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张汝器

TIRELESS
CAMEL



「dalam
singa
pore」

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张汝器

TCHANG JU CHI

TIRELESS CAMEL

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「dalam singa pore」

Dalam Singapore presents a series of focused exhibitions that seeks to reinvigorate and deepen understanding of Singapore's artists and art through new research, insightful curation and engaging programming.



Self-Portrait
1939
Oil on canvas
63 × 49 cm
Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin), daughter of the artist

TCHANG JU CHI: TIRELESS CAMEL

Lim Shujuan

“为此，骆驼出来了。虽则，脚步恁般迂缓，样子笨滞；但是它，纵使前途有沙、尘、有风、雷雨，与一切困苦，还是负着重大的使命，一步一步地前进，永远没有倦意。”

“For this, the camel emerges. Though its gait may be slow and its appearance clumsy, it presses on. Despite the sand, dust, winds, thunder, rain and all hardships that lie ahead, it bears a great mission, step by step moving forward, ever tireless.”

Tchang Ju Chi, in Yeh Hui 《椰暉》, *Lat Pau* 《叻報》, 1930

TCHANG JU CHI: TIRELESS CAMEL¹

椰林皓月。尽是写青佳作。暮霭朝霞。岂非大块文章。而况中原板荡。夷狄交侵。故国荒凉。野灶无烟。此正我辈以艺术警醒群伦时也。

Beneath the luminous moon, the coconut groves stand as perfect subjects for painting; and are not the evening mist and the morning glow also great for literary works? China is in turmoil, beset by foreign invaders, the homeland is in ruin—with barren fields and cold hearths. Now is precisely the moment for our generation to awaken the masses through art.

Tchang Ju Chi, “Brief Words,” in *2nd Annual Society of Chinese Artists Exhibition* catalogue, 1937

Tchang Ju Chi's (张汝器) (b. 1904, Chao'an, Guangdong, China; d. 1942, Singapore) reflection in the aftermath of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which marked the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War, captures the profound ambivalence of a Chinese diaspora artist navigating socio-political upheavals while residing in and adapting to a new country.² The beautiful landscapes of Singapore provided ample sources of artistic inspiration, yet China, his homeland, was in turmoil. A prominent artist, leader, designer and cartoonist in Singapore (active 1927–1942), Tchang explored in his work the negotiations between homeland and diaspora, art and activism.

Early Training in Art

Tchang's art training in Shanghai and Marseille reflects the crucial role of transnational movements that contributed to the development of his artistic language and his belief in the social purpose of art. The May Fourth (1919) and New Culture movements reshaped China's artistic and cultural landscape, prompting figures like Tchang to study Western painting at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts in September 1923, training that would later shape his successful career in Singapore.³ Founded in 1912, the College was one of the earliest institutions in China to embrace modernist art styles and was

¹ Tchang's contributions were first published in Yeo Mang Thong, *Xinjiapo meishushi lunji, 1886–1945*, (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2019).

² Wang Gungwu terms this characteristic as “adaptability,” which reflects the Chinese's pragmatism and resilience. See Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore,” in *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Michigan: Times Academic Press, 1991), 166–178.

³ The May Fourth Movement (1919) was sparked by student protests in Beijing against the Treaty of Versailles—particularly the decision to allow Japan to retain control over former German territories in Shandong—this ignited a broader cultural awakening known as the New Culture Movement. This movement promoted Western ideas, science, democracy and modernisation, leaving a profound impact on literature, education and the arts.



▲
Figure 1:
Self-Portrait
1937
Oil on canvas
36 × 30 cm
Gift of Chang Si Fun
(Shewin), daughter
of the artist

pivotal to the development of Chinese oil painting. In its manifesto, co-founder Liu Haisu (刘海粟) declared: “We want to fulfil our responsibility of promoting art in a society that is callous, apathetic, desiccated and decaying. We shall work for the rejuvenation of Chinese art, because we believe art can save present-day Chinese society from confusion and arouse the general public from their dreams.”⁴ This vision would later underpin Tchang’s belief in art as a form of social engagement.

Tchang received rigorous academic training across various mediums and methods such as colour theory and life drawing. His teachers likely included prominent artists such as Liu Haisu, Guan Liang (关良)⁵ and possibly Viktor Podgursky, a Russian émigré who joined the college in July 1923 to teach life sketching and who was the first private tutor for Georgette Chen (later regarded as one of Singapore’s pioneering modern artists). Podgursky emphasised rigorous observational skills, requiring students to sketch a single plaster model from three or four different viewpoints to understand how form and contour shift with perspective.⁶ The college’s academic rigour, evidenced by mandatory weekly examinations and strict advancement requirements, ensured thorough preparation. Tchang’s diligence and training bore fruit: his works received positive mention in an exhibition review published in *Shen Bao* 《申报》, one of the leading newspapers of the time.⁷

Like many Chinese art students of his generation, Tchang aspired to go to France, above all, Paris, then regarded as the artistic capital of the world. Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), chairman of the college board, supported and sponsored programmes that sent students to France.⁸ In 1924, Tchang travelled with classmate Wang Yuanbo (王远勃) to survey the French art scene.⁹ This trip must have left an impression on Tchang; soon after graduating from the Shanghai College of Fine Arts, he enrolled in a drawing class at the École des Beaux-Arts de Marseille in January 1926.¹⁰ Marseille, then a major port connecting China and France, was the first stop for Chinese students en route to Paris. France must have remained a key fascination for him. In 1934, he returned to Europe, visiting Paris and key sites such as the Louvre. His *Self-Portrait* (1937) (Figure 1) depicts him in suspenders and a beret, which

⁴ Mayching Kao, “Reforms in education and the beginning of the Western-style painting movement in China,” in eds. Julia Frances Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 153.

⁵ Liu Haisu Art Museum and Shanghai Municipal Archives, eds., “Shanghai meizhuan fushe shuqixuexiao yilan ji youguanji guan baosongxuesheng xuxue deng wenjian (1923–1924),” in *Qia Tong Xue Nian Shao Shan, Di Si Juan* (Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House, 2012), 286–287.

⁶ Jane Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art: The Shanghai Art College* (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2016), 97.

⁷ “Shanghai meizhuan zhanlanhui zhi dierni,” *Shen Bao*, January 4, 1925, 18.

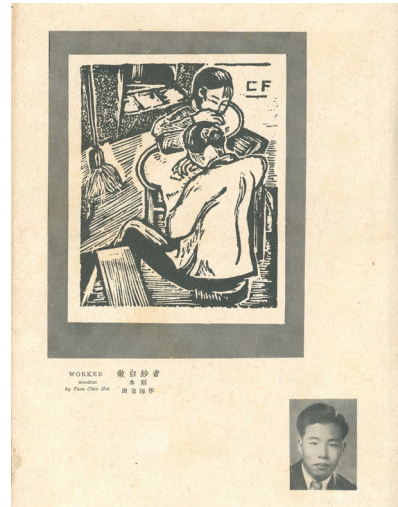
⁸ Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art*, 92.

⁹ “Xing jiang fufa yanjiu yishu zhi er xuesheng,” *Shen Bao*, July 23, 1924, 14.

¹⁰ Horikawa Lisa’s email correspondence with Archives Municipales de la ville de Marseille (Municipal Archives of Marseille), 2019.

Figure 2:
Zhou Jinhai's *Worker*, in
the catalogue of the
4th Annual Society
of Chinese Artists'
exhibition, 1939.

Collection of National
Gallery Singapore
Library and Archive



evoke the symbols of artistic freedom and intellectual engagement associated with French painters. His journey from China to France reflects the multidirectional cultural flows shaping diaspora artists, who drew from multiple places and traditions to develop their own artistic vocabulary.

Painting Local Colours

En route back to China in 1927, Tchang was persuaded by friends to settle in Singapore instead. Tchang's arrival in Singapore positioned him to play a critical role in passing on his artistic knowledge to a new generation, first teaching at Tuan Mong School and later at Yang Zheng School. As a Teochew, he was likely offered employment at Tuan Mong School by Teochew clan associations, a reflection of the importance of such networks in providing socio-economic support to Chinese migrants in Singapore. Among Tchang's students was Zhou Jinhai (周金海), who later enrolled as a student at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts in 1931¹¹ and a co-founder of MK Woodcut Research Society (MK 木刻研究会), a woodcut club established at the college in 1932.¹² Like Tchang, Zhou contributed comics and woodcuts to *Yeh Hui* 《椰晖》, the pictorial supplement Tchang edited, and exhibited work at the Society of Chinese Artists' (SOCA) annual exhibitions (Figure 2).

¹¹ "Shanghai meizhuan fushe shuqixuexiao yilan ji youguan jiguang baosong xuexue deng wenjian (1923–1924)," 177.

¹² Shen Kuiyi, "The Modernist Woodcut Movement in 1930s China," in *Shanghai Modern: 1919–1945*, ed. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 274. Works include criticism of the

Nationalist government misdeeds. Many of the artists, including Zhou Jinhai, were arrested in May, 1934 during Chiang Kai-shek's White Terror Movement. Those who remained free continued to publish in popular magazines such as 《良友》 *Liangyou*.

Tchang's arrival in Singapore coincided with the rise of a new literary movement known as "Nanyang colours," a concept that emerged from migrants' conscious attempts to forge a diasporic Chinese identity distinct from that of mainland Chinese culture. The concept called on migrants to shift their consciousness from longing for China's landscapes to engaging with the local environment and portraying the realities of their "new" life. Two key advocates were Zhang Jinyan (张金燕), editor and writer of *Huang Dao* 《荒岛》, and Chen Lianqing (陈炼青), editor and writer of *Yeh Lin* 《椰林》. Their writings revealed the ambivalence and complexities of diaspora identity. Zhang, for instance, acknowledged his dual identity as being of Chinese descent yet infused with "Nanyang essence,"¹³ while Chen urged migrants to discard feelings of nostalgia for China and draw inspiration directly from their immediate surroundings, portraying scenes such as lush coconut groves and rubber plantations.¹⁴

Yang Songnian (杨松年), a scholar in Malayan and Singapore Chinese literature in the pre-war period, maps the shifting socio-political affiliations of migrants in *Xinma huawen xiandai wenxueshi chubian* 《新马华文现代文学史初编》: from 1919 to 1924, a strong overseas-Chinese consciousness; from 1925 to 1933, the advocacy of Nanyang colours or local colours, with 1927 to 1930 as particularly enthusiastic; from 1934 to 1936, a deeper rootedness among the Chinese migrants in their "new" homeland; and from 1937 to 1942, the rise of overseas Chinese diaspora consciousness towards China, with a corresponding "fall" in local consciousness.¹⁵ Within this context, Tchang's arrival and life in Singapore may be read as part of this larger cultural reorientation in which artists and writers grappled with the complexities of redefining their identities while engaging with and contributing to the local landscape.

Tchang's view of Singapore as a cultural desert was shared by other Chinese intellectuals in "exile," including Tan Yunshan (谭云山) and the editors of supplements such as *Gu Dao* (Barren Island) 《枯岛》 and *Huang Yuan* (Wasteland) 《荒原》. These metaphors were not laments but rallying cries for cultural renewal. In *Yeh Hui* (1930), Tchang wrote of art as an "eternal flame" and likened himself to a camel pressing forward, slow yet tireless.¹⁶

As a close associate of Zhang Jinyan and Chen Lianqing, Tchang translated this ethos into his graphic design and art. He co-founded the *General Knowledge Digest* 《常识小报》 with Zhang in 1932 and was

¹³ Zhang Jinyan, "Nanyang and Literature" 《南洋与文艺》, *Huang Dao* in *Sin Guo Min Ri Bao* 《新国民日报》, April, 1927.

¹⁴ Chen Lianqing, "Local Colours and Literature" 《地方色彩与文艺》, *Yeh Lin*, *Lat Pau*, September 23, 1929.

¹⁵ Yang Songnian, *Xinma huawen xiandaiwenxueshi chubian* (China: BPL (Singapore) Education Association, 2000).

¹⁶ Tchang Ju Chi, "Foreword," *Yeh Hui*, in *Lat Pau*, October 11, 1930.



Figure 3:
Yeh Lin, February 7,
1929

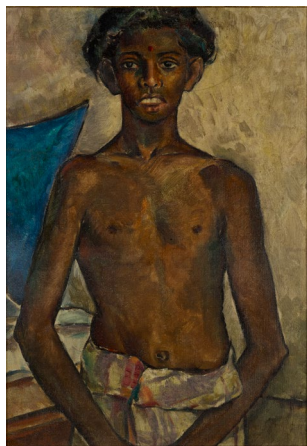
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Figure 4:
莲山双林禅寺
(Lian Shan Shuang
Lin Monastery)
1927
Oil on canvas
97.8 × 62 cm
Collection of
Dr. Claire Ang

commissioned by Chen to design the masthead for *Yeh Lin* and later served as the editor of *Yeh Hui*. For *Yeh Lin*, coconut groves, ubiquitous in the local landscape, became a source of inspiration for Tchang, symbolising the tropicity of the region (Figure 3). Chen praised Tchang's coconut-tree emblem as an ideal Nanyang symbol: its slender form, he said, gained hidden strength in Tchang's hand, reflecting the diaspora's resilient vitality.¹⁷

Tchang's paintings reveal a gradual, rather than immediate, transformation of subject matter and approach. His earliest Singapore work, 《莲山双林禅寺》(Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery) (1927) (Figure 4), reinforces Chinese cultural continuity by depicting a Chinese Buddhist temple in Toa Payoh. The monastery represented institutional Chinese presence in Singapore, built through contributions from local and overseas Chinese communities. In his approach, Tchang paid close attention to the use of chiaroscuro to obscure the face of the Buddha, conveying reverence to the deity. From the sombre colours of 《莲山双林禅寺》(Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery), Tchang's colour palette shifted to bright tropical hues: emerald green, verdant green, turquoise and various shades of blue began to dominate his painting backgrounds. This palette, termed *bi lü* (碧绿), evokes the tropicity and warmth of the local scenery that he encountered. [Not titled] (*Still Life*) (c. 1930s) exemplifies this shift, depicting local fruits such as rambutans, mangosteens, mangoes and jackfruit arranged alongside batik textile set against a turquoise background.

¹⁷ Lian Qing, "Mr. Tchang Ju Chi" 《张汝器先生》, *Yeh Lin*, *Lat Pau*, January 18, 1929.



