

War, Rites of Passage, and *Resistance Sketch*

Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation which I have designated a transition, and one of the purposes of this book is to demonstrate that this symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in more or less pronounced form in all the ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another.

—ARNOLD VAN GENNEP, 1909

Dressed against the autumn wind, Ye Qianyu and three other members of the National Salvation Manhua Propaganda Corps peer apprehensively across the water from under the brims of their fedoras (see figure 23). It is early November 1937. Heeding military orders to flee the national capital Nanjing before it falls into the hands of the invading Japanese army, they have just steamed up the Yangtze River to Wuhan, a tri-city complex rapidly becoming the de facto headquarters of the Nationalist regime and a rallying point for wartime cultural activity.¹ Behind our traveling artists stand the riverfront buildings of Wuhan's commerce-driven treaty port, Hankou. Cosmopolitan, prosperous, linked by rail to China and by water to the world, Hankou is a city much like the one they had until recently called home, Shanghai. Even the Western-style architecture resembles the imposing row of banks, hotels, and consulates fronting Shanghai's Bund along the Huangpu River. But just a month or so earlier, Japanese forces had taken over the Chinese-controlled areas of Shanghai, turning the International Settlement and French Concession into tensely guarded "lonely islands" (*gudao*). Most manhua artists, along with their colleagues in literature, film, drama, and the fine arts, have left the coastal cities over the past several months to reassemble several hundred kilometers upriver in Wuhan. They are all refugees now, but share the conviction, spelled out in the manhua's caption, "to build a War of Resistance cultural center."

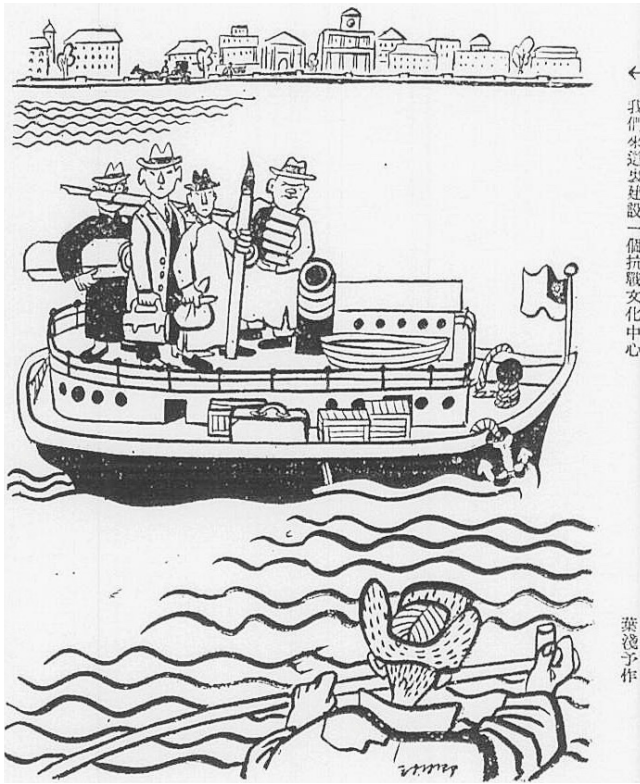


FIGURE 23. "We've Come to Build a War of Resistance Cultural Center," *Battle Pictorial* (Zhandou huabao), no. 11 (November 27, 1937).

This drawing, created by the leader of the corps, Ye Qianyu, appeared in the Hankou-based *Battle Pictorial* (*Zhandou huabao*) in late November 1937. It was created to record the moment, mission, and emotion of the wartime relocation. I have chosen it to open this chapter for its figurative value—the way it pictures a wavering between two worlds, a suspension in what French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep calls a “symbolic and spatial area of transition.” Ye could, of course, have depicted the arrival of his team from any number of perspectives. He chose to show himself and his colleagues on a boat, between two shores, traveling from one place to another, literally in passage. The outsize pens, paper, and books the artists carry recommend that we view this manhua as a metapicture—that is, a picture that reflects on its own conditions and constitution. In this case, we are given a picture not just of artists but of artists looking for something to picture. What are they peering at? Not Hankou, evidently. The city’s landmark buildings appear in the background, receding against the horizon, present as a marker of place rather than an object of the gaze.² Such icons of colonial modernity seem

at that moment to be of little interest to the travelers. The head and shoulders of a ferryman in a patched jacket protrude in the foreground. The four men face his direction but seem to look past him, suggesting that theirs is not the left-wing artist's gaze upon the social underclass. More than anything, they appear to want to penetrate the drawing's fourth wall, to make out the image of those who would return their gaze from beyond the borders of the frame: the audience for the art of wartime manhua.

This chapter explores not just who these artists discerned beyond the frame but how they went about reconstructing that audience in and through the hybrid imagistic and textual devices of the manhua pictorial. Prewar manhua pictorials like *Shanghai Sketch* appealed to readers by ushering them into a community of modern, in-the-know, treaty-port urbanites. Sudden, massive foreign invasion was now pushing these magazines, along with their creators, contributors, and community of readers, out of the coastal cities and into the war-torn Chinese hinterland, or *houfang*. How did manhua, and the periodicals in which they appeared, respond to this forced transition, the passage from the familiar media ecology of the city, with all its consumerist pleasures, to a state of war, where mass culture was militarized to serve a nation in crisis?

This chapter helps to answer that question in one small way through a close reading of the inaugural issue of the magazine that Ye and the Manhua Propaganda Corps published soon after landing in Wuhan: the January 1, 1938, issue of *Resistance Sketch*. I hope to show that *Resistance Sketch* inherited the generic features of the "sketch" that preceded it—*Shanghai Sketch*—in that both pictorials were profusely illustrated miscellanies aimed at a worldly, cultured, treaty-port audience. But where the earlier magazine served as a guide to joining an interpretive community of urbanites in the peacetime city, *Resistance Sketch* addressed a community composed primarily of artists and other *wenhuaren*, or "people of culture," who had fled the coastal cities and were now adapting to a state of all-out war. *Resistance Sketch* adapted to that change as well and did so, I argue, in a way designed to catalyze readers' transition from peacetime to a military footing. At the center of that project, led by Ye Qianyu and the corps, was a certain kind of story, a rite of passage narrative, woven through image and text, that gave shape and meaning to their cultural colleagues' transition from peacetime urban cultural creators to wartime soldiers of culture.

