

Christoph Harbsmeier

The Cartoonist Feng Zikai

Social Realism with a Buddhist Face

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Feng Zikai 1898—1975

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Feng Zikai's best friend, the distinguished abbot Guangqia, whose kindness and warmth I shall never forget.

The first draft of this book was finished in 1979. In view of the generous help I have received since then from so many kind people I cannot help feeling that I should have been able to write a better book. The responsibility for any omissions, inaccuracies and misjudgements that remain is entirely my own.

Introduction

Looking at Feng Zikai's cartoons is like eating Chinese olives, and the taste stays with you for a long time. Zhu Ziqing. (Bibliography no. 1.1: p. 14)

Feng Zikai was the founder and the unequalled master of the Chinese lyrical cartoon. Although Feng never renounced his Buddhist philosophy of life, he has won considerable public recognition since 1949: he was elected president of the prestigious Shanghai Association of Artists after 1949, and held many other honorary posts. During the cultural revolution (1966—1976) his cartoons and his popular writings were attacked as poisonous weeds, but on 26 June 1979 he was posthumously accorded a prominent place in the People's Heroes' Cemetery of Shanghai. As an artist and as an educator, Feng was an outstanding representative of the humanistic tradition in China. Within the context of current cultural policies he is now being recognized as a crucial figure in the world of modern Chinese art.

Nonetheless, Feng Zikai is not one of those illustrious Chinese artists whose works adorn the hallowed halls of Western Museums of Chinese art. In Western histories even of 20th-century Chinese art, he finds no special recognition. In the large encyclopedias of the world one looks in vain for his name.

Feng Zikai was an unrepentant outsider in the great Chinese tradition. He revolted against this tradition. He broke out of it, because he found it elitist, esoteric, morally irrelevant and philosophically sterile.

Feng Zikai was determined that his works should not just be admired by connoisseurs as sublime specimens of profound virtuosity. He wanted his art to be plain, to be humanly and morally constructive. Not the sort of thing that is mounted on expensive silk and distantly ad-

mired by a hushed and reverent public, but something conveniently reproduced on cheap paper. Something a working man might be tempted to buy for a few coppers and stick up on the wall of his ramshackle hut.

No wonder the learned art historians did not take to Feng Zikai when they were scouring the Far East for more exquisite and exotic *objets d'art* to display in luxurious museums and to discuss in lavish tomes or glossy journals, Feng's works were cheap, therefore probably worthless; they were plain, therefore presumably shallow; they were popular, and therefore surely vulgar.

Feng Zikai tried to break away from that perfectionism and from those idealizations of traditional Chinese art that were so popular among Western connoisseurs. He refused to work for the learned few. His favourite themes were not inspired poets but desperate beggars, not obedient 'young masters' but naughty children, not the harmony of nature but the subtle discords of the human predicament.

Feng's aim was unpretentious artistic honesty, not perfect technical proficiency. He wanted his cartoons to look haphazardly felicitous, humanly appealing. And, increasingly, he wanted his cartoons to be socially and educationally progressive, although he never became anything like a political cartoonist. His strength was neither in hostile satire nor in orthodox propaganda. His strength was in the fresh artistic lyricism, the unmediated artistic frankness that had its deep roots in his philosophical Buddhism.

Feng Zikai was thoroughly unpretentious and relaxed about his own work. I would find it grotesquely uncongenial to write a tight-lipped, well-disciplined scholastic commentary on his cartoons. My comments and interpretations in the main part of this book are unashamedly subjective reactions. They do not pretend to be authoritative, theoretical generalizations by an art historian. As I was writing this book it became increasingly obvious to me that my humble aim had to be to exhibit Feng's works in such a way that the reader should be tempted — and enabled — to relate directly and perceptively to the artistic subtleties of these cartoons. My comments serve this aim. My purpose is not to provide definitive interpretations. It is simply to make these cartoons *speak for themselves*, and *to a Western audience*.

This book will be mainly concerned with Feng's cartoons, but Feng is also well-known as a prose writer, especially as a writer of informal essays (*suibi*). His important collection *Yuanyuantang suibi* (Informal Essays from the Hall of Reasoned Contemplation) of 1931 has been

reprinted many times. (I have seen a 10th edition of 1946.) It has also been translated into Japanese by one of Japan's leading sinologists, Yoshikawa Kōjirō. In his introduction, Yoshikawa writes:

I feel Feng Zikai is the most artist-like artist in China today. This is not because he has many talents and skills, plays the piano, draws cartoons, as well as writing essays. What I like in him is his artistic honesty, his love for all things, the strength of his moral convictions. If today you want to find a writer like (the great classical pastoral poets) Tao Yuanming or Wang Wei he is the only one to choose. In the mixed and pretentious world of westernizing Chinese literature he stands out like a wild goose among hens. (2.13:6)

The omnivorous reader and prolific writer Zhao Jingshen, in an essay on Feng Zikai, is less than enthusiastic on a number of points, but he writes:

*He just writes in a plain style, and naturally his writing becomes beautiful. For purity, fluency and grace of style I am afraid only the poet Zhu Ziqing is his equal. (Cao Juren, ed. *Xiandai zuojia chuanyi*, Hong Kong, no date, p. 148).*

For the convenience of the sinologist I have added a detailed bibliography of the books that Feng Zikai has written or illustrated. Over 50 of these have appeared in the People's Republic of China since 1949. Several dozen anthologies of Feng's cartoons have been published. A number of them have been reprinted over and over again. Western art historians may have ignored Feng Zikai, but it seems to me that the public and the publishers of China have voted for him through their enthusiasm.

In spite of the daunting bibliography, this book was not conceived as a contribution only to the arcane science of sinology. Like Feng Zikai's cartoons it is intended for everyone.



增補重訂千家詩註解卷上

信州 謝枋得 疊山 選

瑯琊 王相 晉升 註

莆陽 鄭漢 濯之 梓

春日偶成 程顥

雲淡風輕近午天 傍花隨柳過前川

時人不識余心樂 將謂偷閒學少年

此明道先生自詠其閒居自得之趣言春日
雲烟淡蕩風日輕清時當近午天氣融和傍
隨于花柳之間憑眺于山川之際正喜眼前
風景會心自樂恐時人不識謂余偷閒學少
年之遊蕩也○朱程顥字伯潛河
南人諡明道先生從祀孔子廟庭

春日 朱熹

勝日尋芳泗水濱 無邊光景一時新

七言千家詩上

The first page of a cheap illustrated edition of the *Poems of a Thousand Poets*, which Feng may well have copied in his childhood.

1901, which was appropriately celebrated in grand style. Unfortunately, the public examination system was soon to be abolished, however, which greatly reduced the value of the *juren* degree. Feng Zikai's father had no alternative but to use his learning in teaching. At the age of six Feng Zikai began studying the *Three Character Classic* with his father, and he soon passed on to the *Poems of a Thousand Poets*. On the occasion of entering school, the boy was given a new name: *Run* 'Embellishing'.

When Feng Zikai was no more than 8 years old or so, his father died, aged only 42. Feng remembered him as a rather distant and insensitive man, strict to the point of cruelty, out of touch with his own household, disappearing whenever he could to the opium dens in the vicinity. Feng always remembered vividly an episode when he was severely rebuked by his father for colouring the illustrations in his *Poems of a Thousand Poets*, and how he later traced traditional Chinese book-illustrations through thin paper. He recalls with bitterness how all his early 'artistic' activities had to go on much against his father's will, in a dark place under a staircase, with the assistance of a maid (Hongying, whom he never forgot), and with the connivance of his mother.

Naturally, Feng became very attached to the women in the household, to his mother, to his sisters, and not least of all to the servants, who showed solidarity with their little master. Women played a decisive role in the formation and the fostering of Feng's artistic sensitivity, as well as in the formation of his personality.

By the age of 13, Feng had developed his technique of tracing traditional block-prints to considerable perfection. Apart from the illustrations to *Poems of a Thousand Poets* he had also traced the complete section on human figures in the celebrated handbook of Chinese painting *Mustard Seed Garden (Jieziyuan, renwuhuapu)*.

One day, Feng's class-mates in school were quarrelling over one of Feng's copies, and a teacher found out what was happening. He was impressed by Feng's work and demanded an enlarged portrait of Confucius to hang up over the entrance of the classroom. This was a real challenge, but with the help of his elder sister Feng was able to deliver a passable enlarged portrait of the Master. Reminiscing much later, Feng Zikai suspects that it was the praise he won for this utterly unoriginal work that inspired him to become an artist. In any case, it was now impossible for him to get rid of the nickname he had gained early in school: *huajia* 'The Painter'.

Apart from traditional Chinese woodblock prints Feng felt a special

fascination for the clay figurines of folklore figures, Boddhisattvas, Monkey Sun Wukong, the White Snake Spirit, etc. etc., which children made themselves from moulds that were cheaply available in the market-places. Feng simply collected *all* the moulds he could get hold of and used dyes from the family shop to decorate the figurines. These little clay figurines always retained a nostalgic value for him. Later, they turned up again and again in his cartoons. Feng Zikai became convinced that toys were a very important combination of artistic, educational and industrial aspects. He came to consider them as an important form of popular art.

Another thing that aroused Feng's keen interest were the traditional decorated lanterns which were made for the big lantern festival to be held once every five years in his little home town, Shimenwan.

However, Feng did not grow up as an ethereal young artist. There were harsh realities to contend with. At the age of 15 he had to cut off his pig-tail: this was a major crisis in the eyes of his loving mother, who shed bitter tears bemoaning that the son of a *juren* should have to suffer such abject humiliation. The boy had to kneel down in front of his father's picture and ask forgiveness for this gross impiety. The Feng family was in an economically precarious position after the death of the head of the household, although they clearly continued to enjoy the status of a family of learning. Mainly for financial reasons the 15-year-old Feng was promised in marriage to the daughter of a rich family in Shimenwan, Xu Limin, who was two years his elder.

Studies

In 1914 Feng graduated from primary school with excellent results. His schoolmaster suggested that he take a teacher training course in Hangzhou, and this view prevailed in the end against alternative suggestions of a business career. Feng sat entrance examinations for a trade school, a grammar school, and teacher training school, and gained admission to all three places, but chose in the end to enter the First Teacher Training College in Hangzhou.

The First Teacher Training College had about 500 students, and it was an extremely crowded place. Discipline had to be strict, competition for what there was by way of food was intense. Feng was not a good competitor, being rather fumbling in the use of chopsticks. Fortunately, he was a natural vegetarian and thus did not have to enter the fray for meat on the rare occasions when it was served. What Feng



A world of things with emotional presence (1942)

resented most were the classes in — semi-militarized — physical education.

The First Teacher Training College in Hangzhou must count as quite a distinguished school. It could boast of teachers like Lu Xun and the great scholar Ma Xulun, and among Feng's own teachers there were two thoroughly remarkable men: the writer Xia Mianzun, and Li Shutong, who was to become one of China's most distinguished Buddhist monks in this century. Another teacher was Dan Bucheng, who chose for Feng the name under which he became famous: Zikai.

In Hangzhou, Feng was no longer required to do traditional portraits of Confucius, but portraits of Homer. Not portraits of the legendary beauty Xi Shi, but of Venus. Feng complains that he spent hours and hours trying in vain to do sketches of Laocoon. And he never managed to do a decent Venus. Nonetheless, these exercises led to an important breakthrough for him, because he was asked to draw *things*, not redraw pictures. He says he developed an intense sensitivity for the forms around him. He writes 'All sorts of forms gained a special attrac-

tiveness for me, like that of people's faces. The pattern of mud on the ground, of clouds in the sky, or of cracks in the wall, or drops of water on the table, all these things suddenly related to me.'

Feng reports that he gained a sense of aesthetic quality that changed his attitude to many everyday things. He gained a sense for simplicity. And as a characteristically mundane candid detail he tells us that he gave his two large boxes full of pictures collected from cigarette boxes to a boy from the neighbourhood...

Feng acknowledges that there really was no place in the desperate China of the twenties and thirties for his aestheticism, but he claimed that he simply *needed* what he so often describes as 'food for the eye': 'not aristocratic, elegant and profound works of art, but neat, balanced, natural, and pleasing sights for the eye' (3.18:85). His interest in art, he said, was in the end the result of this — at times desperate — need.

Feng Zikai's art and music master, Li Shutong, was undoubtedly the most profoundly influential person in his life. It was Li Shutong who encouraged Feng to become a painter. And it was Li Shutong who inspired Feng's abiding interest in music and musicology. In fact, Feng concentrated so much on the subjects taught by Li Shutong that his examination results in other subjects were often disastrously bad. Feng ended up ranked as number 20 in his form. But his mind was made up. He wanted to become an artist and an educator. He wanted to follow in his master's footsteps.

Now Li Shutong had received a formative part of his education in Japan, where he had studied both Western art and Western music. Like so many others, he was westernized via Japan. But he had returned from Japan determined to create in China a culture that was both vigorously modern and essentially Chinese.

Although Feng was by now married to the rich girl from his home village, he was a relatively poor young man. But following in his master's footsteps, he was determined to seek education in Japan. Borrowing money from friends wherever he could, he managed to leave for Tokyo in the spring of 1921. For financial reasons his trip could last no longer than 10 months. But by all accounts these ten months were truly crammed with activity: besides studying at a school of Western painting, Feng took intensive lessons in English, learnt some German, took violin lessons, immersed himself in Japanese literature, haunted bookshops, and frequented museums. Here for the first time he demonstrated his astonishing capacity for work, of which his

bibliography bears such eloquent witness. (It is ironic, incidentally, that Feng regarded all his work as the fruit of leisure.)

Artistic development

We can get a pretty precise idea of Feng's artistic studies from his plain, commonsensical books *History of Western Art* (*Xiyang meishushi*, 1928) and *Composition* (*Goutufa ABC*, 1935). However, the most important thing Feng learned in Japan had nothing to do with Western art; it was the old Japanese tradition of the *manga*. (The word *manga* is the source for the modern Chinese loan-word *manhua* 'cartoon'.) There certainly were political cartoons in China long before 1925, but neither the concept nor the Japanese artistic technique were common in China at the time. In his detailed article *On Japanese Cartoons* (3.15:173—198) Feng tells us in detail what it was that fascinated him in the art of the Japanese cartoon.

There was something in the Japanese *manga* tradition that corresponded very naturally to Feng's artistic and philosophical inclinations. It was basically a popular, an 'unbuttoned' art form, which stood in defiant opposition to official and 'respectable' art. The *manga* represented an alternative tradition, an iconoclastic subculture that valued spontaneity, not perfectionist virtuosity. Often the *manga* were provocatively vulgar in subject matter. They were mostly concerned with everyday things or with grotesque fantasies. They were full of — often crude — burlesque humour. The rich history of the Japanese *manga* goes right back to the times of the Chinese Song dynasty, so that the tradition of the *manga* as a well-defined separate art form is a great deal older in Japan than in the West — a point of historical fact which Feng Zikai noted with some satisfaction.

In his very important book *The Art of the Cartoon* (3.17) he shows his great interest in the Japanese tradition. By comparison, his survey of the history of the cartoon in the West — here as elsewhere — is standardized and seems lifeless: it seems he just wasn't terribly interested. Nonetheless, he mentions Daumier with affection, also occasionally George Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz, whose works Lu Xun had done so much to introduce to the Chinese. What Feng admired in people like Daumier and Käthe Kollwitz was their uncompromising social concern. With Daumier he might well have said *Il faut être de son temps*. Like Daumier, Feng refused to compete with the Delacroix's and the Corot's of his world. Echoing Daumier, Feng might well have said *Oui, Qi*

Baishi, mais ce n'est pas ça! But, all the same, the differences go deep: Daumier commented extensively on individual political events and personalities and made caricatures of political figures, while the Buddhist Feng Zikai was of a more philosophical frame of mind, less interested in ephemeral things. Daumier goes in for a more dramatic comic effect, the quick laugh, the biting satirical attack. Feng provokes the quiet smile, the philosophical indignation.

Often, Daumier's humour borders on the burlesque, and in this Daumier is close to the Japanese cartoonists. This sort of exuberant humour is quite alien to Feng Zikai. At the same time Feng's artistic style remains equally distinct from everything I have seen of Japanese *manga*. The uniqueness of Feng Zikai, to my mind, lies in his combination of a light-hearted, relaxed artistic form with philosophical and almost religious semantic depth and seriousness.

At its best, his work has the pleasing, bland bitterness of the famous Longjing tea from his home town, Hangzhou. But he never achieved Daumier's precision of individual characterization or anything like Daumier's versatile virtuosity as a draftsman.

It is indeed remarkable how little Feng's theoretical training in Western artistic techniques and concepts impinged on the freshness and immediacy of his early creative work. In his marvellously informative *A Teacher's Diary* (2.12: 125) Feng reports how, upon his return from Japan, he amused himself by making little portraits of his naughty children, and how he got into the habit of illustrating single lines of poetry, which was all he tended to remember of traditional Chinese poetry. Feng began publishing these things in the journal *Women* (We) apparently already late in 1924. The scholar Zheng Zhenduo, already then a formidable figure on the Shanghai literary scene, was so impressed by Feng's pictures that he solicited some for his influential journal *Wenxuezhoubao* (Literary Review).

Zheng was a specialist in traditional Chinese book-illustration, and by and large he took an extremely dim view of published artistic works during the twenties (1.1:3). In view of this it is remarkable that he was even prepared to visit the quite unknown teacher Feng Zikai to see some more of those pictures that he was printing in his *Literary Review* (1.1:4).

Because of Feng's obvious stylistic links with Japanese *manga* the editors called Feng's work a *manhua*. Within a few years, the term *Zikai manhua* (Zikai's cartoons) became a household word among Chinese readers of magazines and newspapers.

Feng's artistic breakthrough came some time around 1924/5. At that time he was still making rather juvenile, intensely romantic and literary cartoons, often based on lines of Classical Chinese poetry. He was, after all, a very literary man. One is sure his students considered him a *shudaizi* or bookworm.

It was when Feng had the courage to break out of the world of rarefied poetic moods, when, inspired by Japanese models, he turned his artistic attention to the everyday things around him, that his cartoons gained a truly popular appeal.

And the world around him, the world closest to him, was his family, above all his children. It was through his cartoons of his own children that Feng Zikai became really popular in China, and it is for these that he is mainly remembered today.

In his writings Feng talks freely about a great many events in his life, but I found no hint on the circumstances of his marriage. Apparently, the marriage was arranged by his family, partly for financial reasons. However this may be, Feng had altogether six children by his wife, Xu Limin, and on the whole he took a very keen interest in their education, although he felt free to leave his family for lengthy study tours. He always thought of himself as an artist first of all, not a family man. Feng was painfully aware that as an artist and a grammar school teacher he lived a rather marginal and isolated life. But the one down-to-earth thing he had an intense inside knowledge of was his own family life, his own children.

Already in 1925 his first collection of cartoons was published under the title *Zikai manhua* (Feng Zikai's Cartoons) and probably on the strength of this publication Feng was invited to lecture in various institutions of higher learning around Shanghai from 1926 onwards.

Feng's first collection of cartoons is particularly interesting for its many prefaces by leading intellectuals of the time. From the first preface by the scholar Zheng Zhenduo it emerges that he, as the editor of the *Wenxuezhoubao* (Literary Review) magazine, took the initiative for the publication of the work. Also involved in the selection of cartoons for the collection was Mao Dun.

In another long preface the writer and educator Xia Mianzun congratulates Feng on combining traditional lyricism with earthy realism.

There are also enthusiastic prefaces by Zhu Ziqing, Liu Xunyu, Fang Guangshou, and Ding Yanyong. In addition there is a very flattering postface by the literary critic Yu Pingbo, who, at the time, did not even know Feng Zikai personally.



Cover for Zhu Ziqing's first collection of poetry, published in 1924 and illustrated by Feng Zikai.

The clear purpose of this first collection of cartoons was to launch Feng on an artistic career. From now on, Feng was not just nicknamed 'the painter.' He became a professional artist.

Being an artist, however, was not something one could normally make a living by. Feng had to work as an art teacher in a wide variety of universities, art schools, grammar schools, etc. to make ends meet — and to pay the debts he had incurred during his period of study in Japan.

Teaching and writing

By and large, Feng taught without great enthusiasm. More often than not, he felt that teaching was a burden that distracted him from his real vocation, that of a creative artist. Moreover, traditional educational

methods in China were not to his liking. By our standards he held a very liberal view on education, a view which at this time was considered not progressive but extremist.

Owing to his uncompromising frankness and wit, and also because of his growing fame as a man of letters, Feng's lectures were tremendously popular much of the time. (Later, in 1939, when he began lecturing at the University of Zhejiang at Yishan, his lectures had to be moved to the large dining hall to make room for the large audience. Feng always remained too shy to relish this sort of popularity.)

Fortunately, Feng was in the habit — and under pressure — to release many of his speeches to be printed. Reading these one is impressed by his discipline of presentation and his ability to simplify things for young people — when he was putting his mind to it, that is. At other times one gets the unambiguous impression that Feng just wasn't in the mood, that he was simply going through the motions of lecturing. One has no doubt that quite a few of his writings were published for purely financial reasons, or because he was yielding to pressure from enthusiastic publishers.

It is disarming to realize that Feng did not even bother to hide this latter fact. Once a desperate student came to his room and poured out his heart about an awful weekend he had had at a rich man's place. The formality of it all had killed off every natural communication. Feng listened, and when the student had finished he suggested that he should write down the student's story, and if he managed to sell it they would share the profit. In the end, Feng did sell the story. And the story included an account of how it got published, and who was to share the profit!

It turns out that Feng's reservations about public speeches were quite deep seated. In point of fact these reservations apply also to other public occasions like large parties etc. The root of all this is in Feng's almost religious cultivation of honesty. It is not by chance that he called one of his important collections of informal essays *Honesty Collection* (*Shuaizhenji* 2.13). And Feng felt that in public speeches as well as at parties there was no real place for honesty, frankness, candidness. There had to be polite compromise.

At one point, Feng makes his ideals beautifully clear: *'When people have conversations they talk this way and that, aim for completeness, guard their secrets, have their deep intentions, like in a game of chess. This is too tense for me, too frightening. I just have to remain silent. — Where does one find friends who do not talk as if they were in a game*

of chess, but unfold their minds to each other like flowers under the sun?' (2.4: 147.)

It is true: there is an undeliberate, almost haphazard, straightforwardness about a great many of Feng's writings which proves that he was trying to live up to his standards. There is an earnestness in his style that one never suspects of mannerism. His style is as relaxed as his much-admired calligraphy. His manner is that of writing things down pretty much as they come to his mind, haphazardly, but with the natural grace of a thoughtful man. His prose is so remarkably easy to read because it seems to be so utterly uncontrived.

Feng quotes with obvious satisfaction from the ancient Book of Rites: 'Great music is plain, great ritual is easy.'

We can now understand Feng's fascination for children at a deeper level. What fascinated him in children was that their actions were so easy, that in their words it was as if they were unfolding their minds to each other like flowers under the sun.

The writer Feng Zikai must, I think, be considered primarily a master of the informal essay (*suibi*), but he has in fact also written a collection of pure fiction: *Dr X Sees Ghosts* (Shanghai 1948). These are children's stories, often with a very clear though unobtrusive moral message. *The Story of the Five Dollar Note*, in the spirit of H. C. Andersen, continues to be popular today and was recently reprinted in *A Selection of Fairy Tales* (Tonghuaxuan, Jiaoyuchubanshe, Shanghai 1978). Also included in *Dr X Sees Ghosts* is Feng's version of an ancient Buddhist fable *The Pot of Oil* (No 606 in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*): The fable is about a man who is forced to carry a pot filled to the brim with oil from one end of a city to another in order to save his life. By concentrating absolutely on his task and disregarding the bustling world around him, the man succeeds. The fable recommends single-minded concentration on the important things in life. It is not difficult to see why Feng was tempted to produce his own version of it for the edification of children.

