-45) are the results of reductive conventionalisation. Figures 46 and 47 show additive conventionalisation (the addition of elements onto a given motif) and imitative conventionalisation (the manipulation of man-made motifs, from the past or elsewhere).⁵²

Conventionalisation lends itself to many uses. It is an approach designers (*tu'anjia* 圖案家) can use to manipulate motifs, from nature and from diverse objects with ornaments or designs. The aesthetic principles described by Batchelder and Chen allow a basis from which the designer can begin to adapt motifs. In terms of the formal qualities of such a system of image creation, there is a tendency towards unity of whole and parts, and towards the ideal of moderation between rhythm and balance, in other words, harmony. There is not, for example, an emphasis on asymmetry, functionalism, geometric shapes, such as can be seen in Bauhaus design. Rather the importance of the concept and method of conventionalisation (of nature and of motifs) was that it allowed designers such as Chen Zhifo and Qian Juntao to adapt traditional motifs in a 'modern' or different way.

⁵² Figures 27-29; *ibid.*, 30.

In Chen Zhifo's formulation of *tu'an*, there is a certain ambivalence towards the question of nature. We have seen how Chen Zhifo's ideas concerning *tu'an* exist in relation to *xiesheng*. ("*Tu'an* is the expression of the power of creation; *xiesheng* is what results from the expression of the power of observation."⁵³) There is a contrast between creation and observation. While he seems to view *xiesheng* as a representational technique oriented towards nature and reality, the relationship of *tu'an* to nature is more complicated.

The contrast between *tu'an* and *xiesheng* is aligned with creation and observation, as well as with *rengong* 人工 or *jiagong* 加工 and *ziran* 自然. Though he emphasises the importance of *tu'an* in terms of the manipulation of formal elements (tone, measure, shape) and formal principles (rhythm, balance, harmony), there is perhaps still an orientation towards nature. Chen Zhifo writes,

Thus when one creates *tu'an*, often after choosing a motif (or element), one doubts if the motif is suitable for the design. This situation, I believe, is the result of an incomplete understanding of *tu'an*. If one can take the spirit and beauty of nature, and ponder these closely, and if one can capture the essential element of beauty, whether it be a flower or a leaf, with a clear mind, leading towards a certain imagination, then manifestations of nature can naturally and attractively express itself in *tu'an*. So research work such as taking the wings of a bee under a microscope for detailed analysis of its behaviour is certainly not the meaning of *tu'an* research. To observe elusive shadows of flying clouds in the wild, to comprehend its mysteries—such is the true research that a designer should take

⁵³ Chen Zhifo, *Tu'anxue ABC*, 3.

with respect to nature.⁵⁴

There is at once a slight privileging of the creative powers of *tu'an* over the observation of *xiesheng* and an orientation of *tu'an* making towards "the spirit and beauty of nature." Chen seems to be saying that the principles of *tu'an*, when they are completely understood, not only enable the designer to look at nature in a new way but also to discover the principles of beauty in nature. Creativity lies as much within the designer as in nature.

Batchelder is more categorical in emphasising the centrality of the creative imagination of the designer. The conception of beauty lies more in the formal relations of elements. Batchelder writes,

Nature will not furnish you with an imagination, or teach you how to use the wealth which she places at your hand. These must originate with you. If you have them not, you might as well seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow as to expect help from Nature. When you have learned to think in terms of line, form, and tone, and have studied the possibilities and limitations of the problem which you are trying to solve, you may then turn to Nature for suggestions and assistance....
To think of Nature in terms of design is one of the difficult tasks that confronts the student. *As the beauty and interest of the design is not in the motif or subject-matter chosen, but in the constructive relations of lines, forms, and tones, it would seem desirable, before approaching Nature for assistance, to acquire through practice the habit of*

⁵⁴ 「然製作圖案的時候，往往有選取一種資料之後，又疑惑這種資料是否適用於圖案。這類情形，我以為一定是圖案方則尚未完全了解之故。假使能夠把自然的精神，自然的美，親密地去揣摩，不論一花一葉到手，都能夠捉住他的美的要點，以清新的心地，引起一種想像，則自然現象，自能巧妙地表現於圖案上了。所以把蜜蜂的翼在顯微鏡底下詳細調查其形態，這等的研究工作，決非圖案研究的本意。在野外間山觀察飛雲的幻影，領會其神妙之處，像這般的研究，才是圖案家對於自然的真研究。」 Ibid., 20-21.

*working from a design point of view.*⁵⁵ (italics added)

"To think of Nature in terms of design." The primacy of formal principles of beauty is clear: nature is simply a source of motifs, which are chosen according to the "relations of lines, forms, and tones." There is an orientation away from Nature and towards visual perception of the viewer. One can perhaps detect here a disjuncture between Nature and visual perception that is influenced by a physiological understanding of vision.⁵⁶ The formal principles may then be seen as universal principles of physiological vision.

Chen Zhifo's ambivalence towards nature and by extension an implicitly physiological understanding of vision can perhaps be better understood by situating him within shifts in the understanding of *tu'an* (or *zuan*) in Japan. *Zuan* was first constituted in contrast to painting and illustration in the Meiji period, originally associated with "a closed world of designing motifs and patterns." Between the 1900s and 1920s, *zuan* "became a new independent field...with necessary adaptation made to the use of machinery in production which first became practical in the period."⁵⁷ Design (*zuan*) departments were founded in various Japanese colleges of art or crafts around this time (most notably, in 1896, at the Tokyo College of Art, where Chen Zhifo was to study in the late 1910s);

⁵⁵ Batchelder, *Design in Theory and Practice*, 130.

⁵⁶ Perhaps in the way Jonathan Crary describes it in *Techniques of the Observer*. It must be noted that Chen Zhifo discusses visual perception of colour in *Tu'anxue ABC* in some detail, especially the tests of Eugene Cheverul on how colours stand out and recede in relation to one another when placed side by side. See Chen, *Tu'anxue ABC*, 79-105.

⁵⁷ Katsuyo Keiko, "Design in Transition—From the Shijoha School to Photomontages," Trans. by Kenji Kaneko, *Zuan no henbo/Design in Transition: 1868-1945* (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 17-18.

around this time, *zuan* sections were also established in major Japanese department stores and consumer goods manufacturers (such as Mitsukoshi, Takashimaya, and Shiseido). The concept of *zuan* gradually became extended from craft designs and patterns to posters, packages, book and magazine covers, up to the end of the Second World War. (In Japan, *zuan* as a term for “design” ceased thereafter, when the terms *desain* デザイン (design) and *reiauto* レイアウト (layout) were borrowed from the English; in China, *tu'an* continued to be used and developed, with a marked folk influence and orientation, until the late-1970s, when *sheji* 設計 and *zhuangzheng* 裝幀 were adopted (meanwhile, *meishuzi* 美術字 became known as *ziti sheji* 字體設計). The change in terminology is at least partly related to the adoption of Bauhaus and Bauhaus-inspired formulations of design.)