My main purpose in this chapter is not to describe what manhua artists did during the War of Resistance, their harrowing passages to the Chinese interior, their collective efforts to mobilize the masses through heroic but often stark, disturbing images, or their struggles with primitive publishing technologies. That story has been well told elsewhere.³ I am more interested in method: how we read and interpret the materials those artists created. Manhua are pictures, and they are words, and they are the spaces and places on the page constructed by the creative conjuncture of those picture and words. This chapter intends to contribute to historical understanding of manhua's role during the war. But its larger goal is

to change how we read manhua themselves by demonstrating how to view their interpenetrations of words and images carefully crafted within the dynamic context of the manhua pictorial.

I begin with an account of the activities of manhua artists leading up to the publication of *Resistance Sketch* in 1938. My focus here, beyond providing historical background, is to show how manhua and its community of collaborative, quick-thinking, entrepreneurial-minded artists rapidly adjusted to wartime exigencies. Next, I return to the manhua above—depicting the four artists on the steamer—but step back to examine it in material context, laid out on the printed page of *Battle Pictorial* as the first panel of a multiauthor narrative sequence, created by core members of the Manhua Propaganda Corps, called “After We Arrived in Wuhan” (“Women laidao Wuhan yihou”). That sequence is much more than a collection of cartoons. It is a visual narrative that reflects on wartime manhua’s role in defining an interpretive community among the refugee *wenhuaren* of Wuhan. From there, I propose a strategy for reading the inaugural issue of *Resistance Sketch* as a discrete but hybrid image-text work designed to elicit a certain response from its community of readers. Finally, I turn to *Resistance Sketch* itself, analyzing key sections of the magazine’s inaugural issue to demonstrate how a rite-of-passage narrative knits together its seemingly fragmented and miscellaneous content to guide its audience through a symbolic, transformative journey.

MANHUA GO TO WAR

The artists on the Yangtze steamer may look unsure about what lay ahead, but they did not lack momentum. The outbreak of war with Japan in early July 1937 coincided with a peak in the cultural phenomenon known as manhua. Over the preceding four years, around twenty manhua magazines of varying lifespans had functioned as nodes through which manhua editors and contributors developed a close-knit community centered in Shanghai and extending to other major cities, including Guangzhou, Tianjin, and Beijing. In November 1936, leading figures in manhua circles, such as Ye Qianyu, Zhang Guangyu, and Lu Shaofei, mobilized this network to stage the First National Manhua Exhibition (*Diyijie quanguo manhua zhanlan*). The exhibition, which opened in downtown Shanghai before traveling to other cities, was an artistic and public relations tour de force that displayed several hundred works by over one hundred artists.⁴ Following through on this high-profile show, manhua artists in spring 1937 established the National Manhua Artists Association (*Zhonghua quanguo manhuajia xiehui*), a professional mutual support society with branches in Guangzhou, Xi’an, Hong Kong, and other cities. The onset of war in July prompted a change in name to the Manhua Artists National Salvation Association (*Manhuajie jiuwang xiehui*), as well as a shift toward exclusively creating and disseminating anti-Japanese propaganda art. In August, eight members of the National Salvation Association, led by Ye Qianyu, organized the Manhua Propaganda Corps to bring manhua to the capital city, Nan-

jing, through publishing and exhibitions. During its several months in and around Nanjing, the corps was government funded, initially through the city's Nationalist Party Committee and later by the Military Commission Political Indoctrination Office (Junshi weiyuanhui zhengxunchu).⁵ Meanwhile, in embattled Shanghai, members of the Manhua Artists National Salvation Association announced a campaign of "manhua warfare" (manhua zhan) with the launch of the four-page, illustrated, tabloid-format *National Salvation Sketch* (*Jiuwang manhua*), which reportedly enjoyed print runs of up to twenty thousand issues and was distributed in several cities, until it was forced to shut down in early November.⁶

While Shanghai and Nanjing fell to the enemy, Wuhan's star rose as a sudden influx of a million refugees, including artists, writers, and publishers, traveled up the Yangtze and regrouped in the relative safety and stability of the de facto capital, initiating the hopeful and heroic but short-lived Wuhan stage of the eight-year War of Resistance.⁷ A publishing boom ensued as the number of journals produced in Wuhan rose from thirty to two hundred between January and October 1938.⁸ *Resistance Sketch* was on the leading edge of this boom. In December, shortly after disembarking at Wuhan, Ye Qianyu struck a deal with the recently arrived owner of the Shanghai Magazine Company (Shanghai zazhi gongsi) to publish a new manhua periodical.⁹ Capitalizing on their editorial experience and the tight-knit web of manhua artists, corps members launched the inaugural issue of the twice-monthly *Resistance Sketch* on the first day of 1938. In all, *Resistance Sketch* published twelve issues in Wuhan through mid-June 1938, as well as three more issues in Chongqing in 1940.¹⁰

The launch of *Resistance Sketch* at the start of 1938 demonstrates how the manhua community in Wuhan had been making coordinated contributions to the war effort well before the propaganda work of the city's refugee artists and writers was formally organized under the Nationalist government's Third Bureau of the Military Affairs Commission's Political Affairs Department (Junshi weiyuanhui zhengzhibu disanting) in April.¹¹ In some measure, this independence on the part of manhua artists was fostered by the remarkable degree of cultural autonomy, political experimentation, and creative energy that blossomed in Wuhan at the time.¹² Equally important, manhua artists' professional background positioned them to contribute to the war effort. In China, just as elsewhere during the twentieth century, wartime propaganda was a matter of selling war by using "conventional visual codes" to activate "the habits of fantasy and desire generated by mass entertainment."¹³ Manhua artists' deep symbiosis with Shanghai's mass-entertainment market fed their success at generating patriotic propaganda. As classic examples of Republican-era cultural entrepreneurs, they had spent the prewar years developing a wide-open, politically independent, anything-goes attitude that enabled them to produce seemingly endless recombinations of visual and verbal forms plucked and pirated from the global and local domains of cinema, literature, traditional and modern drama, photography, folk culture, and fashion. The editor of

National Salvation Sketch, Wang Dunqing, was surely correct when he remarked that Ye Qianyu was nominated by his comrades to lead the Manhua Propaganda Corps because of his “nose-to-the-grindstone, straight-talking” attitude.¹⁴ But another key consideration would have been Ye’s stature in Shanghai’s media circles, where he was well known as a versatile artist-entrepreneur who had over the past dozen years created the celebrated *Mister Wang* comic strip, pioneered Shanghai fashion design, edited several major pictorial magazines, mastered professional photography, and even managed a film company. As Cai Tao observes in a study of the Hankou propaganda art community, “His multiple identities across multiple domains of urban culture explain manhua’s unique intermediality and trans-cultural character.”¹⁵

MANHUA, NARRATIVE, RITUAL

Ye’s manifold approach to mass culture helps unfold how *Battle Pictorial*’s November 1937 “We’ve Come to Build” works as a metapicture. To get to that level of analysis, however, we have to step back, view the entire page on which the manhua appeared, and let the impulse to narrative come into play. Ye’s manhua was not a standalone piece but, as noted above, the first in a sequence of panels under the collective title “After We Arrived in Wuhan” (see figure 24). Each of its panels was drawn by a different artist, and none are numbered. The spread as a whole, however, uses conventions of magazine layout combined with the visual language of cinema to encourage the reader to imagine a narrative sequence, a story of how the artists initially responded to the wartime refugee community that greeted them in Wuhan.