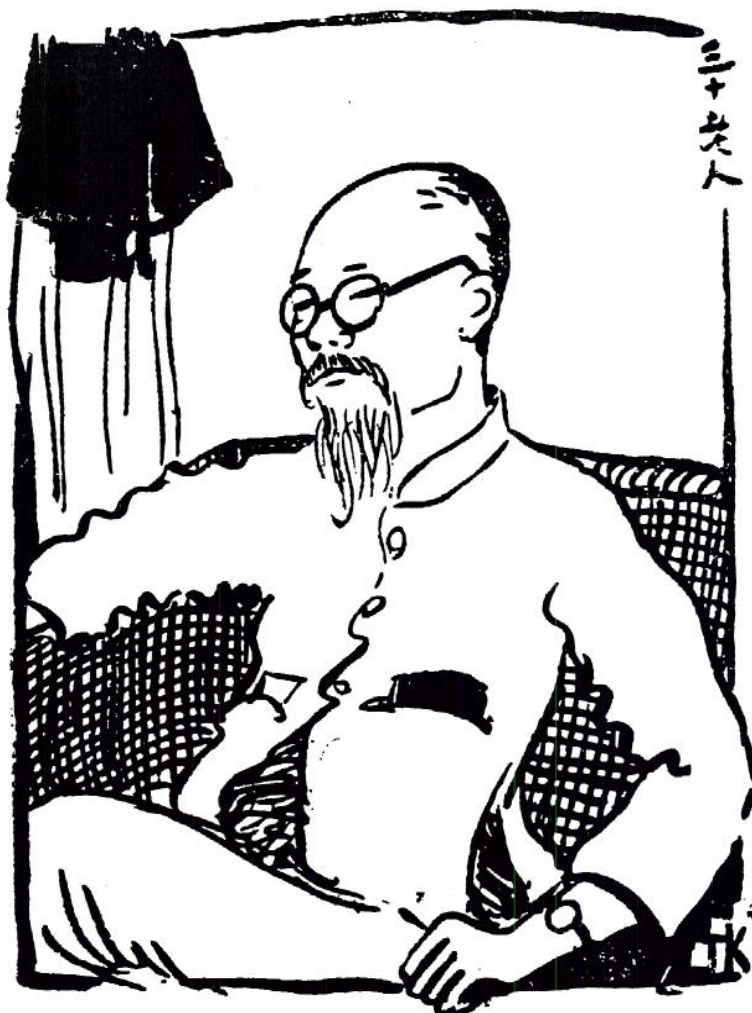
In his essay *Taking Inspiration from a Child* Feng says that he asked his son: 'What do you like best?' Reply: 'Being a refugee?'

'What's being a refugee?'

'It's all about being with brothers and sisters, and with grandmother. Seeing the river-boats with wheels!'

Feng ends his essay like this: 'The child has given me an important hint tonight: he is able to leave aside the web of causal relations between things, see their true form.' (2.1: 11).

An old man at thirty
(1928)
Note the sketch-book in
his pocket.



It is this untrammelled child-like directness of perception that Feng considered as essential also for the artist. And the artist's aim, he thought, must be to integrate the unmediated freshness of the child's response into a harmonious adult life. The purpose of art, then, was to promote this life of immediate responsiveness.

Feng's reference to the 'web of causal relations between things' is not incidental. It is explained in the informal essay entitled *Cutting the Net* (*Jian wang*). As usual, Feng takes an everyday situation as his starting point. An uncle comes home from a pleasure trip to an amusement park and is simply delighted by all the marvellous things he has seen. 'It is really wonderful to go on a pleasure trip', he exclaims enthusiastically. Nonetheless he ends up with a crucial remark: 'But as soon as one thinks of all the money spent, the pleasure is spoilt.' (2.1: 1).

There is nothing particularly interesting about this very ordinary remark, you might have thought. But Feng takes a special interest in the ordinary. His uncle's remark leads him to some plain reflections: 'Whenever I happen to travel by boat or by bus, or when I buy something, I always feel life is interesting, I feel grateful to the workers

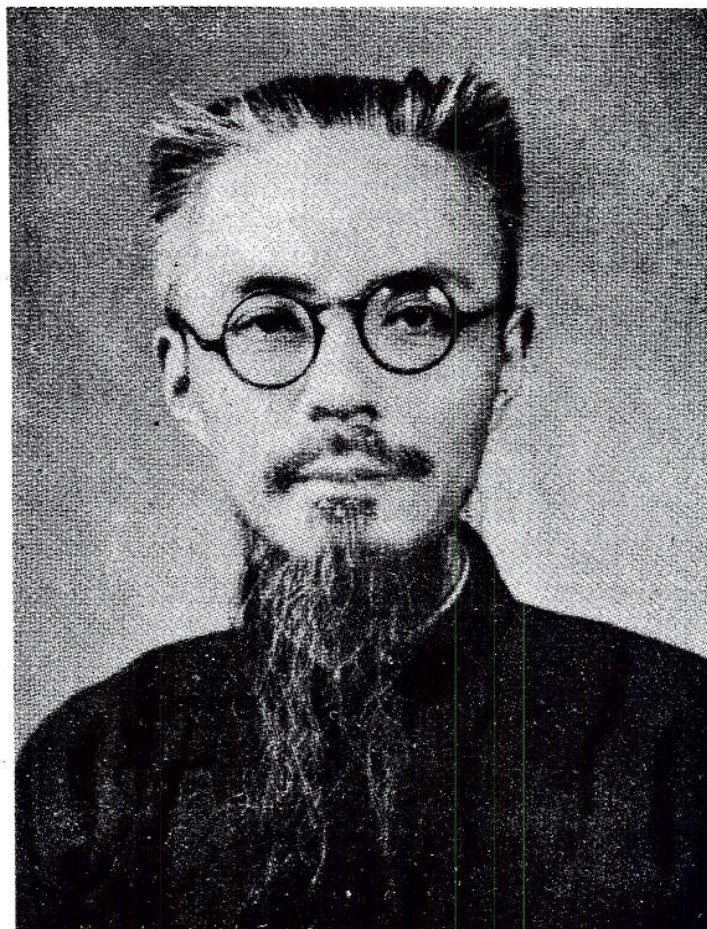
who have made the things I use, and to the salesmen who provide them for me. As long as I don't think of the money I feel that way. But as soon as I think of money as a condition for the exchange of these things, more than half my pleasure is gone. . . . Prices bring things into relation with money, and evidently everything that brings a thing into relation with other things in a way impedes the true intrinsic significance of that thing. Thus if we want to understand the true intrinsic significance of things, then we must inevitably disregard their relations of this sort to other things in the world. . . . Regarding grain in the world one must not think of it as raw material for bread; regarding oranges on a plate one must not come to think of them as a means to relieve one's thirst; regarding beggars in the street one must not think that they are poor people who are begging for money.' (2.1: 3).

Feng invites us to take things at face value, not to consider them in terms of usefulness to man, or their relations to each other. He wants us to experience the beggar not as a general type, but as a unique individual who demands sympathy here and now. (Incidentally: can one really love a class?) Feng sees the things of this world enwrapped by a distracting web of innumerable causal and teleological relations, and he wants to cut this net. 'Art and religion', he concludes, 'are no more to me than the knife with which I seek to cut this web of the world.' (2.1: 4). Note Feng's reference here to religion. It is clear that Feng's was a contemplative artistic religion. Religion was not an isolated area in his thought. It was integrated into his philosophy of art.

Buddhism

Art and religion belong together for Feng, because they both enable him to relate to things in a direct way unmediated by egotistic considerations of usefulness or the endless objective considerations of scientific explanation. Through art and literature Feng feels liberated towards that unmediated sympathy and empathy for things which to him is the essence of Buddhism. This sympathy in turn was the source of and the driving force behind his humanitarian personal form of socialism. No one in the long history of Chinese art has fashioned more loving and more moving portraits of beggars than Feng Zikai. These portraits never became propaganda posters, but they were intended to prepare the ground for social reform.

Let us now look more closely at Feng's connections with Buddhism. He tells us that he was brought up by his father as a strict vegetarian in



Feng Zikai at
the time of his
conversion to
Buddhism.

his early youth, and he grew up to become a non-religious vegetarian with an intense physical dislike for meat. (All his daughters, none of them adherents of Buddhism, have also acquired this natural vegetarianism).

Feng was converted to a Buddhist philosophy of life under the influence of his art teacher, Li Shutong, who was to become one of modern China's most distinguished monks. At the age of 29, Feng made a formal vow of allegiance to the Buddhist faith before Li Shutong. Li gave him the Buddhist name Yingxing, which translates as 'child-like action'.

Feng had a boundless respect for his former art teacher, and indeed Li Shutong regarded Feng as his leading Buddhist disciple. Nonetheless, Feng's diaries show that he never became deeply involved in Buddhist meditation, and his interest in Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist religious practice was limited. (I cannot neglect to mention reports, though, that during the Cultural Revolution Feng survived some of the worst interrogations by going into a mild trance.)

While Li Shutong was deeply involved in Buddhist organizations,

Feng was almost entirely out of sympathy with the official Buddhist hierarchy and popular Buddhist beliefs. Feng's article *Fo wu ling* (Buddha Has No Magic Power, *Kangzhanwenyi* 1938, vol 2, no. 4, p. 59) provides a fascinating insight into this subject. Feng tells us that his beloved Hall of Reasoned Contemplation (*Yuanyuantang*), the house where he had written so many of his famous Buddhist informal essays, was burnt down in a Japanese air attack. An old aunt had commented on this, saying that the Buddha clearly had no magical power, otherwise he would surely have seen to it that this hall of Buddhist contemplation was spared. Relentlessly, Feng castigates the superstitious form of Buddhism that gives rise to such considerations. He emphasizes that he has no respect whatever for those (in the established Buddhist organizations) who seek happiness only for themselves and their families through Buddhism.

In the only outburst of real anger I found in all of Feng's writings he describes the superstitious majority of Buddhist apparatchiks as stupid madmen and anti-Buddhist. He wishes he were not a vegetarian himself, so that he would not be associated with this superstitious egotistic bunch of Buddhist merchants of luck, he adds in a fit of rage. And remember: these are the words of a devoted religious vegetarian, the author of six remarkable volumes of Buddhist cartoons entitled *Hushenghuaqi* (Collection on the Preservation of Life).

What then is the essence of Feng's Buddhism, if it is not the superstitious dogmas of popular religion, and not the monkish mysticism of Li Shutong? The essence of Feng's Buddhist philosophy is difficult to pin down. Nowhere, as far as I know, does Feng formally expound his Buddhist beliefs.

But consider now Feng's informal essay entitled *Jian* (Gradually) written before his formal conversion to Buddhism. The essay begins like this:

Nothing contributes more to the smooth passage of our life-span than the gradualness of change. Nothing is a more effective method for the creator of things for cheating mankind than instituting the gradualness of change. . . As children grow up, the parents who see them all the time do not notice the change, but the distant relatives who rarely get a chance to see them can hardly recognize them when they see them again. On New Year's Eve last year we tried to observe how a narcissus flower comes to flower in candlelight, and that certainly was an idiotic thing to try and do! If the narcissus blossom really had blossomed for us, that would have been a breach of a principle of nature. . .

Here are a few of Feng's concluding reflections:

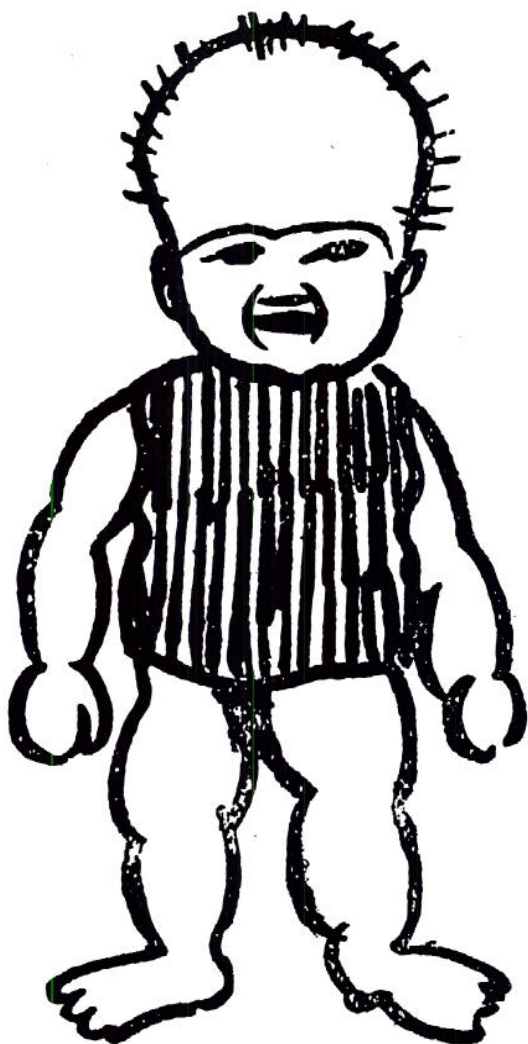
It is as if ordinary people's understanding of time is only sufficient to grasp the time a journey by boat or by train lasts. The life-span of a hundred years they cannot embrace in their understanding. They get caught up in parts of this life-span and have no grasp of the whole. Try and observe the passengers on a train. There is always an enlightened person who is willing to sacrifice a moment's comfort and yield his seat to a weaker person in order to secure his peace of mind (or in order to gamble for a moment's praise from the on-lookers). Some people when they see a crowd struggling to get out of a train first, will stand back, and perhaps they will shout 'Take it easy! Everybody will get off the train in the end!' But the passengers in that great train that is society or the world very rarely are enlightened in this way. Therefore I feel the life-span of a hundred years has been fixed too long. Given that people are as they are today, if one had fixed for them a life as long as a train journey or a journey by boat, one could probably have reduced many of the exacerbating and tragic struggles in life, and people would be polite as they are in trains, and more peaceful, one might think. . . (2.1: 5—11).

On occasions, we do find religious outbursts in Feng's writings, as when in 1925 his new-born son dies. Feng described what happened a year later:

Last year my wife had a difficult delivery. At midnight a little child came silently into the world. The doctor wrapped it in a blanket, took it out for me to see, and he said: 'The child is all right. Just born a bit early, that's all.' When I caught an excited glimpse of what the doctor was holding, the piece of flesh suddenly jerked. The chest protruded. The four limbs struggled desperately, like a frog trying to free itself. The doctor and I got frightened and held our breaths for quite some time. Then the piece of flesh did not move any more. As time went on it got cold. . .

And here is Feng's reaction:

A Nan! I will sigh for you no more! I will praise the honesty and wisdom of your life. In fact the 'I' that I am is not really myself any more. All the man-made things have blocked up my mind. Have covered up my basic nature. Have made me get used to the tussle and the race on the ball that is the earth. Have caused me gradually to get used to it, find it natural, pleasing, find it nothing to be surprised about. In fact my basic nature was already lost when I came into this world, it is chopped off. There is nothing left of it. . . In your one jerk I



飞兒

The lost child (1925)
(A portrait of A Nan)

see in a glimpse the whole of human life. But all these are idle thoughts. The life and death of man are like the rise and fall of the waves in the sea. All the phenomena of the world are just manifestations of the one big life. A Nan! Your and my fortune are not superficial. You are me, I am you. There is nothing that is you or me. (2.1: 71—75).

By and large, Feng's writings are thoroughly secular. Considering his high status in the Buddhist community, one might even say his writings were *defiantly* secular. And while Feng was strict in his vegetarianism (except that he did eat chicken and crabs, and did not mind his food being cooked in pots where meat had been prepared before), he had considerable problems with the Buddhist injunction to abstain from wine. Throughout the 1930s he tried to overcome his old habit of drinking *Shaoxinghuangjiu*, wine from the home town of his friend Lu Xun. Occasionally he even declares in his writing that he has won the battle. But his diaries from the late thirties prove the contrary, and in fact Feng drank regularly — with moderation — throughout his later life. Interestingly enough, he *never* did any artistic work under the influence of wine.

Social realism

We have seen that Feng's religion was undogmatic and superficially non-religious. We shall find that his social realism is equally undogmatic. For Feng social realism comes into the picture when the untrammelled responsive eye of the artist turns from his favoured objects, children and poetic landscapes, willows and swallows, to social life at large. The famous literary critic Yu Pingbo nicknamed his friend Feng Zikai Feng Yanliu (Feng Swallow-willow) in the 1920s, but during the thirties these things became background features of his cartoons. Then the artist Feng, still with the unquestionable authority of the perceptive child, points an accusing finger at the blatant social injustices of this world, by simply drawing things as they are. Feng's cartoon depicting a child asking her middle-class mother 'Why is that beggar standing there like that?' illustrates the profound connection between the idyllic children's cartoons and Feng's later social cartoons of the thirties.

Feng's conversion to social realism can thus be seen as a clear logical consequence of his artistic programme, not *just* as a matter of artistic fashion of the time. But the cartoonist Huang Mao in his outstandingly useful book *Manhua yishu jianghua* (Lectures on the Art of the Cartoon) simply notes that Feng started as a representative of the Japanese school of *manga*, but later merged into the main stream of more political westernized Chinese caricaturists (p. 24).

Obviously, Feng was influenced by the increasing politicization of art during the thirties. Nonetheless it remains deeply significant that his cartoons never became ephemerally political like those of his contemporaries. In fact, it was for this very reason that Feng never commanded very much respect among the truly politicized cartoonists like Huang Mao. Very largely, Huang Mao ignores Feng in his lectures. Feng, in turn, largely ignored the politicized cartoonists' associations that were being organized in Shanghai from 1927 onwards.

The left-wing writer Hu Feng expressed a widely held feeling when he wrote in 1935:

'We have all enjoyed Feng Zikai's cartoons in our grammar school days. The impressions of pictures like 'Bao Bao has two feet, the chair has four' are still with me to this day. But the new cartoons that he is publishing in the journals are, frankly speaking, insufficient in meaning. . . . It is as if Feng Zikai earnestly desires to depict poor people during the last years, but if he does not show the connections of this poverty with the world around it, then the images will not emerge clearly.' Chen Wangdao, *Xiaopinwen he manhua*, pp. 175—6 (Cf. also Rou

阿寶兩隻脚
椅子四隻脚



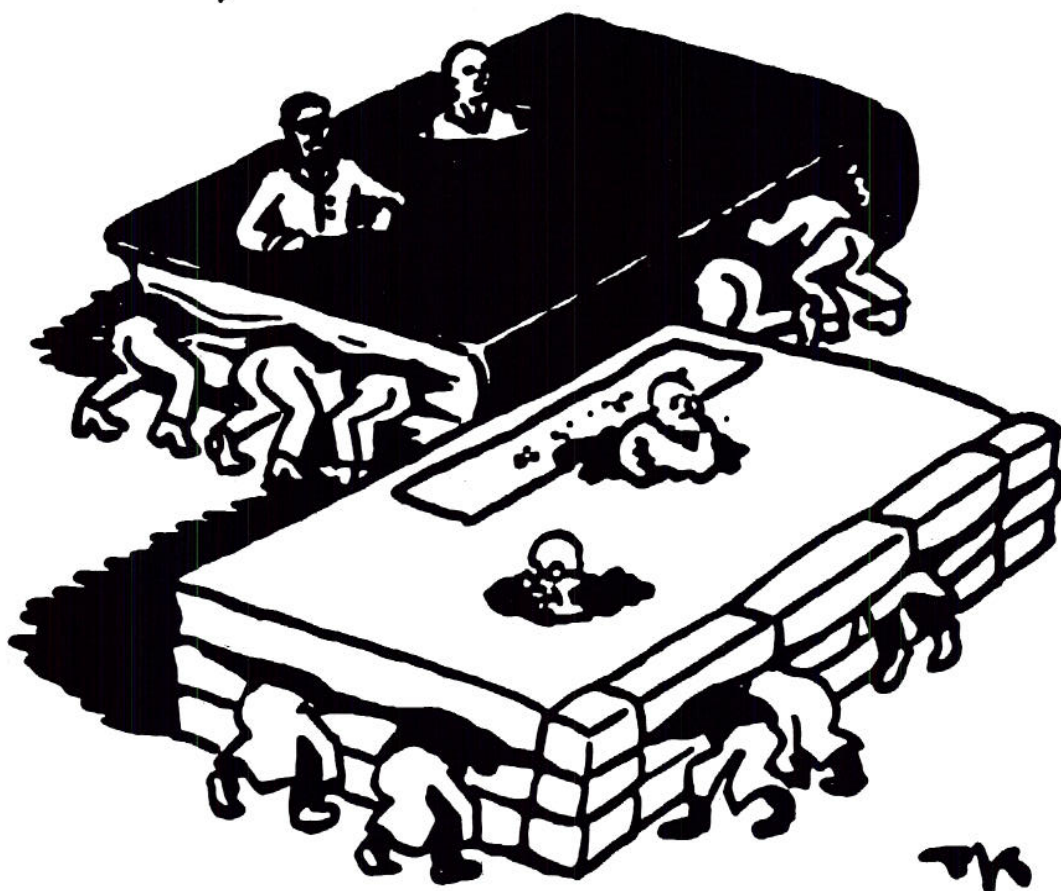
A Bao has two feet, the chair has four.

Shi's article *Feng Zikai's spineless attitudes* in the journal *Mengya*, vol. 1, no. 4, April 1930).

Feng's 'social realism' was essentially not political but artistic. His indignation at the social injustices and atrocities of his time is like that of a powerless child. In the last resort there is no practical or political perspective in it. (Cf. 2.13.) From some points of view this may be his weakness. But in a strange way it also remains his main strength. I can only repeat: he speaks with the unquestionable *authority* of a thoughtful child.

However, it is important not to carry these considerations on Feng's apolitical attitude too far. Although Feng was not a political activist or an ideological propagandist, his solidarity with the struggle for socialism was never in doubt, not even during the earliest stages of his career. For example, he regularly designed cover pages for the left wing journal *Zhongguo qingnian* (Chinese Youth) as early as 1926. (Cf. Bi Ke-guan's interesting article in *Meishu* no 2, 1980.)

鑽研



Thorough study(1935).

If Feng Zikai was a bookworm, he was in any case not one of the conventional kind.

From what I have said so far one might get the impression that Feng was a talented man, but unfortunately rather short of common sense. An impractical man. A bookworm. A philosopher artist.

But in his writings Feng emerges in fact as a man with both feet firmly on the ground, certainly with a great deal of common sense. His comments tend to be — often defiantly — down to earth. They are *never* abstract. Always related to concrete things, observations or

preferably experiences. I should like to illustrate this by an article with a title that could be taken straight from today's People's Daily in Peking: *Shenru minjian yishu* (Deeply Entering Popular Art). In this essay, Feng begins with the question 'How many people can really understand the great artists of China?' Of course he finds that there are very few. But then Feng goes on to ask 'How many people can really understand these progressive publications "For the masses" from the cities?' And here he finds that these progressive journals are really no more than platforms for discussion among the intellectuals themselves. Feng admits he belongs to the elitist tradition in art, although he is trying to break out. He does not really know the working people's life from the inside. He complains that he rarely has any opportunities to mix naturally with the common people. He was in fact grateful that the anti-Japanese war to some extent relieved his isolation by forcing him into natural contact with the common people. He admits he has no deep understanding of their psychology.

All these, one feels, are more than just ritual admissions. This essay was written quite some time before 1949.

The two popular art forms Feng singles out are posters and popular plays. He describes why he finds the current posters socially irrelevant and the plays generally of low quality. He suggests making the plays more relevant to current social and political problems and introducing educational content into the posters. This, he suggests, would be of more use than abstract intellectual argumentation. If art is to become popular, the artistic and aesthetic elements can be no more than seasoning, he concludes (3.18: 128ff).