In the shift from craft-based designs towards mechanically produced designs, one can see the gradual development of *zuan*-creation from original designs (based on drawing or sketching from nature) to a new commercially oriented art that is distinct from both pure art (painting, drawing, etc) as well as more traditional crafts.⁵⁸ Elements of motifs and illustrations could be adopted and recombined for use in packaging, posters, and (book and magazine) covers. Motifs or pictorial/visual elements borrowed and employed came from a wide range of sources and included Egyptian motifs, Art Nouveau, (so-called) primitive art from around the world, and later, Art Deco, and Constructivism, among others. Many volumes of motif catalogues were compiled for design use. Some of these volumes

⁵⁸ This is not to say that traditional crafts were not influenced by new understandings of *zuan*, however.

simply included the reproduction of motifs with no explanation, while others included short texts that situated the motifs (and the objects on which the motifs were found) in context.

The emphasis on a formal understanding of beauty in terms of the interrelation of elements within a design can be understood in relation to the increasing use of primitive, exotic, or foreign motifs. In his explanation of *tu'an*, Chen Zhifo refers to many examples of such motifs, and points the reader towards understanding these motifs in terms of formal principles. Such an understanding allowed the motifs to be analysed, adapted, and used in design, outside of their original contexts (ritual, artistic, functional etc). Conventionalisation (*bianhua*) can be understood as one method of such adaptations: conventionalisation could be employed for natural motifs just as well as man-made motifs. The orientation towards nature (in drawing and illustration for design) shifts to the surface-level relations of tones, measures, and shapes. (Later on, photography would be incorporated in (graphic) designs as well, though this was not as prevalent in China as in other countries due to questions of cost and technology; this would follow the example of the Avant-garde.)⁵⁹

Whereas *zuan* took on a consciously commercial (and, towards the late 1930s, propagandistic) outlook in Japan, *tu'an* did not seem to be articulated as

⁵⁹ The designer Hara Hiromu, in the 1930s, writes in relation to the Soviet graphic magazine *USSR In Construction*: "it is not necessary to question if the photographs themselves are art. As stated by Tifolt, "When they are combined with letters and planes, they can be art if the contrast in composition and the interrelationship of the elements are superior." Quoted in Katsuyo Keiko, *ibid.*, 21. Hara Hiromu was later heavily involved with *FRONT*, founded in 1942 as a Japanese version of the Soviet magazine, under the direct jurisdiction of the General Staff Office.

strongly distinct from crafts. This obviously had much to do with the economic and technological situation in China, such as a much more limited commercial development and lower levels of mechanisation in the production of commercial art. There was also the poverty of the masses, which was directly related to the decline of traditional artisanal crafts and industries. Moreover, while the Japanese government, since the Meiji period, had been actively promoting the study of *zuan* in order to increase exports of Japanese crafts and (later) products, the dire situation in China prevented the government (when there was a functioning one) from doing much to help industry.

As mentioned before, Chen Zhifo was very concerned with the state of artisanal crafts/industry. He argued that to promote 'national products' (國貨), China needed 'not just to focus on the [technical] quality of goods, but also to try hard to beautify products.'⁶⁰ He argued that the traditional master-disciple system was no longer suitable to modern needs, and so, in order to revive China's craft industry/applied arts (*gongyi* 工藝) and China's economy in general, educational institutions specializing in design and crafts must be set up.⁶¹ Aside from training new designers, Chen also aimed to retrain artisans in new methods of production. For Chen, the revival and transformation of craft industries was crucial in aiding China's modernization, and he saw *tu'an*/design as a necessary element in this effort.

⁶⁰ Li Youguang 李有光 and Chen Xiufan 陳修範, *Chen Zhifo Yanjiu* 陳之佛研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu Meishu Chubanshe, 1990) 70.

⁶¹ 「因為中國的工藝品，向來是在徒弟制度下產生的。因為是徒弟制度，產品也一代不如一代。」 From Hu Guanghua 胡光華, "Chen Zhifo Gongyi Sixiang Yanjiu," 78.

Tu'an furnished Chen with a way by which Chen can integrate and utilise a wide range of traditional Chinese motifs found on a variety of media, such as textiles, porcelain, lacquerware, bronzes, etc, as well as elements from the *gongbi*-style of bird-and-flower painting (*huaniao hua*). Chen's collection of *tu'an* motifs allowed other designers of the period to rediscover and reuse motifs found within China as well as without. These motifs, from ancient bronzes (figure 48) and from Han tombs (figure 49), were presented as fragmentary images or elements.⁶² Diverse motifs were collected in order to be reused and reformulated in the creation of a national tradition of *tu'an*. Aside from Chen Zhifo, there were also others who collected *tu'an* designs and motifs.⁶³ These collections typically have conventionalised flower and animal designs, a selection of border patterns, and occasionally foreign designs, especially Japanese designs. This tendency back towards traditional craft motifs would survive the Second World War into the Communist era, where *tu'an* would be practiced as a crafts discipline.

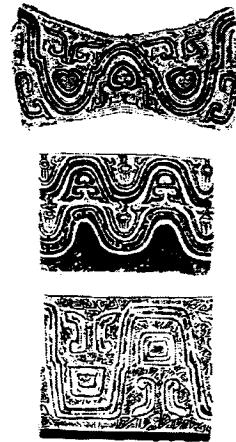


Figure 48 (above)
Figure 49 (below)

⁶² Figures taken from Chen Zhifo, *Zhongguo Tu'an Cankao Ziliao* 中國圖案參考資料 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1953).

⁶³ Wang Zigun 王子均, *Biaoyu Tu'anji* 標語圖案集 (Shanghai: Shanghai Xingxiang Yishushe 上海形象藝術出版社, 1935); Zhou Hanming 周汗明, ed., *Tu'an Huafan* 圖案畫範 (Shanghai: Shanghai Zhongyang Shudian 上海中央書店, 1937).