The default sequence for reading a Chinese magazine of the time was right to left, top to bottom. Thus, Ye’s manhua comes first, after the right-side title text, and determines the visual field of the entire single-page spread. To use film terminology, Ye provides an establishing shot. With the Hankou riverfront setting the location, he initiates a quest narrative by showing the four journeying artists straining to see something off-screen and unknown. The remaining panels respond by revealing with increasing definition what they find. The emphasis throughout is on people. Moving down to the bottom-right corner, we are given an extreme long shot of an anonymous crowd: Hu Kao’s (1912–94) “ocean of humanity” (*renshan renhai*), faceless and distant, milling about below the pillars of what appears to be the landmark Jianghanguan Custom House. Next, Zhang Leping offers a group shot that reveals familiar faces, “acquaintances” among a community of well-dressed but distracted urbanites who, the caption tells us, have “left their native homes behind” (*lixiang beijing*). In the next panel, Lu Zhixiang (1910–92) cuts away from the middle-class crowd to introduce a very different wartime community: two wounded soldiers in padded Red Cross coats. Strangers in the city, too, they not only impassively return the artist’s gaze but also loom large relative to the size of the figures in the

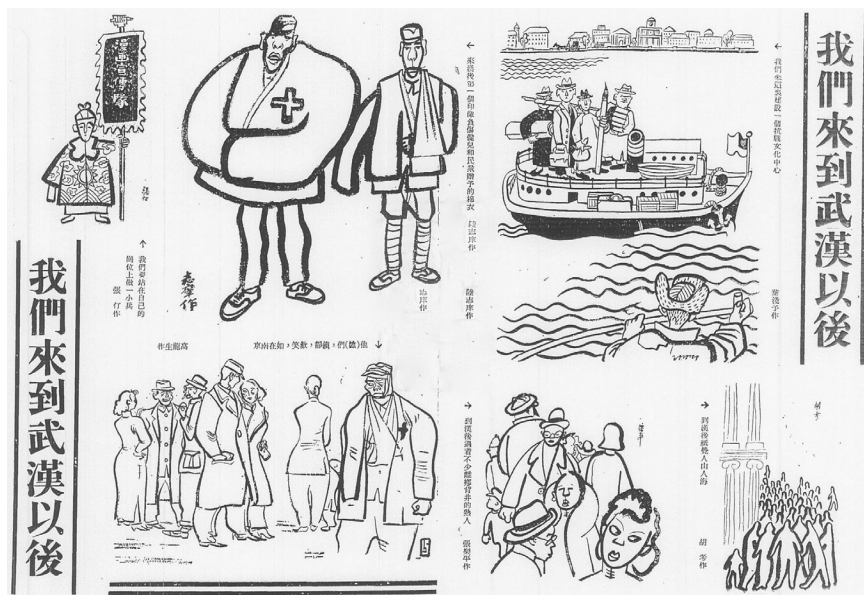


FIGURE 24. "After We Arrived in Wuhan," *Battle Pictorial* (*Zhandou huabao*), no. 11 (November 27, 1937).

other panels, creating a visual crescendo and a powerful prominence. In the next panel, Gao Longsheng (1903–77) sets these two communities, civilian and military, in tension. Here, a gaggle of urbanites, described as "calm and merry, as if still in Nanjing," form a group distinctly apart from the lone soldier in the foreground, who looks on warily, perhaps even resentfully, to judge from his tightly clenched fist. The heavy black bars under Gao's drawing mark the end of the sequence, except for the small, comical figure in the top-left corner. This tiny antique soldier from China's dynastic age, likely a caricature of its creator, Zhang Ding (1917–2010), holds a "Manhua Propaganda Corps" banner topped by the corps' emblem, a fist gripping a pen. "We want to become little soldiers at our posts," reads the caption.

Zhang Ding's tiny soldier makes a self-deprecatory stab at representing a war-time artist. Part of the charm of China's manhua artists is how they never seemed to take themselves too seriously; but Zhang's cartoonish coda is not entirely in jest. It concludes the visual narrative with a hoped-for solidarity between artists and the war's true combatants, the soldiers depicted sympathetically in the two preceding panels. We see that solidarity emblemized as well in the fist atop the corps' banner, which visually echoes the clenched fist of Gao Longsheng's wounded soldier, hinting at shared emotion and mission. It seems safe to say, then, that "After We Arrived in Wuhan" is more than a random handful of manhua snapshots. The layout invites the storytelling impulse, and the story lures us into the war-time project of the manhua artists—namely, reconstructing their audience and

its cultural habits within a state of war. Attention to the structuring role of narrative also reveals manhua's potential to picture a complex historical and ideological situation through page layout in a magazine. The situation, in this case, is defined by passage: spatially, over the water from Shanghai and Nanjing to Wuhan, and symbolically, from a peacetime community of the coastal cities to a wartime community of the interior.

"After We Arrived in Wuhan" foreshadows *Resistance Sketch*. The former engages the problem of using manhua to represent a cultural passage to war; the latter elaborates that story using the complex visual resources of an entire pictorial magazine. What I propose, then, is to read an issue of *Resistance Sketch* as something greater than the sum of its parts. To demonstrate why and how such a reading is meaningful, or even possible, we need to return to and develop the ideas of heterogeneity and seriality. Heterogeneity is the most salient trait of pictorials featuring manhua. As a subcategory of the illustrated magazine, manhua pictorials present the reader with a seemingly discontinuous arrangement of words and images drawn from a variety of visual and verbal genres, mixing and manipulating a range of different kinds of drawings, photographs, maps, and so on in tandem with a range of written material, such as essays, reportage, editorial commentary, and captions, not to mention fiction and poetry. Seriality, meanwhile, implies that any single issue of a magazine is not normally designed as a self-contained whole but is meant to be consumed issue by issue, in a series, over an extended period of time. A single magazine issue thus has no need for aesthetic closure; the stories it tells—sustained by the incessant real-life flow of news, personalities, and entertainment—never end. When it comes to any given single issue of a magazine, then, the very diversity of content, its apparently haphazard arrangement, and its extended, fragmentary presentation typically warn against any presumption of aesthetic coherence.