In some ways Feng was quite surprisingly business-like. For example, he was a member of the board of directors of the extremely important Kaiming Book Company of Shanghai. He was an organizer in the world of publishing, a competent salesman of his works. With his literary comic strips/cartoons based on stories by Lu Xun, he introduced an important new genre into the long history of modern Chinese image literature (*lianhuanhua*). He promoted the literary comic strip based on the best of modern Chinese literature. His illustrated versions of Lu Xun's stories remained outstandingly popular. They have recently been edited with English translations in Hong Kong. (For further details on Feng's role in the history of the Chinese comic strip see Chapter I of my forthcoming book *Modern Chinese Image Literature*.)

Feng's cultural activism, however, was not the result of a natural in-

阿Q遺象

子愷畫



A portrait of Ah Q, the hero of Lu Xun's famous story which Feng Zikai converted into a comic strip.

clination. It was the inevitable result of his considerable fame as a cartoonist. By inclination, Feng was a deeply shy person, naturally disdainful of the myriad petty affairs of this busy world. One of his favourite words has always been *xian* 'leisure'. His ideal is well expressed in the name of his favourite home 'The Hall of Reasoned Contemplation.'

When, at the age of 33, Feng Zikai lost his mother, he took the opportunity to withdraw to his home town, Shimenwan. Owing to his prolific publications he could by now afford to live a life of leisured semi-retirement. He built himself a home (The Hall of Reasoned Contemplation), and he was looking forward to a quiet life of writing, drawing, and occasional teaching. The years between 1930 and 1937 were, after the initial mourning, probably the happiest years in Feng's life.

But things were not to stay that way. The Sino-Japanese war began to rage furiously in Zhejiang Province. Feng had to flee with his family. His house was burnt down, as was his very considerable library of over 10 000 volumes.

From 1937 onwards Feng lived the uncertain and insecure life of a refugee, together with his large family. Following a long odyssey via Guilin and Chongqing, he settled in Hangzhou. In order to earn a living he resumed his teaching activities, and he even rose to professorial rank in Zhejiang University. Some of his experiences from this time are laid down in his charming book *A Teacher's Diary (Jiaoshi riji)*, Chongqing 1944.

Liberation

There is plenty of evidence that Feng welcomed the communist revolution in 1949. Having returned to Shanghai just before liberation, he wrote a ten-page enthusiastic letter to his eldest son who at the time was a student in the USA, recommending him to return to his homeland. This letter was then passed on to Feng's eldest daughter, who at the time was in Guomindang-controlled Xiamen, and intercepted by the secret police. For a time, Feng's daughter was in political trouble with the Guomindang...

Feng attended the All China Literature and Art Workers' Representative Meeting in 1949, thus showing his spontaneous support for the new policies of cultural renewal.

With liberation in 1949 came new restraints on artists in general and cartoonists in particular. The leading art theoretician Wang Zhaowen, in an article in *Guangming Ribao* of 1950, stated the official line on cartooning in terms that must have been frightening to Feng Zikai. In the opening phrase of his article, Wang describes it as the sacred duty of cartoonists to use their cartoons as vehicles of propaganda, and he adds that this sacred duty includes an obligation to evoke hatred for the enemy in the Korean war, and to strengthen the determination for victory. What Wang meant by the slogan *cartoons must be directed towards mass thought* was clearly that cartooning was no more than the continuation of propaganda warfare through the medium of satire (*Wang Zhaowen lunwenji*, vol. 1, pp. 37—41).

In order to be effective, Wang claimed in another authoritative article in the *People's Daily* of 1950, cartoons had to be varied in style and lively. And Wang complained bitterly of the tendency of standardization (*yibanhua*) of all cartoonists' styles (*ibidem* pp. 86-80).

In principle, two tasks were envisaged for the cartoonists: singing the praise of the correct line and attacking the public enemy (*ibidem* pp. 80—85). And Feng Zikai was unfortunately ill equipped for either of these artistic pursuits.

Naturally, therefore, Feng's relations with the political authorities after 1949 were not always easy. Like so many other leading intellectuals he was forced to offer public self-criticism. Some excerpts from the article entitled 'Investigating my Thought' (*Dagongbao*, Shanghai, 16 July 1952) will speak for themselves on this matter. Feng lines up four sins of his past: '1. his aestheticism, 2. his concern for wealth and fame, 3. his defence of the purity and independence of art, 4. his old-fashioned humanism.' He continues:

These four points have combined to produce confusion and mistakes in my thinking. For the last 26 years I have lived separate from the masses, and this has exacerbated my estrangement from the masses. (From the age of 30 I have not held a regular job. I have lived at leisure in my home, right up to now. Only during the Japanese War, for economic reasons, did I teach for three years at Zhejiang University.) Although I have given talks at many meetings since liberation, the influence of the old habits is still there. On the whole, my intellectual mistakes stem from the fact that I have been separated from the masses in the past and have not bothered about politics. I was unable to understand my class standpoint. I was just an onlooker to the class struggle. In this way I have worked for many years on pure art in the service of the capitalist class. And I have caused the poison of my thought to spread widely among the people. Today, I want to express my regrets to the masses.

Therefore I have made three concrete plans: 1. I shall make a special effort on political studies, I shall read widely all sorts of materials in this area. 2. I shall intensify my professional work, I shall introduce more and more of contemporary Soviet literature to our people. (Feng was proficient in Russian.) 3. I shall intensify my participation in the collective intellectual life and join all sorts of meetings that I have a duty to attend. . . . In the past I have suffered a good deal from pneumonia and have had my chest X-rayed. From now on I shall do my best to recover. I am sure to regain my health. Marxism together with Mao Zedong-thinking are to me like air and light, they are the best things to nurse my health. I firmly believe that under the leadership of the party, and with the encouragement of the masses, I must surely be able to correct my intellectual mistakes of the past through study. In this way I can then become an artistic worker in the service of the people.

These words were written during the *liberal* fifties. They tell us something of the background to Feng's work since 1949.

It is remarkable that in spite of many humiliations and mortifying public displays of ideological conformism like this one Feng always remained a loyal supporter of the communist system. I suspect the reason is that his socialism had very deep religious/philosophical roots in his Buddhist convictions.

Moreover, in 1951 Feng received weighty public support from the very theoretician, Wang Zhaowen, who had enunciated the party line on art and cartooning after liberation. Under the title *We need children's cartoons* Wang Zhaowen published a long article on Feng

Zikai's work, where he starts out by recalling how he had enjoyed Feng's cartoons as a youngster. Wang reports that he was particularly moved by the children's cartoons, and writes: 'Zikai's children's cartoons live up to the programme he had set up in his book *The Method of Cartooning*: to emphasize meaning, and to use the brush in an uninhibited way.' After analyzing Feng's achievements in some more detail, Wang continues 'Naturally, not all of Zikai's cartoons are good as regards their content, and from a formal point of view they are not completely flawless. We are not suggesting that all cartoonists (even less all painters) should go and imitate Zikai's painting technique, but we feel we are completely justified in coming to the defence of Zikai's cartoons (except for a few, the content of which should be improved). Particularly, we must jump to the defence of his children's cartoons... As long as they have a healthy content, cartoons in the style of Zikai can become a part of the new (socialist) realism in art.' This emphatic conclusion saved Feng Zikai's public life. But Wang continues with a thinly veiled warning: 'One must point out that quite a few of Zikai's works express an escapist, pessimistic mentality and an old-fashioned humanism... These shortcomings cannot be separated from Zikai's life and thought of the past. We must hope that Zikai will strive earnestly to develop the strong points in his style.'

After all this, Wang Zhaowen adds a surprisingly personal remark: 'We should all appreciate life with the sensibility of a child, in the manner of Zikai.' (ibidem pp. 91—95). On the crucial point Wang declares himself effectively a follower of Feng Zikai! No wonder Feng was profoundly grateful to Wang for this public defence.

But defiantly he joined the writer Ye Shengtao and others in a ceremony to unveil a monument to the Buddhist Li Shutong in 1954. And in 1956 he wrote an enthusiastic article on the same Li Shutong in the Tianjin Daily (*Tianjinribao*).

An inveterate Southerner, Feng had never been to Peking before 1949. But in 1959 he went to Peking to give a speech at the Third Chinese People's Consultative Conference in Peking. He wrote an article for the Hongkong left-wing paper *Dagongbao*: 'I was filled with enthusiasm on this occasion. My hands got red and swollen from all the clapping. ... That really was a glorious congress: Gratitude and enthusiasm filled my heart. I tried to express myself in prose, but my heart was too full of meanings, so I did not know where to start from. I thought of using my painting brush to express my feelings, but the images were too rich, so I did not know where to put down my brush. But

it would not be right to lock such things up in one's heart, so in the end I wrote the poem *Looking towards Jiangnan*. . .'

Very often, it is as if Feng does not speak with his own voice. He speaks with the public voice of his time. His private attitudes can only be guessed at. His private Buddhist publications are curiously disconnected with his officially published works. His published poetry as well as his cartoons are no longer nourished by his intensely private sensitivity but by public responsibility. Long past were the days when he could plausibly call a collection of his prose the *Candidness Collection*. Patriotic responsibility had to take precedence over personal honesty.

In fact, Feng's public responsibilities were more numerous after 1949 than ever before. It was not for nothing that Feng had been nicknamed *Mr Thrice No* (*San Bu xiansheng*) during the forties: he consistently refused to get involved with the political authorities before 1949. By contrast he was publicly loyal to the communists after 1949, and took on a large number of honorary posts. In 1960 he was appointed head of the Institute of Chinese Painting in Shanghai; in 1962 he was even elected president of the powerful Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists' Association. During the autumn of 1962 a short film was made entitled *The painter Feng Zikai* (*Huajia Feng Zikai*). Feng tried to be a constructive member of communist Chinese society.

At the second Shanghai Conference of Cultural Workers' Representatives in 1962, Feng felt confident enough to speak his mind in public on cultural policy: 'Since the flowers (of free creative art) are fragrant, let us allow them to grow freely. Let us not "help" them to grow. Let us not interfere with them! . . . But there are some people who must use a big cutlass and cut the evergreen plants so they are even, shave their heads or practically cut the heads off, get them all to have exactly the same height, so that they are everywhere the same. . .' (*Xin wenxueshiliao* 1. 1981: 127). Feng gained roars of applause for this talk about the big cutlass, but he was soon to suffer bitterly for what he had said.

As time went by Feng became increasingly aware that there really was no place for his style of writing and cartooning in the New China. He turned deliberately from creative work to translation. Between 1961 and 1965 he finished his monumental translation of the medieval Japanese novel *Genji Monogatari*, to be published in 1982. He was so fascinated by this kind of novel that he went on to translate two more *monogatari*, and it is to be hoped that these, too, will be published in due course.

For private publication in Singapore, Feng also translated a Japanese



Visits by his friend Guangqia were among the highlights of Feng's later life.

commentary on a Mahayana Buddhist text, the *Dasheng qixinlun* (Treatise on the rise of the Mahayana faith). A facsimile of the manuscript of his translation, over 400 pages in all, was privately published in Singapore in 1973, eloquent proof of Feng Zikai's continued adherence to Buddhism until the end of his life. It is as if the grotesqueness of the political situation during the cultural revolution confirmed him in his belief in the inanity of this world.

The distinguished abbot Shi Guangqia from Singapore has collected more than sixty — often devotional — paintings that Feng Zikai sent to him during the early sixties. Shi Guangqia has also privately published a selection of Feng Zikai's letters to him from this period.

From 1966, Feng faced increasingly severe criticism as a bourgeois intellectual. Already in the opening months of the cultural revolution he was severely beaten up. In June 1966, the Shanghai Institute of Painting (*Shanghai Huayuan*) was occupied, and Feng was defined as a 'reactionary academic authority' (*fandong xueshu quanwei*), Feng was

forced to report daily for confessions etc. at the Shanghai Institute of Painting. Mercifully, he fell ill in August and was confined to a hospital.

From August, Feng's assets were frozen, and he was issued only a minimal sustenance allowance. After recovering from his illness, Feng was again made to report daily to his Institute of Painting, where he was regularly placed in a 'cow-shed' (*niupeng*). (These 'cow-sheds' became familiar to the world public during the trial of the Gang of Four...) From September 1968, Feng's daily ordeal was moved to the Shanghai Municipal Museum, and Feng was equipped with a board to hang round his neck. This board was inscribed *reactionary academic authority Feng Zikai*.

During the autumn and winter of 1969, Feng was sent to the countryside to harvest cotton. Over 70 years old, Feng could not take the strain, and fell ill. In February 1970 he was hospitalized because of lumbago.

On 18 December 1972 the results were announced of official political investigations against Feng. He was declared innocent of capitalist reactionary leanings. But as late as 1974 the authorities organized an exhibition of 'black' paintings by Feng, which purportedly unmasked his counter-revolutionary bourgeois mentality.

On 15 September 1975 Feng Zikai died at a Shanghai hospital, humiliated and embittered. An artist in disgrace.

Together with artists like Zhang Guangyu, Ye Qianyu, and Zhang Ding, Feng Zikai established an indigenous tradition of the Chinese artistic cartoon. Hua Junwu, perhaps the most prominent of contemporary Chinese cartoonists, clearly continues Feng's graphic style in a more satirical and politicized key, but with some of the same philosophical depth and the same artistic directness. Bi Keguan, the leading historian of the Chinese cartoon, is a proud disciple of Feng Zikai, and a distinguished cartoonist in his own right. Fang Cheng's glorious new humoristic cartoons seem to indicate that there may be a future for that very Chinese humane sensitivity for which Feng Zikai was such an outstanding spokesman.

The romantic breakthrough: Willows and wistful ladies

As Feng Zikai himself saw it, the year 1925 marked a decisive artistic breakthrough for him. In fact, his cartoons from 1925 do show a remarkable technical freshness, which seems to be born of a certain residual insecurity combined with newly-won confidence.

In 1946, when Feng Zikai published a large selection of his cartoons, he apparently did not reproduce any work from before 1925, and in this book I shall also ignore his earlier work.

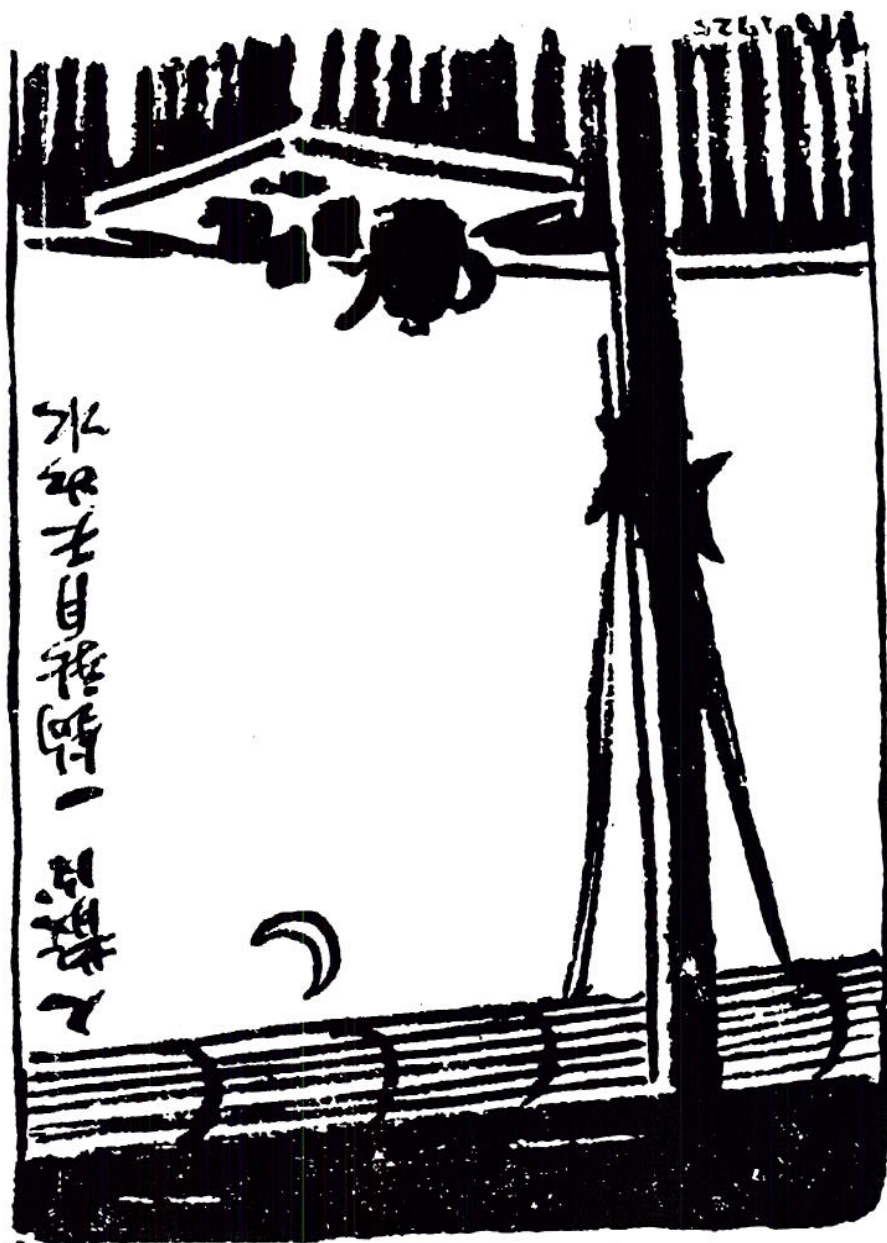


Autumn night (1925)

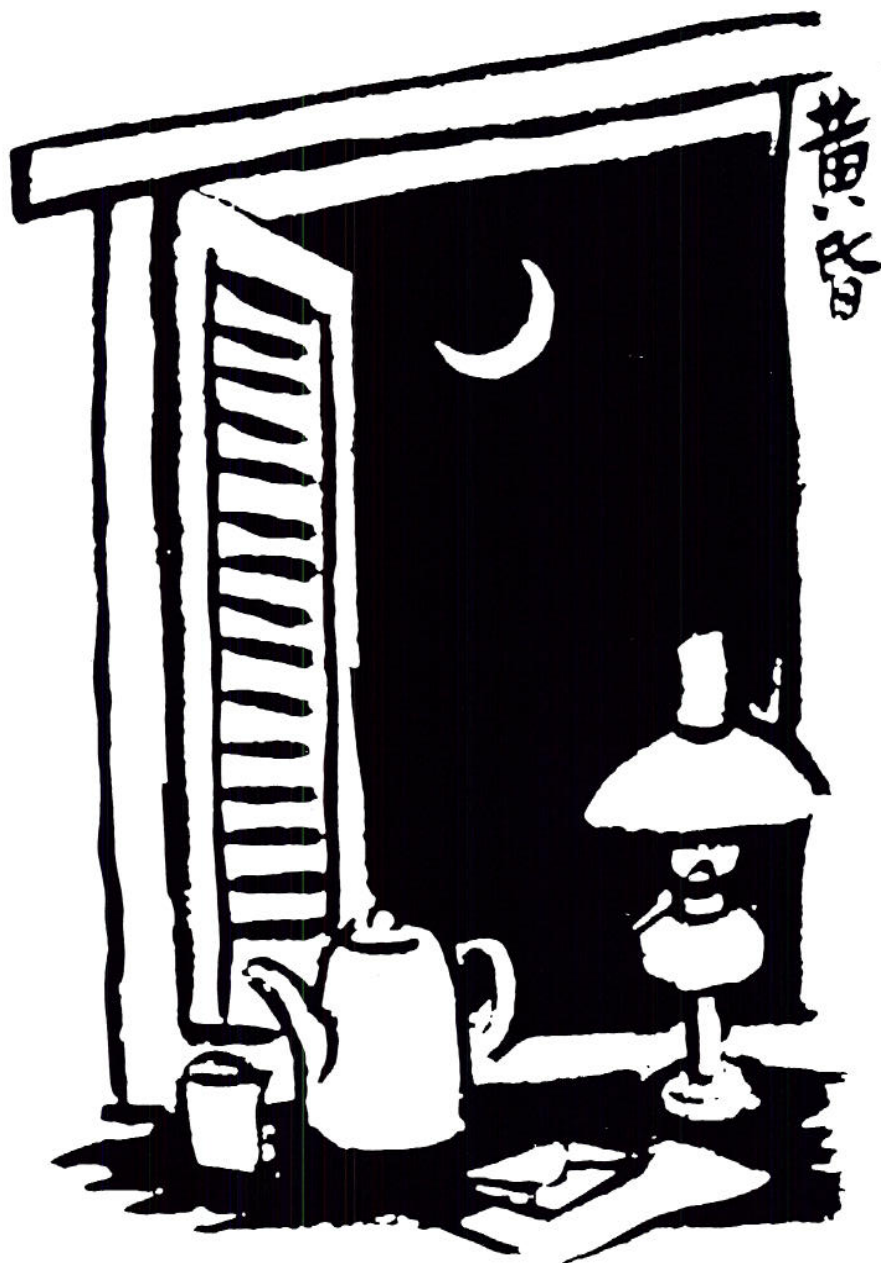
Let me begin by considering a very atypical still life entitled *Autumn night* from 1925. Western influences are obvious. It wasn't for nothing that Feng Zikai had studied Western art in Japan. Forget the Chinese characters on the right, and you have what could *almost* have been the work of a westernized Japanese artist. Almost, but not quite. And one wishes one knew what exactly it is that makes *Autumn night* a sad cartoon. Somehow one feels sure that a romantic, melancholy lady is sitting next to the window, knitting quietly away as she is waiting for her friend.

Typically, Feng breaks the predominant mood by introducing the ingenious petroleum lamp fitted on to a biscuit box. This lamp shows that we are in a poor home, not a stately mansion. The lamp is a typical example of Feng's good-humoured realism and his consistent attempt to bring his art close to the people. We shall see more of this good-humoured sense for incongruous detail, but in 1925 we see more, above all, of his romanticism.

Feng Zikai tells us that most of his early cartoons were inspired by lines of poetry. He says he didn't generally like whole poems but used to get fascinated by the moods captured in certain lines. In his cartoons he tried to give graphic expression to such moods. Take the cartoon *The people have dispersed. The sickle of the new moon spreads its pale watery light*. Here Feng seems to be thinking not so much of the host being left alone in his home, having to do the washing up, or feeling tired after the guests have gone. It is the veranda-scene with the rolled-up bamboo curtains as such, the atmosphere after a gathering among friends that is captured.