Chapter 4: Qian Juntao

Qian Juntao 錢君匋 (1907-1998) was born in 1907 in Tongxiang 桐鄉縣, Zhejiang, in the same prefecture as Feng Zikai and Mao Dun. In 1923, Qian entered the Shanghai Normal Art School 上海美術師範學校 which had been founded by Feng Zikai, Wu Mengfei 吳夢非, Liu Ziping 劉質平, and others.¹ Qian was a student of Feng Zikai, who taught, among other subjects, *meishu zhuanye tu'an* (美術專業圖案), or 'professional art design',² having spent some time studying in Japan from 1921-1922. It was at the Shanghai Normal Art School that Qian met Tao Yuanqing and his friend, Xu Qinwen 許欽文 (through them, Qian was eventually to meet Lu Xun in 1927).

In 1926, Qian taught design (*tu'an*) at Zhejiang Yizhuan 浙江藝專.³ There, he formed a musical group called Chunfeng Yuehui 春蜂樂會. He composed musical pieces which he sent to the periodical *Xin Nüxing* ("New Woman" 新女性), edited by Zhang Xichen 章錫琛. Qian Juntao was given a column where he would publish a song per month. Zhang Xichen (1889-1969) had previously edited the periodical *Funü Zazhi* 婦女雜誌 at the Commercial Press from 1921-1925. In 1925, the *Funü Zazhi* published an issue devoted to the "new sexual morality" (新性道德號) which provoked strong conservative reactions; in

¹ Song Yuanfang 宋原放 and Sun Yong 孫頤, eds., *Shanghai Chubanzhi* 上海出版誌 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe 上海社會科學院出版社, 2000), 1072.

² Cheng Tianliang, *Qian Juntao ji qi Shiyou Biezhuan* (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1998) 1-9, 36-39.

³ Ibid., 53. Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 1114.

the end, Zhang Xichen was forced out of the Commercial Press.⁴ Undeterred, Zhang established *Xin Nüxing* in early 1926, and later that year, in August, he established the Kaiming Book Company.

In 1927, Qian was invited to join the Kaiming Book Company 開明書店 as the arts and music editor. In its early years, the Kaiming Book Company had five principal members on the editorial team. Zhang Xichen was the manager, the director of the translation department, and the editor of *Xin Nüxing*. Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 was in charge of reading and correcting manuscripts, and also translated various works. Wang Aishi 王謫史 was responsible for proofreading, while Suo Fei 索非 managed the printers. Qian Juntao started by editing music and art, but soon he was designing book covers, eventually becoming responsible for creating or overseeing all cover designs published at the book company. The division of labour was efficient enough that the small, fledging book company managed to publish about ten books a month.⁵

In the 1920s publishing world of Shanghai (and of China), the Commercial Press and the Zhonghua Press dominated the market, publishing textbooks, magazines, as well as other works. The Kaiming Book Company was a small new publisher eager to establish its name as a reputable, high-quality book publisher. In 1927, the Commercial Press effectively had a monopoly on publishing musical material, a dominance that Kaiming was very eager to break. Whereas the Commercial Press had specialised equipment to print musical scores, Qian Juntao

⁴ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 1049.

⁵ Cheng, *Qian Juntao ji qi Shiyong Biezhuan*, 54-55.

improvised by drawing all the musical staff and lines, which no one else bothered to do.⁶ Kaiming became known for publishing many educational texts aimed at secondary and university students, as well as numerous works of the New Literature movement.

Qian Juntao gradually designed more and more covers for Kaiming, everything from novels to magazines to textbooks. Qian's designs were considered innovative at the time, and, thanks to Qian, the Kaiming Book Company had acquired a special 'Kaiming' style.⁷ Lu Xun passed by the Kaiming Book Company, and upon seeing the well-designed books on display commended Qian on his cover designs. Indeed, Lu Xun invited Qian and Tao Yuanqing to discuss designs and stone rubbings at his house.⁸

By 1930, Qian Juntao's cover designs was quite well-known, to the extent that some people, in spite, called him "*Qian Fengmian*" (錢封面)—which, according to Qian, only furthered his reputation.⁹ When Kaiming Book Company had grown substantially (and therefore Qian Juntao simply could not create all the cover designs), some writers, such as Ding Ling, Hu Yeping, and Dai Wangshu, specified that they wanted Qian Juntao to design their covers. Indeed, during the design stage of his work of translation, *Shaonü zhi Shi* (少女之誓, 1931), Dai Wangshu went to Kaiming many times to verify that it was indeed Qian Juntao

⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁸ Yang, 1998, 54. Qian first met Lu Xun on 12 Oct 1927 and first went to his place on 4 Nov, 1927.

⁹ Cheng, *Qian Juntao ji qi Shiyong Biezhuan*, 63.

who was designing and he urged Qian to “do his utmost.”¹⁰ Qian became friends with Dai Wangshu and Shi Zhecun; he recollects that while he got 1.25 yuan for each character he designed, Dai Wangshu got 3 yuan for every thousand words in his short stories.¹¹ (For the purposes of comparison, it may be noted that Lu Xun spent 2404.5 yuan on books in 1930, which was not an inconsiderable sum.)¹²

Kaiming attracted many new writers and writers of ‘New Literature’ (*xinwenxue*), including Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Ye Shengtao, and Xia Mianzun. Ba Jin’s trilogy of *Jia* 家, *Chun* 春, and *Qiu* 秋 were published by Kaiming, as were *Miewang* 滅亡 and *Xinsheng* 新生; Mao Dun also had a few of his works published there (*Shi* 蝕, *Hong* 虹, *San Ren Xing* 三人行, *Ziye* 子夜)¹³ Kaiming published over 1500 books in its years of existence, most of which were aimed at a relatively younger audience. Periodicals were also published, most notably, *Xin Nüxing*, *Yiban*, and *Zhong Xuesheng*—the last notable for its influence and for its creative cover designs. Kaiming also published the Kaiming Youth Compendium 開明青年叢書 and the Kaiming Literary Journal 開明文學新刊.

In the mid-1930s, Qian Juntao left Kaiming Bookstore to join Shenzhou Guoguang as the chief editor. His output of cover designs decreased as he became more involved in editorial work.¹⁴ In 1938, he started, with Li Chucai 李楚材, the Wanye Book Company, which was dedicated to publishing textbooks for music

¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹¹ Ibid., 112.

¹² Ibid., 66.

¹³ Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 235-237.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1114.

and art education.¹⁵ At around the same time, Qian became very interested in seal-engraving and calligraphy, for which he would be known most widely from the 1950s up to the 1980s.