Clearly, the diffuse but continuous stream of variegated content found in popular illustrated magazines does not make for a self-contained story in the traditional sense. What it does provide are multiple, contingent paths that readers can reassemble according to their own tastes and inclinations. To bend French cultural critic Roland Barthes's terminology to my purpose, magazines are by design not "readerly" texts that guide readers to a single, predetermined message, thus making them consumers of meaning; rather, magazines are "writerly" for how they present "a galaxy of signifiers" that let readers become producers of meaning.¹⁶ Of course, one cannot take Barthes's notion of the writerly too far. In practice, editors of mass-market illustrated magazines were less interested in opening wide the gates of signification than in producing consumers of lifestyles and their associated commodities, including, of course, magazines themselves. In a more positive sense, and as discussed in the examination of *Shanghai Sketch* in chapter 1, pictorial magazines' traffic in modern ephemera provided timely writing and images that readers could, week after week or month after month, steadily and selectively apply to constructing their selves and their everyday lives. This

kind of presentation, shallow but continuous, diffuse but extensive, weaves image and text with the implicit goal of summoning and sustaining an interpretive community “bonded together by the experience of common reading.”¹⁷

Magazines, then, do not so much narrate a story of modernity as give readers the chance to selectively appropriate “multiple shallow fragments” as they navigate their own semiautonomous path toward a personal, but at the same time broadly shared, comprehension of the modern.¹⁸ With every new issue, readers are drawn for a time into the spell of the magazine, traversing a miscellaneous, but never random, configuration of words and images supplied to help them piece together a picture of themselves as discriminating, consuming, performing, and knowing members of a modern public. Reading the magazine is thus a form of narrating and constructing the self within a larger community.

As discussed in chapter 1, this kind of collective consumption of print media echoes Benedict Anderson’s classic formulation of print capitalism and its creation of imagined communities through the ritual of simultaneous newspaper reading.¹⁹ Reading popular illustrated magazines was basically the same: a mass, secular ritual that offered membership in a shared imagination of self and community—in this case, a community of modern urbanites. But to go a step further, if magazines could create a sense of community through the regular ritual of mass reading, they could also be modified to reconfigure that community, to reshape reader identity in new directions and with new emphases. That, I hope to show, was precisely the goal of *Resistance Sketch*: to apply the print genre of the manhua pictorial toward recreating a community of readers for wartime. The question, then, is how.

In this instance, it accomplished this goal by embedding one type of narrative metaphor throughout the heterogeneous elements of the magazine. That is to say, the first issue of *Resistance Sketch* did not present readers with a single continuous narrative across its entire content—a virtual impossibility given the miscellaneous nature of the pictorial genre. Rather, it repeatedly presented readers with the same narrative trope in words and images. That story was one that resonated with and acted upon readers’ immediate experience to help generate a sense of belonging to a new community grounded in the exigencies of the war rather than those of the modern treaty-port city.²⁰ *Resistance Sketch*, as I hope to show, borrowed a narrative trope that could be repeated across the multiple image-text subgenres that comprised the magazine, thereby enhancing its message while retaining the open, hybrid format of the pictorial. The story I refer to is structured upon the three-stage transitional sequence of separation, liminality, and aggregation. As elaborated by anthropologist Victor Turner, “Separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions . . . ; during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject . . . is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated.”²¹

Resistance Sketch does not present the three phases in strict sequence, as they might appear in a conventional linear narrative in the mode of, say, fiction or biography; instead, the layout of the magazine's twenty-four pages remains true to the popular pictorial's variably navigable "esthetic of unpredictability."²² Nor does all the content in the magazine contribute to the three-stage narrative, due again to the format of the magazine as a miscellany. But as I will show, a remarkable number of otherwise very different elements of issue 1 of *Resistance Sketch*—including the cover art, the masthead, single- and multipanel manhua, the editor's introduction, a reportage piece and its accompanying illustrations, and more—present the reader with variations on the three-phase transition story. Thus, readers can enter the magazine at any point and move through it along multiple pathways. In so doing, they traverse a collection of overlapping, mutually resonant figures and micronarratives that thread through and knit together the magazine's words and images.

In the end, however, even as the reader is guided through these three stages, what we can call the ritual space of the actual reading experience belongs to the middle, liminal, "betwixt and between" stage. By this, I mean that the three-phase story form itself draws the reader into a liminal, reflective state by offering a narrative that suggests redefining and reinventing oneself, both as an individual and as a member of a community. By repeatedly presenting this story form, the magazine's contents "give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process" that divests readers from "their previous habits of thought, feeling, and action" while also guiding them to reflect upon their society.²³

Resistance Sketch enacts for its readers such a state of ritualized reflection, one bound up with their physical and emotional positioning in an undefined state between their role in the cultural community of the coastal cities and a nebulous future in the as yet undefined cultural community of the wartime national interior. In early 1938, the readership for *Resistance Sketch*, primarily urban artists and intellectuals, had indeed been thrown into a state of ambiguity and transition. Invasion had ousted them from their stable communities in China's eastern coastal cities, most prominently Shanghai, and forced them to make a journey far inland. Wuhan became for a time a center of intellectual experimentation, a place to reinvent identity and renew a sense of shared mission, all in the face of uncertainty and the threat of national disintegration. It is within this larger historical context that the inaugural issue of *Resistance Sketch* communicated with its readers, inviting them to make a passage from one social position to another, from peacetime, coastal, urban intellectuals, through a liminal period of initiation, to a new status as "soldiers" of culture of the wartime interior.

MASK AND MASTHEAD

Leafing through issue 1 of *Resistance Sketch* quickly reveals how its mixed, loosely structured content is typical of manhua pictorials, and of 1930s pictorials in

general. The magazine's twenty-two interior pages were printed mainly in black and white, with three-tone color printing (black, red, and yellow) limited to its front and back covers and a two-page center spread of a cartoon-style map. Images dominate, with only about 20 percent of the interior pages comprising text. Aside from the color covers and the center map, the imagistic content spans a variety of forms, such as four-panel, single-author manhua spreads on pages one and twenty-two, a set of thematically linked single-panel current affairs manhua on page three, a two-page display of cloth-banner propaganda posters across pages five and six, and samples of woodcuts on pages thirteen, fifteen, and sixteen, as well as a number of illustrations to accompany written matter. On page twenty-one is a comic by Ye Qianyu featuring Young Chen, whom we encountered earlier in *Shanghai Sketch's* *Mister Wang* strip. The issue's written content covers a range of topics, including an inaugural editorial, the transcript of a speech on wartime manhua by Lu Shaofei, the first installment of a serial history of Ming dynasty general Qi Jiguang (1528–88), a set of personal testimonials from figures in cultural circles, and a three-page illustrated reportage piece on occupied Shanghai.