▲
Figure 5:
印童 (Indian Boy)
1939
Oil on canvas
65 x 45 cm

Tchang's figurative works depict the diverse communities he encountered in Singapore, often displaying a sensitive and detailed approach to the cultural specificities of his sitters. In 《印童》 (Indian Boy) (1939) (Figure 5), he carefully renders the *kumkum*, a red mark on the centre of the boy's forehead, which indicates a likely South Indian Hindu background. The multicoloured *lungi* wrapped around the boy's waist adds vibrancy to the painting. 《印妇》 (Indian Woman) (1939) (Figure 6) depicts a woman from the labouring community, drawing particular attention to her cultural markers through a triangular composition, with the diagonal line of her bent arm and body: a nose stud, a plug that enlarges her earlobe and a small dark *tilaka* on her forehead. Her simple saree drape and simple necklace chain suggest her economic circumstances. Her posture is grounded and somewhat tense, with her arms resting on her lap and her gaze cast forward in a pensive expression.

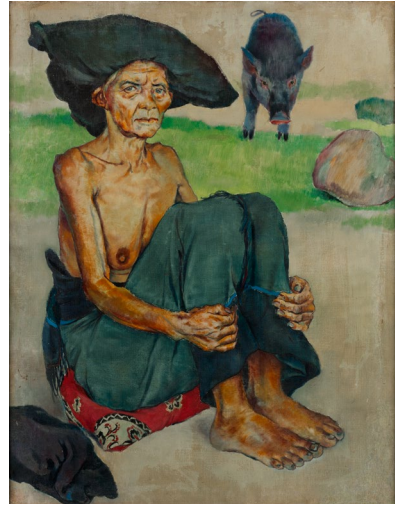
In Tchang's paintings such as 《汝人像》 (Portrait of You) (c. 1939–1942) (Figure 7) and *Mila and Jena* (c. 1939), he explores the pairing of figures to create visual echoes while experimenting with structural differentiation and dynamic tension. In *Portrait of You*, two Malay boys rest on a beach, bare-chested and wearing white sarongs. One boy drapes his arm languidly across his shorter companion, and both gaze pensively into the distance, evoking a sense of unity and intimacy. As in *Indian Boy* and *Indian Woman*, Tchang employs a muted, earthy palette that contrasts with the cooler background hues and the stark white of the boys' garments. Receding elements such as rocks and the sandy shore create spatial layering, rendering an intimate scene set against the expansive tropical backdrop.



◀
Figure 6:
印妇 (Indian Woman)
1939
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm

▲
Figure 7:
汝人像 (Portrait of You)
c. 1939–1942
Oil on canvas
61 x 76 cm

Figure 8:
 马达老妇
 (Old Woman of Batak)
 1937
 Oil on canvas
 81.5 × 62.5 cm



By the late 1930s, Tchang went beyond the “local” to the “regional” in search of inspiration, demonstrating the same cultural curiosity that had earlier drawn him to Paris and the European art scene. Travelling to Indonesia from the late 1930s to 1940, he may have been one of the earliest known artists in Singapore to embark on a regional trip. Little is known of this trip, but Tchang’s extant work, 《马达老妇》(Old Woman of Batak) (1937) (Figure 8), offers insight into his approach. This unflinching portrait of an elderly *Batak* woman (likely from the Lake Toba region in Sumatra, Indonesia) captures her weathered skin and bony frame. Bare-breasted, she holds our gaze with a discernible equanimity. Tchang’s detailed rendering of her headdress, attire, the local textile of the cushion on which she sits and the wild boar (an animal associated with the *Bataks*) fleshes out the scene and evokes the highland environment. Lost works from this period include *Mila and Jena* (c. 1939), *Bountiful harvest* (1940) and *Women of the Batak Tribe* (c. 1939–1941), and suggest sustained engagement with Indonesian subjects. His 1940 SOCA exhibition works, 《峇里木偶》(Balinese Puppets) and 《爪哇人》(Javanese People), indicate possible travels to Medan¹⁸ and Bali as well.

Leading the Charge

In his role as president of SOCA, Tchang’s engagement with the “local” seemed to be limited to the Chinese diasporic community, where the formation of a society to maintain arts and cultural ties was paramount. Tchang’s description of Singapore as a cultural desert overlooked the efforts of early art associations and exhibitions. The Singapore Art Club (est. late 1880s) and the Amateur

¹⁸ “Huang aiduo nu shi chouzhenghuazhan riqi
 didian yi shanding zhuzhi tebiehui quanshuo
 huajuan piaojia zi ershi yuanzhierbaiyuan,”
Nanyang Siang Pau, August 15, 1940, 6.

Drawing Association (est. 1909) promoted drawing and the literary arts and organised exhibitions. However, these societies remained ethnically segregated: Singapore Art Club's members were mainly Europeans and the Amateur Drawing Association largely served Peranakans. The *Singapore Art Exhibition* (1929) represented a pioneering effort to unite the visual arts scene with participation from artists such as Tchang¹⁹ and Low Kway Song, a Peranakan artist known for his commissioned portraits, and highlighted to Chinese diaspora artists the absence of a society for their community. In this regard, Tchang, together with the members of SOCA, stepped up.

In 1935, graduates from the Shanghai College of Fine Arts, Xin Hua Fine Arts Academy and the Shanghai University of Fine Arts formed the Salon Art Society. However, restricting membership to graduates of the three institutions proved unsustainable, with membership at just over ten people. On November 17, the Salon Art Society reconvened and agreed to expand the membership of the Society to include art lovers from Singapore, Malaya and Dutch-colonised territories, renaming itself the Society of Chinese Artists (华人美术研究/Société des Artistes Chinois, or SOCA). Tchang, together with Xu Junlian, assumed responsibility for drafting the society's regulations. On 20 January 1936, the Society was formally established with Tchang appointed founding president of SOCA, a position he held for five years (1936–1939, 1941).

SOCA played a key role in rallying Singapore's Chinese arts community, organising annual exhibitions that featured over 60 artists and 900 works between 1936 and 1941, with Tchang contributing more than 70 pieces.²⁰ Yet its activities remained largely within the Chinese diaspora network—cross-cultural exchanges with other art societies in Singapore were limited to a single joint exhibition, *Fight for Liberty* (为自由而战) with the Singapore Art Club in 1941. Instead, SOCA focused on strengthening regional Chinese artistic ties, particularly through participation in the *Ying Ying Art Exhibition* (嚶嚶艺术展览会)(1936) and the Penang Art Society exhibition (1937). These ties were largely maintained by Yong Mun Sen, who served as vice president of SOCA in 1936 and 1937 and was founding vice president of the Penang Art Society in 1935. The exchange between Yong Mun Sen and SOCA led to the founding of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA). In 1937, Yong wrote to SOCA proposing the formation of a school of fine art, with Lim Hak Tai (林学大) subsequently appointed founding principal. Tchang became one of its earliest Western painting instructors in 1940, together with several members of SOCA, such as Chong Pai Mu (钟白木) and Gao Peize (高沛泽), demonstrating SOCA's strong support for the Academy. With Chinese as the medium of instruction, NAFA formalised art training within the diaspora community.

¹⁹ Tchang served on the judging committee, led the committees for Chinese and Western painting and co-led the sculpture committee.

²⁰ Quantity of artists and number of contributed artworks were obtained from SOCA's annual exhibitions. See Yeo Mang Thong, *Liudong qianyi zaidi jingli: Xinjiapo shijue yishu xianxiang (1886–1945)* (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University Confucius Institute, 2017).



Figure 9:
Xu Beihong
Mother and Daughter
1939
Oil on canvas
93 x 74 cm
Image courtesy of
Xu Beihong Museum

Tchang's continued political loyalties to China demonstrated the ambivalence of Chinese artists' identity. The Second Sino-Japanese War became a rallying point for overseas Chinese to help alleviate victims' suffering. As founding president of SOCA, Tchang used his three-storey shophouse at 181 Tank Road as SOCA's headquarters until 1939. The first floor housed The United Painters (朋特画社), his advertising and design studio, which he ran with his brother-in-law, Chuang U-Chow (庄有钊), who was also SOCA's secretary. On the second level, artists gathered for meals cooked by Tchang, bonding over art and food. Liu Kang recalled visiting Tchang's home for meals, describing him as an amiable person who cooked well and was the best realist artist in Singapore, with a strong foundation in art and adept at various genres.²¹ The third level of Tchang's shophouse was a studio where artists created anti-Japanese propaganda banners and paintings. Tchang's daughter, Chang Si Fun (Shewin), remembered: "This was where propaganda works were done, models posing as victims of Japanese atrocities such as pregnant women being bayoneted."²² Both *Self-Portrait* (1939) and 《画家的夫人像》 (Portrait of the artist's wife) (1939) offer a glimpse of a rare quiet moment in this otherwise tumultuous period. *Self-Portrait* shows a confident artist with a paintbrush in his hand, poised in front of a canvas, as if ready to paint, an affirmation of his identity as a painter. In 《画家的夫人像》 (Portrait of the artist's wife), the earthy, muted hues create a calming and introspective mood. Chen Mengyu's (陈孟俞) relaxed pose, contrasted against the folding chair and the canvas on the left, suggests her ease, as she often sat for her husband, from personal portraits to wartime propaganda paintings, many now lost.

²¹ Liu Kang, Oral history interview with Chen Min Luan, disc 22 of 74, April 15, 1994. National Archives of Singapore, accession number 000171.

²² Chang Si Fun's recollections of her parents Tchang Ju Chi and Tan Meng Joo, unpublished manuscript.

Singapore also became a fundraising stopover for visiting Chinese artists and SOCA fostered connections by helping to organise exhibitions and hosting the artists during their visits. A key example is Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿). Xu would visit Tchang whenever he came to Singapore. Tchang's daughter recalled Xu visiting her father's studio and enjoying his cooking. On one occasion, Xu painted *Mother and Daughter* (1939) (Figure 9), portraying Chen Mengyu and Chang Si Fun. Tchang's studio also served as a venue for organising fundraising exhibitions for victims of the war in China, most notably *Xu Beihong's Art Exhibition* in 1939. In the final three days of the exhibition, works by SOCA artists such as Tchang, Lim Hak Tai, Chen Chong Swee and Chuang U-Chow were included. Tchang served on the organising committee with SOCA responsible for setting up the exhibition.²³ Xu's continued support was evident in his foreword and contribution to SOCA's fourth and fifth annual exhibitions, highlighting the close bond between Xu and Singapore's Chinese art community.



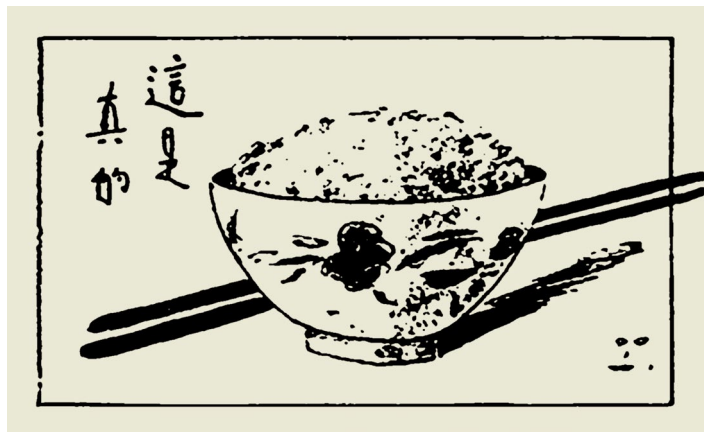
▲
Figure 10:
Guide to Singapore,
1932
Courtesy of
Shanghai Library

Cartooning Life

In the field of design and *manhua* (cartoons), Tchang demonstrated a deep understanding of and engagement with the socio-political upheavals in China and “local” Singapore, a reflection of his parallel, rather than opposing, bonds to both places. Just as his design of Yeh Lin's masthead reflects his engagement with and understanding of the local environment, his design of *Guide to Singapore* 《新加坡指南》(1932) (Figure 10) presents Singapore as a modern and cosmopolitan city and a tropical getaway, with lush coconut palms and beaches. Cartoons, which used biting wit and bold imagery to engage the public on social and political issues, became a particularly versatile medium for Tchang to deliver sharp socio-political commentary on both China and Singapore. As both cartoonist and editor of Singapore's first pictorial supplement, *Sin Kwang* 《星光》 and later, *Yeh Hui*, Tchang played a pioneering role in shaping this visual medium in Singapore. In *Sin Kwang's* 1929 inaugural issue, he wrote: “仅凭悠悠遐想，已或许捉住了一刹那现实的人生味，苦闷与厌倦，亦从而消逝。[By mere imagination, one may have captured life's experiences in a moment, thus wiping out bitterness and weariness.]” Cartoons became a way for Tchang to mediate the stresses and socio-political upheavals in everyday life.

Through his cartoons published in pictorial supplements, Tchang addressed themes such as mass hunger, the challenges faced by youth and the political apathy of Chinese immigrants. His approach included using metaphors,

²³ Ouyang Xingyi, *Beihong zai Xingzhou* (Singapore: Yishu Gongzuo Shi, 1999), 114.



▲
Figure 11:
Words within
cartoon: “这是真的” [This is true]

Sin Kwang 《星光》,
Sin Chew Jit Poh
《星洲日报》,
November 18, 1929
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symbols, caricature and text to create works that roused people. One example is a cartoon depicting a full bowl of rice captioned “这是真的” (This is true), which spotlighted the harsh reality that many people lacked the means to obtain this basic necessity (Figure 11). His cartoons, such as “南洋商人的现状” [The current plight of the Nanyang businessman] and “腰里有几个臭铜板便作威作福起来” [With a few stinky copper coins, he became arrogant and domineering], reflect his engagement with the “local” through depictions of the collapse of the rubber industry in Singapore and his observation of deprecating attitudes towards the labouring class. At the same time, Tchang remained deeply engaged in the politics of China, critiquing the devastation wrought by Chiang Kai-shek’s Northern Expeditions and calling out the political apathy of the Chinese immigrants, rendered, for example, as a hatchling chirping “革命” [Revolution] and an image of a pair of spectacles with the words “三千度的近视。” [Short-sightedness of 3000 degrees].