Qian Juntao worked under pressures of efficiency and produced an enormous number of cover designs (over 1700) from the 1920s to the 1940s.¹⁶ Inevitably, such a large number of cover designs included many different styles of varying quality. Broadly speaking, Qian's earlier cover designs (approximately 1926-1930) show influences from Tao Yuanqing's cover designs and Chen Zhifo's *tu'an* designs, while the later designs (in the 1930s) show more experimentation with geometric lines and forms and with greater contrastive use of colour.

Qian Juntao started creating cover designs when Tao Yuanqing, having decided to stop doing cover designs, forwarded Lu Xun's requests to Qian. Qian recalls seeing Lu Xun's collection of bronze and stone rubbings with Tao Yuanqing in 1927, when Lu Xun strongly encouraged the two to create designs that are inspired by these stone rubbings in order to create an art form that is at once modern and popular/national (*minzuxing*).

Qian's design for *Dongfang Zazhi* in 1928 was one such design (figure 50). He designed not the entire cover, but the inset band which was placed near the top. The



Figure 50

¹⁵ Ibid., 214.

¹⁶ Sima Loufu 司馬陋夫 and Xiaoyun 曉雲, eds., *Qian Juntao de Yishu Shijie* 錢君匋的藝術世界 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1992), 5.

design is obviously not a copy of any particular ancient rubbings; rather, Qian adapted motifs in order to create something new. The two figures, broadly sketched with even lines, are similar in shape and size; they work in relation to one another, as can be seen through the diagonal black staff (in different directions) as well as the nine flower-like (or bird-like) elements that are arranged throughout the design. It is important to note that these nine elements are repeated in almost identical forms; such repetition is very characteristic of Qian Juntao's designs. The simplicity of the element in terms of shape and colour is used to compose the design. One can see this with his design for *Funü Zazhi* 婦女雜誌 in 1930 (figure 51). In this symmetrical design, what is repeated are not only the female figures (possibly Egyptian, which was quite popular at the time) but also the



Figure 51

conventionalised leaf shapes. There are no lined contours around the leaves; instead, leaves are represented by patches of green in similar shapes, each pointing at slightly different directions. Moreover, the plant formation in the middle fits the space between the two female figures exactly. The design is not an attempt at illusionistic representation but rather a design that plays with the interrelation of shapes and colours.

Qian Juntao was trained in the techniques of *tu'an*, and he was certainly aware of different foreign designs, especially Japanese designs. He learnt of these

mainly through various *tu'an* collections, most of which were available only in Japanese. These collections would often be wide-ranging in terms of geographical and historical scope; designs would be presented with minimal context, aimed at designers for use or reference in the creation of new designs.

Qian Juntao's designs, especially his earlier ones, were considered to be heavily influenced by Japanese *zuan* and decorative styles. His non-naturalistic or non-representational manipulation of shapes as well as his sensitive use of colour (whether strongly contrastive or subdued) reflect his exposure to other *tu'an* designers in Japan and in China (and most likely elsewhere).¹⁷ His illustrations for *Xin Nüxing* 新女性, for example, employs flat patches of colour in simplified contours (figures 52 and 53). Colour is used in a restricted way, limited to five

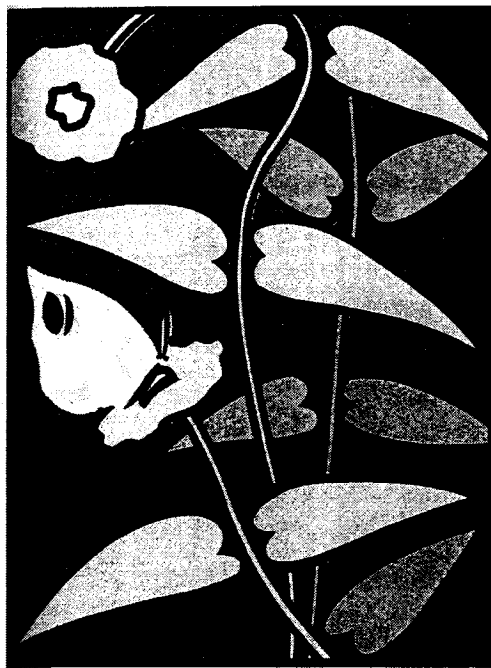


Figure 52



Figure 53

¹⁷ Qiu Ling, *Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishu Jianshi*, 80; Song and Sun, *Shanghai Chubanzhi*, 830.



Figure 54

different hues, two of which are a difference of tone. If we look at the design by Tsuda Seifu 津田青楓 for *Shobijutsu* magazine 小美術 (figure 54; 1904), the similarities in style are remarkable: patches of colour outlined in somewhat conventionalised forms, which are contrasted rather strongly with one another in colour. Qian Juntao's design is probably even more simplified and its elements more conventionalised than Tsuda Seifu's design.

Another characteristic of Qian Juntao's cover designs is the repetition of elements. Not only are individual elements often reduced to bare conventionalised shapes that hint at what they depict, such elements are repeated and organised on the page in various ways. In the cover design for *Xinghuo* 星火 (figure 55; 1930), there are essentially three shapes, other than the characters: dots in red and white, eye-like shapes with hollowed out circles near the bottom edge, and an even stripe that splits in two near the end, probably evoking a tree. On the page, there are only six distinct colours: red, white, indigo, taupe, yellow, and

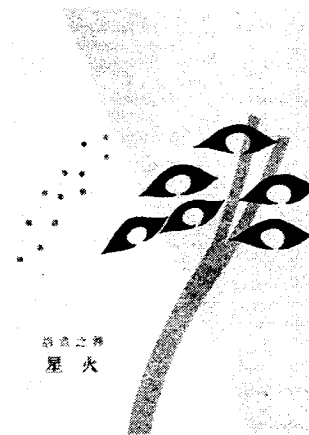


Figure 55



Figure 56



Figure 57

beige, all of which are in found in rather distinct shapes. Repetition also occurs in designs that depict human figures, as in *San Gongzhu* 三公主 (figure 56; 1928), where the three faces depicted are almost identical. This composition is very balanced, with only the two circular elements (the ones with the blue and white) creating a sense of imbalance that is echoed by the two diagonal patches of blue around the two top corners. In *San Jiemei* 三姊妹 (figure 57; 1929), there are three figural elements that are repeated, each positioned at different height of the page. Their downward movement (or rhythm) from the top left to the bottom right is counterbalanced by a slight tilt of the light yellow background, such that the feet of the three figures form a movement that is opposed to the bottom of the yellow shape. Perhaps there is even a balance of measure: the larger yellow background is tilted at a smaller angle than the angle at which the three figures are arranged. The range of colours is also limited here, and the colours are positioned in thoughtful ways: the crimson of the leftmost figure is also deployed across the top of the

design (next to the hands, and the title), whereas the light gray of the rightmost figure is also found as a line across the bottom of the design (as a zigzag line that evokes grass perhaps). Of course, in these two last cases, the repetition points to the concept of “three” in the titles of the book (*San Gongzhu* or “Three Princesses,” and *San Jiemei* or “Three Sisters”), but such repetition is found even when the titles or the content are different.