None of the images or texts comprising the issue extend over more than three pages, with the exception of the celebrity testimonials, which run along the bottom of pages fifteen through nineteen. The magazine adheres to the conventions of the pictorial miscellany, designed to be consumed any number of ways depending on the inclination of the individual reader. But at the same time, certain conventions of the magazine anchor this typically fragmentary layout, such as the cover illustrations, the centerpiece feature, the editorial below the magazine's masthead, and the publication information inside the rear cover.

The logical place to begin is with the cover art. Covers were designed to seize readers' attention, and in doing so they "declared the magazine's personality and promise" while also making "a statement about the intended reader."²⁴ The front cover of the inaugural issue of *Resistance Sketch* is no exception and indeed carries special significance as the face of a new publication that had to assert its identity, purpose, and readership. Here, I will discuss how the two main design elements on the cover, the illustration and the masthead, can be interpreted within a scheme of liminality as a symbolic process of defamiliarization and reconstruction that prompts cultural reflection on the part of the viewer. More specifically, the visual composition of the cover illustration and masthead reduces "culture into recognized components or factors," recombines these components "in fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes," and then recombines them "in ways that make sense with regard to the new state and status" to be entered.²⁵

Cover art as a rule aims to engage viewers and stimulate some sort of reflection. For that reason, publishers of pictorial magazines typically favored illustrations over photographs, as the abstraction of illustration was better suited to signaling that "they were dealing with ideals rather than reality."²⁶ But what ideals did Ye Qianyu intend to express with the bizarre and arresting cover design? Clearly, the subject is a Nationalist Chinese soldier, as evident from the helmet, round collar



FIGURE 25. Front cover of *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).



FIGURE 26. "A Defender of China." Photograph by Robert Capa. © International Center of Photography / Magnum Photos.

with insignia, and what appears to be a rifle over the right shoulder (see figure 25). It is worth mentioning that Ye's illustration bears striking resemblance to the famous photojournalist Robert Capa's photograph "A Defender of China" (see figure 26), which appeared on cover of the May 16, 1938, issue of *Life* magazine,

about five months after issue 1 of *Resistance Sketch* was published. Both images provide a full-frontal headshot of a Chinese soldier, thus elevating the anonymous freedom fighter to the level of a statesman or celebrity. The *Life* cover romanticizes a foreign war for a primarily American audience, an effect enhanced by the low-angle shot and the subject's preoccupied, vaguely troubled gaze set against a background of sky. In contrast, Ye's soldier stares aggressively straight out of the frame, in a manner reminiscent of the famous Uncle Sam recruiting poster, and is drawn in bold primary colors that seem to exoticize this domestic war for local readers. It is easy to empathize with Capa's boy soldier; it is much more difficult to do so with the unnerving face Ye created. Ye's image is simply too fantastically inhuman, almost monstrous. Which is precisely the point. The strangeness of Ye Qianyu's cover soldier derives from how, within the conventions of the cover illustration, the image merges several different cultural components from its intended audience's worldview, presenting them so as to trigger a moment of reflection.

Part of the stimulus to reflection comes from how Ye frames these superimposed perceptions as a metaphorical mask, thus offering viewers some sort of new and clearly unusual identity. Ye highlights the mask trope in several mutually reinforcing ways. First is the color scheme. Working with limited print technology, Ye combined three strongly contrasting solid colors—black, red, and yellow—to create a flat, abstract look. The straight-on gaze is a classic technique for attracting visual attention in magazine cover art, and Ye accentuates it by giving the soldier red-ringed pupils set off by bright yellow sclera. The stark tonal contrast of black on yellow attracts the viewer's attention even more strongly to the eyes and enhances the mask effect by creating the illusion of seeing through the eyeholes to the yellow background. The real-life dimensions of the illustration further augment the illusion of the mask. In its original format, the illustration approximates the size of an actual mask and in fact appears slightly magnified because of how the head crowds the borders of the cover. In that respect, the magazine greets potential readers as a new identity, something they can "try on" and perform after acquiring and internalizing the stories attached to the mask, which are, of course, to be found in the visual and textual contents of the magazine.

But what kind of role does such a mask invite readers to adopt? The illustration might at first strike the viewer as simply depicting a soldier of the Chinese army, alert and equipped for battle. But in another, more subtle visual and symbolic dimension, the mask's red and black composition indexes Chinese indigenous tradition through its resemblance to the theatrical makeup (*lianpu*) used for the legendary Guan Yu, god of war, subduer of demons, and exemplar of loyalty and righteousness. The allusive face of Guan Yu invokes a sense of myth that interpenetrates Chinese folk religion, traditional literature, and popular operatic entertainment. Yet one could at the same time associate the soft, rounded features of the soldier's face and its predominance of black with a decidedly nonindigenous iconic image that would have been familiar to the magazine's Jazz Age cosmopoli-

tan readers through film, popular music, and print media: the American tradition of blackface. In short, Ye has created an intercultural chimera by extracting specific symbolic elements from their usual cultural settings and recombining them to form a new, grotesque configuration. Presented on the “face” of the magazine, the soldier-mask prompts potential readers, consciously or unconsciously, to become “vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called ‘factors’ of their culture,” provoking them “into thinking about objects, persons, relationships and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted.”²⁷

The initial shock of the front cover illustration thus introduces the magazine as a liminal space designed to spur reflection on cultural identity and community. Reinforcing that shock is the equally arresting back cover illustration. Zhang Ding’s “Atrocity” (“Baoxing”) is a nightmarish depiction of a blood-smeared Japanese soldier, bayonet gripped between his teeth, who appears to have just raped and murdered a young woman, presumably following an attack on the burning village in the background. As Louise Edwards has argued, images of sexual violence distributed throughout issues of *Resistance Sketch* were one way that manhua artists attempted to spark patriotic resistance to the Japanese invasion.²⁸ Here, I would add that Zhang’s back cover, placed in paratactic opposition to Ye’s soldier-chimera, opens up a narrative space. Paired as such, the two images imply a cautionary tale, whereby the brutality shown on the back, with all its starkly gendered connotations of national violation and destruction, could be prevented if the reader managed to transform him- or herself into the front cover’s “defender of China.”