Tchang’s editorial vision positioned Singapore within dynamic networks of Chinese artistic and political exchange, reflecting both the influence of China and his ability to function as a cultural broker. He commissioned leading Shanghai artists and cartoonists such as Ye Qianyu (叶浅予), Huang Wenong (黄文农), Zheng Guanghan (郑光汉), Xu Junlian and photographer Lang Jingshan (郎静山), to contribute to this growing visual medium. Influenced by pictorial supplements such as 《三日电报》 (China Camera News), Tchang modelled *Sin Kwang* and *Yeh Hui* on a similar modular page: photographs, cartoons and editorial content. The inaugural issue of *Sin Kwang*, published in 1929, was a two-page spread featuring a mix of images—most notably, photographs of graduates from the Nanyang Girls’ School teaching class—and cartoons. Most of the cartoons were drawn by Tchang himself; one was by Ye. Later editions of *Sin Kwang* featured social and political news from China. The influence of Tchang’s experimentations extended beyond Singapore, with Yong Mun Sen adopting a similar format for Penang’s *Chunam Morning Daily* 《中南晨报》.²⁴

Figure 12:
看吧!暴日下的
同胞 (Look! The
violence of the
Japanese against our
compatriots)

Nanyang Siang Pau
《南洋商報》,
January 1, 1938
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Recognising the power of cartoons to mobilise the masses, cartooning and related exhibitions became a genre-specific way for Chinese diaspora artists to demonstrate solidarity with and support China's wartime resistance. The first *Malayan Chinese Cartoons Exhibition* was held in 1937, the same year that the Cartoonists' National Salvation Association in China was founded, and featured over 185 works by artists such as Chen Chong Swee and Yong Mun Sen. In addition to serving as a jury member, Tchang contributed three works to this exhibition. In the following year, he continued his efforts by organising more exhibitions, including the *National Salvation Cartoon Exhibition* (1938), to raise funds for war victims. Tchang's cartoons like “看吧!暴日下的同胞 (Look! The violence of the Japanese against our compatriots) (1938) depict a soldier rendered in black bayoneting a baby (Figure 12). The image was designed to evoke horror and outrage at Japanese wartime atrocities and to appeal to the public for financial contributions.

Tchang's loyalties to China drew the attention of the Japanese. As a prominent figure and an outspoken critic of the Japanese, Tchang made works such as 《奸淫劫杀》(They commit these sins) (c. 1939), which placed him in real danger. Recognising the threat to himself and his family following the Japanese incursion and subsequent occupation of Singapore in 1942, Tchang and his family fled their 181 Tank Road studio to seek safety in an outlying plantation. Japanese military forces caught up with him and, together with his brother-in-law Chuang U-Chow and Ho Kwong Yew (何光耀),²⁵ he was executed during the Sook Ching operation.

As the “tireless camel” of his own metaphor, Tchang played a pivotal role in nurturing Singapore's early cultural landscape. He strengthened ties within the Chinese diaspora while negotiating the tension between deep loyalties to China and the need to adapt and respond to local realities. His early death, the loss of many of his works, and limited circulation and study have long obscured his legacy. A further barrier has been researchers' lack of proficiency in Chinese, which has left many unable to access primary sources found only in archives of Chinese newspapers and magazines. *Tchang Ju Chi: Tireless Camel* is a step towards unearthing the stories of other pioneering artists of the pre-war period.

²⁴ Simon Soon, “Becoming Mun Sen: Shaping of a Penang Modern Art Scene,” in *Yong Mun Sen in Nanyang* 《杨曼生与南洋》, ed. Bridget Tracy Tan (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2023), 22.

²⁵ Ho Kwong Yew was the first locally born Asian registered architect in Singapore. He designed numerous buildings, including the iconic Haw Par Villa. He was also a patron of the arts and served as vice president of the Society of Chinese Artists in 1941.



Detail of [Not titled] (*Still Life*)

c. 1930s

Oil on canvas

94 × 130 cm

Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin), daughter of the artist

ARTWORKS





莲山双林禅寺
 (Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery)
 1927
 Oil on canvas
 97.8 × 62 cm
 Collection of Dr. Claire Ang

Temple
 c. 1930s
 Oil on canvas
 51.5 × 62 cm
 Collection of Dr. Claire Ang



Self-Portrait
1937

Oil on canvas
36 × 30 cm

Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin),
daughter of the artist



Self-Portrait
1939

Oil on canvas
63 × 49 cm

Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin),
daughter of the artist





Attributed to Tchang Ju Chi
Bust of the artist's wife—Chen Mengyu
 c. 1930s
 Plaster of Paris
 35 × 24 × 24 cm
 Collection of Selina Ang



画家的夫人像
 (Portrait of the artist's wife)
 1939
 Oil on canvas
 80 × 110 cm





Portrait of Lim Hak Tai

c. 1930s

Oil on canvas

55 × 44.2 cm

Collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum



Portrait of Ho Kwong Yew

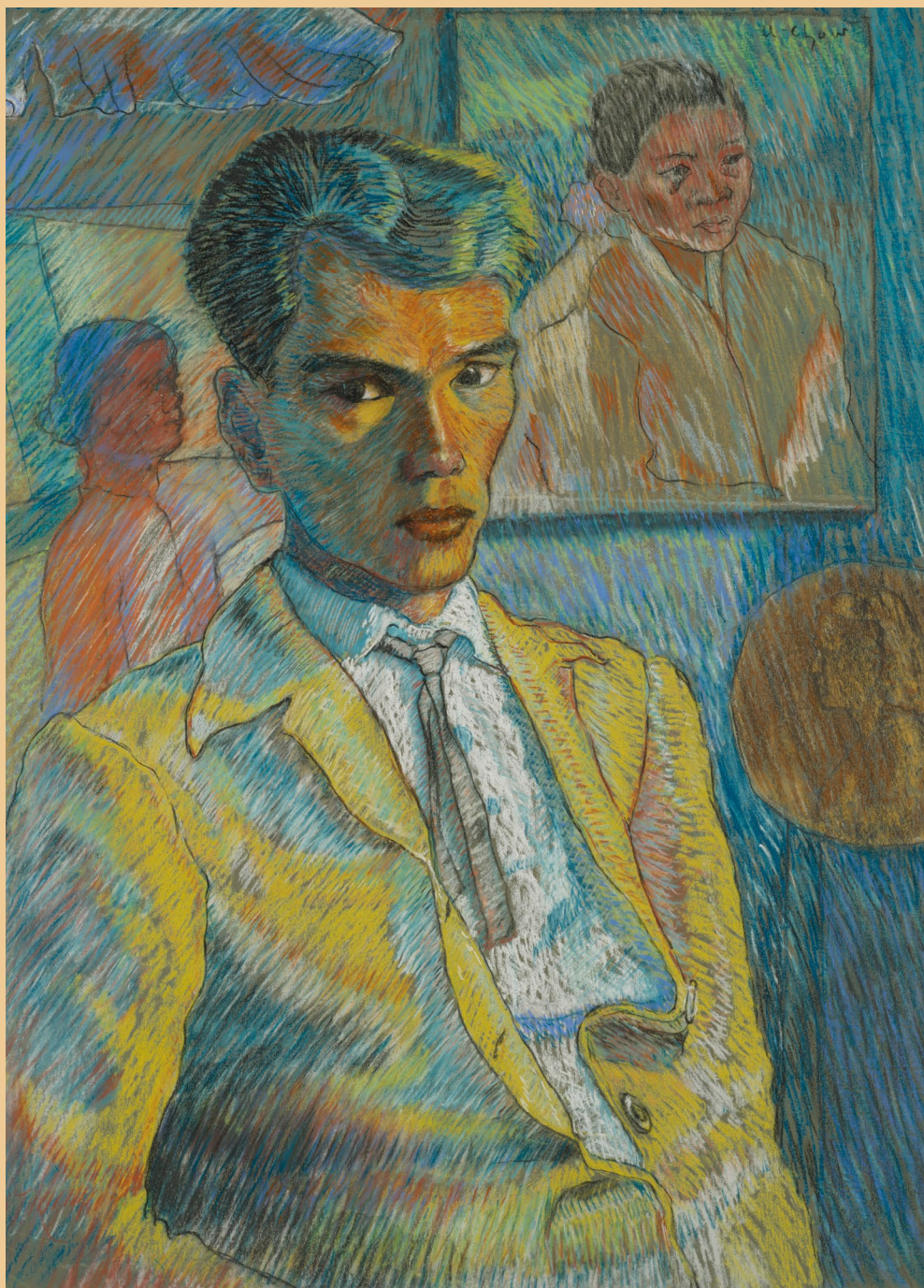
c. 1939–1940

Oil on canvas

44.5 × 35.5 cm

Collection of Ho Kah Keh







Chuang U-Chow (庄有钊)
(b. 1907, China; d. 1942, Singapore)

Self-Portrait
1939

Pastel on paper
76 × 54 cm

Gift of Chong Chee Beng, daughter of the artist

Chuang U-Chow (庄有钊)
(b. 1907, China; d. 1942, Singapore)

Boy
1936

Watercolour on paper
40.9 × 50.3 cm

Private collection



汝人像
(Portrait of You)
c. 1939–1942
Oil on canvas
61 × 76 cm





印妇
(Indian Woman)
1939
Oil on canvas
70 × 60 cm



Untitled (Seated Malay Man)
c. 1930s
Oil on canvas
80 × 61.5 cm
Collection of Ho Kah Keh





Jaga Man (Watchman)
1936
Oil on canvas
29 × 24 cm
Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin),
daughter of the artist



Portrait of a Sikh Man
c. 1930s
Oil on canvas
48.8 × 39 cm
Collection of Selina Ang





Nude
1939
Oil on canvas
78.4 × 64 cm
Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin),
daughter of the artist





◀
Old Man
 c. 1930s
 Oil on canvas
 74 × 50.5 cm
 Collection of Dr. Brenda Ang

▲
 马达老妇
 (Old Woman of Batak)
 1937
 Oil on canvas
 81.5 × 62.5 cm



[Not titled] (*Still Life*)

c. 1930s

Oil on canvas

94 × 130 cm

Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin),
daughter of the artist

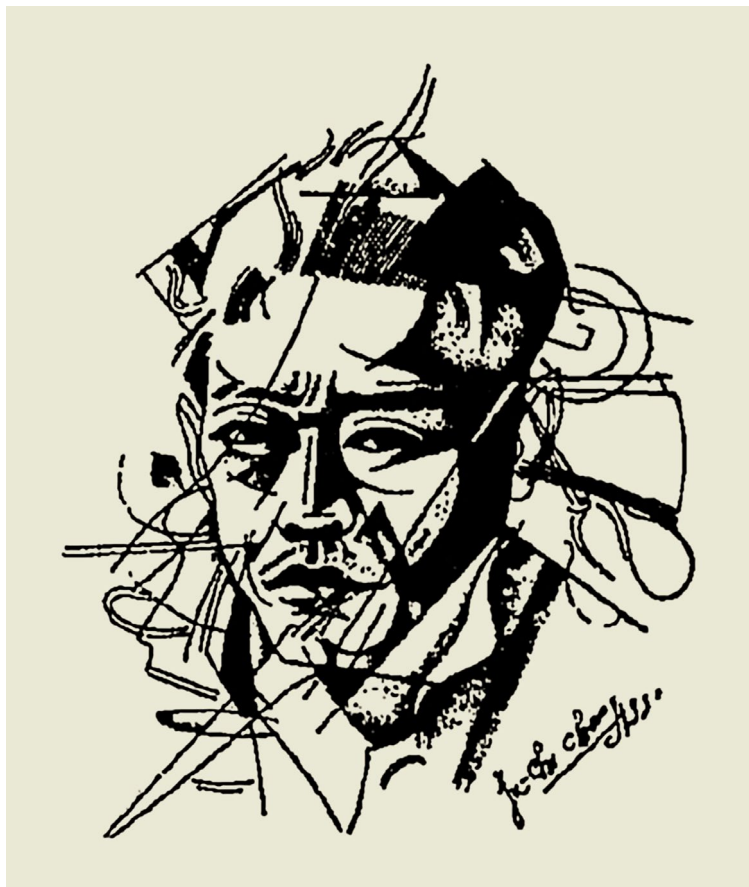




In 1929, Tchang was invited by Chen Lianqing to design the masthead for *Yeh Lin*. His design incorporated local motifs, such as coconut trees, to evoke the tropical character of the region.

Yeh Lin, *Lat Pau*, February 7, 1929.

CARTOONS, DESIGNS & ARCHIVAL MATERIALS



1

1 苦闷

[Confusion]

Yeh Hui 《椰暉》, *Lat Pau* 《叻報》,

November 1, 1930

With permission from Special Collections,
National University of Singapore Libraries

2 Words within the cartoon: “革命大道”

[The path of revolution]

非清洗一下不行

[It must be cleaned]

Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*

《星洲日報》, December 9, 1929

© SPH Media Limited

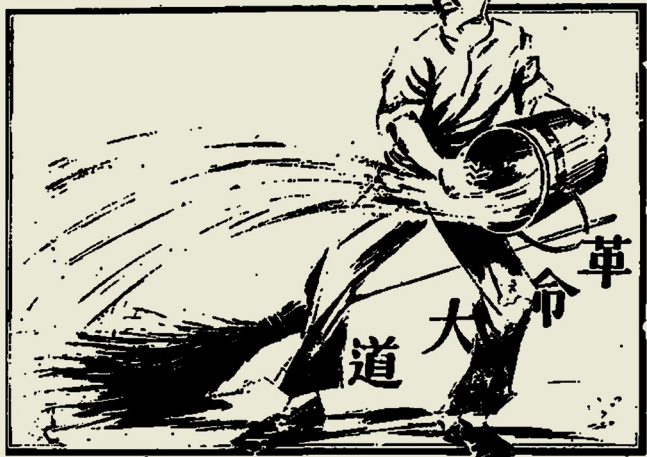
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3 中国青年的能力就有限。推上这么多东西。
更不能翻身了。[The capabilities of China's youths are limited.
Shouldering so many burdens makes it even
harder for them to turn their fortunes
around.]Words within the cartoon, clockwise from
top: “礼教; 政治; 经济; 家庭; 恋爱”[Confucian code of ethics; Politics; Economy;
Family; Love]*Sin Kwang* 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*

《星洲日報》, October 28, 1929

© SPH Media Limited

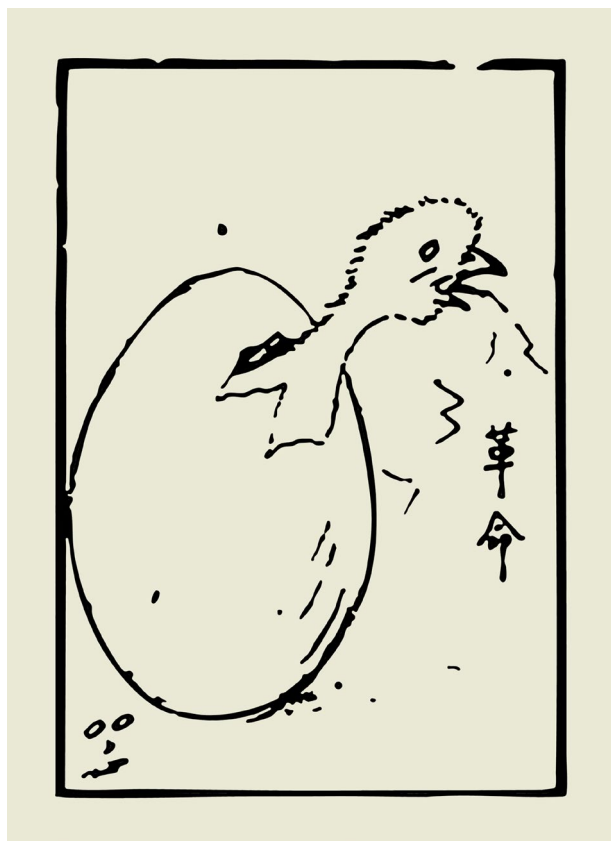
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2