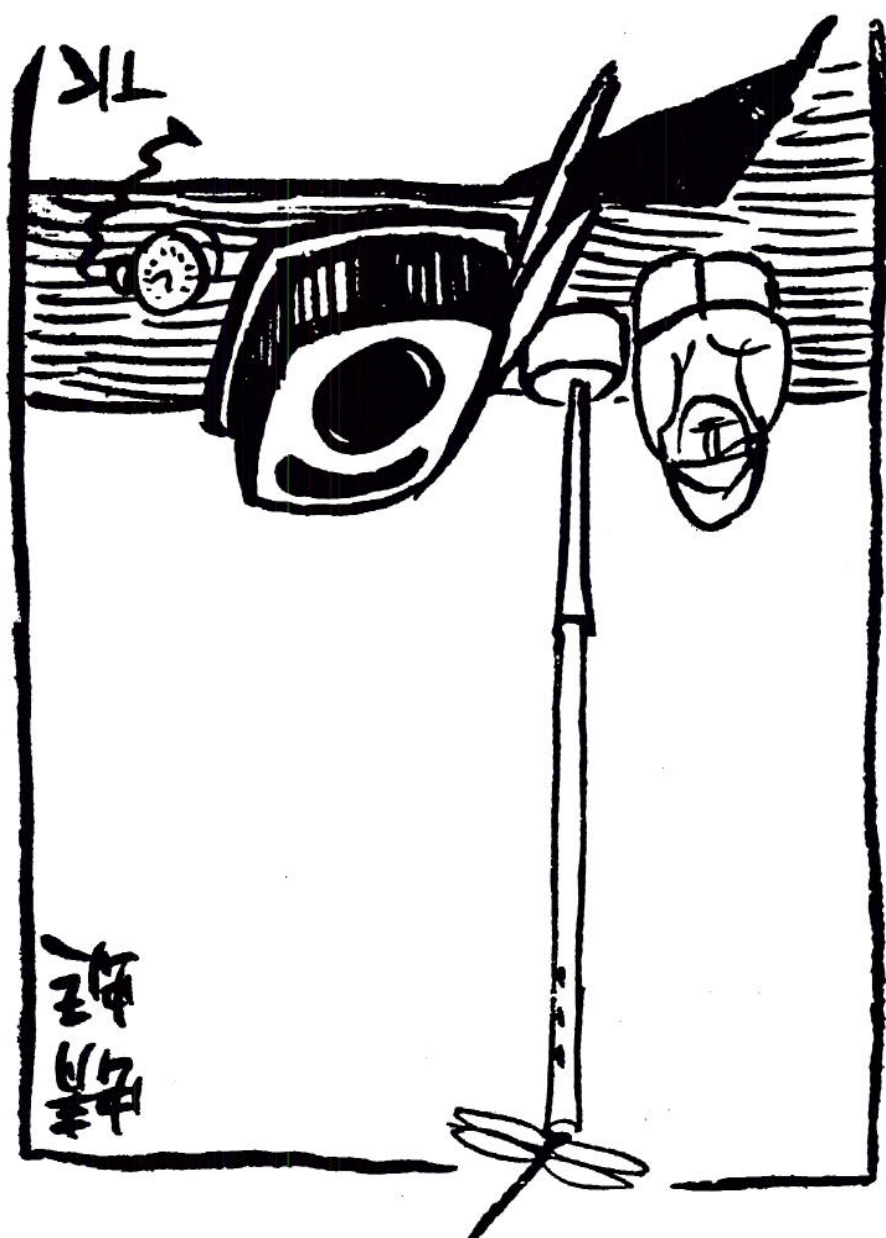
*The people
have dispersed.
The sickle of
the new moon
spreads its pale
watery light
(1925)*



Evening (1925)

In the simple cartoon *Evening* the letter under the petroleum lamp and the distant moon are unmistakable symbols: we are in a lonely person's room. The Chinese window opening into the empty expanse of darkness increases the sense of constricted loneliness.

Throughout his life, Feng was very particular about the arrangement of the objects on his desk. Clearly, he was particularly fond of his carved jade chop on the left. But the clock symbolizes that the idyllic *Stilleben* is not lifted above time. Moreover, there is an intrusion into the frame of the *Stilleben* by a living creature, the infringing dragonfly. Feng liked to think of his art as part of the life around it, part of the ephemeral jumble of events.



The dragonfly
(1925)



How many people like you are there in this world? (1925)

The fisherman is mindful of his fish. He is mindful. He will not be disturbed in his mindfulness by the petty world around him.

This is a portrait of the art of concentration. Of course, Feng is not recommending fishing as a hobby. He is recommending single-mindedness about the things in life that matter.

In its simplicity, this is one of the finest of Feng's cartoons. Note the uncompromising simplicity in the characterization of the fishing rod.



Afternoon (1925)



Cooling off in the evening (1925)



Midnight
(1925)



*In the middle of
the night
someone is still
doing his rounds
(1925)*

One can imagine the background to this picture: Feng Zikai is sitting up late in his study. His cat looks in. Nothing special, one might think. But Feng was fascinated by the cat's gaze of sustained warm concern. Somehow, the cat achieves its own kind of metaphysical presence.



The swallows are returning but not the friend (1925)

Most of the time, though, the human figure introduced is that of a romantic girl. In *The swallows are returning but not the friend* we have a very realistic portrait of a girl. Note her slightly unruly hair and her apparently slightly plumpish figure. We have nothing like the stereotyped beautiful young girl of the classical kind. The balustrade, the wistful hanging leaves, the swallows in the sky, these are all favourite themes of Feng Zikai in 1925.



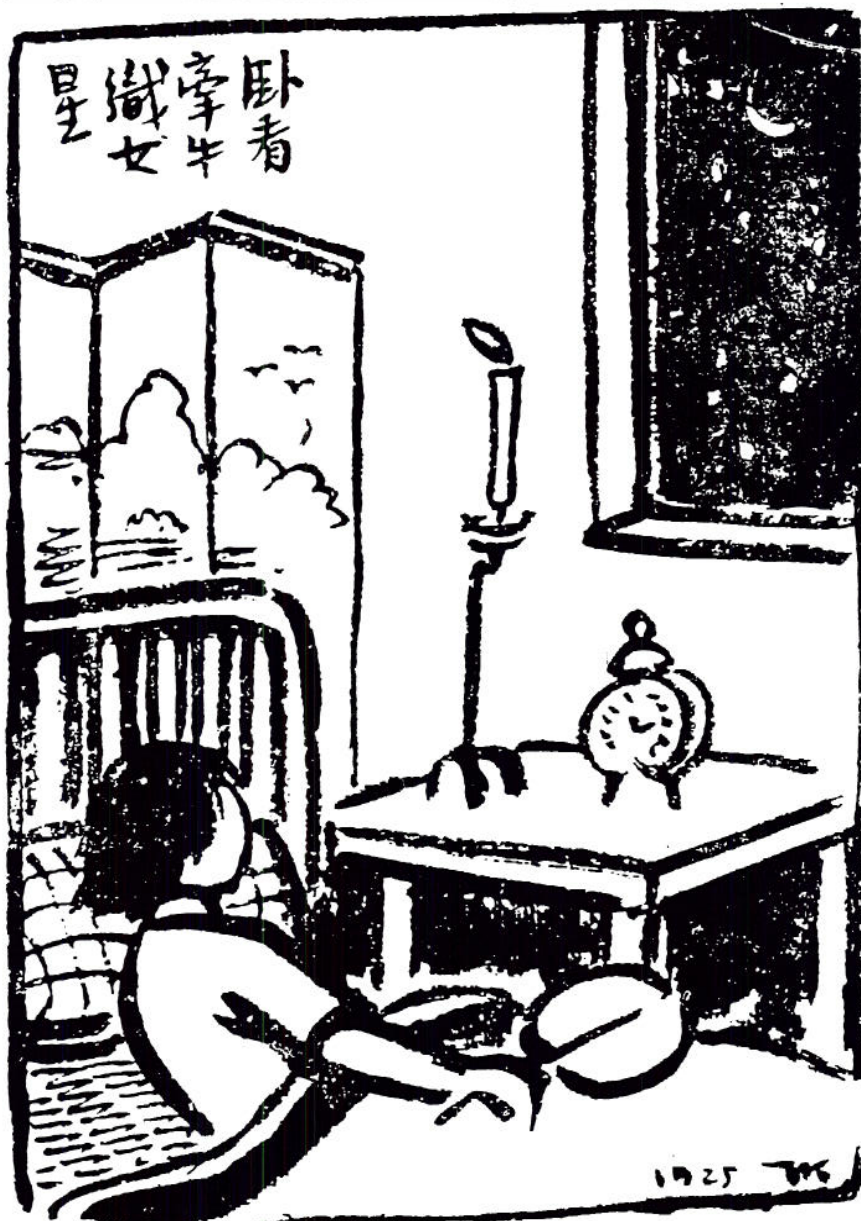
*Moon climbing
on the willow
twig's end
(1925)*

Compare the girl in the *Moon climbing on the willow twig's end*. Again the girl is realistically drawn. She even wears a 'vulgar' vest, not a romantic floating robe. The girl is cut off from the infinite space and from the moon by the fence. Feng often exploits this contrast between the hemmed-in human sphere and the infinite cosmos around him. It is this metaphysical contrast that motivates his predilection for windows, verandahs, fences, etc.



明月窺人未寢歛衾橫髮亂

*The moon looks
at the girl. The
girl has not fallen
asleep. She leans
on her pillow,
her hair in
disarray (1925)*



*Reclining she
watched the
weaver-woman
in the sky (1925)*

The same theme becomes even more explicit in *Reclining she watched the weaver-woman in the sky*. Compare the mixed bunch of things inside the girl's room with the celestial order beyond. The incongruousness of the objects within the rooms is striking: the then ultra-modern clock next to the unrepentantly traditional candlestick. The modern, Western wrought-iron bed right in front of the classic screen with the obligatory Chinese traditional landscape. A cool breeze from the outside is bending the candle flame. The wistful girl doesn't have to use the fan she is holding.



Green leaves stroking the heads of passers-by (1925)

In *Green leaves stroking the heads of passers-by* there seems to be an air of romantic expectation about the two girls (sisters?). Note how Feng indicates movement by letting the older girl almost walk into the picture, through the frame. I find this the strongest of Feng's early 'wistful' cartoons. Partly because of its uncompromising simplicity, but very importantly because there is something quite unartificial and intriguingly realistic about the set-up. By comparison with this cartoon, the others seem deliberately, almost theatrically 'arranged', (*gestellt* (contrived)). Here in *Green leaves stroking the heads of passers-by* it is as if the two girls just happened to walk into the cartoon. There is no romantic posturing. The cartoon is very intensely emotional without indulging in sentimentality.



*Spring in
the city (1925)*

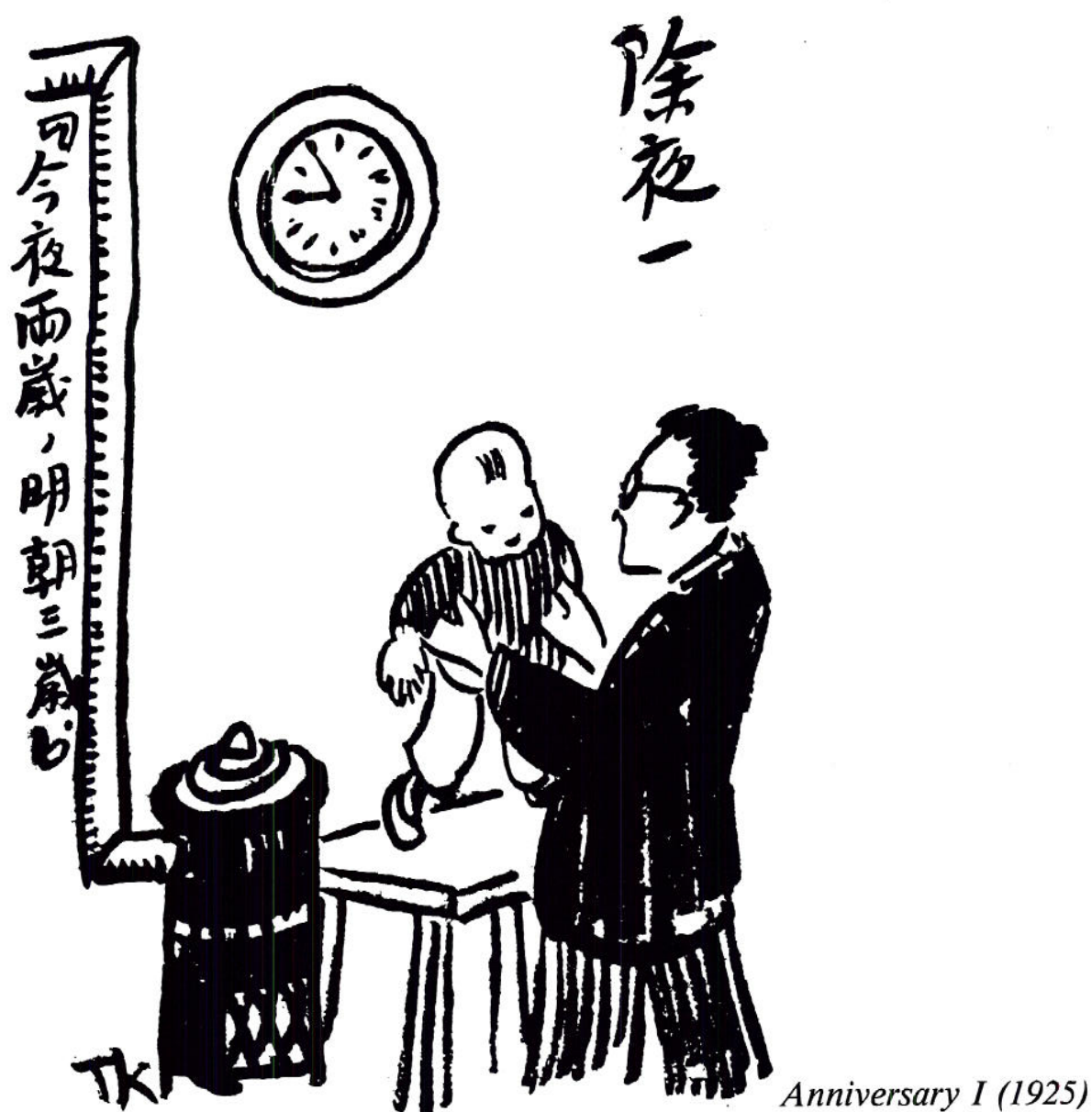
This is a delightful graphic comment on the incongruence of city life. The kite is hopelessly out of place in the city. (Just think what would happen if the thing went down three rows of houses away from you!) Flying kites in the country-side are a favourite subject of Feng in later years. Here in the city, the kite reminds the person on the constricting balcony of the freedom, beauty, and humanity of the countryside.

In his writings, Feng Zikai frequently comments on the inhumanity of city life.

War and music
(1925)



War and music is a very 'conceptual' cartoon. The soldier hasn't bothered to take his cap off, but he is quite definitely *not* playing martial music. He still looks like a soldier, and the gun is still within his reach. But for the moment he is opening his heart to delicate music. The incongruousness captured in this picture is the incongruousness of the human predicament.



'Today you are two years old. Tomorrow you will be three.'

Note that Chinese children become one year older on New Year's Eve. The time is only nine o'clock. Still three hours to go. But the child will be asleep when the decisive moment comes. In any case the child does not seem to be very interested in what it is being told. It lives in a world of its own, where anniversaries are irrelevant. The child is just waiting to be set free again.



Anniversary II (1925)

A portrait of the artist faced with the dimension of time.

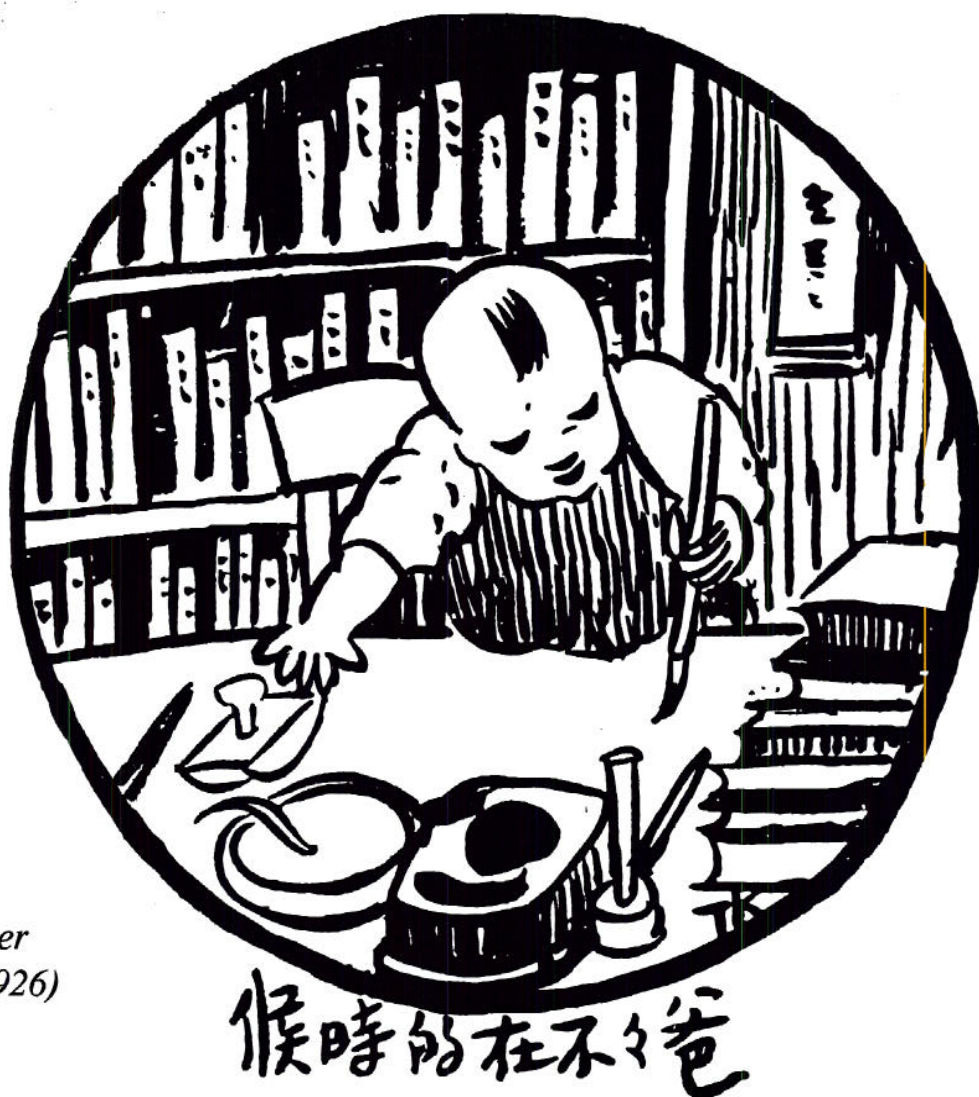
The turn to realism: Children's portraits

By 1926 Feng Zikai had left the wistful world of willows, ballustrades, and pensive youths. He became almost totally absorbed in the world of children. Not the world of the torted-up puppets dangling from the hands of their mindful nannies, but of children free to be themselves.

Partly, Feng's children's pictures were inspired by the old tradition of New Year Baby Pictures (*wawa nianhua*), but the contrasts go deep. The grotesquely sleek and jolly little creatures on the New Year pictures have little to do with the naughty little individuals depicted by Feng Zikai.



First step (1925)



*When father
is away (1926)*

候時的在不父

A cartoon like *When father is away* shows a child liberated — not exasperated — by the absence of his parent. Now at last he can explore his father's desk! But in an obvious way we are, in this cartoon, still with the world of the adults.

Feng was fascinated by the contrast between children's creativity and adult pomposity. The clownish child, triumphantly uninhibited by the adult straight-jacket it is wearing, had a profound significance for Feng Zikai: the child symbolizes triumph over the insensitive constraints of adult life.



Putting on father's clothes (1925)



Being portrayed (1926)

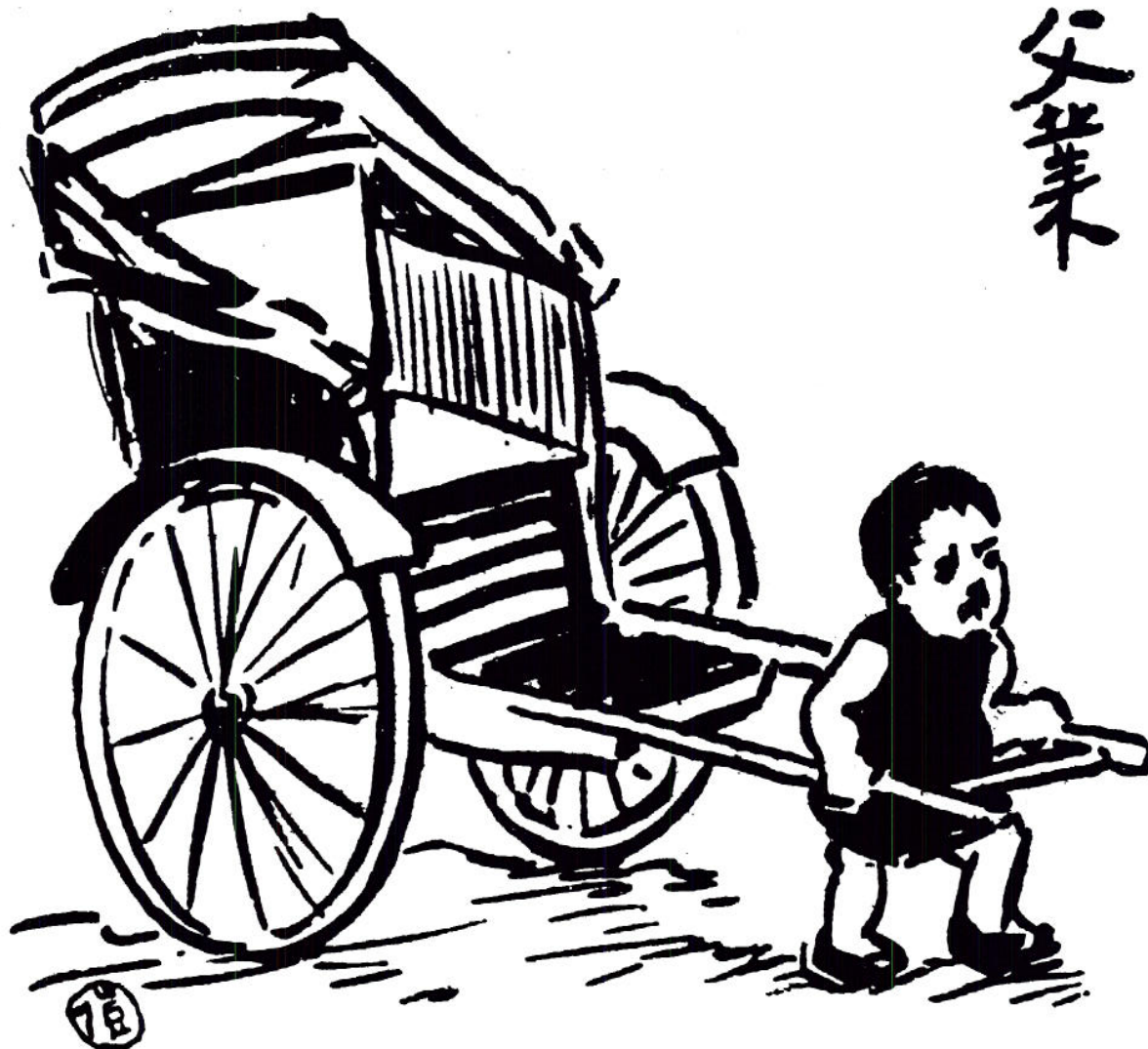
What Feng wants to put across in his cartoons is not his own artistic perception of his children. What he wants to put across is the children's own perspective. Thus, when he draws a portrait of his three-year-old child (*Being portrayed*), he tries to capture what it feels like to be portrayed at that age. It is quite typical that Feng Zikai cannot abstract from the portraying situation. His cartoons are always based on immediate observation and spontaneous empathy. One is reminded of the strange mixture of diffidence and self-consciousness one felt when one had photographs taken as a child. The way one couldn't just be oneself.



*Zhan Zhan's vehicles
(2) The bicycle (1926)*

Zhan Zhan, or Feng Huazhan, is today a Professor of English Literature in the distinguished Fudan University of Shanghai.

父業



Father's trade (1932)

This child, on the other hand, is unlikely to become a university professor. But he is no less lovable for that. Feng's pictures of children are not just doting portraits by a devoted father of his beloved offspring.



The peanuts are not enough (1925)

Like many of Feng's cartoons, *The peanuts are not enough* invites a smiling Buddhist sympathy. The child *has* plenty of peanuts to enjoy. The little boy is unhappy because of his ambitious pre-conceived desires. One wonders how much human misery is like the desperation of this little boy . . .