For all their freakish, nightmarish qualities, or indeed because of them, the two cover illustrations were typical of mass-market periodicals, which rely on timely, eye-catching graphics that changed from issue to issue to keep in step with social trends, the change of seasons, and current events. A magazine’s masthead, on the other hand, remains the same across issues to provide visual branding.²⁹ The masthead for *Resistance Sketch*, a woodcut-style rendering of the four characters of the magazine’s name, was no exception. Its symbolism becomes fully apparent when compared with the masthead of its Shanghai-based predecessor, *National Salvation Sketch*. Where the earlier publication presented a refined, intellectual cosmopolitanism associated with Shanghai, *Resistance Sketch* advertised itself in the more earthy, populist aesthetic mode of the modern woodcut. The contrasting aesthetics of the two mastheads, read in sequence, contribute to *Resistance Sketch*’s embedded narrative of passage.

Turning first to the *Resistance Sketch* masthead, visible on both the front and back covers, we can see clearly that it is meant to project a cartoonish, naïve style.³⁰ The masthead was redrawn for subsequent issues of *Resistance Sketch*, each time with minor variations to harmonize with the cover art. The template for these variations was the interior masthead, the black-on-white title logo, executed in the modern woodcut style, usually printed at the top of the second interior page of the magazine (see figure 27). The modern Chinese woodcut is a genre of

FIGURE 27. Mast-head for *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).



FIGURE 28. Mast-head for *National Salvation Sketch*, no. 1 (September 20, 1937).



graphic art that developed in China parallel with manhua during the 1930s, but its monochrome, often Expressionist style and serious subject matter contrasted with manhua's typically more urbane, cosmopolitan emphasis on satire and play. By invoking an alternative, woodcut aesthetic, the *Resistance Sketch* masthead associates the magazine with what Xiaobing Tang describes as the "vision and commitment" of the 1930s modern woodcut movement: "stark images of current events, of war, flood, and famine, of the disenfranchised and the underrepresented, and the desolate rural and urban lives and landscapes."³¹

The banner title of *Resistance Sketch*'s predecessor, *National Salvation Sketch*, on the other hand, featured calligraphy by Zhang Naiqi (1897–1977), a member of Shanghai's financial and intellectual elite and one of the Seven Gentlemen (Qi junzi) imprisoned by the Nationalist government in November 1936 for supporting anti-Japanese labor unrest.³² Zhang's elegant, idiosyncratic script (*yiti zi*), accompanied by his personal signature, affiliated the magazine with urban intellectual circles (see figure 28). Taken in sequence, the two manhua publications literally headlined an ideological shift, with *Resistance Sketch* rejecting the individualistic literary mark of the Shanghai urban elite in favor of the populist anonymity of the woodcut style. Thus, where the earlier publication, *National Salvation Sketch*, presented a refined, intellectual cosmopolitanism associated with Shanghai, *Resistance Sketch* advertised itself through an aesthetic affiliated with the national interior and the lower classes. Each anchors its identity in a different set of associations, and the sequence contributes to *Resistance Sketch*'s embedded narrative

message of transition from urbane peacetime culture to the militant, rough-hewn world of the wartime national interior.

REBIRTH IN IMAGE AND TEXT

The cover illustration for issue 1 of *Resistance Sketch* breaks down, recombines, and ultimately defamiliarizes components of urban treaty-port culture to spur reflection among Wuhan's refugee intellectual readers. The masthead, meanwhile, rebrands manhua in line with a woodcut aesthetic affiliated with the lower classes. Before even opening the magazine, then, potential readers were visually cued to reflect on the symbolic elements of a liminal, transitional space. Next, on the first two interior pages, the magazine introduces micronarratives that reinforce the transition story. Careful inspection reveals how, on these two facing pages, a three-part rite of passage sequence recurs several times in the form of mutually resonant stories of capture, entrapment, and rebirth.

Ding Cong's (1916–2009) “Warriors Returned from Manchuria” (“Cong Dong-bei guilai de zhanshi”) introduces the narrative template of rebirth in four sequential panels (see figure 29). Panel one shows an able-bodied Chinese male forcibly driven from home by Japanese soldiers while another figure, presumably a female family member, clutches desperately at his clothes. Panel two depicts a scene of confinement and torture for those unwilling “to go to the front as cannon fodder and kill their own countrymen,” while the third represents the summary execution of the “thousands of compatriots” who refuse being pressed into service for the Japanese army. In the final panel, Ding Cong has drawn Manchurian recruits joyously leaping across no-man's-land to join the Chinese army, where they “pledge allegiance and vow to battle the enemy.” In figurative terms, the sequence starts with separation from home and family, moves through symbolic death in a marginal space under enemy control, and ends with the trope of aggregation in the form of a return to a new “family”—the Chinese military. Not to be overlooked is how Ding Cong heightens the sense of return by drawing the welcoming arms of the soldiers in panel four such that they parallel the clutching hand of the family member in panel one, thus lending an iconic closure to this short but symbolically rich story of separation, trial, and return.

Where Ding Cong's four-panel sequence ends, another narrative of passage begins. As can be seen in figure 29, just to the left of the fourth panel of Ding's “Warriors,” the reader encounters a large-type, boldface title announcing the magazine's introductory editorial: “A Second Life for Manhua of National Salvation.” Ye Qianyu is given as the author, but in fact two-thirds of the essay's content is copied directly from Wang Dunqing's September 20, 1937, editorial introducing *Resistance Sketch*'s predecessor, *National Salvation Sketch*. Why does Ye do this? In one respect, he is recognizing the prior periodical and thus stressing the continuity between the two. But just as important, I believe, is that Ye uses Wang's account to



FIGURE 29. The first two interior pages of *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).

relate a story structurally parallel to the one Ding Cong presents in the manhua opposite, a three-stage narrative of separation, sequestration, and rebirth, but with Shanghai's manhua artists as a collective protagonist.