3



4

- 4 南洋革命家
[Nanyang's revolutionaries]

Words within the cartoon: “革命”
[Revolution]

Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*
《星洲日报》, January 13, 1930
© SPH Media Limited
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- 5 南洋侨胞都要各配一个
[Every overseas Chinese in Nanyang needs
to be prescribed one]

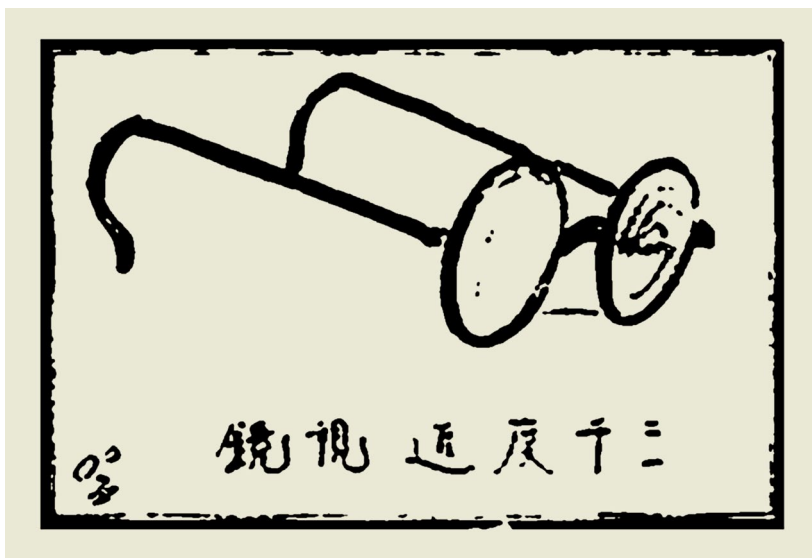
Words within the cartoon: “三千度的近视”
[Short-sightedness of 3000 degrees]

Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*
《星洲日报》, December 16, 1929
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- 6 捉迷藏
[Hide-and-seek]

Words within the cartoon, clockwise
from the top:
“政治; 华侨” [Politics; Overseas Chinese]

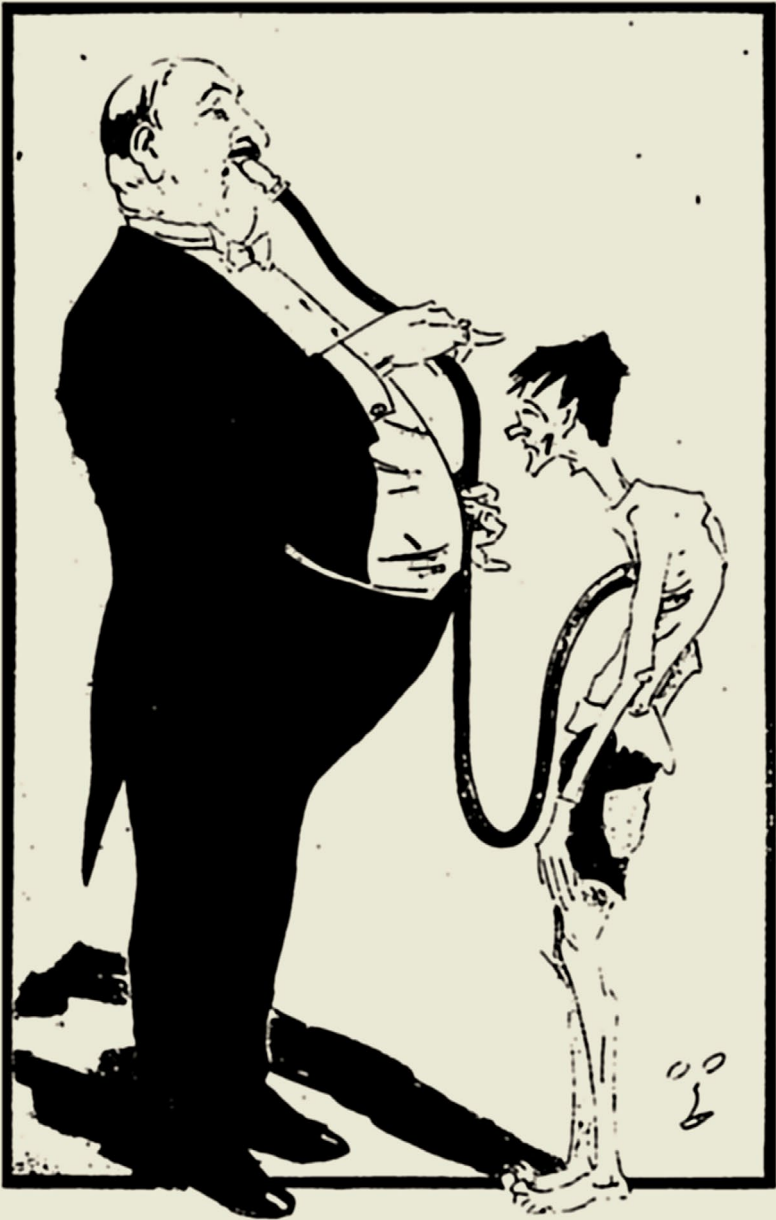
Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*
《星洲日报》, October 28, 1929
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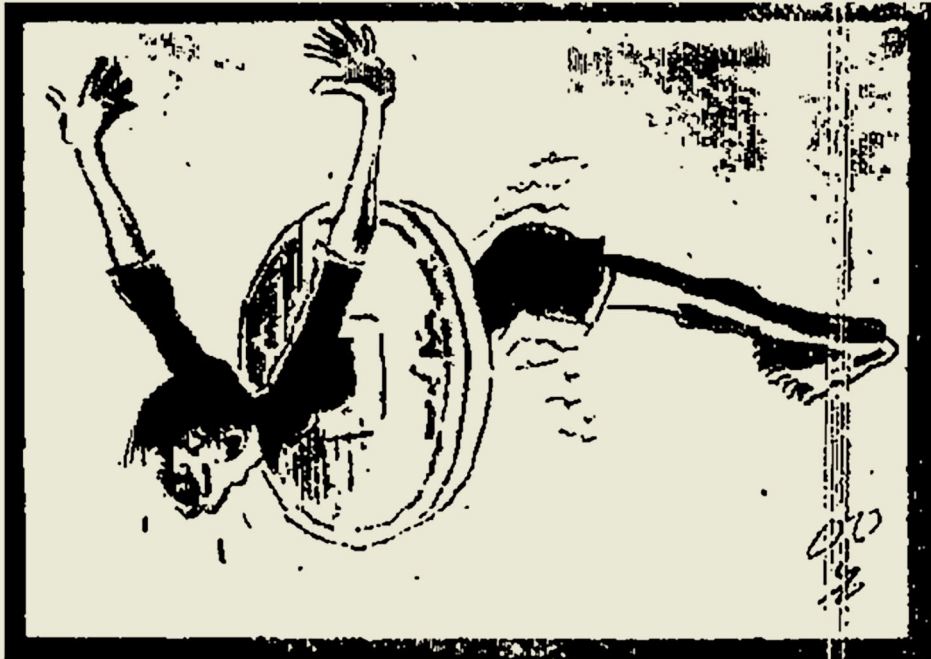


5



6





8

7 安得不瘦藏

[How could one not be thin]

Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*
《星洲日报》, November 25, 1929

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8 金钱紧迫下的市民

[The commoners under the oppression
of money]

Yeh Hui 《椰晖》, *Lat Pau* 《叻報》,
December 20, 1930

With permission from Special Collections,
National University of Singapore Libraries



9



10

- 9 Words within cartoon, clockwise from left: “卢沟桥”; “正义”; “公理”
[Marco Polo Bridge; Justice; Axiom]

Nanyang Siang Pau 《南洋商報》,
July 10, 1937
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- 10 Words within cartoon: “倡言和平的人拼命把地球装满炸药”
[Advocates for peace are eagerly trying to fill the earth with explosives]

Sin Kwang 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*
《星洲日报》, November 18, 1929
© SPH Media Limited
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11

11 看吧!暴日下的同胞

[Look! The violence of the Japanese
against our compatriots]

Nanyang Siang Pau 《南洋商报》,
January 1, 1938

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1

Tchang Ju Chi was a highly accomplished graphic designer and advertising professional. His designs reflect a strong Art Deco influence, typical of the training and aesthetic sensibilities of that period.

1 Advertisement for Ru Qi Studio, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, May 26, 1930. The studio offered services in advertisement design, background design and logo creation

2 《新加坡指南》*Guide to Singapore*, 1932
Cover designed by Tchang; calligraphy
by Yu Youren (于右仁)

Courtesy of Shanghai Library







3

3 *Sin Chew Jit Poh Herald*, c. 1929

Reproduced with permission from Special Collections, National University of Singapore Libraries

4 《光艺》 *Light Art*, 1928



5



6

5 Advertisement for Long Long Laundry Basket; *Lat Pau*, October 27, 1930

6 Advertisement for Ya Si An Ma Biao Dian Zhi Ka Fei Fen (ASEAN Horse brand coffee powder); *Lat Pau*, October 27, 1930

7 Advertisement for Ya Si An Ma Biao Dian Zhi Ka Fei Fen (ASEAN Horse brand coffee powder); *Lat Pau*, October 15, 1930

8 Advertisement for Ya Si An Ma Biao Dian Zhi Ka Fei Fen (ASEAN Horse brand coffee powder); *Lat Pau*, October 21, 1930



7



8





11



12

9 Sin Kwang, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, October 21, 1929, p. 21

10 Sin Kwang, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, August 26, 1929, p. 21

11 Sin Kwang, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, September 9, 1929, p. 21

12 Sin Kwang, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, July 28, 1930, p. 21

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13



14

13 Yeh Lin, *Lat Pau*, February 1, 1929

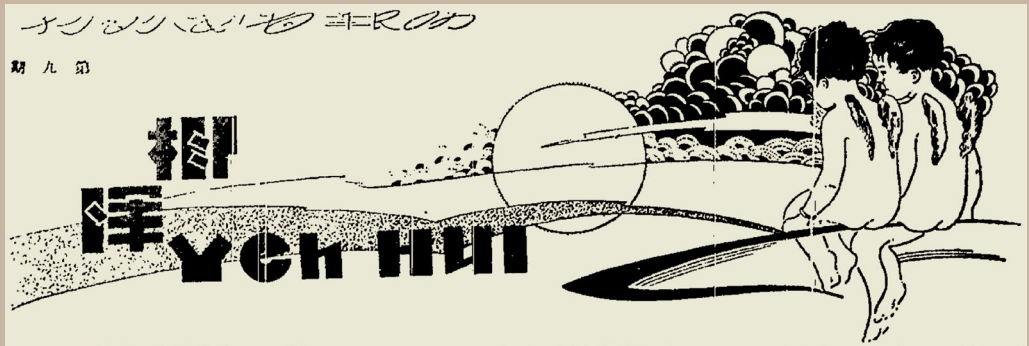
14 Yeh Lin, *Lat Pau*, April 16, 1930

15 Yeh Hui, *Lat Pau*, December 6, 1930

16 Yeh Lin, *Lat Pau*, February 8, 1929

17 Yeh Hui, *Lat Pau*, December 27, 1930

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1



2

1 Tchang's first job in Singapore was as a teacher at Tuan Mong School. Graduation photo of Tuan Mong school, c. 1928
Last row from left: Tchang

3 Tchang, c. 1920s

4 Family photo of Tchang and Chuang U-Chow, c. 1930s

Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive with kind permission from Chang Si Fun (Shewin)

2 Tchang was appointed one of the teachers in the Western painting department at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, c. 1938
First row from right: Tchang

Gift of Lim Yew Kuan. Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive



3



4



5



6

The Society of Chinese Artists (SOCA) frequently organised group outings for *en plein air* painting, fostering camaraderie among members and providing opportunities to create new works. These sessions often concluded with artworks displayed for critique and discussion.

5 SOCA members with their artworks displayed behind them, c. 1936–1939
Front row: Chen Chong Swee, Tchang (fourth from left), Yong Mun Sen (far right) and Chuang U-Chow

Gift of Lim Yew Kuan. Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive



- 6 Group photo of SOCA members, including Tchang (far left); Liu Kang (second from left), c. 1930s
- Image courtesy of family of Liu Kang
- 7 Top: Group photo taken on the day of SOCA's inauguration. Second from left: Tchang
Centre: Group photo taken following a SOCA outing
Bottom: After notes of the catalogue

- 8 Group photo following a SOCA outing. The left column lists Tchang Ju Chi as president and Liu Kang as vice president. The right column lists the names of the members, including women artists such as Su Er Qi (苏尔琪), Lim Chu Suan (林子瑄) and Chern Yet Siu (陈月秀).

Gift of Liu Kang family. Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive



9



10

Tchang and Chuang U-Chow were part of the decorating committee for the Nanyang Chinese Relief Fund Conference in 1938. Tchang was responsible for designing the venue's decorations.