Qian Juntao’s restrained use of colour is deliberate. In many ways, Qian’s manipulation of colour seems close to Chen’s formulations of colour, a topic to which he devoted some attention in *Tu’anfa ABC*. Aside from introducing the basics of primary, secondary, and complementary colours, he emphasised particularly the contrast of colours, that is, the relation of colours to one another, as a type of optical illusion that designers should be aware of.

If we stare at colour A first and then move our gaze towards colour B, colour B will appear to have the complementary colour of colour A and thereby change its apparent colour.¹⁸

Optical illusions for colours existed not only for successive perceptions of colour, but also in relation to the brightness and saturation of colours. Chen had a whole list of advice to follow in terms of such optical illusions, whether it be related to direct sunlight, dusk lighting, moonlight, and electric light;¹⁹ he also prescribes certain combinations of colour based on his reading of various colour theorists,

¹⁸ Chen Zhifo 陳之佛, *Tu’anfa ABC*, 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111-115.

most notably Chevreul. For Chen, it is very important when creating a design to have one dominant colour, in order to gain a sense of harmony. The dominant colour has to be considered in terms of the area size that it covers, the intensity of the colour, and how the other colours interact with the dominant colour.²⁰ Qian Juntao's designs seem to follow similar principles.

In Qian Juntao's designs, the simplicity of elements in terms of line, shape, and colour is all the more remarkable considering other images found on commercial advertising and, to a lesser extent, on other book covers. Many book cover designs contain either no images (but with *meishuzi* or calligraphy) or else an illustration with varying degrees of representationality; at any rate, shapes and colours are not usually reduced to such a bare minimum. If we look at *yuefenpai* (calendar posters) or images on most

commercial advertising, the difference is even more striking. These very often contain a profusion of colours, clamouring for the attention of the viewer with a wealth of illustrative detail. Even a relatively sparse poster, such as the advertising poster for the Hatamen by Ni Gengye 倪耕野 (figure 58; circa 1920s), is detailed in its illustration.²¹ Aside from the luxuriant vegetative patterns of the



Figure 58

²⁰ Ibid., 92-93.

²¹ Deng Ming. *Lao Yuefenpai: Zui hou yi pie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 5.

border, the figure is depicted in a life-like representational way, with details of shading and variations in colour. Of course, the purpose of the poster is to create a representation of a feminine figure in order to sell cigarettes; the point is that Qian Juntao's style is very different from what was seen on calendar posters. In the case of commercial labelling, the difference in style is also great: the label for the Shimeitu brand 時美圖牌 (figure 59; date unknown)²² depicts a female figure with quite a few strongly contrasting colours and is already in an illusionistic style (unlike, for example, many other labels which had even more colours and details).



Figure 59

In Shanghai of the late 1920s and the 1930s, there were also styles of advertising that emphasised simplicity. Art Deco was particularly popular as a style, but one must moreover note that such posters often entailed the reduction or elimination of extraneous elements to a few, well-defined elements that are foregrounded. The perfume advertisement of figure 60 is one such example (mid-1930s). This followed a trend towards more restrained and minimalist posters in Europe (more restrained as compared to late-nineteenth-century posters, that is). The *Sachplakat* (object poster), a poster genre created in the first decade of the twentieth century, was a reaction to the cluttered style of posters of the time. The *Sachplakat* involved “the reduction of a selling message to a minimum number of

²² Ibid., 109.



Figure 60



Figure 61

elements—usually the product, a logo or trademark, and a bold line(s) of type, often in hand-drawn block letters.”²³ One example is a poster for Rarität, a cigarette company (figure 61; circa 1920). The design foregrounds the cigarette that is highlighted by the blue and red background shapes; the use of colour is restricted to a small but contrastive palette.

This tendency towards a focused use of elements is not restricted to advertising in Europe. Jan Tschichold, a Bauhaus typographer whose *New Typography* influenced a whole generation of graphic designers in Europe and America, advocated clarity in typography “because of the manifold claims for our attention made by the extraordinary amount of print, which demands the greatest economy of expression.”²⁴ The nature of printed matter had to change because of

²³ Steven Heller and Louise Fili, *Typology: Type Design from the Victorian Era to the Digital Age* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 62.

²⁴ Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. by Ruari McLean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 66.

the sheer quantity of print that the modern consumer encounters. Tschichold writes,

the speed with which the modern consumer of printing has to absorb it means that the form of printing also must adapt itself to the conditions of modern life. As a rule we no longer read quietly line by line, but glance quickly over the whole, and only if our interest is awakened do we study it in detail.²⁵

Tschichold argues for the rethinking of graphic arrangement in terms of order of importance (figure 62) and against following traditional symmetrical organisation (figure 63). Figure 62, an invitation card, illustrates how different textual elements can be highlighted and arranged on the page in order to communicate the message, as opposed to a symmetric arrangement.

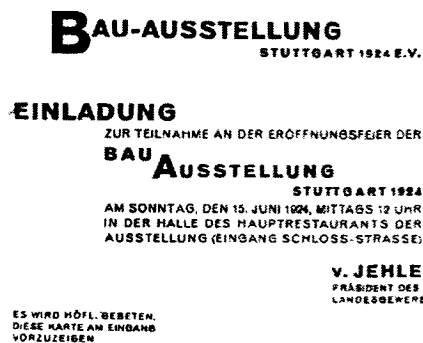


Figure 62



Figure 63

While Tschichold advocated a particular conception of typography, inflected by Constructivist modernism, the rise of the *Sachplakat* and of similar (but not identical) poster styles in China suggests a similar movement in China.

²⁵ Ibid., 67.

Although Qian Juntao may or may not have been aware of Bauhaus graphic design theories,²⁶ his cover designs certainly show a reduction of different elements in order to focus on a few carefully selected components; this makes the design more visually effective in an urban space increasingly filled with printed matter.