By reprinting Wang's essay, Ye presents this narrative twice. After two paragraphs arguing for the effectiveness of manhua, especially during wartime, Wang Dunqing relates how the Manhua Artists National Salvation Association, organized in Shanghai following the outbreak of hostilities on July 7, 1937, was foiled in its initial attempt to carry out manhua warfare due to persecution by traitorous publishers. These "manhua mongers" (*manhua fanzi*) as Wang puts it, choked off the leading manhua magazines in the city, forcing artists into "guerilla-style manhua warfare"—that is, publishing patriotic manhua across a variety of different periodicals while carrying out propaganda work in the field. This dispersed state of activity was followed by reaggregation in the form of the "birth" (*dansheng*) of *National Salvation Sketch*, which Wang describes as "the main mobilizing force of our manhua warfare," "an encampment for the manhua warriors who have remained behind in Shanghai."³³ Ye Qianyu then picks up the story of manhua warfare in his own words, reprising the trope of repression and rebirth. He relates how, in November, the "brave and loyal fighters" of *National Salvation Sketch* had been confined to Shanghai's International Settlement, where pressure from the local authorities and the Japanese deprived them of their freedom. From there,

Ye moves to the present moment of “rebirth” (*zaisheng*), to be achieved through the current effort to “foster a new life by rallying our comrades in Hankou around the Manhua Propaganda Corps.”³⁴

In Ding Cong’s four-panel manhua and Ye Qianyu’s typeset editorial, the narrative of passage, framed as symbolic rebirth, is repeated three times, once in image and twice in text. The recurrence of the same story type on the opening pages establishes a pattern of interpretation that shapes the reception of the other materials in the magazine. Indeed, the narrative pattern of rebirth as reaggregation encourages the reader to view in sequence the two single-panel manhua printed just above Ye’s editorial and below the masthead (see figure 29). Thus, where Hu Kao’s “Mortally Wounded Warrior” (“Shou le zhongshang de yongshi”) on the right represents the hero near death, fighting alone and grotesquely dismembered, Lu Zhixiang’s “Kiss of Metal and Blood” (“Tie yu xie de jiewen”) shows him reborn whole, fighting again alongside comrades on foot, in tanks, and in the air. The layout of this page also prompts the reader to correlate the action of battle with the making of literature and art. Right above both manhua, on either side of the masthead, are fists gripping pens: the symbolic weapon of the newly formed soldier of culture.

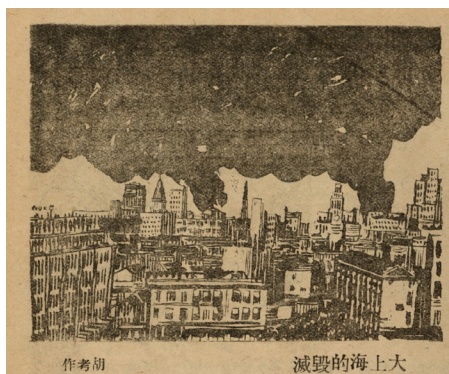
Moving further into the magazine, we find more material to stimulate reflection through narrative. The most extensive instance spans pages fifteen to twenty. Here, a work of illustrated reportage runs over several pages above a set of personal testimonials from displaced cultural celebrities. The reportage piece, called “Shanghai after the Fall” (“Xianluo hou de Shanghai”), narrates in words and images the loss of the city several months before. The celebrity statements, gathered under the title “After Arriving in Wuhan” (“Laidao Wuhan yihou”), provide a group psychological portrait of the newly arrived refugee intellectual community in Wuhan, lending names and emotional expression to the anonymous urbanites pictured in the similarly named *Battle Pictorial* manhua assemblage discussed at the start of this chapter. Where “Shanghai after the Fall” describes separation—the abandonment of Shanghai—“After Arriving” responds with stories of liminality and transition, voiced by members of the cultural community expelled from Shanghai and now seeking new purpose. The two articles are discrete, but as I show below, their symbolic emphases, as well as proximity in the magazine, bring them into the larger framework of the rite of passage sequence.

Written by journalist Li Sha and running from pages eighteen to twenty, “Shanghai after the Fall” is an eyewitness account that invites readers in Wuhan to vicariously experience the disruption of daily life in Shanghai. Li offers a series of detailed vignettes of a post-siege city: the desperate state of two hundred thousand starving refugees locked out of the French Concession; the skyrocketing price of radishes and pork; the post-curfew silence of the main commercial thoroughfare, Nanjing Road; and the hedonistic activity in dance halls and hotels. Most telling perhaps is his description of city residents compelled by the Japanese to pin strips

FIGURE 30. Zhang Leping, “Pinning a Strip of Paper Reading ‘Nationless Slave’ to His Back,” *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).



FIGURE 31. Hu Kao, “The Destruction of Shanghai,” *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).



of paper reading “nationless slave” (*wangguo nu*) to their backs before being permitted to cross Garden Bridge into the city’s Hongkou and Yangshupu districts, a psychological atrocity that Zhang Leping unsparingly recreates in one of his five accompanying illustrations (see figure 30). Li also includes news of cultural figures in peril for their lives. He writes, for instance, of how the manhua artist and former editor of *Modern Sketch* Lu Shaofei appeared on a Japanese most-wanted list and mentions a rumor (which he debunks) that the charismatic playwright Tian Han (1898–1968) committed suicide by leaping from a steamer into the ocean to evade arrest. Readers could only infer that Shanghai, the foremost coastal city and home of modernity, was now a place of no return. The keynote image for that dismal conclusion is located adjacent to the article’s title on page eighteen. This is Hu Kao’s apocalyptic “The Destruction of Shanghai” (“Da Shanghai de huimie”), a depiction of the city on fire, columns of black smoke rising into a massive cloud that weighs ominously over the skyline (see figure 31).

With reliable news of the war at a premium during these months of upheaval, Li Sha’s report would surely have held intense interest for Wuhan’s community of refugee intellectuals. At a deeper level, however, Li’s account, coupled with the

illustrations, confirmed not just the perfidy of the invading army but the impossibility of return. Shanghai was lost, and those who fled the city now needed to reflect on their detachment from the set of cultural conditions that gave them their identity as urban people of culture. That reflection in fact appears in the form of the “impressions” (*ganxiang*) that the editors of *Resistance Sketch* solicited for “After Arriving in Wuhan.” The contributors were all cultural celebrities, among them filmmaker Shi Dongshan (1902–55), poets Guang Weiran (1913–2002) and Lu Yishi (later known as Ji Xuan, 1913–2013), the Manchurian woman writer Bai Lang (1912–94), composer Lin Lu (1913–2001), actress Zhao Huishen (1914–67), and playwright Yang Hansheng (1902–93). Their responses generate a collective psychological sketch of writers and artists grappling with loss and uncertainty. Some are short and sloganeering, others focus on the work at hand. The most interesting weave in images of death and disintegration to evoke a semimorbid state. The longest and most developed among these responses suggest the passage of initiates through a liminal state, where “the symbols that represent them are . . . drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge.”³⁵ Shi Dongshan, for example, confesses to an internal conflict between the emotional pain of wartime loss and a rational impulse to struggle, concluding with, “Now I am prepared to don a helmet, lower my head, close my eyes, and charge forward without thought of death in the direction my heart has determined.” In a similar vein, Guang Weiran writes of how he is “ready to join these new ranks” gathering in Wuhan but recognizes as well the precariousness of life for young people like him, listing the many ways that death can suddenly strike, such as enemy bombs, a bullet from a traitor-assassin, or a trumped-up criminal conviction. Zhao Huishen expresses the sense of disorientation perhaps most clearly when she compares Hankou to London, describing how she has been “in a fog” since arriving from downriver a week before, “feeling dizzy, vision blurred, unsure what to do, as if in a foreign country.” Author and critic Sha Yan echoes Zhao’s response, confiding that coming to Wuhan was “like I had arrived in another world, a world that should not exist in China in the War of Resistance” because “its entirety is expressed in chaos, disorder, and pursuit of debauched hedonism.”³⁶