The difference between adults and children is, of course, that the children are able to forget quickly. And most of the time it is their ingenious use of what they have that impresses Feng. Like Zhan Zhan's use of two fans as a bicycle. The success of that cartoon lies in the fact that as one is looking at it one admires the child's ingenuity, not Feng Zikai's.

研究
九
(一)



Experiment I
(1926)

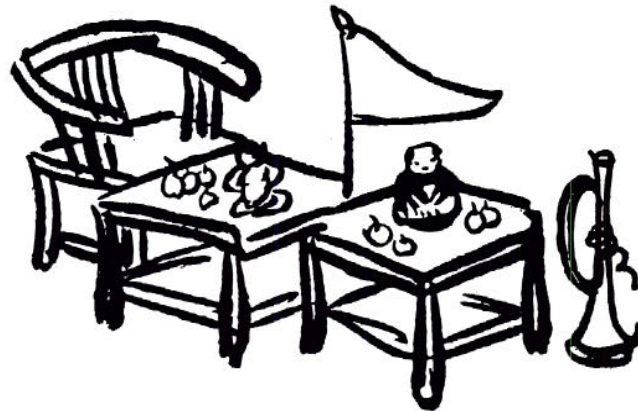
The Child is exploring a spittoon. He *knows* he is not supposed to do that. You can see the excitement of it all in his eyes.

名題



No title (1926)

No title is a portrait of absorption. The child is absorbed in drinking. The cat is absorbed in watching with deep sympathy. And the observer is invited to learn from the cat. To feel the taste of the milk with the child as the cat does. To get absorbed in the little scene.



快樂的勞動者

*Enthusiastic
workers (1926)*

It is when he describes children relating to each other that Feng Zikai really comes into his own. He has, for example, always been especially fond of his *Enthusiastic workers*. The delicate confidence with which the taller child is hoisting the bamboo stool: the child has no doubt where the stool has to go. And the admiring upward glance of the little one in the background, who is looking forward to the time when he can manage to cut a similarly impressive figure. Meanwhile he is having to push his little stool awkwardly along. The elder brother will know where it has to go.



Experiment III
(1932)

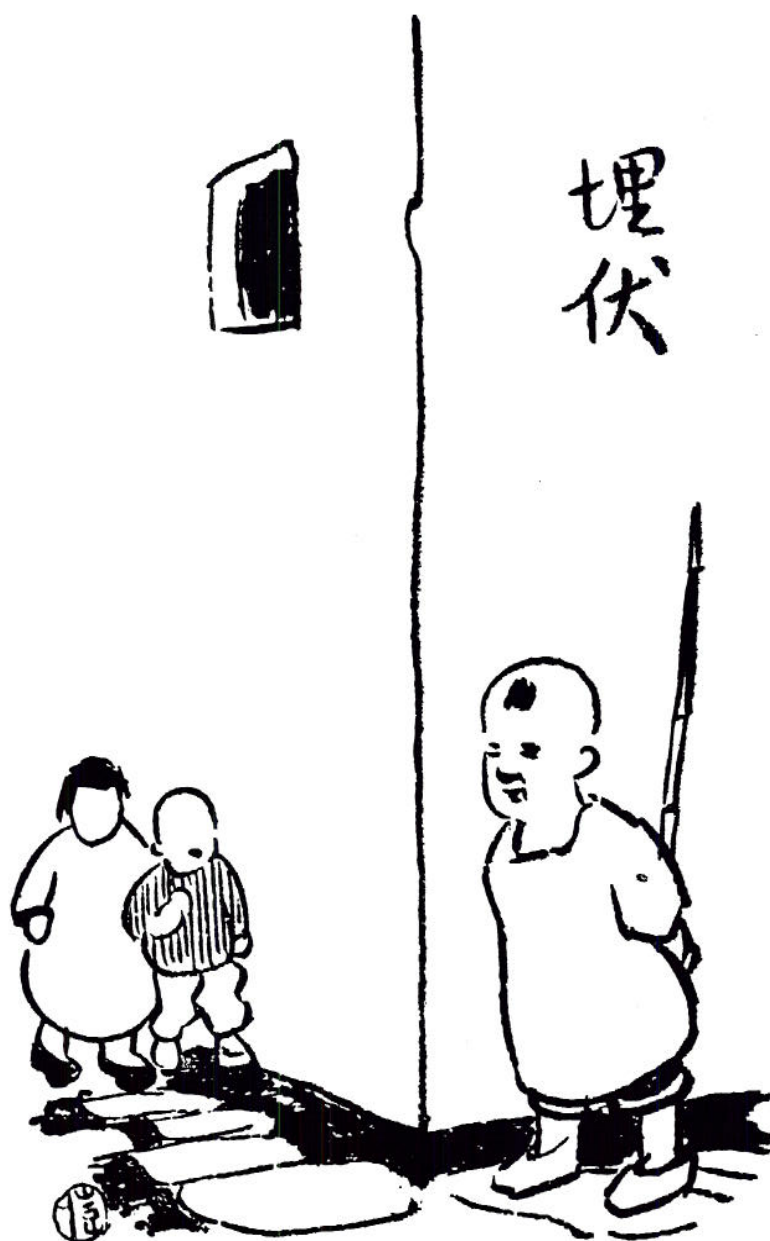
It is by no means always the elder child who leads. In *Experiment III* the elder sister is evidently frightened to disturb whatever dangerous substance or creature is in the vase. You can tell the children are not supposed to poke about in the spittoon: why else have they taken care to try to close the door? In any case, the little boy is probably not old enough to appreciate the importance of prohibitions.

軟々新娘子，
 膽々新官人，
 寶姊々做媒人



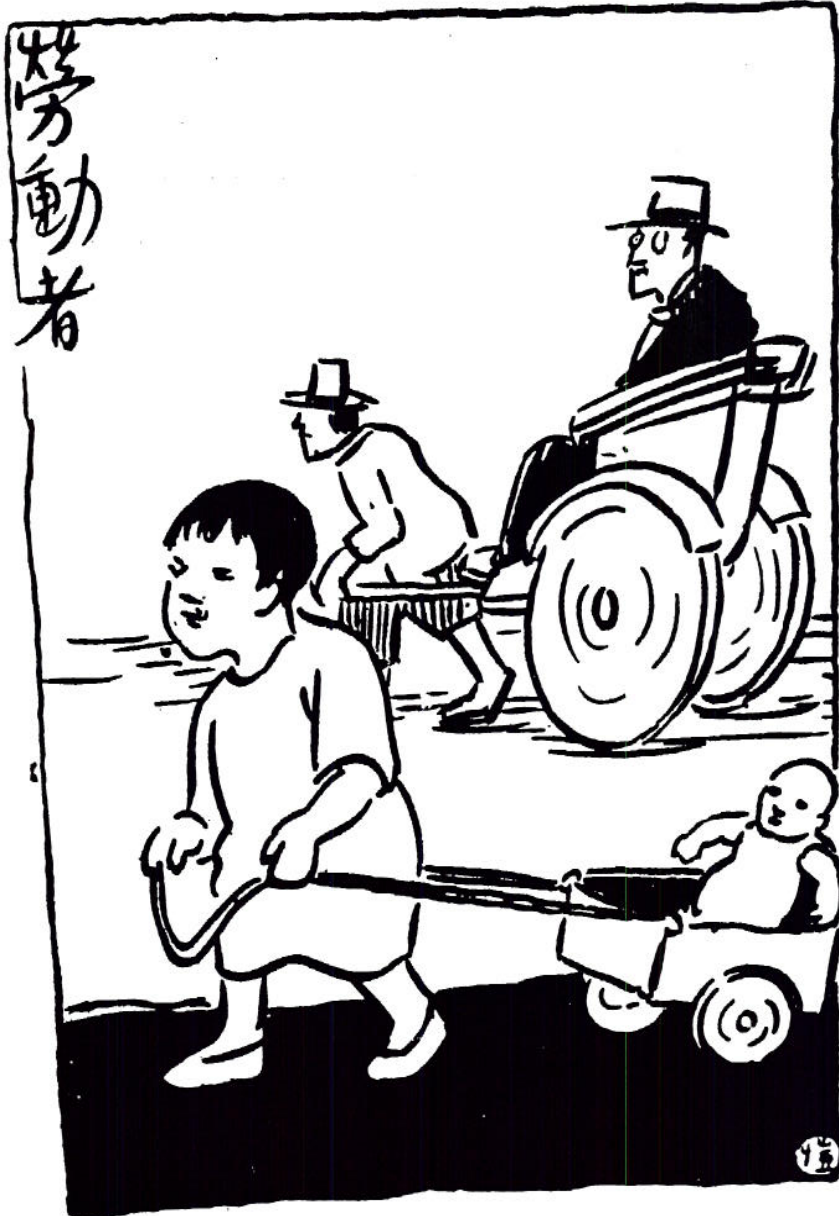
Ruan Ruan the bride TK
Zhan Zhan the
bridegroom
Elder sister Bao plays
the go-between (1926)

Feng Zikai liked to think of himself as a 'realist', and his characterization of children at play is not really idyllic at all. In his famous marriage cartoon, for example, it is quite clear that the bride doesn't know what is going on and wishes the whole thing were over, while the little bridegroom has evidently just noticed something more important than his wife-to-be. The only one interested in the wedding seems to be the go-between.



Ambush (1932)

Also this little scene does not look as if it will end in idyllic harmony. Notice that the girl on the left is making sure her little brother will be the first to turn the corner. Is she aware that all is not as it should be?



Working people
(1932)

Children's imitation of adults is more than mechanical mimicking. There is a deep, loving ambition to be able to say 'we rickshawmen have our duties to perform.'

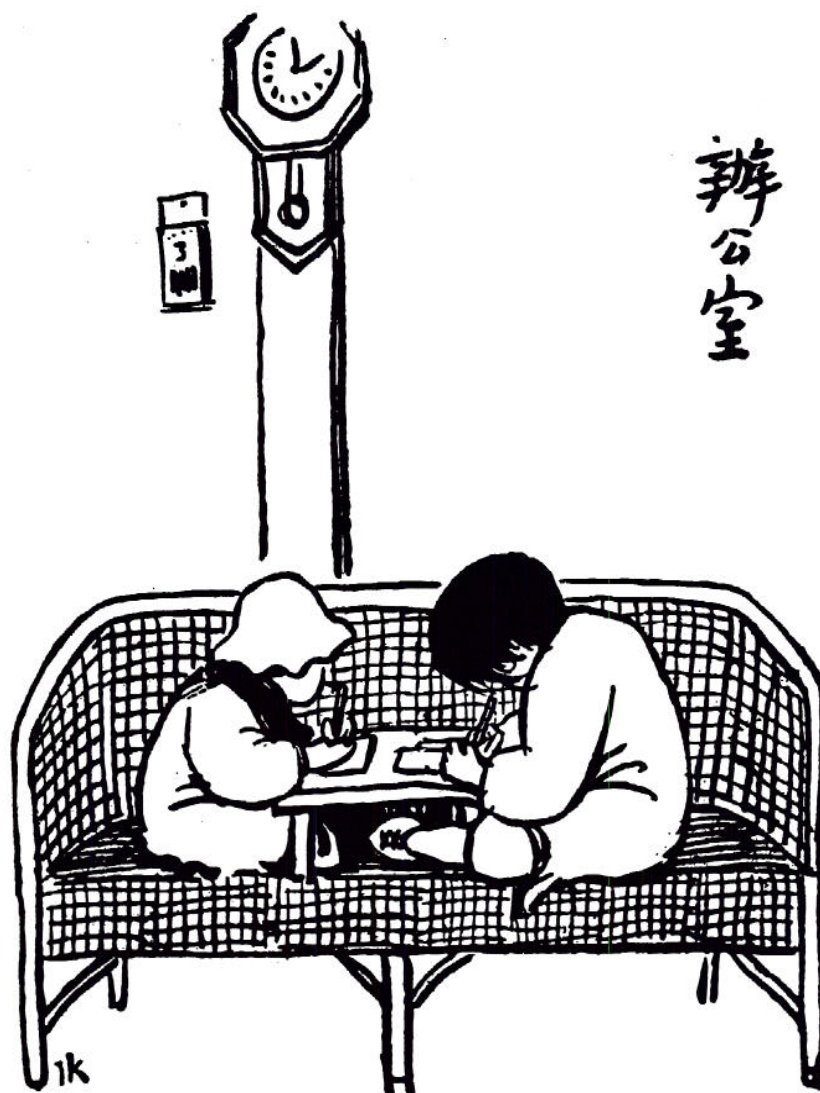
兜風



*Going for a
ride (1932)*

This ride will not end well, but it is no less fun for that. Life can be sheer fun — so long as one is not mindful that it ends in death.

辦公室



Office (1926)

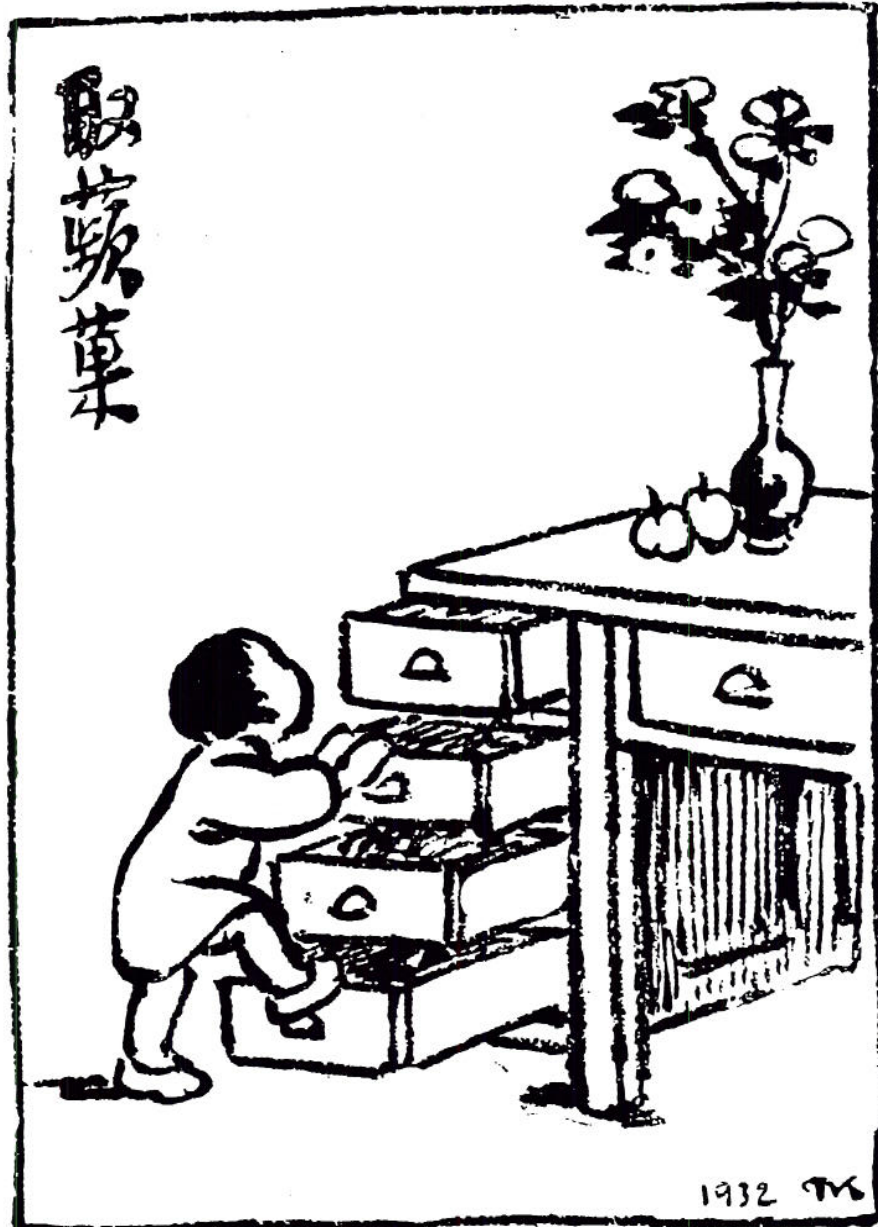
At first sight one might think that the office scene *is* just a trite idyllic set-up. But then you notice that the little one with the white hat isn't working at all. He is looking at the elder one and trying to work out what the game is, and how one uses a pencil.



*Pulling the
rickshaw (1932)*

This
sheer

The game in *Pulling the rickshaw* is again less than idyllic, although the boy in the horizontal position presumably had once imagined it would be fun for everyone.



*Getting the
apples (1932)*

Again, one admires the tactical ingenuity of the child in *Getting the apples*, but at the same time one notes with a smile the dangerous proximity of the vase to the apples. This gives a sense of drama to the cartoon.



*There's a pencil behind
father's ear (1926)*

The drama is less dangerous in *There's a pencil behind father's ear*. Proudly the bookish father Feng Zikai picks up his child, hoping to communicate with it. But, of course, the child is more interested in the pencil than in the father. As old-fashioned fathers know: it is not so easy to communicate with children.



I want it! (1932)

The child is so used to his mother, that he can focus on other things . . .



Mother, why does he want to go begging? (1939)

Feng's children's cartoons were a resounding success in their time. One could have included dozens of further outstanding children's cartoons in this section without — I imagine — boring the reader. But in fact, Feng Zikai got bored with them himself. During the thirties he began to feel that there was something escapist and irrelevant about these cartoons. He felt compelled, on the one hand, to argue apologetically that his children's cartoons were full of indirect social criticism, and, on the other, he began to make cartoons like *Mother, why does he want to go begging?* Of course, the innocent child gets no reply from its unspeakably boring well-groomed middle-class mother. The mother is more interested in her westernized handbag than in the beggar on the roadside.



Generosity
(1932)

Also in *Generosity* the children have taken on a clearly political significance. By giving her favourite trumpet away to the beggar's baby the generous girl is unwittingly directing a forceful accusation against the political system that made beggars a ubiquitous phenomenon during the thirties in China. As a humane socialist, Feng Zikai shared this indignation. And in the coming years he was to dedicate his work to the furtherance of social justice.

Religious humanism: Buddhist cartoons

Feng Zikai's Buddhist beliefs are intimately connected with his fascination for the world of children. For Feng, the essence of Buddhism lies precisely in that deep feeling of sympathy for all (living) things that is so characteristic of children. For Feng, Buddhism is closely connected with the fresh sensitivity for the things around them, the unmediated fascination for the appearance of things that is so important for the artist and so beautifully natural in children. For Feng, artistic sensitivity and freshness of perception are inseparable from his Buddhist sympathy for things.

Another basic emotion that Feng shared with children was that of abject powerlessness and helplessness, a feeling of profound dependence on things and circumstances beyond one's control. He always remained preoccupied with the role of chance in human life. (Cf. *Yuan-yuantang suibi* pp. 82—86.)

The current popular forms of the Buddhist religion did not interest Feng, and he showed no sympathy for the Buddhist priesthood in general. His was an intensely lived and emotional philosophy of life, rather than a religion. Even in the quasi-hagiographical accounts of Feng's Buddhist master, the monk Li Shutong, Feng emerges as a spokesman for Buddhist common sense. (Cf. Liu Xinhua, *Hongyi fashi xinzhuan*, Taipei 1965; Chen Hui-jian, *Hongi dashi zhuan*, Taipei 1966. These are two fascinating biographies of Li Shutong.) His mind was certainly uncluttered by obscurantist Buddhist metaphysics, and in his own writ-

ings he is well on his guard against what he regards as superstition.

When Feng talks about his Buddhist master, the monk Li Shutong, he often comes back to the concepts of earnestness and moral seriousness, two concepts that again play an important part in the psychology of children. Feng never became a monk, but had a sustained admiration for those monks, like Li Shutong, who tried to live uncompromisingly up to the values they stood for. (Feng always remained a lay practitioner of Buddhism or *jushi*.)

It is useful to remember that there is an old Chinese tradition for Chinese painters and calligraphers to go through a course of fasting and meditation before they pick up their ink-stick and prepare their Chinese ink on their ink slab. Feng mentions this practice, and not altogether without sympathy. His art is never ephemeral, always philosophical in perspective. He cultivated a certain detachment from the petty political affairs of the day, and Buddhism provided a basis for this detachment. It was this detachment that set free in him his child-like all-embracing sympathy for things, and his child-like fresh perception of his surroundings.

In 1954 Raghu Vira produced a new edition of Feng's *Ahimsa in black and white* from 1930 with both Sanskrit and English free translations. In his introduction Raghu Vira says:

In the following pages we reproduce a unique set of Chinese poems and pictures on Ahimsa. The sensitivity of the calligraphed words and the power of the simple drawings on the pages opposite are unparalleled in India. Neither the Buddhists, nor the Jainas, nor the Vaishnavas have anything similar to offer. It was left to the Chinese genius to catch the cruelty that is being perpetrated on the poor creatures, whether for food, fun or sport, wittingly or unwittingly, and to portray the same with the power and refinedness of a gentle and magnanimous soul.

(Sarasvati-Vihara Series, volume 34, *Chinese Poems and Pictures on Ahimsa*, Nagpur 1954).

In the late 1920s Feng promised his Buddhist master Li Shutong that he would mark every tenth anniversary of Li's birthday with a collection of Buddhist cartoons, 50 cartoons on Li's 50th birthday, 60 on the sixtieth etc. It is a measure of Feng's unswerving determination that he carried out his promise. The six volumes of his *Hushenghuaji* have recently been republished by a private Buddhist association in Singapore.

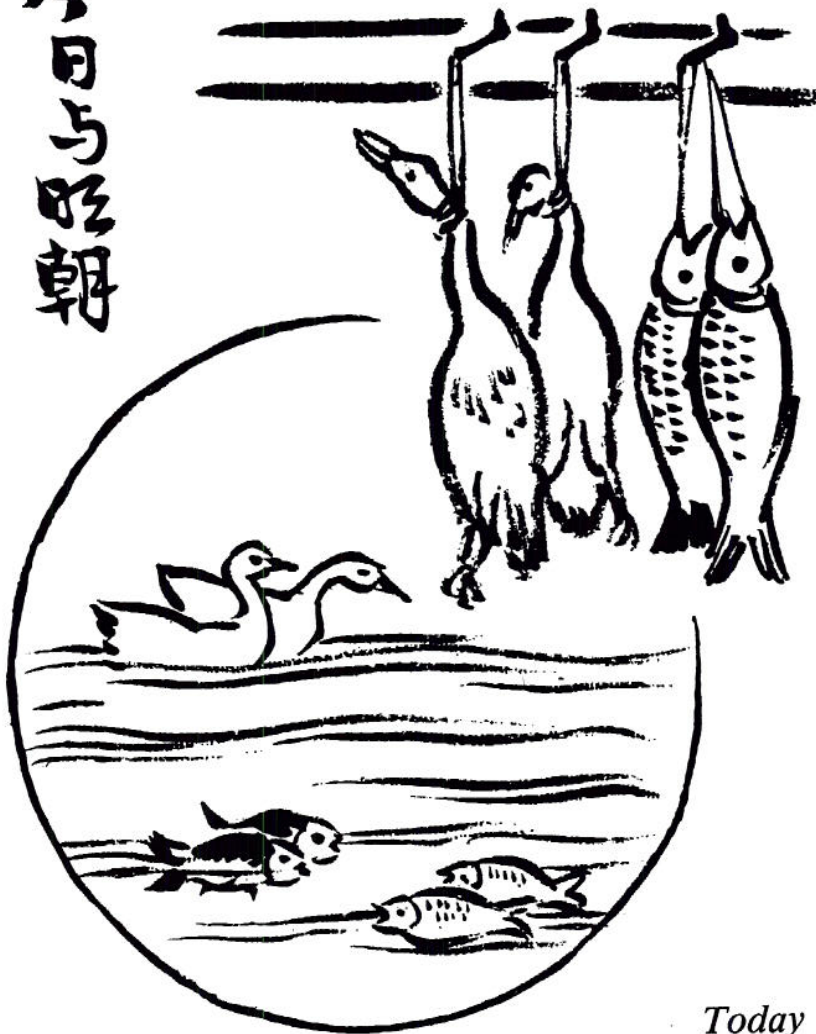
*Gentleness will
overcome
cruelty (1945)*



Feng's belief in this dictum is an act of intellectual desperation — and an act of religious faith.