Qian Juntao created a few designs with strong geometric or typographic elements in the early 1930s, somewhat akin to Bauhaus and Constructivist designs. For a special issue of the *Wenxue Zhoubao* 文學周報 on Soviet literature (*Su'e Xiaoshuo Zhuanhao* 蘇俄小說專號)(figure 64; 1929), Qian Juntao used only typographic elements (that is, characters). The title of the special issue, in black, is overlaid on the name of journal, sideways in red. While the colour scheme (black and red on what was possibly white paper) is similar to many Bauhaus designs, Qian had to adapt such aesthetics to Chinese characters. The background text in red is rendered in mostly even lines, thus giving an impression of geometric shapes; the title of the issue, in black, is probably hand-drawn in a style

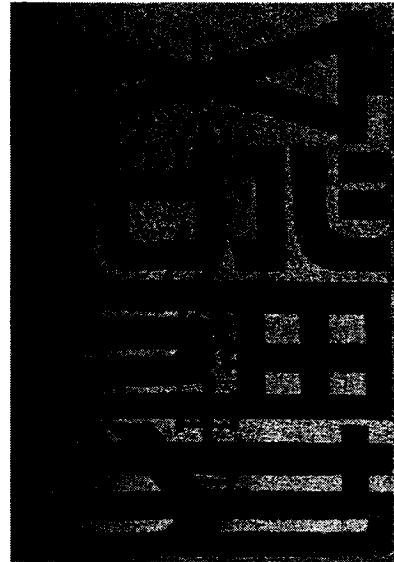


Figure 64

similar to a standard *songti* font, as four of the characters were variant characters at the time. Bauhaus insistence on not using ornamentation, including the exclusive use of sans serif roman letters, was difficult

²⁶ It is quite probable Qian was aware, or could have been. Feng Zikai, who was his teacher at the Shanghai Meizhuan and briefly a colleague at Kaiming Bookstore, wrote quite a lot on different modernist art movements including Bauhaus. On the other hand, Feng Zikai probably did not explain Bauhaus ideas on graphic design in depth.

to apply to Chinese characters; quite aside from the cosmopolitan insistence not to use national scripts (such as the German *Fraktur* or *Schwabacher*, or the Chinese script, which Tschichold cites as an example of nationalism), the relative complexity of Chinese characters means that individual elements within each character had to be carefully managed in relation to each other. Qian's cover design for *Ten Years of the Shenshi Telegraphic Dispatch Agency* (figure 65; 1930) would not have received Tschichold's approbation: the construction would be considered too axially balanced and the characters too decorative. Tschichold's principles of graphic design were often very restrictive, so it is difficult to say whether Qian Juntao knew of Tschichold's ideas and purposefully ignored them, or else he encountered examples of Bauhaus or Constructivist design and adapted the style. At any rate, his design for the *Wenxue Zhoubao* was lauded as very innovative in China at the time.

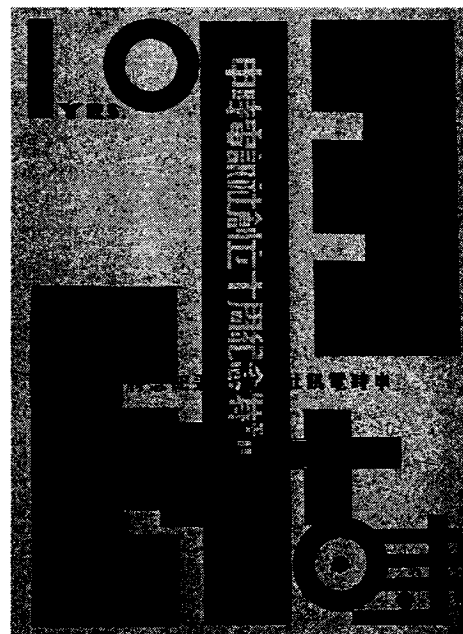


Figure 65

Qian Juntao created many cover designs involving *meishuzi*. For *Zai Hei'an Zhong* 在黑暗中 (figure 66; 1928), he created a design using just black, on red paper. The characters have purposely rough definition, and like the two hieratic figures, are constructed of relative thin red lines, thus evoking the “darkness” of the title. It is unknown if Qian carved these characters; later in his life, he was well known for his seal engraving. In the cover for *Lian'ai zhi Lu* 戀愛之路 (figure 67; 1930), the characters are used as a major element of the design. Geometric shapes are used, such as the circles (representing *dian* 點 and the empty part of *kou* 口) and the straight lines of the horizontal, vertical and some diagonals (in *zhi* 之). The placement of the diagonal axis from the top left to the bottom right has the effect of arranging the circles of *lian* and *lu* around an axis. The use of such circles was quite prevalent at the time in commercial advertising.

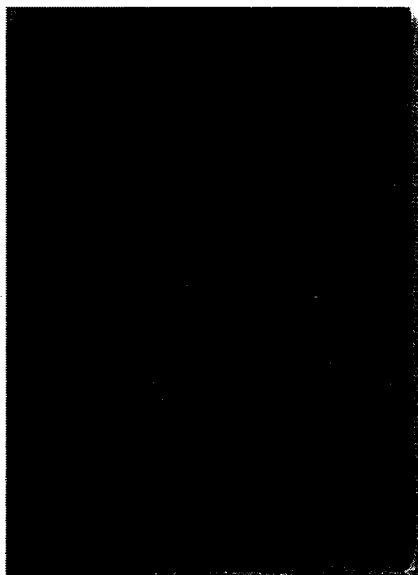


Figure 66



Figure 67

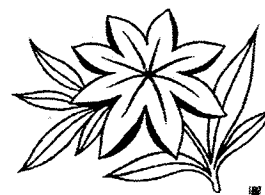
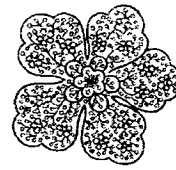
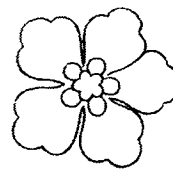
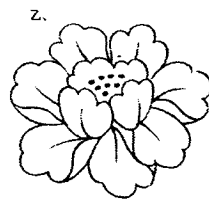
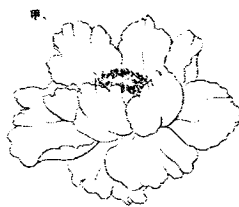
Qian Juntao continued to design covers after 1937 right through to the 1960s. While he was more involved with editorial work in the 1950s, and then with seal engraving and calligraphy thereafter, he was recognised for his achievements in cover design when he became the first Chinese graphic designer to have a collection of design published in 1963, *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan* 君匋書籍裝幀藝術選.²⁷ After suffering greatly in the Cultural Revolution, Qian's graphic design achievements in the 1930s were recalled and celebrated again in the early 1980s, when there was renewed interest in the 1930s.