9 Group photograph of the decoration team for the Overseas China Relief War Effort, 1938
First from right: Tchang

10 Decorated hall at Chinese High School, 1938

Lee Brothers Studio Collection. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

THE SOCIETY OF CHINESE ARTISTS

4th Annual Exhibition Catalogue

梁小天 Leong Siew Tien

33 帆影曙光 Seascape	水彩 Water Colour	十五元 \$ 15
34 靜物 Still-life	,, ,, ,,	十五元 ,, 15
35 風景 Landscape	,, ,, ,,	十元 ,, 10
35 風景 Landscape	,, ,, ,,	十元 ,, 10
36 風景 Landscape	,, ,, ,,	十元 ,, 10

莊有釗 U-Chow

37 雙林寺 Temple	水彩 water colour	四十五元 \$ 45
38 孟加里像 Portrait of a Sikh	水彩 ,, ,,	五十元 ,, 50
39 亞答屋 Attap houses	水彩 ,, ,,	廿五元 ,, 35
40 印度女 Indian girl	水彩 ,, ,,	四十五元 ,, 54
41 劫 Agony of Aggression	水彩 ,, ,,	四十元 ,, 40
42 自畫像 Self-portrait	粉彩 pastel drawing	非賣品 not for sale
43 三姊妹 Three sisters	粉彩 ,, ,,	五十元 \$ 50
44 馬來婦 Malay Girls	粉彩 ,, ,,	五十元 ,, 50
45 女人像 Girl with a fan	油畫 oil painting	非賣品 not for sale
46 沙味的家庭 Mr. Sany's Family	油畫 ,, ,,	二百元 \$ 200
47 海邊 Seascape	油畫 ,, ,,	二百元 ,, 200
48 羅女士像 Portrait of Miss R. Loh	油畫 ,, ,,	非賣品 not for sale
49 花底嗎 Fatima	油畫 ,, ,,	八十元 \$ 80
50 姊妹 Sisters	油畫 ,, ,,	四百五十元 ,, 450

張汝器 Ju-Chi Tchang

51 姦淫劫殺 They commit these sins	油畫 oil painting	四百元 \$ 400
52 南國佳人 Malay Beauties	油畫 ,, ,,	六百元 ,, 600
53 咪拉與姬娜 Mila & Jena	油畫 ,, ,,	三百元 ,, 300
54 自畫像 Self-portrait	油畫 ,, ,,	非賣品 not for sale
55 女孩識芬 My Daughter Sie-Fuin	油畫 ,, ,,	,, ,,
56 閒讀 Reading in the Studio	畫油 ,, ,,	,, ,,
57 紅衣馬來婦 Malay Girl in Red	油畫 ,, ,,	一百元 \$ 100
58 吉寧婦 Indian Woman	油畫 ,, ,,	一百元 ,, 100
59 花 Sunflowers	油畫 ,, ,,	八十元 ,, 80
60 老人 Old Man	油畫 ,, ,,	一百元 ,, 100
61 老亞答屋 Old Attap Houses	油畫 ,, ,,	八十元 ,, 80
62 憩 At Rest	油畫 ,, ,,	二百元 ,, 200
63 的沙 Tisa	油畫 ,, ,,	一百元 ,, 100
64 靜物 Still Life	油畫 ,, ,,	一百五十元 ,, 150
65 園丁 Kubun	油畫 ,, ,,	一百元 ,, 100

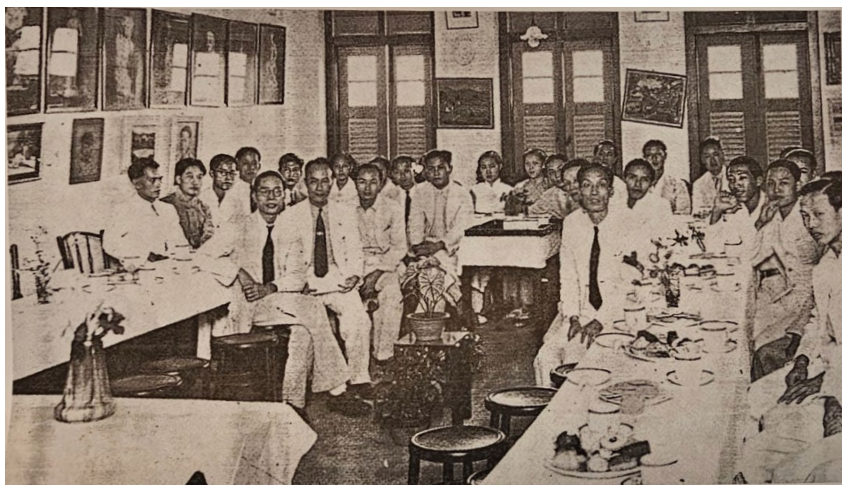
Tchang's *They Commit These Sins* and Chuang U-Chow's *Agony of Aggression*, exhibited in 1939, condemned Japanese wartime atrocities and likely drew the attention of the Japanese Kempeitai.

11 4th Annual Exhibition of the Society of Chinese Artists catalogue (1939)

Gift of the Society of Chinese Artists.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive



12



13

Xu Beihong visited Singapore to raise funds for the war-relief effort, and on each visit, he would call on Tchang. Their close relationship is reflected in Xu's painting *Mother and Daughter* (1939), depicting Tchang's wife, Chen Mengyu and their daughter, Chang Si Fun.

12 Photo of Tchang and his family with Mrs Huang Mang Shi, Huang Menggui and Xu Beihong

Image courtesy of Jack Bonn

13 Xu at SOCA's headquarters in Geylang, c. 1939
Second from left: Xu Beihong; fourth from left: Tchang

Courtesy of Ouyang Xing Yi



14

14 Xu Beihong
Mother and Daughter
1939
Oil on canvas
93 x 74 cm

Image courtesy of Xu Beihong Museum

會 究 研 術 美 人 華
SOCIÉTÉ DES ARTISTES CHINOIS

167, GEYLANG ROAD, SINGAPORE. 號七六一牌門律羅芽

公告會員書

自聯軍勝利，暴寇屈膝，世界和平實現，人間正義重伸，吾人終由悲慘黑暗之地獄，進入光明自由之世界。過去三年半，殘酷痛苦之淪陷生活，于今已成陳跡。際此同僑歡慶，僑團復活，重建馬來亞之時，本會同人自應依昔日宗旨，奮起為社會服務，惟當星洲淪陷，倭寇施行慘絕，震之大檢証時，本會正副主席張汝器何光耀二君同遭毒手，至今生死未卜，致目下領導乏人，言之殊堪痛心。按諸會章，除召開留坡會員大會商討推舉臨時負責人外，須待全馬各地郵電恢復，然後通函各地會員，重新選舉。舍此別無他途。惟事有異者，南洋商報突然發表華人美術研究會經已重新選舉並選出林學大李魁士為正副會長之新聞一則。查華人美術研究會會員，留坡人數三十許，多數未受通知開會，何從產生會長。此係愚三數人所玩弄之非法選舉，本會同人絕不能緘默容忍，且本會之註冊以職員會為會中最高機關，職員會設正副主席以辦理對內外事宜，從未有會長制之組織，而彼等公然抹煞會章，其陰謀尤甚，同人等深恐各地會員，因道途遠阻，郵電不通，一時真相不明，用特將情公告，俾免魚目混珠。一俟全馬郵電恢復，本會當慎重進行投票選舉，庶幾十一年來全南洋美術界苦心組織之純學術團體，不致湮沒無聞也。

陳月秀 黃良泉 鍾鳴世 劉叔熙 林子燦 楊思民 蘇鳳珠 徐若蘭 葉冬森 李長民 劉先德

15 Notice to SOCA members mentioning the loss of Tchang, Chuang U-Chow and Ho Kwong Yew



16

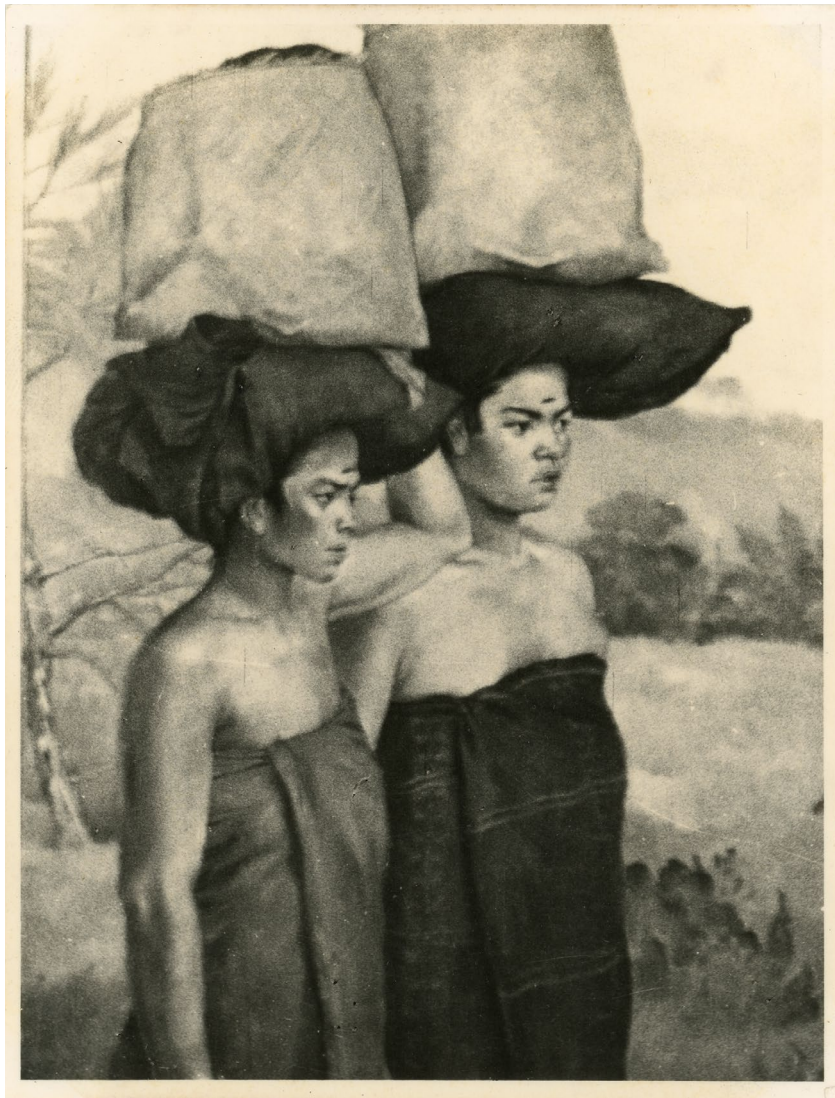


17

The 6th annual SOCA exhibition in 1946 included a commemorative section honouring members who perished during the war; among them Tchang and Chuang U-Chow.

16–17 Exhibition section featuring Tchang's works
Photographed by Liu Kang

Image courtesy of the family of Liu Kang



18

These two works were exhibited in a group exhibition of works by Lim Hak Tai, Yong Mun Sen and Tchang Ju Chi in 1966.

18 Tchang's *Two Women* (1940)

Gift of Lim Yew Kuan. Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive

19 Tchang's *Mila and Jena* (c. 1939)

Gift of the Society of Chinese Artists.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore
Library & Archive



Mila & Jena 咪拉與姪娜
oil painting 油畫
by Ju-Chi Tchang 張啟昌作





Design for Preface to Inaugural
Issue of *Yeh Hui, Lat Pau*,
October 11, 1930, p.1

ARCHIVAL TEXTS

前言

张汝器

《椰晖》，《叻报》

1930年10月11日

现在的艺坛是一个沙漠：这么荒凉，这么干涸！然而，在这沙漠中，我们渴求着生之泉。这生之泉，会使寂寞的心化为活泼的，空虚的灵魂变为完善的，在生与死，明与暗，白昼与黑夜，永远燃烧火一般的意志，策着马儿前冲。为此，骆驼出来了。虽则，脚步恁般迂缓，样子笨滞；但是它，纵使前途有沙、尘，有风地雷雨，与一切困苦，还是负着重大的使命，一步一步地前进，永远没有倦意。在《椰晖》下，我们这样视着。去罢，骆驼！走上你的征途！

Preface

Tchang Ju Chi
Yeh Hui, Lat Pau
October 11, 1930

The art world today is a desert—barren and parched! Yet within this desert, we desire the spring of life. This spring of life will transform lonesome hearts into vibrant ones and completely fill empty souls. Between life and death, light and darkness, day and night, with a will burning like an eternal flame, spurring the horse forward. For this, the camel emerges. Though its gait may be slow and its appearance clumsy, despite the sand, dust, winds, thunder, rain and all hardships that lie ahead, it bears a great mission, step by step moving forward, ever tireless. Under *Yeh Hui*, this is our vision. Go forth, camel! Get on with your mission!

小言

张汝器

第二届华人美术研究会展览纪念刊，1937

余本嗜游。兼耽绘事。欧陆归来。栖留狮岛。每念人生朝露。时光如流。苟无经纬大才。何以为国。敢期雕虫小技。得意自鸣。椰林皓月。尽是写青佳作。暮霭朝霞。岂非大块文章。而况中原板荡。夷狄交侵。故国荒凉。野灶无烟。此正我辈以艺术警醒群伦时也。爰集同调。共组画社。二年与兹。规模粗具。适届展览之期。用有特刊之刻。兴感所至。不计工拙。虽无琳琅满目之观。应邀椎轮草创之谅。艺界高明。有以教之。若夫道兹写佛。摩诘画诗。长康阿睹传神。僧繇涂龙飞壁。千古美谈。何敢望其项背哉。至于澹泊明志。美意延年。抑尤余事耳。

Brief Words

Tchang Ju Chi

2nd Annual Society of Chinese Artists Exhibition catalogue, 1937

I have always been fond of travelling and have found joy in painting. Upon my return from Europe, I have settled on the island of Singapore. Often I reflect on life's fleeting nature—ephemeral as morning dew. Time flows relentlessly. If I lack the talent to serve the nation, how can I be of any use? I dare not think that this modest craft is reason enough for pride. Beneath the luminous moon, the coconut groves stand as perfect subjects for painting; and are not the evening mist and the morning glow also great for literary works? China is in turmoil, beset by foreign invaders, the homeland in ruin—with barren fields and cold hearths. Now is precisely the moment of our generation to awaken the masses through art. Thus, I gathered like-minded souls to form an art society. Two years have passed, and our modest scale has taken shape. Now, with the exhibition at hand and this special publication to mark the occasion, it is offered in the spirit of inspiration rather than polished craft. Though it may not present a dazzling display, I ask for understanding of its rough, early form. May the esteemed masters of the art world offer their guidance. If one were to speak of Wu Daozi's depictions of the Buddha, Wang Wei's poetry woven into paintings, Gu Kaizhi's conveyance of spirit through the eyes, or Zhang Sengyou's dragons so lifelike they seemed to take flight from the walls—these are timeless marvels of the ages. How could we dare compare ourselves to them? As for cultivating serenity to strengthen resolve or seeking beauty to inspire longevity, these are merely pursuits on the periphery.