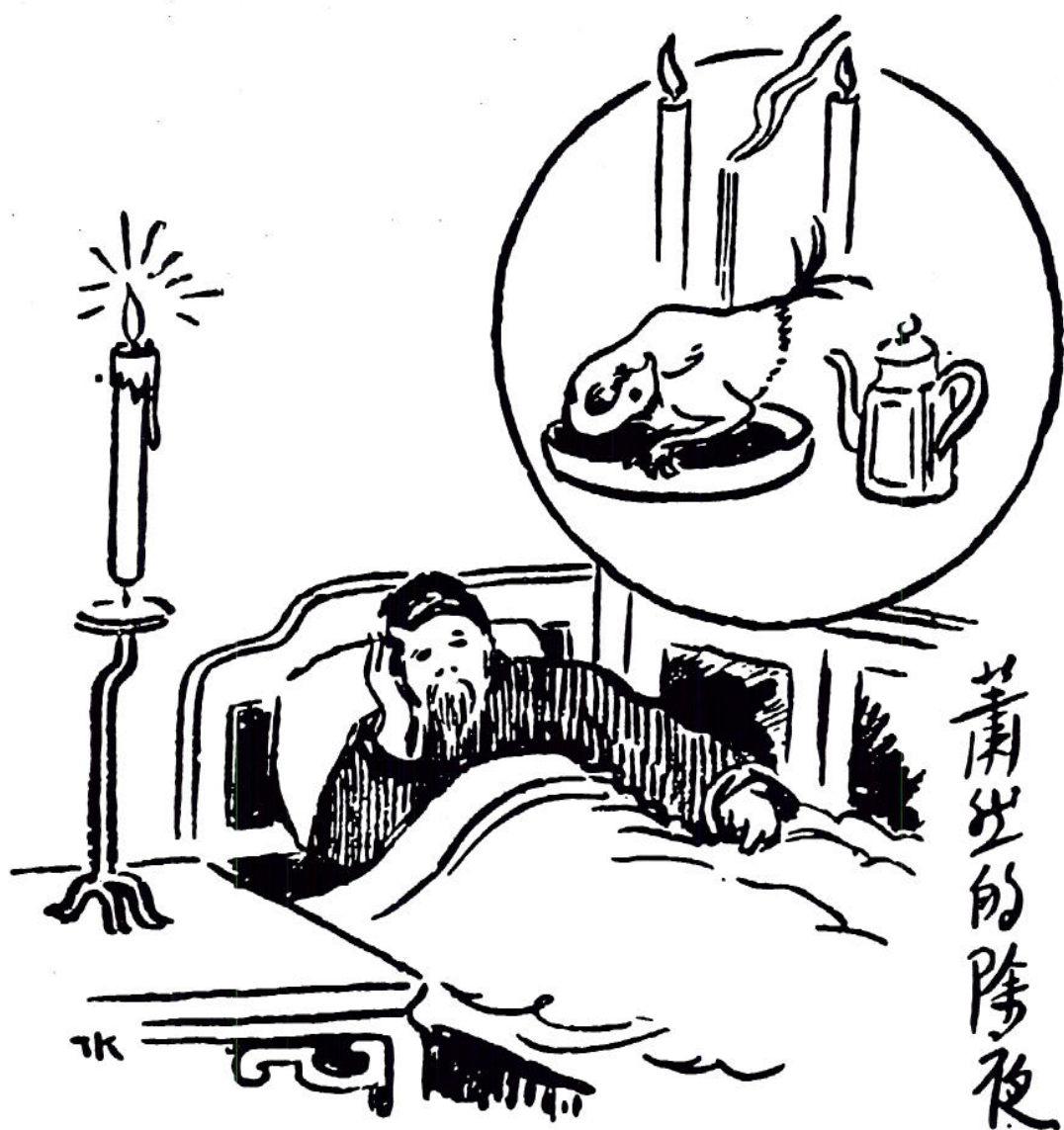
Feng knows full well that no amount of Buddhist invocation or meditation would change the carnivorous nature of the tiger. The notion of a vegetarian tiger is absurd. But was there not someone who said: *Credo quia absurdum*? (I hasten to add that Feng had probably never heard of Tertullian.)

今日与明朝



Today and tomorrow (1928)

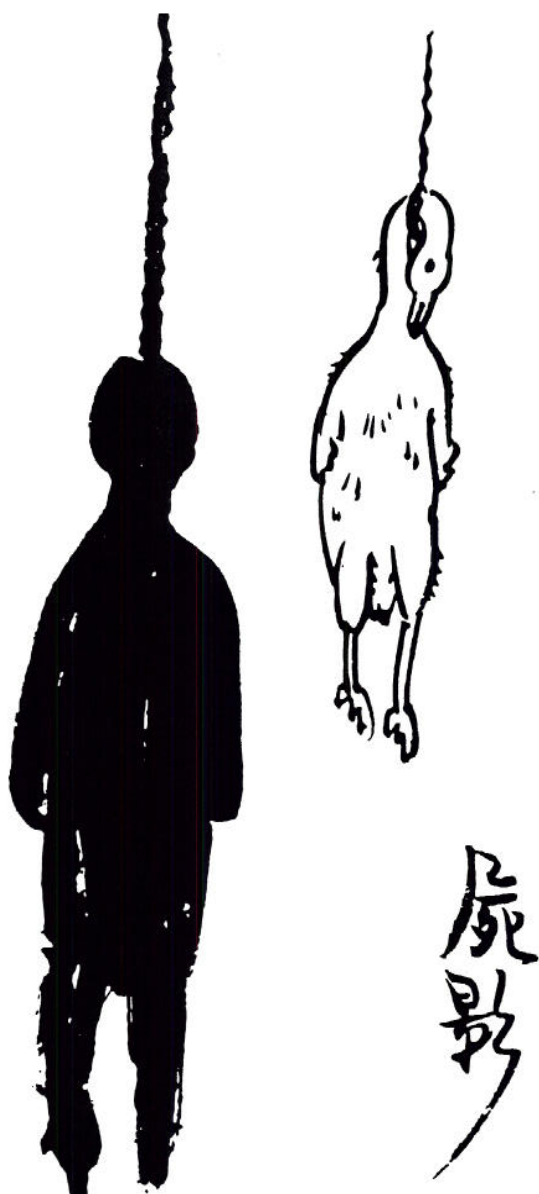
Feng contrasts the open space in which birds and fish are thriving with the confined crooked world of hooks and commercial slaughter. This contrast is basic to Feng's perception of the human condition.



A Quiet New Year's Eve (1928)

For many days the sleepless old man has been hearing the sound of chickens being slaughtered at midnight in preparation for New Year festivities. When at last the slaughtering has stopped, it is because the dead animals are being ceremoniously consumed.

The fact that people are careful to slaughter their chickens *at midnight* does, however, show that the butchers have something of a conscience.



The corpse and the shadow (1965)

This cartoon does not leave any doubt about what Feng is thinking when he comments on the eating of chicken.

!!!



!!! (1928)

It is not just the chicken that Feng is concerned for. Feng is trying to make man aware of what in fact he is doing to the world around him by his very existence, by his very walking the earth. The crudeness of the boot is in deep philosophical contrast to the delicacy of the spider. Such is man. And in a profound sense Feng is not proud of being a man. (Note incidentally that Feng is not advocating that one should avoid walking around for fear of killing an ant or a spider!)

誘殺



Murder by seduction (1928)

The very respectable angler is clearly murdering for pleasure.

溪邊不垂釣



*Not fishing on the
river bank (1940)*

The enlightened man on the other hand takes a different attitude to the living creatures in rivers and lakes . . .

血肉團中有性靈



We creatures
flesh and bone
have a living
spirit in us
(1959)

Mu.

The ve

Feng Zikai invites us to be *mindful* of the fact that meat and fish are the flesh of fellow creatures. As long as we are mindful of this, he finds nothing wrong *in principle* with eating meat! This cartoon shows the growing mindfulness in the eater. (In fact Feng did eat occasionally chicken.)

殘廢的美



Crippled beauty (1928)

Feng is not just attacking the eating of meat. His deep concern is for the *mentality* that makes one eat meat. That same mentality which makes one *pick* flowers, kill them, in order to admire them as they wither away, crippled and maimed, in a vase. Our very love of nature is perverted. We feel we have to rip things out of their natural context and exhibit them as dead objects for our pleasure. We suffer from endemic aesthetic necrophilia.

春
的
佔
有
慾

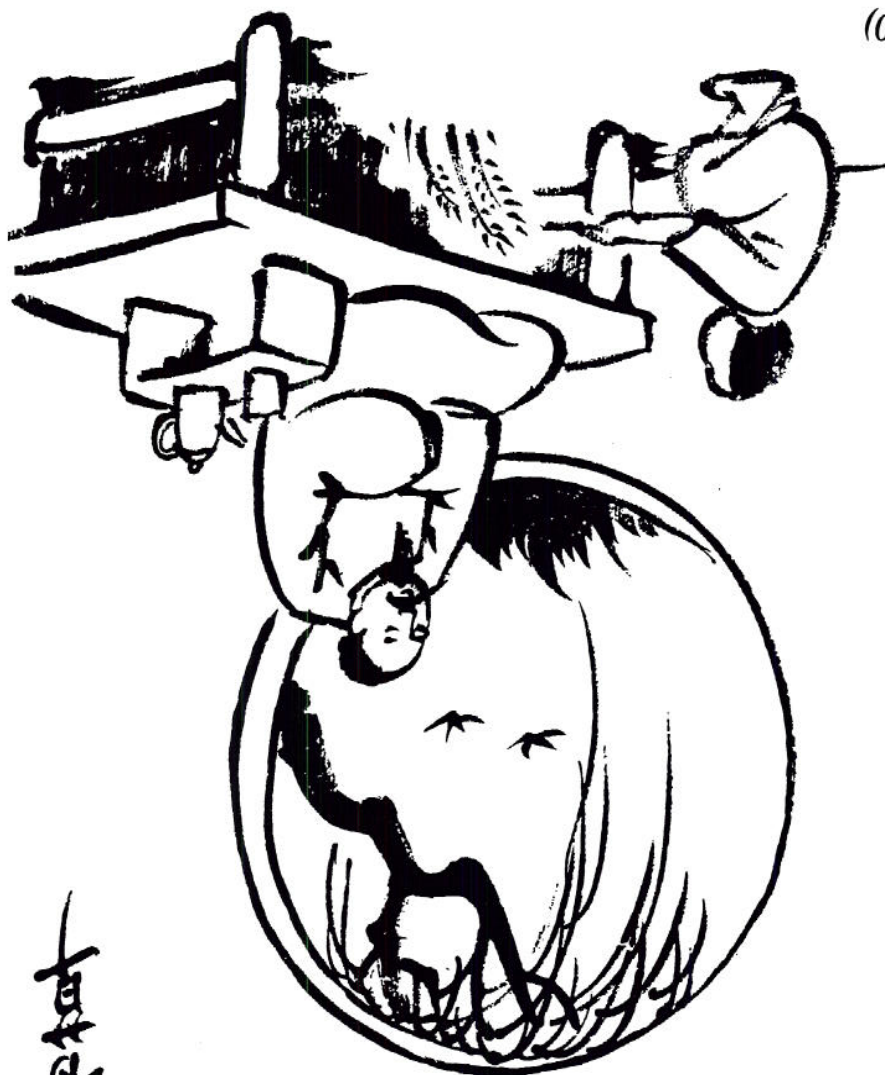


*The lust for
possession in
spring (1949)*

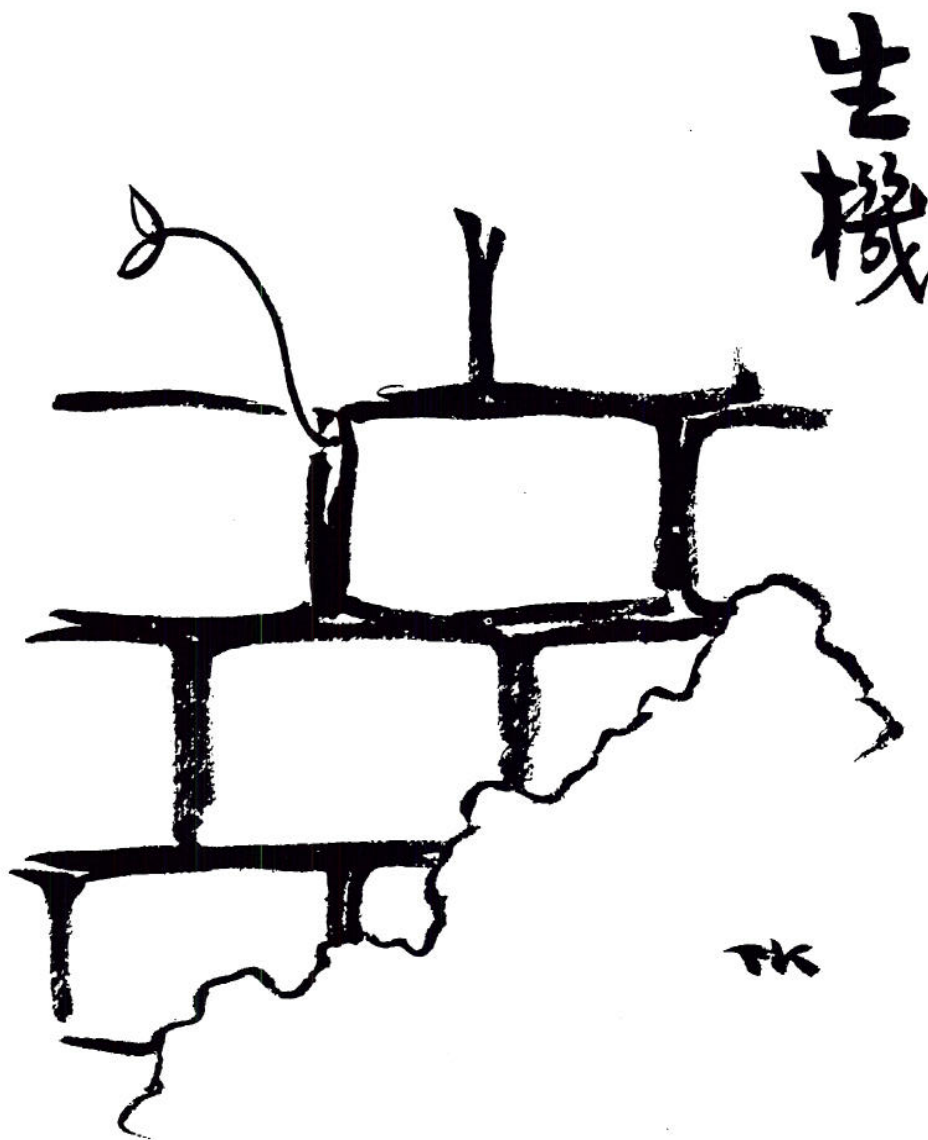
The appreciative soul in the picture has ripped a branch from a living tree. The buds are opening into flowers on his table. There is still some life in them. The onlooker is delighted because he thinks he *owns* a beautiful 'living' thing.

The Buddhist listens with patient pleasure to the child that has discovered grass even inside his abode.

Spring grass (1940)



春草



The instinct for life (1928)

The spontaneity of life in spite of the insensitive rectangular environment humans create for themselves arouses a warm philosophical sympathy in the artist Feng. He dwells with pleasure on the humble delicacy of the sprout set against the crudity of the bricks. For Feng this is a cartoon of hope. Those people in the cities whom he likes are just like this delicate humble plant: surviving in their fragile beauty in spite of their environment, on the edges of the institutional bricks. To my mind this is one of the finest of Feng's Buddhist cartoons.

草不知名畧似蘭



*I do not know
what kind of
weed this is, but
it is a bit like an
orchid (1965)*

Of course, this pot has just been forgotten. The unruly beauty of the weeds, their spontaneous growth, have a metaphysical significance for Feng.



Resurrection (1940)

It is, of course, man that has felled the tree. And yet, life is indomitable. Feng is gratefully moved.



The big tree king (1940)

It gives Feng considerable satisfaction to show a large tree which the petty and cruel saw of man is not large enough to tackle. Of course, such a tree would pose no problems to more advanced technology . . .

前
冬
青
聯
想



*Associations
on the cutting
of hedges
(1949)*

TK

For Feng the maiming of nature has close connections with the rigid educational system which seeks to eradicate individuality among the pupils.

雀巢可俯而窺



*One can look
down into the
swallow's nest
(1928)*

The appreciative symbiosis of children and animals is for Feng a profoundly moving motif.

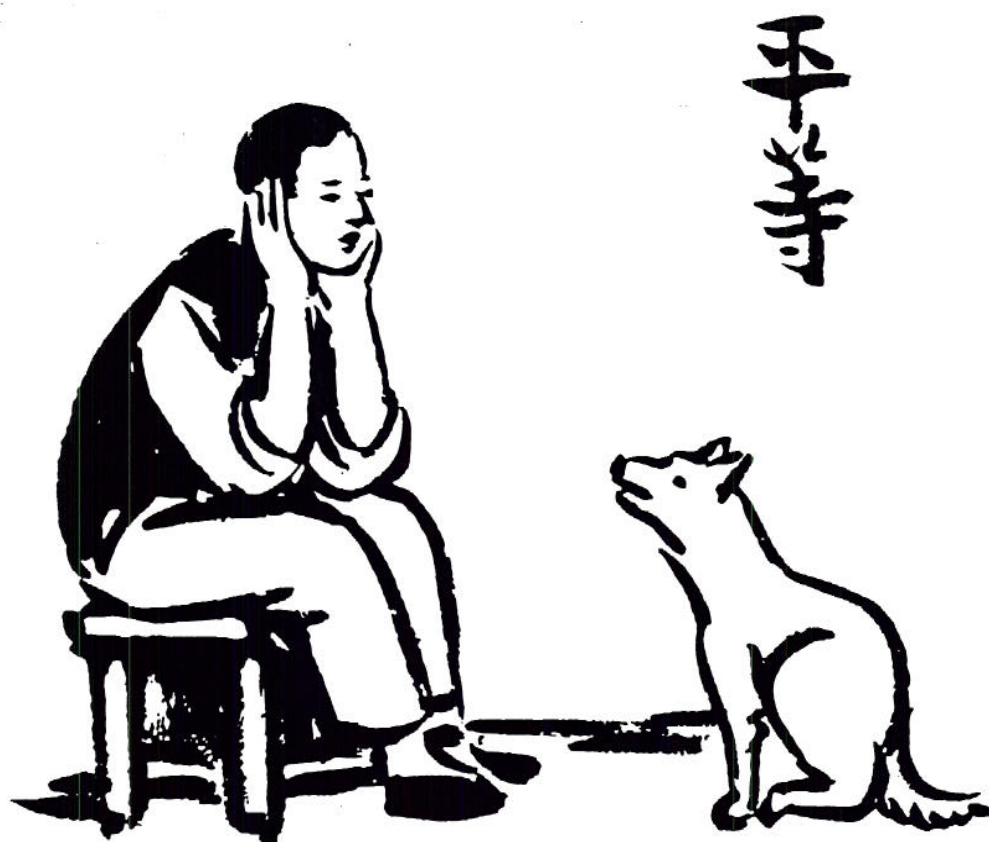
小猫似朋友
偎肩看画面



*The kitten
looking at the
painting like a
little friend
(1950)*

TK

Cats have a way of taking an interest precisely in what one is working with, for Feng a symbol of empathy between animal and man. Actually, the cat will at any moment jump onto the paper and make a mess of the picture. But that is not the subject of this cartoon.

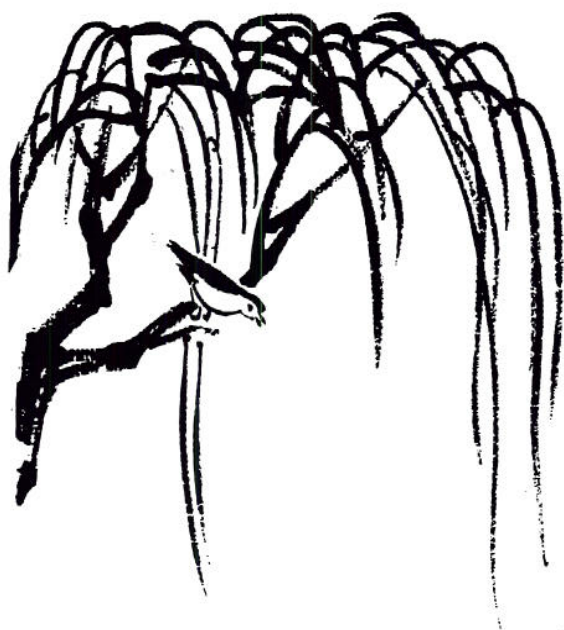


THEY ARE THE EYES OF EQUALS

—TURGENIEV—

Equality (1928)

Feng's Buddhism is not a profound kind of wisdom of the East . . . Later in his life Feng learnt Russian and translated a number of Turgeniev's books directly from the Russian, but in the 1920s he only knew Turgeniev from Japanese and English translations.



好鳥枝頭亦朋友



A good bird on a branch is also a friend (1940?)

There is even a tea-cup for the metaphysical bird. Absurd, you might say, since birds do not drink tea. But it is the thought that counts.

天地為室
園林是籠



TK

*The universe is my house
The garden is a cage for the birds (1949)*

This cartoon reminds one of the joke about the poet-philosopher Xi Kang of the third century AD. When the eccentric Xi Kang received the Prime Minister at home, he sat naked playing his lute. 'Why are you wearing no clothes?' he was asked. 'This universe is my house. This house is my clothing. What, may I ask, are you doing in my trousers?'



*The young bamboo is giving shade. No one is hunting:
We can enjoy together the breeze at the northern window (1949)*

Here we have a variation on the theme. A child is joining in with the ants, playfully, as one should. The adult has a blank face, doesn't understand what is going on in the child. In a second he will start telling the child off. But the child is only trying to protect the ants from being trampled on by a gross adult.

*The ants moving
house (1940)*



蚂蚁搬家



7
H

Seeking nectar (1.

Here Feng's Buddhist romanticism is at its best. The constellation of these houses recurs so often in Feng's cartoons that one is sure it is from the vicinity of his home.

老牛亦是知音者
橫笛聲中緩步行



*The old water buffalo does know music.
He moves slowly to the sound of the traverse flute (1940)*

There is something intensely musical about the sensitivity Feng advocates. A cosmic musicality, you might say. This cartoon is a glorious illustration of this aspect of Feng's thought. Note the gleeful smile on the buffalo's face.



*On the rock the boy
from the hill is fast
asleep (1965)*

The lower part of the soul, the ox, drinks the pure water from the river. The face of the ox shows the delicate harmony and satisfaction that comes from a good conscience.