²⁷ Qian Juntao. *Juntao Shuji Zhuangzheng Yishuxuan*. Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1963.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have presented some basic information concerning a few designers active in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, including relevant biographical information and preliminary analyses of some cover designs. I have also attempted a basic analysis of how design, or *tu'an*, was understood. I have suggested or hinted at the similarities between the construction of *meishuzi* and *tu'an* images, both involving the manipulation of the shape on the surface. I will try to push this analogy between *meishuzi* and *tu'an* a little further, and to highlight some parallels with Bauhaus concepts of design.

The emergence of artistic characters in cover designs was quite interesting, happening as it did during a time when the certainties of language and of script were thrown in question. The way that artistic characters are shaped and drawn bears similarities to the construction of *tu'an* images. Perhaps as in traditional China where there was a close link between painting and calligraphy, in a certain conception of design, artistic characters and images or shapes can be thought of together, though of course with vastly different implications than that of calligraphy.



圖十三

Figure 70

Figure 71

the individuating details of each flower petal are simplified and regularised. Once the conventionalised form is attained, one can then adorn it as one wishes, as in figure 71. The same rules for the decomposition of a given motif into a simplified form are applied to the addition of decorations: we see the same regularity of decorative elements in the more complex images on the right-hand side (in figure 71). I am suggesting here that there is a parallel in the construction of *meishuzi* and *tu'an* designs: in both cases, there is a basic form to which one can add additional elements, and furthermore, separate elements that make up the whole are discrete forms that show some kind of formal unity with each other. The additive process of *meishuzi* construction is the reverse of the reductive *bianhua* (conventionalisation) which we see in figure 70.

If we look at the practices of the Bauhaus, one also sees an emphasis on elemental shapes on the one hand and the interrelation of elements on the other. It is quite clear that the Bauhaus masters assumed the fundamentality of certain graphic elements. According to Wassily Kandinsky,

"We must at the outset distinguish basic elements from other elements, viz.--elements without which a work...cannot even come into existence."¹

Kandinsky, a master at the Bauhaus, taught a type of graphic analysis called "analytic drawing" (figure 72), whereby the main theme of a composition can be explored and grasped in terms of its principal tensions. Whereas *tu'an* images are conventionalised for the purposes of creating designs, the linear reduction here serves to highlight the inner "tensions." For, "drawing instruction at the Bauhaus is training in observation, in exact seeing and exact rendering, not of the external appearance of an object, but of its constructional elements, of their logical forces or *tensions* which are to be discovered in the objects themselves and in the logical arrangement of them."² The notion of an inner logic to objects (and the discovery thereof) bears some similarity to conventionalisation in *tu'an*, though the Bauhaus is oriented towards the discovery of an inner vision. Chen also expresses something similar, though not identical:

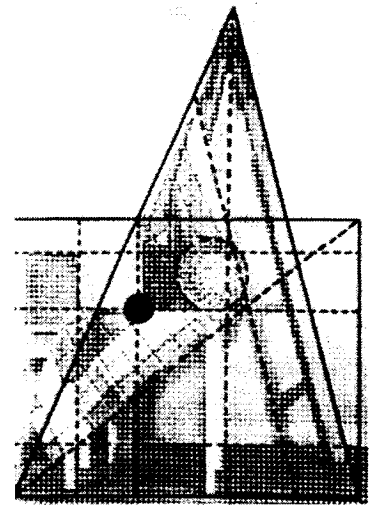


Figure 72

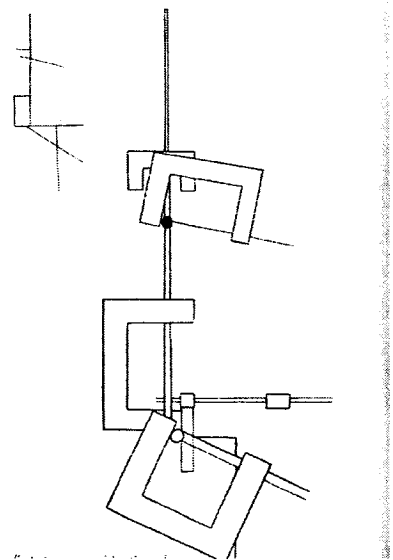


Figure 73

¹ Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (New York: Dover, 1979), 20.

² Herbert Bayer et al., *Bauhaus: 1919-1928* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939), 36.

If one can take the spirit and beauty of nature, and ponder these closely, and if one can capture the essential element of beauty, whether it be a flower or a leaf, with a clear mind, leading towards a certain imagination, then manifestations of nature can naturally and attractively express itself in *tu'an*.³

Chen Zhifo suggests the designer to grasp “manifestations of nature” in *tu'an*. Though this is not the same as the “inner tension” in the Bauhaus formulation, both are informed by a sense of inner form within objects.

It is not surprising that Chen Zhifo's ideas exhibit similarities to the Bauhaus, as Chen borrowed heavily from the Arts and Craft movement, which also influenced the Bauhaus by way of the Deutsche Werkbund (founded by Hermann Muthesius in 1907), of which Gropius was a member. (The Deutsche Werkbund had articulated the need to forge real cooperation between artists and craftsmen as well as trade and industry, much like the Bauhaus did.) The emphasis on fundamental formal elements and formal graphic logic in the Bauhaus and to a lesser degree in Chen Zhifo has antecedents in nineteenth-century early childhood pedagogy. Concretely, one can see very close links between these specific formal elements used in art pedagogy in order to teach drawing and the linear reductions we see in the Bauhaus and in Chen. Figure 74 is taken from Heinrich Pestalozzi's *ABC's of Anschauung* (1803).

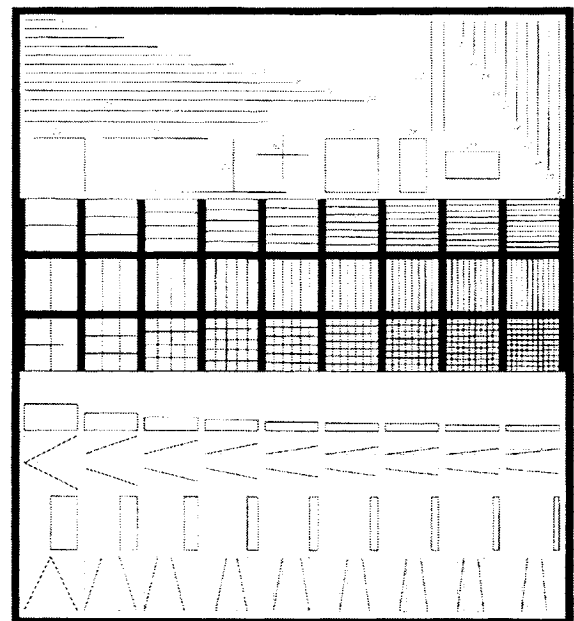


Figure 74

³ Chen, 20-21.