地方色彩与文艺

(陈)炼青

《椰林》，《叻报》，1929年9月23日，p. 12

写了上面这个题目之后，同时并不踌躇地把它写做一篇短文，决意写至原稿纸四张为止。理由之一，是因为这个题目所涵的意义，我将打算写入那篇凝思甚久而终于不敢毅然下笔的《南洋文学》文中所包括的一部分，故在这里不愿多所发挥，只简略地抒出一点感想而已；理由之二呢，就是我近来已打算多写些短篇文字，少发表长篇大论的东西。有了以上两个理由，所以就决意写做短篇。至于本文的意思，自然是近似于杂感之类，并不敢说是一篇论文。这些也许无须声明罢，然而我总觉要这样说才好。

现在暂把文学是什么这些大问题搁在一边，而来谈一谈关于褊狭方面的景物的描写罢。

谁都承认文艺断不能超出时间与空间等限制，只作品中关于景物的点缀一点，就绝对不容作家随便的。一篇作品，如其所记的是国内的事，凡人物，地方，一切都是国内中所有的俱（？）可写出，否则如把南洋的景物混入，那可无疑地断定为错误。譬如作家们未曾看过纷纷飘舞雪片是怎样飘舞法，便俨乎其然地大谈起来，纵然谈得很劲，但总不能写得逼真。文艺虽重想象，然而作家总难以离开现实的生活专去冥想些生平不曾赏鉴过的东西，而写着不忠实的景物来。所以地方色彩 (local colour) 问题，便为我们所注意。

成功的作家，无论诗歌小说抑或散文，里头所取材的景物，总就作者日常所接触者写出。资产阶级的文学家，如吉卜林，他因为生长印度，所以他的作品即以描写印度的景物见长；如司蒂文生，因曾经来南洋养病，以故他中年的作品，也便充满了很浓厚的南洋景物的风味；即如去年逝世的哈提，据世界上大大小小的批评家说，他的小说与诗，单就景物，均取材于他的故乡的。这是一个事实，要起人们深切的共鸣，写的有声有色的除开实际的体验外，幻想毕竟只是空虚，人们读后自觉无味，断没有生起蜘蛛丝似的反应。

Local Colours and Literature

(Chen) Lianqing

Lat Pau, September 23, 1929, p. 12

When it came to writing about this topic, I could not help but end up filling four pages, turning it into a short essay. The first reason is that I had intended to include this topic in a longer essay “Nanyang Literature” which I have long contemplated but not yet dared to pen. So, this is just a brief reflection to express my thoughts. The second reason is that I have resolved to write more short articles and publish fewer lengthy ones. These two reasons are why I decided to keep this short. As for the nature of this paper, it naturally reflects a range of feelings, but I do not dare call it a thesis. Perhaps there is no need to declare this, but I have always felt that it is better to clarify such things.

Let us, for now, set aside the weighty question of what literature is, and turn instead to the circumscribed aspects of describing the scenery.

It is widely accepted that literature and art cannot transcend the boundaries of space and time. Even the smallest detail of a scene in a work must not be embellished arbitrarily. If a piece of writing is about affairs of the homeland, the characters and places in China must be those recognisable within the homeland, otherwise, if elements of Nanyang are included in the same piece of writing, the work would be judged as a mistake. For example, if writers have never seen snow drifting in the wind but insist on writing about it, no matter how strong their writing is, they will not be able to write about it authentically. Although literature and art value imagination, a writer can hardly detach themselves from real-life experiences and indulge solely in contemplating things they have never encountered, thereby depicting scenes that lack authenticity. Therefore, the topic of local colours (地方色彩) has come to our attention.

Successful writers—whether in poetry, fiction or prose—always draw on scenes and experiences from their everyday lives. An example is bourgeois literary figure, Kipling, who grew up in India. He became known for his depictions of Indian scenery; or Stevenson, who once came to Nanyang to recuperate, resulting in his later works imbued with Nanyang flavours and scenery; even the late Hattie who passed last year was said by critics of all stripes to have based all the scenery featured in his novels and poems on his hometown. This is a fact. For writing to resonate deeply with people, it has to be immersive and engaging, stemming from lived experience. Fantasy is, after all, just hollow, readers find it dull and emotionally unengaging.

地方色彩这问题，既然在文艺上占着一席颇为重要的位置，但反观我们南洋上一般青年的创作，怎么关于地方色彩的作品很缺乏呢？近年来南洋刊物之发达，虽则不能说比较国内多，但总较往昔蓬勃得多了；可是你如要在那些刊物里头找到一篇充满南洋的景物稍微浓厚的作品，那好像披沙炼金似的困难。作家们围在椰丛下，写着梅花，雪片，杨柳……等东西，这是不会革去；而我们的地方色彩的风味，不知怎的总蕴在作家们的肚子里，似乎烟土披里纯未到以前，这些都不愿意发洩了罢！

如其谓南洋的景物太粗俗与太不艺术，所以不上我们的作家赏鉴的话，就我的眼光看起来，这里的本地风光，那倒也不觉得这样的难堪。你看，苍翠的青椰，浓密的树胶，茂盛的芭蕉，竖立的老枳，也还觉得可爱；兼之那富于雨量的气候，“一雨便成秋”的热带下的生活，似乎不无一点诗意；即如落日斜晖，我们在海边眺望，大自然的壮丽奇伟，似不能说比国内的还不好看些。然而我们的作家，却熟视无观，专去摹倣——不，应该说冥想，而偏描写些国内的景物，这颇使我费解了。

仅此一遍——只仅仅此一遍，关于南洋景物的显现，就觉这样的贫困，那么要作家们能够获得南洋文学真正的意识，武断的说，其途径尚遥远难以达到。国内的景物是不很适合于南洋的。作家们多从国内来，在这里创作，最低限度也要激起一点灵感来抒出一两篇具有地方色彩的作品，那我不至于变成超人，弄至写些不受制于时间空间的文艺来。

在艺圈里，南洋尚有许多宝藏没开闯过，国内的作家，要梦想开闯这些新的宝藏，非亲自来南洋跑一回不可。但是我们的作家怎可放弃我们的任务，摆在眼前的景物那可轻轻放过呢？

今天读到张仲君投来一篇《漂流到狮岛去》的稿子，（按该文不日在《椰林》发表）其中描写本坡所谓“老皇山”的水池及芽笼的景物一段，觉得地方色彩颇浓厚，读后如身历其境一般；于喜慰之余，因激动两年来的主张，故略抒一点感想如上。

Since local colours bear such importance in literature and art, why then is there a lack in works of young people in Nanyang? In recent years, the growth of publications in Nanyang has flourished more than in the past, though not more than China's; but it is still remarkably difficult to find works depicting Nanyang scenery in any depth. Writers gather under the coconut groves only to write about plum blossoms, snowflakes and willows. This habit persists. The richness of our local landscape seems to remain buried within the writers themselves, as if they are unwilling to release any of it.

Some may claim that Nanyang scenery is too crude or lacks aesthetic value, and therefore unworthy of literary attention. But from my perspective, our local environment is not without beauty. Look around: the green coconuts, the rich tree resin, the lush banana groves, the tall and straight old trees, these are all worthy of appreciation; and the abundant rainfall brings with it a tropical life not without poetry, as in "the sudden shower at the end of summer that abruptly brings autumn." Even watching the sunset by the sea reveals the magnificence of nature, which rivals the views in China. However, scenery from the homeland is more familiar for our writers to the point that they're choosing to reproduce, or rather, to imagine, scenes of the homeland, fixated on familiar materials drawn from China. This puzzles me.

Just this once—only on this occasion—do I feel how impoverished our depictions of Nanyang scenery are. I must admit, it is a distant and difficult goal for writers to develop a proper understanding of Nanyang literature. The landscape of China is not suited to this place. Writers from China who create while living here, should, at the very least, draw inspiration from their surroundings and write a piece or two featuring the local colours. Rather than attempt the superhuman feat of writing literature that is unmoored from both space and time.

In terms of art, there remain many undiscovered treasures waiting to be unearthed in Nanyang. Writers from China who dream of uncovering new artistic frontiers should personally make the trip to Nanyang. How can we turn away from the responsibility to depict the very landscape that surrounds us? Today, I read Mr. Zhang Zhong's manuscript, "Drifting to the Lion City," which will be published in *Yeh Hui* tomorrow. It describes the rich local colours of the "Old Huangshan" pond and scenery in Geylang. His piece transported me into the scene. In addition to my joy and comfort, I am stirred by the convictions I have held over the past two years, and thus I have briefly expressed my thoughts above.

第四届展览前言

徐悲鸿

第四届华人美术研究会展览纪念刊, 1939

马来人民, 优游善歌, 既任天而治, 又任人而治。饮椰浆, 栖阿答, 相率而浴于海, 弄潮捕蚌, 复追小鱼。倘有所获, 恒俟槁聚腐化而始食之。晨光熹微, 与夕阳西坠, 恒以曼声送迎, 似未尝争杀, 亦鲜劫夺之风, 更少尽力排演之男女悲剧。美哉美哉, 此清静淡泊之生活, 虽我佛不出世可也。

群椰虽好冽队矗立, 亦有颠倒偃仰, 如醉徒拘倭酩酊之态者。聚实累累, 遂丛集为鼠辈自然巢穴。于思巨榕广布, 深山穷谷之际, 亦产幽兰。虽乏清芬, 每秉绝色。其嫣红、雪白、纯黄、沉紫, 斑驳迷离, 奇形怪状之群兰昆季长幼, 真南方大族也。闻鳄鱼昔受韩愈遣送, 爰率队先吾华人开辟南洋。其懒德实为天下第一。抑饶舌之鹦鹉, 峨冠堂堂, 尤乐居斯土。举凡最饕之珍禽、异兽、巨蟒、大虫, 与装配近代化丰繁富庶之介类, 浩浩荡荡诚不可胜数也。而鱼类之文章, 尤为世界之伟观。吾曾以机缘, 伺渔者计功之际, 见其大小俘虏, 无论其长短圆扁、巨鳞或细腮, 莫不身披异章, 五色绚烂。往往在深浅复密之间, 制成简雅高妙之旋律。千变万化。不可思议。令治图案者惊叹。马来人既嗜音乐。度有所成。而绘画无闻。以如此之造化。为吾人之逆旅。凡吾同好。当不患无所寄兴。而必乞灵于清湘八大之骸骨也。抑吾人既远离炮火烽烟之难。允当有以贡献于世。否则寻常皮囊。虽视资吾人为工具之南洋风物。亦殊多愧色也。兹届展览。敬此献词。

Foreword for the 4th Exhibition

Xu Beihong

4th Annual Exhibition of the Society of Chinese Artists, 1939

The Malay people, graceful in movement and song, are governed as much by the ways of nature as by the ways of humankind. They drink coconut milk, live in attap houses, and bathe in the sea—chasing tides, gathering clams and pursuing small fishes. Whatever they catch is left to ferment before consumption. At dawn and dusk, they greet and bid farewell to the day with gentle song. Their world is untouched by the spirit of plunder and the tragic tales of men and women. How beautiful, how tranquil is such a simple life, one in which even the Buddha might have found no cause to enter this world [to preach the salvific truth].

While coconut trees are often upright and orderly, they sometimes lean and sway like drunkards in a stupor. They bear fruit in heaps, with rats making their nests there, nature's design at work. Elsewhere, huge banyan trees spread their canopies wide. Even in remote hills and valleys, wild orchids bloom. They may lack fragrance, but their colours—bright red, snow white, pure yellow and dark purple—are dazzling. Mottled and strangely shaped, these orchids form a strange and beautiful clan: a great southern family in bloom. It is said that crocodiles, once exiled by Han Yu, arrived here before the Chinese, as if to pave the way to settle in Nanyang. Their languor is unrivalled. Parrots, with majestic crests and dignified bearing, chatter freely and delight in making this land their home. Rare birds of every kind, even the most insatiable, exotic beasts, giant pythons, insects and other creatures thrive in dazzling variety and endless abundance. But it is the fish here that offer the most magnificent sight, one of nature's great spectacles. By chance, I observed fishermen sorting their catch. I saw fishes of all sizes, long or short, round or flat, with large scales or delicate gills, each bore striking patterns and brilliant hues. They form subtle yet sublime harmonies in their shifting depths and layered intricacies; ever-changing and beyond imagining. They astonish even the most seasoned pattern designer. The Malays have a gift for music, though when it comes to their painting, it is less widely known. For us, mere travellers in this land, there is no lack of inspiration. Those who share this passion will find kindred spirits here and may inevitably look to the legacy of Bada Shanren of Qingxiang [artist Zhu Da, a late-Ming and early-Qing dynasty Chinese painter] for guidance. Being far away from the calamities of war, we ought to contribute something of worth to the world. Otherwise, if we merely drift through life in mediocrity, even the landscapes of the Southern Seas—which may regard us as nothing more than tools—would surely make us feel shame.

On the occasion of this exhibition, I respectfully offer these words.

新加坡漫画历史

张汝器

《星洲日报》，July 1, 1937

润在这炎热的狮子岛上，爱好文艺的青年，常常郁悒地呼喊这里的艺园，是像一片沙漠般的荒凉。但在这过去一年中，稍有些更新气象，值得我们欣慰的。现在青年励志社发起的马来亚漫画展览会，已经开幕了，算是南国破天荒文艺热烈轰动的表现，让我们鼓掌庆祝它前途光明吧。《星洲日报》决发印一纪念刊，藉贤宣扬，又以新加坡漫画历史，颇有一述的价值，余缘于星洲日报发刊之初就任特约漫画记者，兹承星洲日报不忘其旧，嘱余记其梗概，故不揣冒昧，爰就感想及记忆所及约略记述。语有未详尚祈阅者明教。

新加坡的有漫画历史，不及十年。从前在报章上漫画绝罕看见，研究的人亦很少。当时有一新加坡画报，余与古风君时有投稿，两人之外，投稿可以说寥若晨星。民国十八年一月十五日，星洲日报出版时，主笔为朱君宝筠，系余在法时的好友，余因私人友谊关系，每日在《繁星》栏中，刊一漫画，为期数月。及朱君辞职归国，馆方乃增刊一图画副刊，取名《星光》，是年七月十五日出世，亦可说是新加坡漫画刊行的创举。非有深长经验的我，终于在这一半儿惊怯，一半儿惭愧中主编起来。

The History of Cartoons in Singapore

Tchang Ju Chi

Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1 July 1937

In this scorching Lion City, young art and literary enthusiasts often lament that the artistic landscape here is as barren as a desert. But in the past year, there have been some refreshing changes that bring us gratification. With the recent opening of the Malayan Chinese Cartoons Exhibition initiated by the *Qing Nian Li Zhi She* (Youth Inspirational Society), we can now view it as a groundbreaking artistic movement in the Southern region. Let us all applaud and celebrate its bright future. The *Sin Chew Jit Poh* has decided to publish a commemorative issue, not only to showcase the exhibition but also because the history of *manhua* development in Singapore is worth documenting. As I was a contributing cartoonist for *Sin Chew Jit Poh* at its inception, I have now been entrusted—thanks to the newspaper's thoughtful remembrance of the past—with summarising its development. I have thus taken the liberty of giving a brief account of my thoughts and memories, and sincerely hope that readers will offer their guidance on any inaccuracies.

The history of *manhua* in Singapore spans less than a decade. Previously, it was rare to see *manhua* in newspapers and there were very few individuals who studied them. At that time, a Singapore pictorial newspaper existed, and I, along with Mr. Gu Feng, would occasionally contribute to it. Apart from the two of us, *manhua* submissions were rare as morning stars. On 15 January 1929, when *Sin Chew Jit Poh* was first published, the editor-in-chief was Mr. Zhu Baoyun, an old friend of mine from my time in France. Due to our friendship, I contributed *manhua* daily to the *Fan Xing* (Starry Sky) column for several months. When Zhu resigned and returned to China, the newspaper launched a pictorial supplement, named *Xing Guang* (Starlight). It was released on 15 July that year, marking a pioneering achievement in the publication of *manhua* in Singapore. It was then, with little experience in this field, that I became the editor-in-chief of the publication, filled with equal parts fear and humility.