This is the original picture of the famous ox-herding sequence on which Feng's cartoon is based. (*Muniu tusong* p. 9a, reprint of Ming edition with preface dated 1609)

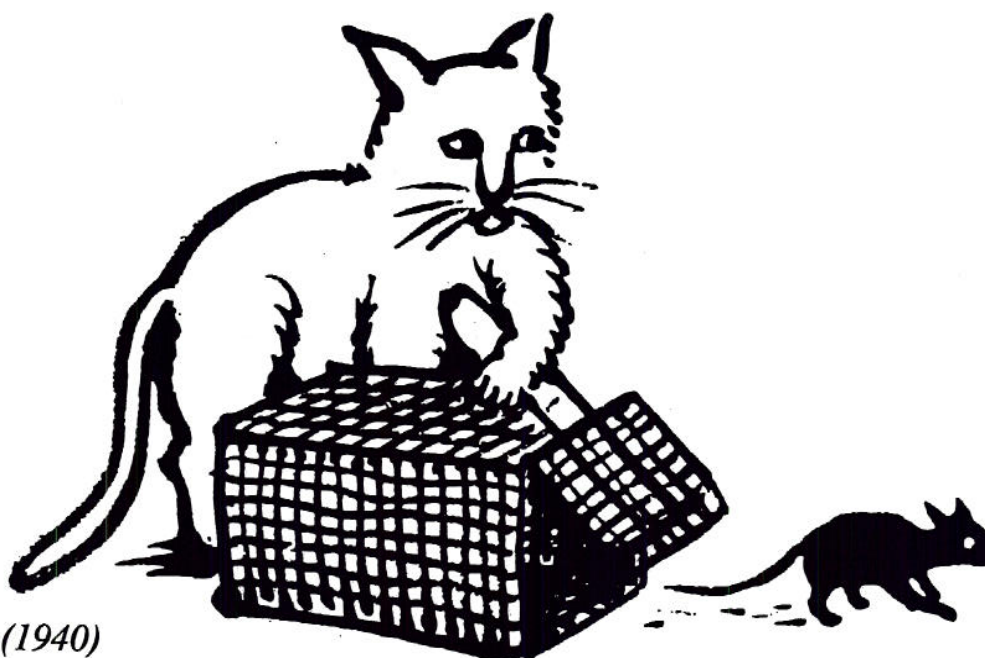
羌笛聲中送晚霞



*Music from the flute
sends home the
evening clouds
(1965)*

The boy is riding on a marvellously inspired ox.

解放



Liberation (1940)

Even cats release mice from human traps in Feng's utopia. Cats, of course, never do this sort of thing. It would be absurd for a cat to do this. Paradoxical. But on the cat's face one can see that this is an *enlightened* cat . . .



*Returning to town
(1940)*

Tiger, mother, and child are at peace with each other.

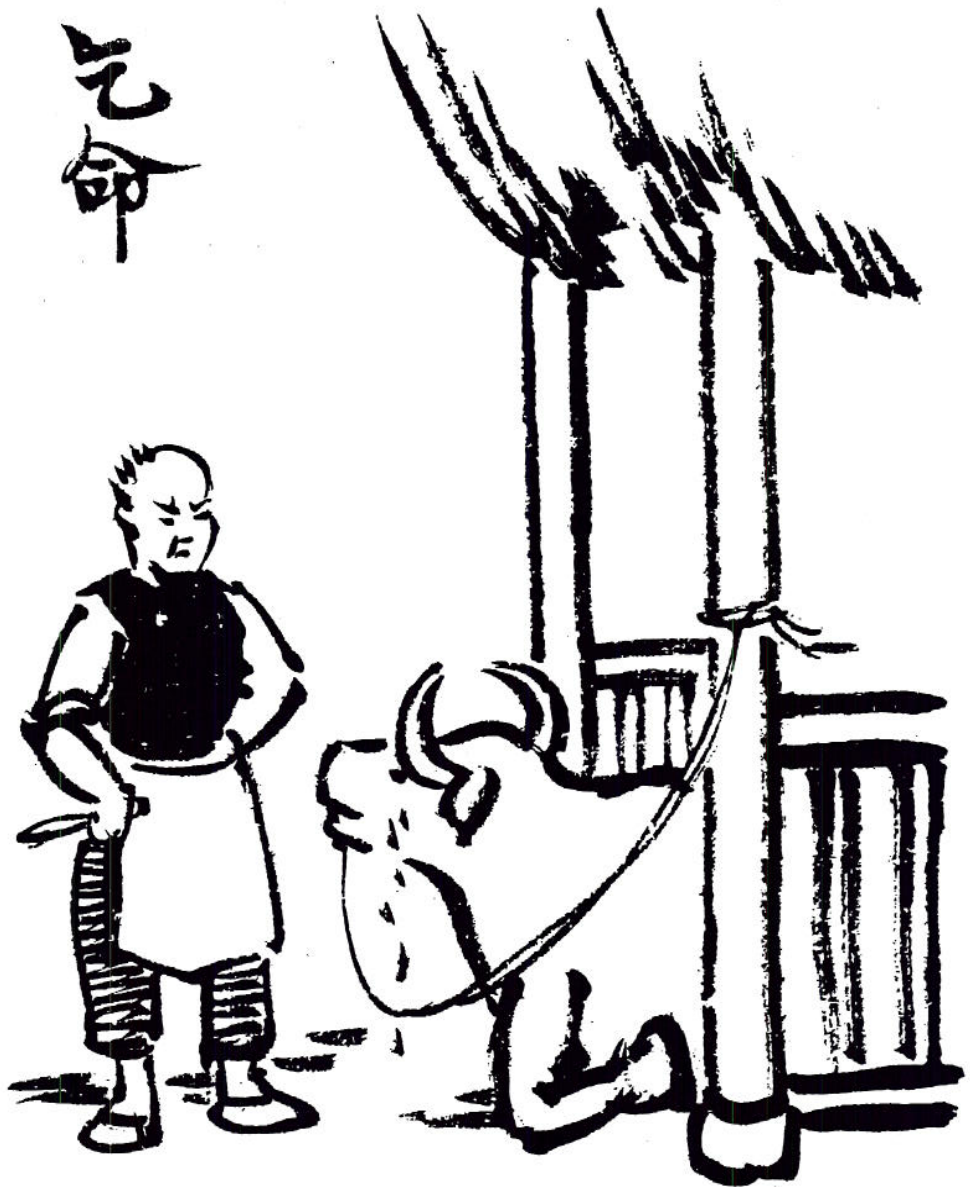


Feng does not hide the unrealistic side of his beautiful fantasy. Two moon hares join in the festivities.



Now consider adult festivities: Feng exploits the contrast between the murderous preparations for the feast and the mild, civilized pleasures of the repast. Feng is out of sympathy with this murderous politeness. He is out of sympathy with those who follow the ancient Chinese maxim and keep far away from the kitchen. On the contrary, the artist takes us right into the kitchen. He wants us to know what we are doing. To face up to it.

乞命



*Spare my
life! (1928)*

Like this butcher who tries in vain to hide his murderous knife: Will he take mercy on the poor creature he is paid to kill?

肉



Meat (1928)

Needless to say, it is the adult mentality that decides what is to be done.

遇救



Being saved (1940)

Feng likes to dramatize the conflict between sensitivity (typically children's) and cruel insensitivity (typically adults').

懺悔



Repentance
(1928)

In the face of all this inevitable human monstrosity there is only one thing left: repentance.

民國廿一年九月廿五日
弟子吳昌碩行狀造像圖



*Portrait of the
master Li Shutong
(1932)*

This is a portrait of Feng Zikai's Buddhist master and art teacher, Li Shutong (1880—1942). In 1954 Feng Zikai, together with his friend Ye Shengtao and others, conducted a formal and ceremonious reburial of Li Shutong by the West Lake near Hangzhou. All Feng's Buddhist cartoons in this chapter are dedicated to Li Shutong.

The social perspective: Towards a humanist revolution

Feng Zikai was a grocer's son, and he married a wealthy girl. I suppose he must qualify as a member of the middle class. And he was a very leisured member of that class. He knew what he was talking about when he was characterizing the middle classes in his cartoons.

我們所造的



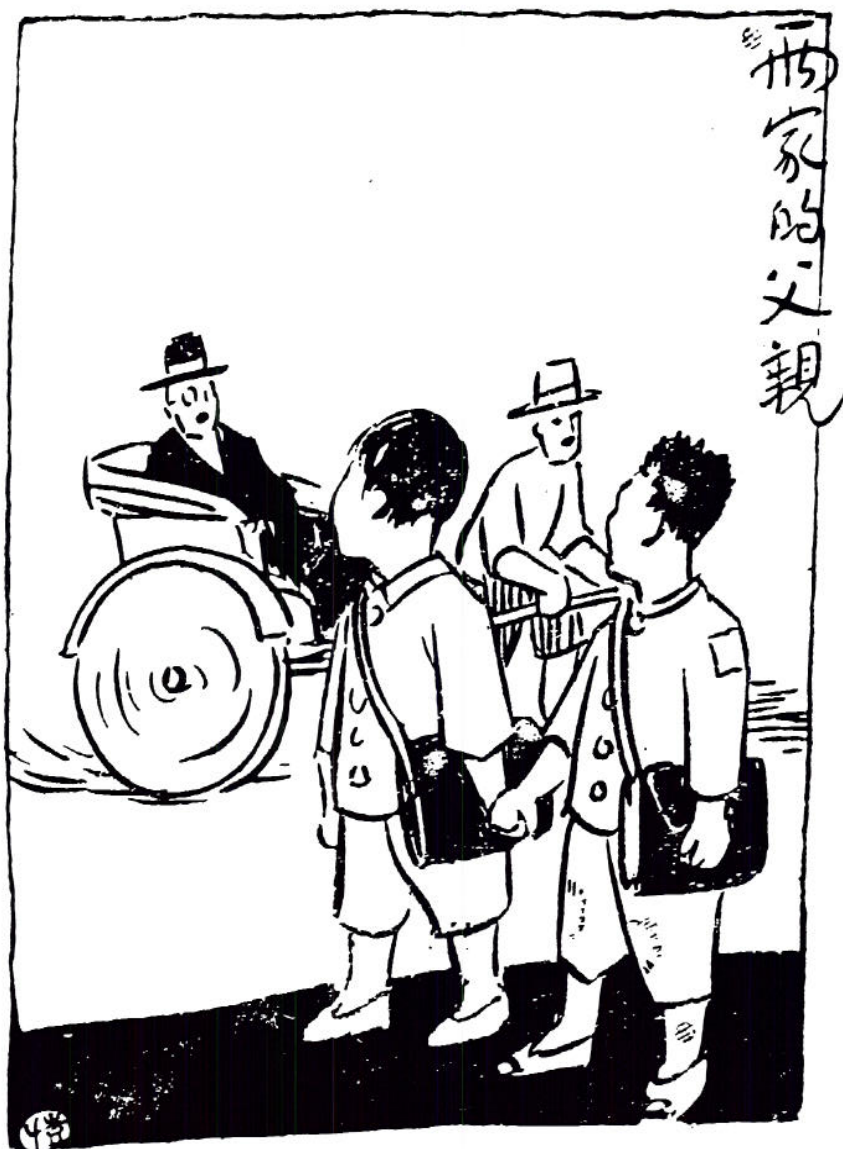
*The work of
our hands
(1934)*

The work of our hands may well look both trite and contrived, a piece of straightforward artistic propaganda. But one wonders if it was already trite in the China of 1934. The sentiment expressed in this cartoon has unfortunately become so obligatory in China since 1949 that it has lost its meaning. But in 1934 it was well worth making the point strongly that the marvellous temples of Chinese culture were not built by emperors but by working men. In the end I feel that *The work of our hands* is a very effective political cartoon. And it doesn't pretend to be anything else.

*What a beautiful
day! (1937)*



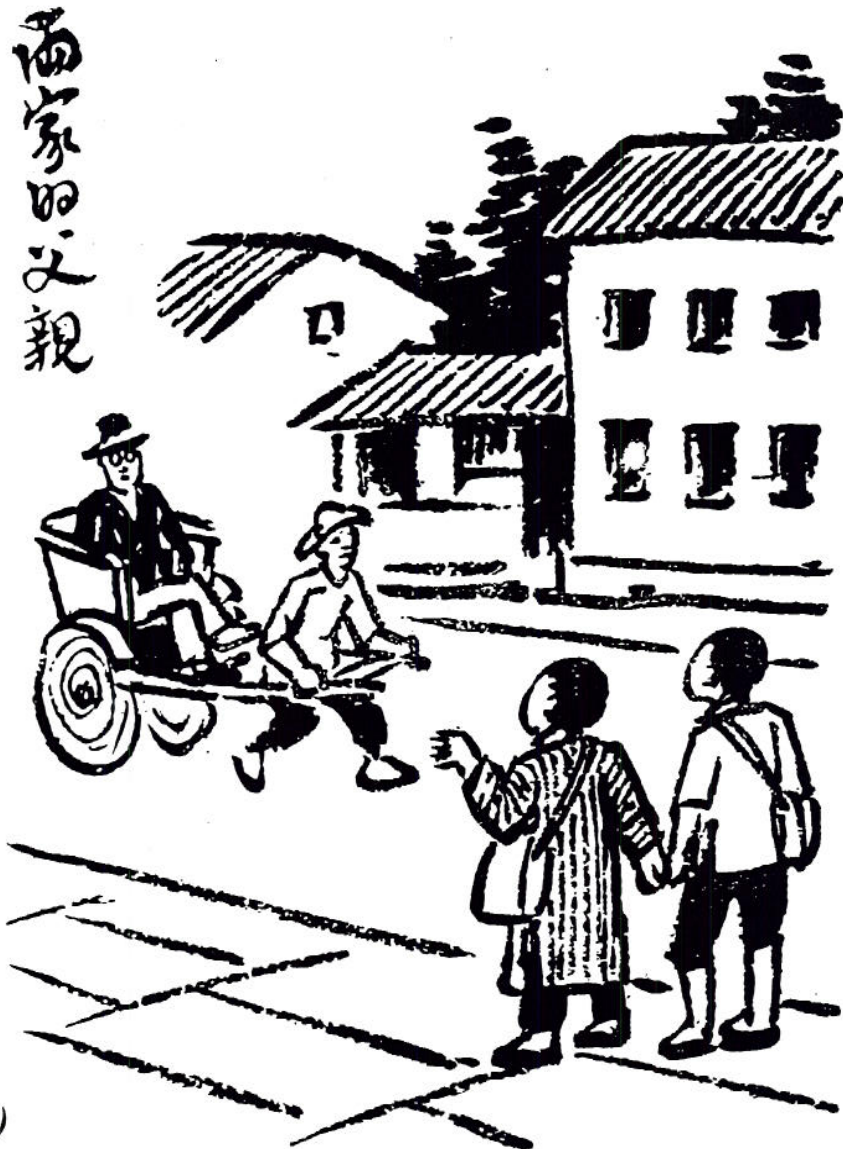
The man with the hat in *What a beautiful day!* is probably not only sensitive to climate and scenery, he might also be a very kind grandfather. He is a very pleasant and respectable middle-class person. His bourgeois tranquillity and mild kindness are maintained precisely *because* he doesn't see the little beggar with his empty bowl. He moves in a different sphere. He may well return home to discuss the terrible lot of the impecunious in the lower strata of society. All this makes no difference: he stands condemned by Feng's cartoon. So do we affluent Europeans.



兩家的父親

Two fathers (1932)

The children are friends. Holding hands they watch how the rich child's father is being pulled along by the poor child's father. They look at their fathers' world with shared indignation.



Two fathers (1946)

This is a later version of the same cartoon. And it shows the importance of finding the earliest versions of Feng's works.

某種教育

子恆畫



*Certain kinds
of education
(1942?)*

A recurring theme in Feng's attacks on the educational system is the comparison of it with the making of traditional Chinese clay toys with moulds.

教育
(二)



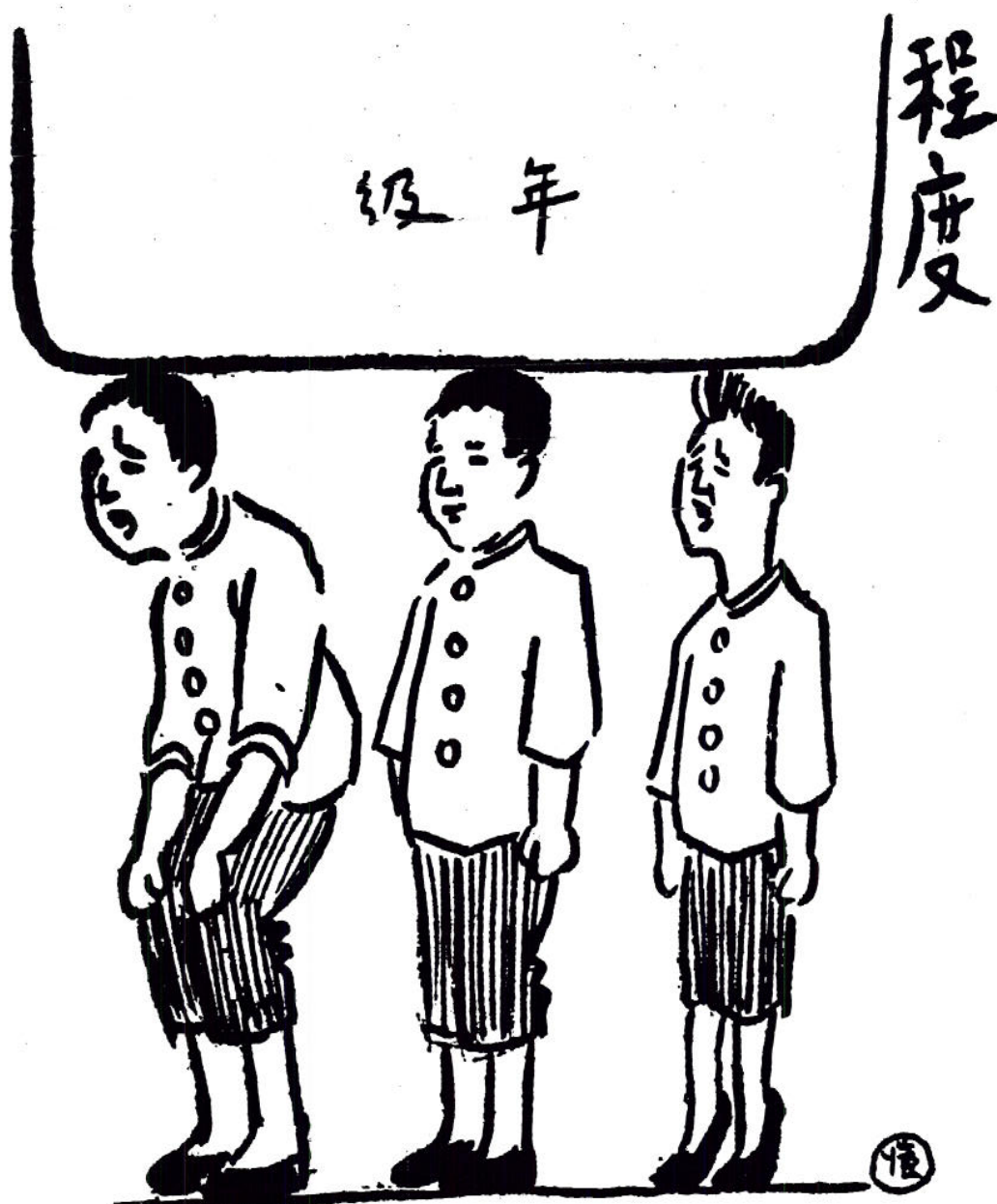
Education II
(1932)

Feng felt children did not like to be moulded in that way.



Education 1 (1932)

The threatening fists are those of parents and teachers. Education confronts children like a threat. Feng was upset by this threat to the integrity and creativeness of children. And he was thoroughly depressed that the situation in this regard has not improved since liberation. The schooling system in China continues to be highly traditional today.



Age and achievements (1932)

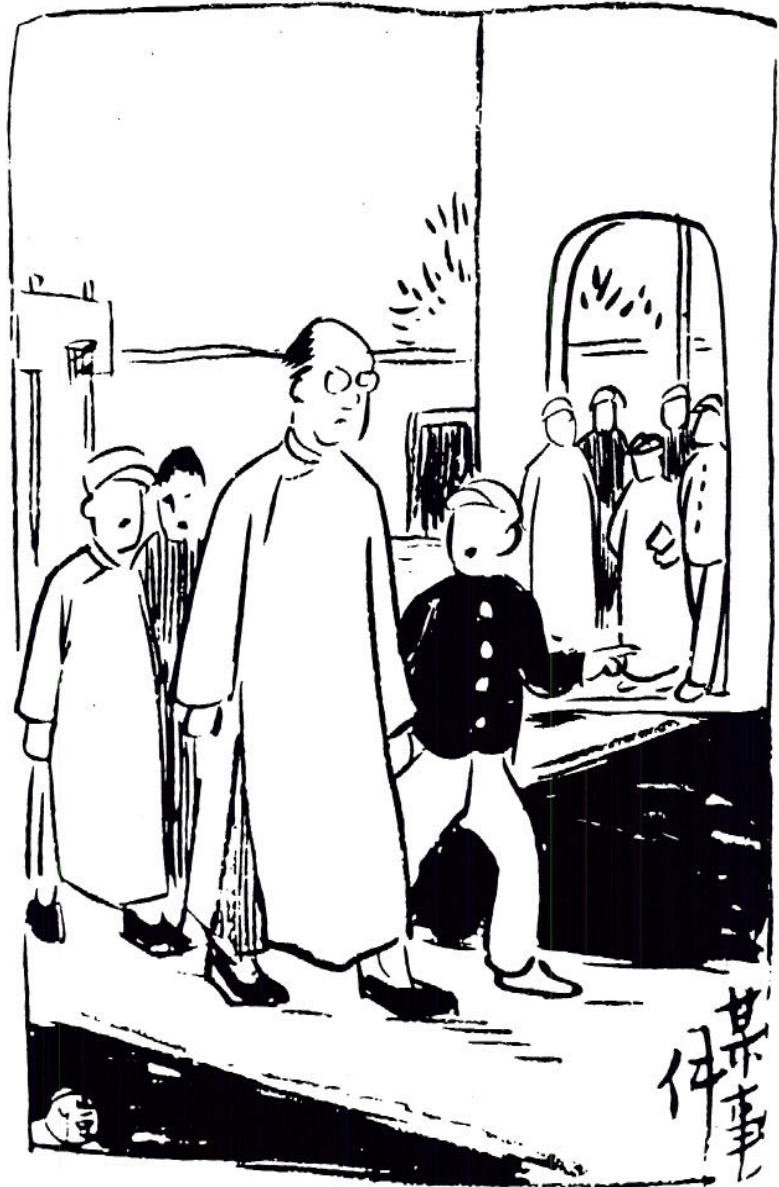
Feng was preoccupied with the need to do justice to each child not according to age but according to the development of each individual.



Certain kinds of schools (1932)

The monkey on top of the pole is the school-teacher, who is being controlled by the head-master beating the drum on the left. The treasurer with the black coat on the right is demanding money from the students who are watching the performing ape.

If one wants to understand why Feng was dissatisfied with life as a school-teacher, and why he wanted to found his own school based on humanitarian educational principles, this is the cartoon to study.



An episode at school
(1932)

Note the economy in the characterization of this dramatic little scene. The accuser pointing the finger. The wronged student walking behind the teacher, turning to his friend. The teacher, annoyed that he has been disturbed by this affair, determined to deal with the culprit.



Examination time (1936)

The bucket in the foreground is for washing one's hands: there is no toilet paper . . .

吸煙室
①



*In the smoking
room (1936)*



The resident master's head (1935)



Listening (1926)

Much of his life Feng Zikai lived by painting and by writing, but at various times he took up teaching posts in schools and universities. By and large he didn't enjoy teaching very much, but there were many sights that fascinated him. Like the student in *Listening*, who is concentrating so hard that his surroundings have completely disappeared, and the menacing sight of *The resident master's head*, which must have frightened the students into discipline and respect.



Nine o'clock in the morning (1938)

The most touching of these pictures from school life is the portrait *Nine o'clock in the morning*. It is as if one had known this servant all one's life. One has never seen him. But one is absolutely sure he looks *exactly* like that!