Pestalozzi, a pedagogical reformer, broke with academic art pedagogy in teaching drawing, relying instead on the square: through the progressive manipulation of the square, concepts such as proportion, angle, and scale could be taught.⁴ Obviously, the aim of using such elemental forms was to make the process of learning drawing easier for the child, to simplify and to naturalise the process of learning (how to draw), but by breaking the square down, Pestalozzi forged a link between geometry and drawing.

Johannes Ramsauer's *Drawing Tutor* (1821) offered another system of teaching drawing. Forms were first categorised into objects of rest, objects of movement, and objects of rest and movement, with each category having one or two sub-categories. Every form can thus be reduced to outlines and further abstracted until one reaches a linear equivalent (figure 75). The reduction of every form to outline serves the purpose of simplifying drawing for children. This simplification of forms is not dissimilar to Chen Zhifo's conventionalisation. It was probably not an accident that conventionalisation took hold first in crafts that require repetitive patterns: simpler graphic forms permit repetitive manipulation more easily. This drive for formal reduction allows for simple forms to be treated discretely and repetitively, as the graphic equivalent of the alphabetic 'ABC.'

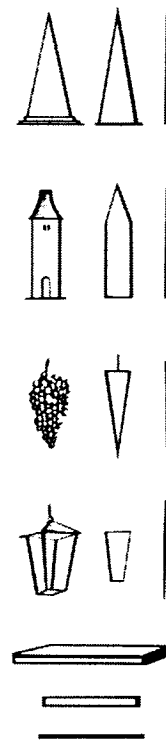


Figure 75

In the Bauhaus, the isolation of fundamental graphic elements helped articulate a language of form, which we can also call a theory of design. The notion of a language of

⁴ J. Abbott Miller, "Elementary School," *The ABC's of : the Bauhaus and Design Theory*, edited by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 4-21.

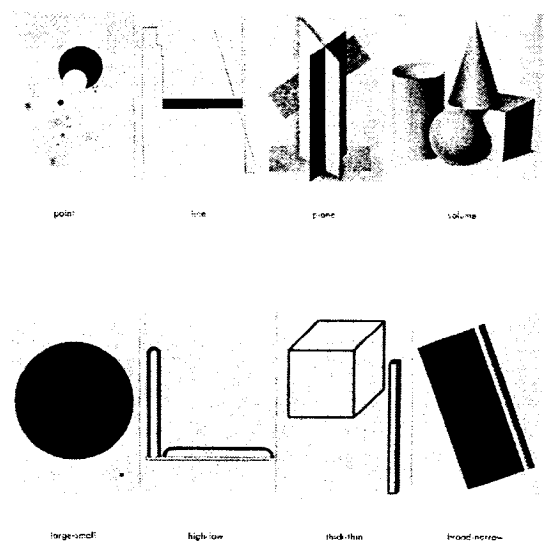


Figure 76

form was taken quite literally, from Itten's theory of contrasts in the Basic Course (example in figure 76) to Kandinsky's visual language (from elements, to grammar, and to theory).

Walter Gropius, speaking about the language of form, writes:

"Its vocabulary consists of the elements of form and color and their structural laws.... The elements which constitute the 'grammar' of creation are its rules of rhythm, of proportion, of light values and full or empty space."⁵

Kandinsky goes even further, taking the notion of language of form to a 'grammar' and a 'theory of composition':

"The progress won through systematic work will create a dictionary which, in its further development, will lead to a 'grammar' and, finally, to a theory of composition that will pass beyond the boundaries of the individual art expressions and become applicable to 'Art' as a whole."⁶

⁵ Walter Gropius, 'The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus,' (1923) in *Bauhaus: 1919-1928*, edited by Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius and Ise Gropius (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939), 28-29.

⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (New York: Dover, 1979), 83.

There is a certainty about this language of form, conceived of as universal but anti-illusionistic. In Chen Zhifo, too, one sees the belief that the theory of *tu'an* will eventually solve design problems, though this was not articulated as a language of form:

Thus when one creates *tu'an*, often after choosing a motif (or element), one doubts if the motif is suitable for the design. This situation, I believe, is the result of an incomplete understanding of the principles of *tu'an*.⁷

Chen Zhifo's formulation of *tu'an* shares with Bauhaus design theory in having faith in design, such that there is a theory of forms that can be grasped by the designer and is in some way related to fundamental forms or principles inherent in objects.

The fundamentality of basic elements grounds the Bauhaus language of form in an inner vision that is anti-illusionistic and yet universal. This language of form is like a language, in the sense that it does not depict mimetically; it is also unlike a (natural) language, in the sense that it was conceived as universally comprehensible. The indexicality of photography was thought to have offered an objective foundation for graphic forms. As Moholy-Nagy argues,

"An Egyptian pictograph was the result of tradition and the individual artist's ability; now, thanks to photography, the expression of ideas through pictures is far more exact.

"The camera's objective presentation of facts frees the onlooker from dependence on someone else's personal description and makes him more apt to form his own opinion."⁸

⁷ Chen, 20-21.

⁸ Moholy-Nagy; cited in Bayer et al., 154

The objectivity of visuality allows the notion of creativity to be thought of as inherent within the designer. Bauhaus students have to *unlearn* the “mass of accumulated information which he must abandon before he can achieve perception and knowledge that are really his own.”⁹ Talent has to be reached at through a process of uncovering or unlearning. This sense of an inner vision also informs the Bauhaus sense of universal progress: the universalism is possible

because it is grounded in the objectivity of visuality. This mentality allowed for Herbert Bayer to conceive of a Universal typeface, based on the truths of geometry (figure 77).



Figure 77

In early twentieth-century China, such sentiments of universal progress were rather less obvious. Chen Zhifo’s articulation of *tu’an* was rooted in the Chinese historical situation: he was concerned with saving and transforming traditional handicrafts, and with revitalising Chinese *tu’an*. In the same way, Lu Xun’s emphasis on *minzuxing* and the readaptation of ancient motifs was a necessary nationalistic move. Later on, the intervention of the Sino-Japanese war shifted *tu’an* to a much more folk and popular orientation, a shift that was continued post-1949. The cosmopolitan leanings of a designer like Qian Juntao were no longer possible.

⁹ Bayer et al., 36

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