预料不到的是收获竟出于耕耘的期望以外，画刊印行之后，深得人们的赞许，来函勉励者大不乏人。那时投稿亦踊跃得很，国内方面的特约，有黄文农，叶浅予，张光宇，郑光汉，林道庵，及现《星光》的主编徐君廉诸君。时余任学校教职，故般好画的学生，亦很高兴的来投稿，虽意趣未臻完美，也都是这园地的一位忠实园丁。余以任编《星光》及二校教职，操劳过甚，心力交疲，故在十九年九月间，辞去《星光》编辑。继之为胡斌君，主编三月再继者为陈君昇平。是时新加坡多家报纸，皆趋向画报，《新国民日报》，亦有画刊，那时余之老友陈君炼青，主编《叻报》，与经理部商增一画刊，名为《椰晖》，又挽余主其事，余推诿不得，故勉任其难，半载后以费重停刊。其他如《南洋商报》，亦会发刊彩色画报，主编者为郑君光汉，惜为期不久，亦告停办。这就是新加坡有画报的历史，也就是漫画历史的概观。颓废情形，谅阅者总有一种同情的感想。不过我们对于人生苦闷的象征，社会恶劣的症结，总想在可能的范围，尽量地表现，负起促进艺术的使命，携手于文化的人生道上迈进。

To our surprise, the reception far exceeded all expectations. The publication of *Xing Guang* was met with widespread praise, and we received many letters of encouragement. At that time, submissions poured in. Among the contributing artists from China were Huang Wennong, Ye Qianyu, Zhang Guangyu, Zheng Guanghan, Lin Daoan and the present editor-in-chief, Xu Junlian. At the time, I was also working as a teacher, and many of my art-loving students enthusiastically submitted their works. Although their works were not fully refined, they were all devoted gardeners of this artistic field. However, managing both *Xing Guang* and my teaching duties became overwhelming, exhausting me both physically and mentally. As a result, I resigned as editor of *Xing Guang* in September 1930. I was succeeded by Mr. Hu Bin for three months, followed by Mr. Chen Shengping.

During this period, many newspapers in Singapore started to adopt pictorial supplements. The *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* also introduced pictorials. Meanwhile, my old friend, Mr. Chen Lianqing, editor of *Lat Pau* worked with the management to launch a new pictorial supplement called *Yeh Hui*. He urged me to take charge of the project. Unable to decline his invitation, I hesitantly took on the responsibility. However, after six months, the publication was discontinued due to high costs. Other newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau*, also attempted to publish a colour pictorial, with Mr. Zheng Guanghan serving as editor-in-chief. Unfortunately, it was short-lived and eventually discontinued. This, in brief, is the history of Singapore's pictorial publications, which also reflects the early history of *manhua* here. The state of decay is likely to evoke a sense of sympathy in the reader. Nevertheless, our mission has always been to express the struggles of life and expose the social issues of our time to the best of our ability. We remain committed to promoting art as a means of cultural progress, walking hand in hand toward a more enlightened artistic future.

木漫在南洋

(戴) 隐郎

《文漫界》，《南洋商报》，May 31, 1936, p. 11

在目前的南洋，木，漫这问题之被提出，似乎还嫌太早。从以往的出版物看来，曾刊载过木刻创作的，固属恒河沙数；而漫画的踪影，也是寥若晨星。除了几个短命的，朝生暮死的期刊曾登载一些外，现在似乎只有在二三家大报里头，才能看见一点了。然而，那也只能说是一点而已，虽然，每天总能看到一二幅，但毕竟难免势寡力孤之憾！在单刀匹马，独脚揽台底下，无论如何也不能掀起滔天的波浪；当然更谈不上和读众们，作者们的联络的！

木，漫在南洋，目前为止，谁也不能否认是非常沉落，丝毫没有发展！

这原因，依笔者看来，最小有如下四点：

第一——一般人对于漫画，尤其是木刻，不但不加以重视，而且多认为是不正统，没有价值的东西。

第二——一般刊物的编者，多不重视漫画，尤其是木刻。在他们认为，刊物上刊载木刻或漫画，不是多余，便是无聊的举动。自然，这是指一般的说，有许多是因为经济能力或才力有所限的，不在此例。

第三——有些编者死守门罗主义，虽在经济能力和才力两重许可底下，也一样的垄断一般作者的发表机会，无形中摧残了不少作者的创作兴趣和能力。

第四——从事木刻，从事漫画的人确是太少了！间有一二爱好木刻或漫画份子在着手制作，但，往往一方面为了同调者不多，他方面为了刊发的机会无着，因此，也就日益消沉下来了。

根据上列四点原因，直到现在，木，漫在南洋之不得发展。这，未始不无重大关系。然而，我们如果想决心填补以往的缺陷，既要能捐弃关起大门，自吹自擂的老法子，无论如何，是不难办到的！

Woodcuts and Cartoons in Nanyang

(Dai) Yinlang

Wen Man Jie, Nanyang Siang Pau, May 31, 1936, p. 11

In today's Nanyang, raising the subject of woodcuts and cartoons still feels premature. Judging from past publications, while a great many have featured woodcut works, instances of cartoons remain few and far between. Aside from a few short-lived periodicals that featured some [woodcuts or cartoons], such content now appears in only one or two major newspapers, if at all, and even then, only in token form. Although one might come across a piece or two every day, their visibility remains marginal and scattered. Working in isolation without support, it is almost impossible to make any impact, let alone speak of cultivating meaningful relationships with readers or fellow authors.

At present, few can deny that woodcuts and cartoons in Nanyang are in a state of deep stagnation, with almost no development!

In my view, the reasons for this are at least fourfold:

1. The general public fails to take cartoons seriously, especially woodcuts, and regards them as unorthodox or lacking in value.
2. Editors of most periodicals likewise show little interest in cartoons, especially woodcuts. In their view, publishing woodcuts or cartoons is either unnecessary or frivolous. Naturally, this does not apply to those genuinely constrained by economic means or resources.
3. Despite having both the financial means and capability, some editors still adhere to a Monroe Doctrine-like [monopolistic or protectionist] approach. By monopolising publication opportunities, they have unintentionally undermined many authors' creative interests and potential.
4. Very few individuals are actively engaged in the production of woodcuts or cartoons! While a few enthusiasts may attempt to create such works, the lack of peer support and platforms for publication has led their efforts to fade over time.

Hence, these four factors have undeniably contributed to the underdevelopment of woodcuts and cartoons in Nanyang.

However, if we are committed to addressing these past deficiencies, we must abandon our old ways of closing ranks and singing our own praises. There is no reason why meaningful change cannot be achieved!

因为木刻用具已简单轻便，表现又强而有力，所以几年来，在中国不但有不少人提倡，而且已有许多前进的作者，刻出不少强而有力的作品献给大众了。至于漫画，制作起来，也较一般所谓纯粹艺术（油画、水彩）来得便当，而且它所表现的事物，都是和社会，和人类有密切关联的；说起来，它的作用确乎超乎一切纯粹艺术之上。所以，几年来，中国漫画界，从事者真如雨后天青；而漫画刊物也日益加多，固然，其间是有不少背叛时代，逃避现实的作者，但我们却不能因为少数的他们底存在，便否认漫画本身的作用和价值！

现社会随处都充塞着瘴烟鬼影；到处都可听悲惨凄凄的哭声！木刻的表现强而有力，漫画的取材便捷而多面，两者所负的任务，都是不离暴露黑暗，批判现实，散播光明的。因此，凡是站在南洋文化范畴里的文化人，都应有立即提倡和动员制作之必要！

像组织木刻创作研究会、漫画创作座谈会，发动以提倡木刻、漫画为前的定期刊物……都是目前应该实践的工作！

另一方面，一般副刊或期刊的编者，推崇门罗主义的，应该马上粉碎门罗主义；平素不很重视木刻和漫画的，也应该立即捐弃这种成见，站在文化里头的文化人，假如还不会离开大家共守的阵线，对于推进文化的任何一项工作，无论如何，不应有所偏袒或蔑视的！

在南洋，木刻和漫画的前途，能否发展，绝不是凭空能够解答的事；重要的，还是要看多数作者能否共同开垦，共同努力以为断。

1936, 5, 30 晨

Woodcut tools today are lightweight and simple, yet capable of producing powerful results. In recent years, many in China have promoted woodcuts and many progressive artists have produced impactful works for the public. Cartoons, too, are more accessible to produce than so-called fine arts (oil painting, watercolour), and the subjects they depict often bear a close relationship to society and the human condition. In this regard, their function may indeed surpass that of purely aesthetic pursuits. Therefore, China's cartoon industry has seen an influx of practitioners in recent years, with the number of cartoon publications increasing steadily. Admittedly, there are individuals who have turned their backs on the times and sought to escape from reality, but we should not discredit the role and value of cartoons on account of a few!

Society today is clouded by unrest and uncertainty, with suffering and despair all around! Woodcuts possess a powerful expressive force, while cartoons are versatile and offer a wide range of subject matter. Both of them are tasked with exposing injustice, critiquing reality and shedding light in dark times. Therefore, all cultural workers in the Nanyang sphere should immediately advocate for and mobilise the production of such works!

Efforts such as forming a woodcut art research society, holding cartoon creation forums and launching regular publications devoted to promoting woodcut and cartoons—these are all immediate tasks that should be undertaken!

On the other hand, editors of general supplements or periodicals who maintain a monopolistic stance should immediately rid themselves of such attitudes; those who have habitually overlooked the value of woodcuts and cartoons should also let go of their prejudices; anyone who considers themselves part of the cultural community must stand in solidarity within our shared front. There should be no bias or disregard in advancing any cultural endeavour!

In Nanyang, the future of woodcuts and cartoons and whether they can flourish is by no means something that can be answered in theory alone; most critically, it depends on whether creators can work together with shared purpose and sustained effort.

1936, May 30, Morning



Self-Portrait
1937
Oil on canvas
36 × 30 cm
Gift of Chang Si Fun (Shewin), daughter of the artist

TIMELINE¹

■ Events related to the artist

■ Singapore art events

■ World events

1904

Tchang Ju Chi, style name Lian Ruo, is born in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province, China. As a child, Tchang loves art. He starts copying Chinese paintings while also learning Western painting techniques.

1911

The Xinhai Revolution, also known as the 1911 Revolution, ends the Qing dynasty, China's last imperial dynasty.

1912

The Provisional Government of the Republic of China, led by Sun Yat-sen, is established.

1914 – 1918

July 28–November 1, 1918.

World War I leads to massive casualties and the restructuring of geopolitical boundaries.

1919

May 4. Students gather at Tiananmen Square to protest the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles. The demonstrations mark a turning point in the broader New Culture Movement, which seeks to replace traditional Confucian values with modern reformist ideals.

1923

September. Enrols in the department of Western painting at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts.²

1924

August 28. Travels to France with classmate Wang Yuanbo (王远勃) to survey the art scene.³

¹ For an extensive primary research on Tchang Ju Chi and pre-war visual art and cultural activities in Singapore, see Yeo Mang Thong, *Essays on the history of pre-war Chinese painting in Singapore*, (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 1992) and *Liudong yu qianyi zaidi jinli: xinjiapo shijue yishu xianxiang* (1886–1945), (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University Confucius Institute, 2017).

² "Sili Shanghai Meishu Zhuan Ke Xuexiao xingming suoyin (November 1912 to September 1952)" in *Shanghai Meishu zhuan ke xuexiao dang'an shiliao cong bian*, eds. Liu Haisu Meishu Guan and Shanghai Shidangan guan, di 4 juan: Qia tong xue nian shao (zhong), (Shanghai: Zhong Xi Shu Ju: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe), 13.

³ "Xing jiang fu fa yanjiu yishu zhi er xue sheng," *Shen Bao*, July 23, 1924, p. 14.

1925

January 2. Exhibits at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts' 13th anniversary exhibition. A review highlights Tchang's works as among the most outstanding on display.⁴

March 12. Sun Yat-sen passes away. Chiang Kai-shek assumes leadership of the Kuomintang.

July 1. The National Government of the Republic of China, also known as the Nationalist Government, is established under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek.

c. 1925

Likely graduates from the Shanghai College of Fine Arts.

1926

January 20. Registers at the École des Beaux-Arts de Marseille in the Drawing Class. His registered residential address is 28 rue de la Rotonde.⁵

July 9, 1926–December 29, 1928.

The Northern Expedition, led by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government, seeks to unify China by defeating regional warlords and establishing a centralised government. This leads to massive turbulence, prompting many to migrate to Southeast Asia.

⁴ "Shanghai meizhuan zhanlanhui zhi dier ri," *Shen Bao*, January 4, 1925, p. 18.

⁵ Horikawa Lisa's email correspondence with Archives Municipales de la ville de Marseille (Municipal Archives of Marseille), 2019.

c. 1927

Tchang is unable to pay school fees and returns to China. En route, he stops in Singapore, where his friends persuade him to stay.

1927

January 28. *Huang Dao* 《荒岛》 a literary supplement in *Sin Kuo Min Ri Bao* 《新国民日报》 is launched. It promotes the ideal of incorporating Nanyang colours (南洋色彩) into literary works. One of its editors, Zhang Jinyan (张金燕), later collaborates with Tchang on *General Knowledge Digest* 《常识小报》 in 1932.⁶

April 1927–December 1929.

Teaches art at Tuan Mong School.

1929

January. Contributes cartoons to *Fan Xing* 《繁星》 at the invitation of Zhu Baoyun (朱宝筠), Tchang's friend from France and editor-in-chief of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* 《星洲日报》. Designs the masthead of *Yeh Lin* 《椰林》, *Lat Pau* 《叻報》 at the invitation of Chen Lianqing.⁷

March 15. Designs the masthead for *Tsing Nien* 《青年》, published by the Youth Inspirational Society (青年勵志社).

⁶ "Zhuzhang Nanyang secai wenyi de zhang jin yan," in Yang Songnian, *Xinma zaoqi zuojia yanjiu* (1927–1930), (Singapore and Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian and xinjiapo wenxue shuwu, 1988), 23–37.

⁷ (Chen) Lianqing, "Zhang Ruqi xiansheng," *Yeh Lin*, *Lat Pau*, January 18, 1929.

April. Appointed head of the art department at Yang Zheng School (养正学校).

June 17. Chen Lianqing (陈炼青) becomes editor of *Yeh Lin, Lat Pau*. Chen writes several pieces, including "Local Colours and Literature" 《地方色彩与文艺》, advocating for the incorporation of Nanyang colours in literary works. The supplement ceases publication on January 5, 1931.⁸

July 15. Becomes editor of Singapore's first pictorial supplement, *Sin Kwang* 《星光》, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. He resigns in September 1930.