Similar to the design of the several pages already discussed, the imagery accompanying “After Arriving in Wuhan” reinforces the symbolic messaging of these personal narratives. Strongly foregrounded is the darkly toned woodcut that straddles the top half of both pages directly above “After Arriving,” Ma Da’s (1903–78) “Heroic Sacrifice” (“Zhuanglie de xisheng”). The four sequential panels of “Heroic Sacrifice” tell a story that parallels the flow of the refugees’ testimony. The first panel shows a direct hit from an aerial bomb to a Japanese warship on the Huangpu River, adjacent to the Bund. Panel two then depicts the Chinese bomber flying past Shanghai’s skyline and over its rowhouses, where residents have spilled into the alleyways, “jubilant at the blow dealt to the formidable foe” (*licuo qiangdi*

minzhong huanteng), according to the caption. Next, we see a bomber pilot supine on a stretcher at the airbase: “A hero dies for his country” (*yingxiong xunguo*), says the caption. The final panel pictures him indoors, lying in state, still wearing his goggles and helmet. Through the window behind him, we see a tall building, an emblem of the city, topped by a national flag and surrounded by bomb blasts.

Ma Da’s woodcut stands on its own as a patriotic war story. But its placement, literally overshadowing the serial portraits of the refugee intellectuals, creates a symbolic resonance between text and image. The dead flyer becomes a military surrogate for the civilian writers, filmmakers, and actors who, like him, had flown from the coast to find themselves in a dark, ambiguous state, awaiting rebirth against the backdrop of a city besieged. The caption to the final panel reads, “Though he has left this world, his spirit lives on”—a predictable slogan perhaps, but one that invites readers to suture their stories of flight from the cultural metropolis to the narrative of military resistance.

NEVER-ENDING STORIES

For the sake of clarity in presenting an argument, my discussion of *Resistance Sketch* has moved from front to back, focusing on content that contributes most directly to the passage narrative. That content, by chance or otherwise, is concentrated near the front and rear covers of the magazine. Significantly, I believe, the materials included on the final few pages echo those in the front. Thus, where the first several pages of the magazine emphasize stories of rebirth, the final pages present narratives of death. I have already mentioned the back cover illustration, Zhang Ding’s “Atrocity,” and how it cautioned readers against the devastating violation of a female-gendered national body that would, presumably, result from a failure to fill the role of soldier of culture. A more developed admonitory sequence appears two pages in from the back cover. Here, in a location that mirrors the position of Ye Qianyu’s inaugural editorial at the magazine’s front, readers found a full-page, six-panel comic, also by Ye Qianyu, that tells another story of destruction, this one describing the fate of anyone who would evade the war and its patriotic responsibilities (see figure 32).

Entitled “Fleeing to the Pamir Plateau” (“Taodao Pamier gaoyuan qu”), the strip follows Young Chen—a self-indulgent bureaucrat and long-time sidekick of Ye’s signature comic strip character Mister Wang—as he flees to the interior from his home in a major coastal city. After Young Chen coldly refuses to lend money to a neighbor, also on his way out of the threatened city, the next frame shows him in Hankou, reclining in a luxury hotel and commenting to himself on how that city is a “paradise” (*jile shijie*) where one can still see movies, eat Western food, and visit dance halls—in other words, a place just like Shanghai. A newspaper report on Japanese gunboats making their way up the Yangtze suddenly disrupts his reverie, and we then see him on a steamer, hoping to find security in the next major city



FIGURE 32. Ye Qianyu, "Fleeing to the Pamir Plateau," *Resistance Sketch*, no. 1 (January 1, 1938).

upstream, Chongqing. But there, a rain of Japanese bombs chases him out of his soft bed, and compels the cowardly urbanite to flee to the Pamir mountain range, thousands of kilometers west, in Central Asia. The final panel shows Young Chen

dead in the mountains, shoe soles worn through, his swagger stick lying at his side, and a gigantic bird of prey preparing to feed on his corpse.

The narratives at the front of the magazine emphasize the metaphorical rebirth of the population into a community of cultural combatants. With the story of Young Chen, Ye Qianyu shows readers the fatal consequences of refusing the new community for the sake of consumerist urban pleasures, such as the cinema, restaurants, and dance halls. In that sense, Young Chen's misguided passage to the interior inverts the trope of aggregation. Failure to join the national cause leaves him alone in the wilderness, his lifeless body soon to be torn to shreds and devoured as carrion.

As a single issue of a serial publication, the inaugural number of *Resistance Sketch* does not, strictly speaking, "end" when we reach its final pages. Certain kinds of content—publication information, advertisements, comic strips, and so on—might by convention be placed on or near the back pages of a pictorial magazine, but narrative devices like climaxes, denouements, and codas normally have no place in the nonlinear, miscellaneous, multigenre, open format that defined such publications. As I have tried to show, the first issue of *Resistance Sketch* incorporates a mutually resonant array of micronarratives. These little stories give readers, most of them refugee *wenhuaren*, a framework for their own passages into wartime through the shared ritual of reading. That ritual aimed to create a shared, imagined experience, one that began with separation from the coastal metropolis, moved through a liminal stage of transformation, and gestured toward a reaggregation as a renewed interpretive community. The act of reading *Resistance Sketch*, of taking in and making sense of these interactive narrative elements, immersed readers in the middle stage of this figural journey through the liminal by prompting them to reflect on, reconstruct, and in the end renarrate their own stories of self. That kind of intended response may seem very specific and rather unusual. But it in fact falls in line with what new, mass-market illustrated magazines had been doing since their invention in the 1890s: satisfying middle-class readers' desire "to see who they were" by giving them the means to "coalesce around the compelling presentation of their own environment."³⁷ War and invasion had drastically altered the environment in which the magazine-reading audience for manhua pictorials found itself. *Resistance Sketch* offered that audience a new vision of itself, tailored to wartime conditions. Apprehending that vision, that imaginary picture of a wartime interpretive community, requires more than just examining the art of the "cartoon" image in isolation. It can be done only by journeying into the never-ending stories told by the endlessly hybrid, perpetually incomplete art of the manhua magazine.