August 16–18. Serves on the judging committees for the *Singapore Art Exhibition* organised by the Youth Inspirational Society. He chairs the committees for Chinese and Western paintings and co-chairs the sculpture committee with Zhu Yugu (朱愚谷). Tchang also exhibits 《东洋牛》 (*Oriental Buffaloes*).⁹

1930

c. February. Sets up Ju Chi Studio (汝器画室) at 306 River Valley Road. Services include designing advertisements, signboards, portraits and backgrounds.

April. Appointed publicity head of Singapore Girls School (星洲女学); the studio serves as a temporary meeting place.

October 11. Becomes the chief editor of *Lat Pau*'s pictorial supplement, *Yeh Hui* 《椰晖》 at the invitation of Chen Lianqing. In his preface for the inaugural issue, Tchang expresses his commitment to supporting the arts community. He designs the supplement's masthead and contributes regularly.

As editor, Tchang invites prominent artists such as Ye Qianyu (叶浅予) and Lang Jingshan (郎静山) to contribute. He also mentors emerging comic artists, including his student Zhou Jinhai (周金海), who later gains recognition as a woodcut artist.

1932

Co-founds *General Knowledge Digest* 《常识小报》 with Zhang Jinyan, Wu Hanhui (吴汉辉), Pan Guozhang (潘国章) and Han Huaizhu (韩槐准).¹⁰

April. Commissioned to design the advertisements for the Great World Amusement Park Charity Fundraising Fair (大世界筹赈游艺会).

October. *Guide to Singapore* 《新加坡指南》, with cover designed by Tchang and calligraphy by Yu Youren (于右任), is published.

⁸ Yang Songnian, "Zhili yu wenxue piping jianshe de Chen Lianqing," in *Xinma zaoqi zuojia yanjiu* (1927–1930), (Singapore and Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian and xinjiapo wenxue shuwu, 1988), 74–102.

⁹ "Xinjiapo meishu zhanlanhui xiaoxi," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1929, p. 7.

¹⁰ Yang Songnian, "Zhuzhang nanyang secai wenyi de Zhang Jinyan," *Xinma zaoqi zuojia yanjiu* (1927–1930), (Singapore and Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian and xinjiapo wenxue shuwu, 1988), 23–27.

1935

April 15. Graduates of the Shanghai College of Fine Arts, the Xin Hua Fine Arts Academy and the Shanghai University of Fine Arts meet at New Life Restaurant at Great World Amusement Park (大世界新生活酒家) to set up the Salon Art Society (莎郎艺术研究会). Members who attend the meeting include Cai Zhuzhen (蔡竹贞), Li Yunyang (李云杨), Lin Daoan (林道庵), Xu Junlian (徐君廉), Zhang Bohe (张伯河), Lin Tian (林天), Chen Shengping (陈昇平), Liu Gongxi (刘恭熙), Huang Qingquan (黄清泉) and Li Kuishi (李魁士).

As membership is restricted to graduates of the three institutions, the initiative falters with membership at just over ten members.

November 17. The Salon Art Society reconvenes at New Life Restaurant. They agree to expand the membership of the Society to include art lovers from Singapore, Malaya and Dutch-colonised territories and to rename the Society to the Society of Chinese Artists (华人美术研究会/Société des Artistes Chinois, or SOCA).

Members who attend this meeting include Tchang, Chuang U-Chow (庄有钊), Zhang Bohe, Lu Heng (卢衡), Lai Wenji (赖文基), Gao Zhensheng (高振声), Chen Chong Swee (陈宗瑞), Lin Tian, Xu Junlian and Li Kuishi.

1936

January 20. The Society of Chinese Artists (SOCA) is formally established, with Tchang appointed the founding president. Tchang's home and studio at 181 Tank Road become the headquarters of SOCA until 1939.

January 22. Wins second prize in Tolley's Brandy advertisement design competition. The winning design is rendered in black and white, with a kangaroo outlined against a shaded grape leaf.¹¹

March 1. SOCA organises an outdoor painting and picnic session at Katong.

April 1–3. *Ying Ying Art Exhibition* (嚶嚶艺术展览会) takes place at Li Teik School 5th Branch (莲花河丽泽第五分校) in Penang. SOCA members contribute works to the exhibition, with Tchang contributing two figurative works.¹²

May 24. *Wen Man Jie* 《文漫界》 in *Nanyang Siang Pau* 《南洋商报》 is founded. Publication ends on December 20.

June 25–29. The first annual SOCA exhibition is held at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Over 165 works by 20 artists are displayed. Tchang contributes 14 works.

¹¹ "Tolley's Brandy," *Malaya Tribune*, January 22, 1936, p. 9.

¹² Simon Soon, "Becoming Mun Sen: Shaping of a Penang modern art scene," in *Yong Mun Sen in Nanyang*, (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2023), 23.

December. Tuan Mong School graduation publication, with cover designed by Tchang, is published.

1937

February 21. SOCA holds an indoor painting session at Tuan Mong School.

March 28. SOCA holds an outdoor painting and picnic session at Pasir Panjang.

July 1. The Penang Art Society exhibition opens. SOCA sends Chuang U-Chow to Penang for the opening and to deliver other members' works. Tchang contributes two oil paintings and one sketch.

July 1–5. Invited to be a jury member responsible for selecting works for the first *Malayan Chinese Cartoons Exhibition* (首届马华漫画展) organised by the Youth Inspirational Society. He also authors "A History of Cartoons in Singapore," published in *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. Over 185 works by artists such as Chen Chong Swee, Yong Mun Sen (楊曼生) and Dai Yinlang (戴隱郎) are on display. Tchang contributes three works.

July 7. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, also known as the Lugou Bridge Incident (卢沟桥事变), sparks the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

In response, the comic and cartooning community in Shanghai forms the Cartoonists' National Salvation Association (漫画界救亡协会). The Association organises exhibitions and publishes works that expose the brutality of Japanese forces, aiming to rally public resistance. Notable members include Ye Qianyu, Lu Shaofei (鲁少飞) and Zhang Guangyu (张光宇).

July 10. Tchang and Chuang U-Chow start to contribute daily anti-Japanese war cartoons to *Nanyang Siang Pau*.

August 1–4. The second annual SOCA exhibition is held at the YWCA. 20 artists participate with 147 works. Tchang contributes 15 works.

August 13. Japanese forces invade Shanghai, capturing the city on November 12.

October 1–3. The Singapore-China War Relief Committee organises the First Charity Entertainment Fair at the Great World Amusement Park. Responding to the suffering and displacement of refugees, SOCA holds a charity exhibition of calligraphy and paintings for disaster relief. Alongside works donated by members such as Tchang, Yong Mun Sen and Chen Chong Swee, SOCA also solicits contributions from private collections and artists, raising over 2,000 Singapore dollars for the relief efforts.

November 5. Appointed as one of the seven members tasked with encouraging fellow industry peers to donate to the relief efforts at the second Singapore Advertisers Committee meeting.

November 11–12. Tchang, together with members of SOCA, Chuang U-Chow, Gao Zhensheng (高振声), Chen Chong Swee and Liu Xiande (刘先得), participates in a memorial for Sun Yat-sen.

December 4–6. SOCA organises the *National Salvation Cartoon Exhibition* (救亡漫画展览会) at New World Amusement Park. Over 100 works are on display.

December 22. Yong Mun Sen writes to SOCA, proposing the formation of a school of fine arts.¹³

December 24. SOCA welcomes sculptor Zheng Ke (郑可) at Happy Restaurant (快乐酒家).

1938

January 13. Plans to set up the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) are announced.¹⁴

March 10. NAFA opens with Lim Hak Tai (林学大) as founding principal. Tchang is appointed one of the Western painting teachers.

April. SOCA holds an outdoor painting session at NAFA.

April 5. SOCA hosts Wang Jiyuan (王济远), who comes to Singapore to organise an exhibition.

April 12. Tchang judges the Children's National Product Fashion competition, organised by the Youth Inspirational Society.

July 4. Appointed the head of the decorating committee for Hu Chengxiang's (胡呈祥) exhibition at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Proceeds are donated to the war-relief fund. Tchang is also one of the members in charge of pricing the artworks.

¹³ "Huaren meishu yanjiuhui dui chuangshe meizhuan xiaoshi," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, December 23, 1937, p. 7.

¹⁴ Yeo Mang Thong, "Yong Mun Sen in the paradise of art: between passion and obsession, hustle and toil," in *Yong Mun Sen in Nanyang*, (Singapore: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 2023), 47.

July 4–6. The third annual SOCA exhibition is held at the YWCA, followed by second showing from July 8–10 at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. 33 artists contribute 230 works. Tchang contributes 15 works.

Half of the proceeds are donated to the war-relief fund. Tchang, together with Lim Hak Tai and Liu Kang (刘抗), are part of the judging committee.

c. September–October.

Tchang and Chuang U-Chow serve on the decorating committee for the Nanyang Chinese Relief Fund Conference (南侨筹赈大会) at Hwa Chong School, with Tchang responsible for designing the venue decorations.

1939

February 9. Appointed vice president at the inaugural meeting of the alumni of Jin Shan Secondary School (金山中学), Chaozhou.¹⁵

February 11. SOCA welcomes Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻) at the Youth Inspirational Society.

March 24. Xu Beihong holds an exhibition to raise war-relief funds for the Second Sino-Japanese War. The exhibition includes works by Ren Bonian (任伯年), Zhao Shao Ang (赵少昂), Lim Hak Tai and Tchang. Tchang contributes two works: *Malay Person* 《马来人》 and *Tropical Scenery* 《热带风光》.

SOCA prepares for the exhibition at Tchang's house. That same year, SOCA also organises war-relief exhibitions for Weng Zhanqiu (翁占秋) and Shen Yibin (沈仪彬).

October 27–31. Kunming Literary Association Branch's *Cartoon and Woodcut Exhibition* (昆明文协分会漫画木刻展) is organised at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. 300 works are on show.

November 1. SOCA bids farewell to Xu Beihong as he departs for India to participate in an exhibition at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore.

November. Tchang and Zheng Ke are appointed to oversee the addition and alteration work for the Changi Naval Base Cinema.

¹⁵ "Nanyang jinzhong xiaoyouhui diyi ci choubeihuiyi tui zengzhengwen wei choubei zhengzhuren," *Nanyang Siang Pau*, February 9, 1939, p. 9.

December 11–13. The fourth annual SOCA exhibition is held at Victoria Memorial Hall, followed by a second showing from December 16–18 at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. 41 artists contribute over 200 works. Tchang contributes 15 works, including an oil painting *They commit these sins* 《奸淫劫杀》 which condemns the atrocities committed by the Japanese military forces. All proceeds are donated to the war-relief fund.

1940

January 14. SOCA holds an outdoor painting session.

February 9–15. Xin Hua Relief Fund organises a collaborative ink exhibition at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. SOCA members, Wu Zaiyan (吴再炎), Lim Hak Tai, Liu Kang and Chern Yuet Siu (陈月秀) contribute works.

March 31. Appointed a member of the organising committee for the *Singapore Chinese Schools Art Exhibition* (星洲华校图画展览会).

April 7. SOCA publishes the supplement *Art* 《艺术》 in *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. Alongside Dai Yinlang's *Today Art* 《今日艺术》,¹⁶ it is one of the key publications that enriches and advances art discourse in Singapore. The supplement runs for 16 issues, concluding on 28 July.

May. Tchang and Chuang U-Chow are appointed members of the Fujianese Overseas Associations' Drama Performance and Medicine Procurement Committee (闽侨各会馆演剧购药委员会).

c. June. Tchang, together with Vladimir Tretchikoff, is on the judging panel for the fourth Inter-School Art Exhibition.

July. Tchang is part of the decorating committee of the Singapore-China Relief Fund (星华筹赈会).

August. Tchang is part of the decorating committee for Wang Aiduo's (王霭多) war-relief fund exhibition.

December 19–21. The fifth annual SOCA exhibition is held at Victoria Memorial Hall. 33 artists contribute 207 works. Tchang contributes 15 works.

1941

January 18. SOCA welcomes Liu Haisu (刘海粟), who is in Singapore to hold an exhibition at the invitation of the war-relief fundraising committee. The exhibition is held from February 23 to March 4 with over 200 works.

¹⁶ *Today's Art* 《今日艺术》 commenced on January 10, 1937, running for 29 issues and concluding on August 13, 1937.

August. Johor's Teachers' annual report, with a cover designed by Tchang, is published.

September 11–16. SOCA and the Western Painting Club co-organise the *Fight for Liberty* (为自由而战) exhibition, held at Victoria Memorial Hall. An exhibition of works by The Singapore Art Club is also on display.

All proceeds are donated to the war-relief fund. Tchang contributes three paintings—two oils and a Chinese ink painting. The exhibition raises 1,100 Singapore dollars.

1942

February 15. The British surrender to Japanese forces, marking the beginning of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore until September 12, 1945.

February 21–March 4. The Sook Ching operation is launched. Chinese males between the ages of 18 and 50 are summoned to various mass screening centres and those suspected of being anti-Japanese are executed.

February. At dawn, Japanese soldiers raid Tchang's home. Men and youths are separated from women and children, lined up and taken away. It is the last time Tchang's family ever sees him. A prominent anti-Japanese activist

whose art exposes wartime violence, Tchang has long been on the occupiers' watch list. During the Sook Ching operation, he, together with Chuang U-Chow and Ho Kwong Yew—the first locally born Asian to become a registered architect and an arts patron—is executed.

1946

The sixth SOCA exhibition is held. A section is devoted to exhibit works by artists killed during the war, among them, Tchang.

September 29. SOCA changes its Mandarin name to Zhong Hua Mei Shu Yan Jiu Hui (中华美术研究会).

1947

Tchang's posthumous exhibition is held. Over 50 oil paintings and 50 paper works are exhibited.

1966

June 25–28. Singapore Art Society organises a group exhibition of works by Lim Hak Tai, Yong Mun Sen and Tchang at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. 26 works by Tchang are on display.

EXHIBITION VIEWS









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Raymond Chai

and the entire team at
National Gallery Singapore

A camel never tires and neither did Tchang Ju Chi.
A painter, cartoonist and activist, Tchang takes his place
as the inaugural artist in the Dalam Singapore series.
Trained in Shanghai and France, he was a driving force in
the making of Nanyang art, contributing to the art scene
of 1930s Singapore. This catalogue brings together rare
archival material and artworks, many unseen since 1966,
that offer a fuller picture of Tchang's life and his practice.
An essay by the curator presents a layered portrait of
Tchang, whose commitment to the arts and the cultural
and political life in Singapore was, above all, tireless.