師生

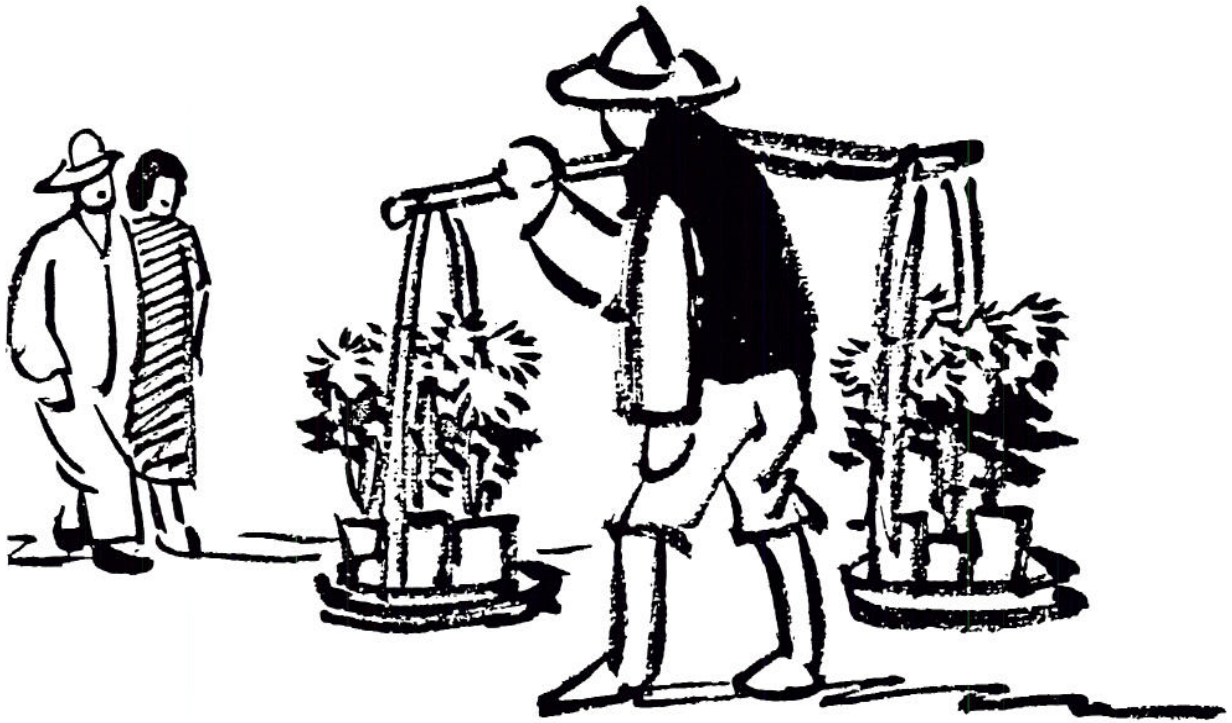
Teacher and student (1932)



In the corner of a tea-shop (1940?)

On the notice in the background it says 'No talk about national politics permitted'.

(一) 長安買花者



Buying flowers (1940)
(1) Customers in Chang'an



(2) One pot worth ten thousand cash

(三) 道旁有飢人



(3) There is a beggar on the road-side

捐不錢 (四)



(4) They have not a penny to spare



*Hi there! Come
and have a drink
with me (1942?)*

Theleisured drinker cannot do anything for the beggar. And really, invit-
ing the beggar to have a drink does not do much for the poor man.
Still, it is a gesture. A gesture Feng is fond of. It symbolizes his sympa-
thy, and at the same time it shows his powerlessness.

飽
狗



The well-fed dog (1934)

The force of the sequence on the flower-seller has to do with the rough juxtaposition of two incongruous brief episodes. In the portrait *The well-fed dog* it is the terrible contrast between the emaciated beggar, whose bony hand can hardly sustain the large stick, and the sprawling, satisfied dog that is trying to keep awake by his side, which attracted Feng's attention. And it is probably true: dogs had a better life than beggars in the China of the thirties.

賣兒



For sale (193?)

Also, rich men's maids had a better life than poor peasant girls. In *For sale* the grim determination on the face of the father (or is he a slave-merchant?) is born out of destitution. He is determined that his daughter shall have a better life than that in a starving village. His look is directed into the long distance. He tries to forget the row he had with the girl's mother when he tried to persuade her that if they wanted to survive they had to sell their daughter. Now his mind is made up. He is prepared to use the stick. His daughter, wearing her best clothes, is rigid with fear. Too frightened even to move her arms as she goes along.

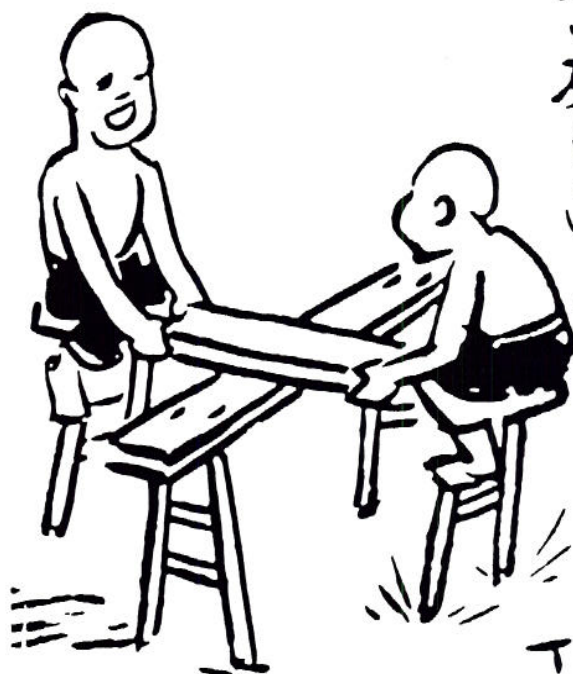
獨行



Leading the way
(193?)

Technically, *For sale* is in some ways a rather careless cartoon. The father's left arm is considerably longer than would be natural, his left foot has no organic connection with his body. *For sale* is a quick, occasional piece. Compare a perfectly classical piece like *Leading the way*. It is almost timeless. The little boy's confidence is in carefully weighed contrast to the old musician's diffident, faltering steps. The difficulty the two have in finding a common walking rhythm is nicely observed. The little scene isn't just taken from a traditional painting. There is a modern touch of realism about it.

窮小孩的
跷跷板



The poor children's seesaw
(1934)

On the other hand, *The poor children's seesaw* would be an outrage on any self-respecting traditional scroll. It is a rough-and-ready sketch that does little credit to Feng's skills as a draughtsman. The sketch came into existence like this. In 1934 Feng received an anonymous letter from an admirer: 'Recently, I have seen your cartoons every day in the journal *Ziyou Tan* (Free Talk) . . .' The anonymous correspondent suggests a motif for a cartoon Feng should make: two poor children playing seesaw with two rough benches . . . The correspondent had seen this in the street and had thought this should be something for Feng Zikai. Feng Zikai was evidently touched. This was exactly what he hoped his cartoons would do for his readers: open their eyes to the things around them. Promptly, he published the cartoon *The poor children's seesaw*, and in an accompanying article he described the harsh fate of poor children in the cities, how they are forced to go collecting cinders and dogs' dung. There is nothing very distinguished about this cartoon, but it does contain some of Feng's typical good-humoured details: the glee on the invisible face of the child on the right who is looking at his frightened stiff and protesting companion, who doesn't dare to climb down from the seesaw. These are *not* idealized young members of the working classes practising solidarity: one is tyrannizing over the other!



*Primary school
classmates (1931)*

Feng Zikai was a bourgeois revolutionary. His deep sympathy lay with the working people but he knew he was not one of them. He was walking the streets of the Shanghai of the 1920s with a large hat, with a waistcoat, and for all I know he may even have stooped to striped trousers. The artist in *Primary school classmates* looks roughly like Feng Zikai in the 1920s. He is busy. He has arrived. He is thinking about important things, has no eyes for the people around him. His empty eyes do not even see the classmate with his buckets. The classmate has an open, friendly and inquisitive look, would like to know how things have gone for the artist. But soon the artist has hurried past. It was a profoundly disturbing thought to Feng Zikai that he might ever have been or ever would become an artist of this sort. He was haunted by the knowledge that he was not really one of those common people he felt so deeply for. He was deeply worried that his art might come to be like the pursuits of the artist in this picture: the business of the intelligentsia.



Father and son (1930)

Another disturbing thing to Feng Zikai was the new breed of westernized Chinese youths that dominated the cultural scene in Shanghai during the 1920s. *Father and son* is a haunting illustration of the generation gap at that time. The young careerist, who is almost ashamed to be associated with his father, walks at a slight, embarrassed distance, unwilling to talk to him. He is as inane as his face is empty. In a later version of the same cartoon, Feng Zikai credits the son with an unfocussing pair of eyes, but he remains irretrievably boring and inane. Thoroughly unworthy of his delightful father.

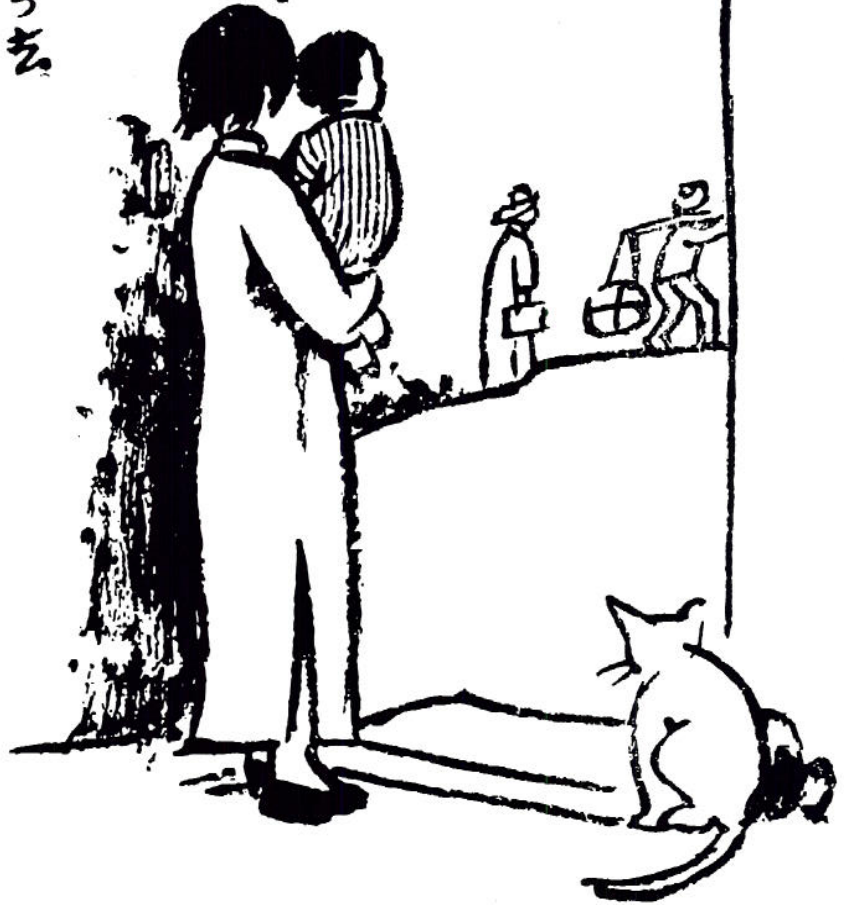
咖啡茶



Coffee-tea (1932)

Coffee, in the boy's mind, is a subspecies of tea. To this day, coffee and (so-called 'red') tea tend to have about the same colour. Probably because of the exorbitant price of coffee it is drunk extraordinarily weak.

父親上学去



*Father has gone off to
school (1931)*

Feng Zikai lived in a men's society. Women used to enter Chinese art only as objects of male admiration. But just as Feng sides with the beggars, with the working man carrying his buckets, with the hopelessly outdated father carrying his belongings in a coarse sack slung over his arm, in just the same way he sides with the oppressed women longing for participation in the outside world but confined to their narrow homes. The woman in *Father has gone off to school* is not only a romantic figure; above all she is sad because she will be alone all day. It would be utterly pointless for her to try and break out of her predicament. Nonetheless it is not bitterness that dominates the picture. It is a moving portrait of a warm mother and a loving wife.



Petals from three years ago (1934)

But motherhood is not all. While she is breast-feeding her child she is reading a book that reminds her of her hopes and aspirations of three years ago. Half the time she cannot concentrate: the child demands her attention. In the course of three years she has not got much further in her book. She is trapped in her role as a mother. Her potential for other things is not realized. There is a cruel sweetness over this picture. Its impact in 1934 must have been enhanced by the fact that it was outrageous at the time to draw a woman actually breast-feeding.

野
外
理
髮
店



*The open-air
barber's shop
(1935)*

It would be quite wrong to suggest that Feng Zikai was entirely preoccupied with the dark side of Chinese social life. He was very fond of taking extended boat-trips, and he greatly enjoyed the company of the boatmen. Once, for example, he drew a cartoon of a scene he had seen through the window of his boat: *The open-air barber's shop*. In an accompanying essay Feng describes the process of making this cartoon in relaxed detail. With pleasure he reports how the boatman, noticing the cartoon as he is bringing in Feng's supper, finds the subject undignified for a famous artist. The forthright wife of the boatman advises Feng to scrap the cartoon and draw some beautiful flowers instead. One objection the cartoon raised among Feng's hosts was that it almost looks as if the barber is poking in the customer's ear!



Feng Zikai found these comments very inspiring: indeed, why not draw a barber cleaning a customer's ear? I wouldn't be at all surprised if *Cleaning the ear* was in fact inspired by the boatman's comments. And these comments are instructive in more than one way. They show that Feng had to fight not only against the upper class prejudices against his vulgar subjects. These prejudices had spread right down the line to the common people: they *expected* art to be irrelevant to their daily experience. The common people objected most strongly to his vulgar themes. The depressing fact was that his admirers were among the progressive intellectual youths in the cities, not among the rural working people.

Pissing prohibited
(1934)



No, these were not the sort of cartoons the boatman admired. He suggested instead that Feng should come along to a famous lantern festival. *There* was something worth commemorating in a cartoon. Feng Zikai went along all right, but the cartoon he made on this occasion wasn't quite up to the boatman's expectations either: *Pissing prohibited*. It was a disgrace!



Third aunt (1935)

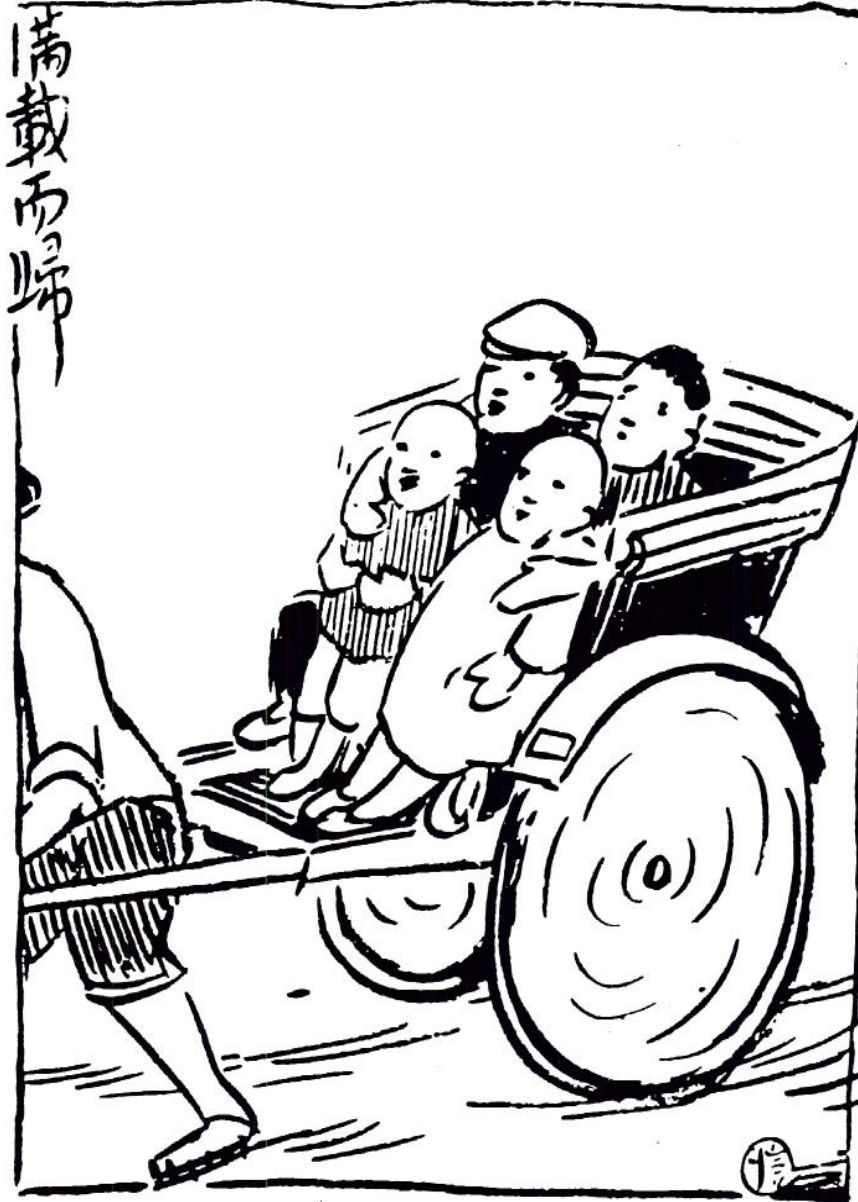
It was the progressive city youths who had a sense for Feng's glorification of the spinning woman in *Third aunt*. In an essay accompanying this cartoon Feng calculates that poor Third Aunt in her decrepit shop has to stretch her arm as far as she can no less than five to six hundred times a day. Fifty to sixty times, Feng calculates, she has to perform this movement with slow precision in order to earn a penny (*tong*).

Feng is fascinated by the grace and superb control of her movements, comparing her control to that of an artist or a calligrapher. But one is sure that her neighbours do not share Feng's admiration or interest.



Loo-loo (1925)

Different creatures have different values . . .



*Returning
home with a
full load (1932)*

In this cartoon it is as if Feng is simply sharing with us an exhilarating sight. The thing is amusing enough in itself. No need to make an artistic fuss.



*Rickshaws
returning from
Xihu (1947)*

Feng liked to base his cartoons on incidental observations. He liked to portray the little details of city life that normally go unnoticed. Like the two playful rickshaw men returning home at night in *Rickshaws returning from Xihu*. They don't look tired at all. But presumably they have been pulling their rickshaws all day. Or aren't they fooling around after all? One cannot be sure. Probably Feng wasn't sure either. This just happened to be a scene he came across.



Cassia flowers (1934)

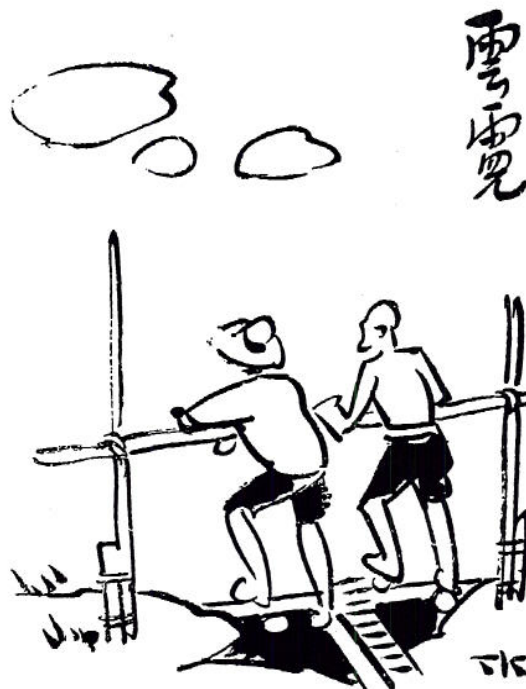
Again, the tired rickshaw puller transporting a potted plant for a rich man in *Cassia flowers*, is clearly just someone Feng Zikai has come across while he was walking the street. The tired man could, of course, just as well have conveyed a well-groomed middle-class lady to her afternoon tea party, but his humiliation becomes even more palpable when he is trotting along with a potted plant. The cartoon makes all these poignant points in a marvellously light-hearted way.



楊柳岸曉風殘月
子愷

Morning breeze, waning moon (1934)

The market for Feng Zikai's cartoons was mainly in the towns and cities. But he was himself a man from the countryside. The countryside as against the city symbolized to him social warmth and the harmony of nature. But his rural scenes are never just idyllic. The title of *Morning breeze, waning moon* is misleading in a way: the peasants are working hard. They are trying to plant as much rice in the paddy-field as they can before the blazing sun slows down their efforts. It is through their work and in their work that they enjoy the marvellous fresh morning breeze. This is not the sort of enjoyment of the morning breeze that the middle-class poets get enthusiastic about when, still in their pyjamas, they survey the scenery from their verandahs on a romantic hill-side.



Clouds and rainbows (1935)

There was, in the rural area where Feng was born, a constant threat of drought. On his frequent boat-trips the sight of tired men treading their irrigation wheels to get some water from the river into their fields was ubiquitous. During dry periods, a peasant family had to keep the wheels turning day and night to try and save what they could of their harvest. Women, children and old people, everybody had to help. Mostly, they had to tread their wheels unprotected against the blazing sun. They would follow the course of any bit of cloud across the sky with desperate hope. And the water in the river was lower every day. Feng mentions such droughts frequently in his writings, and in *Compartment Society* (2.5: 197 ff) he gives a very emotional detailed account of these droughts. The accompanying cartoon *Clouds and rainbows* tries to capture some of what Feng saw, and it became the title cartoon for an anthology of his works published in 1935. But by the time he writes the introduction to this collection he has doubts about this cartoon. He finds it necessary to point out that the clouds are too few and too small to bring rain. There is not going to be rain. This drought will continue to be terrible. And the one next year will be equally terrible . . . In a related piece (2.5:43ff) Feng Zikai draws attention to the macabre contrast between the parched naked legs on the irrigation wheels and the sleek naked thighs in the Shanghai night clubs a few hours further down the river.



Those who have read the first biographical chapter of this anthology will remember that Feng Zikai was not only an observer of this kind of misery. His own life was severely disrupted by the anti-Japanese war. He and his family spent many years of the war basically as refugees. But this is a cartoon about Guomindang cruelty forcing people from their homes.



*Little brother's
funeral (1935)*

This cartoon is so moving precisely because it is so restrained. The only emotional thing in the cartoon is the raised hand of the little boy. The terrible thing is the *ordinariness* of the scene. And indeed: little brothers were getting buried all the time in the city.



Bombing II (1938)

74 1938

Feng's own house was bombed to pieces by the Japanese. His cartoons about the Japanese atrocities are not realistic, but they are born out of intense and horrifying personal experience. Dozens of his anti-Japanese propaganda-cartoons are printed in his various anthologies. I would not like to burden the readers' imagination with many of them. *Bombing II* must suffice as a typical example. In his *A Teacher's Diary* Feng tells us that the students whom he was teaching to make anti-Japanese cartoons laughed at *Bombing II*. They found it funny that the woman had no head. They did not understand Feng's symbolic language with the breast-feeding mother and the favourite children's toys being blown to pieces. And it seems to me to be true that Feng Zikai had no particular flair for the representation of human cruelty.

酒杯投助不能食



*The appetite for
wine and food has
gone (1938)*

By contrast with *Bombing II*, there is no misunderstanding the force of *The appetite for wine and food has gone*. Here, Feng makes a much more heart-felt artistic comment on the situation. He is not subordinating his art to the needs of horror-propaganda. He has scope for the subtlety of his characterization.

舉杯澆愁更愁

子恆



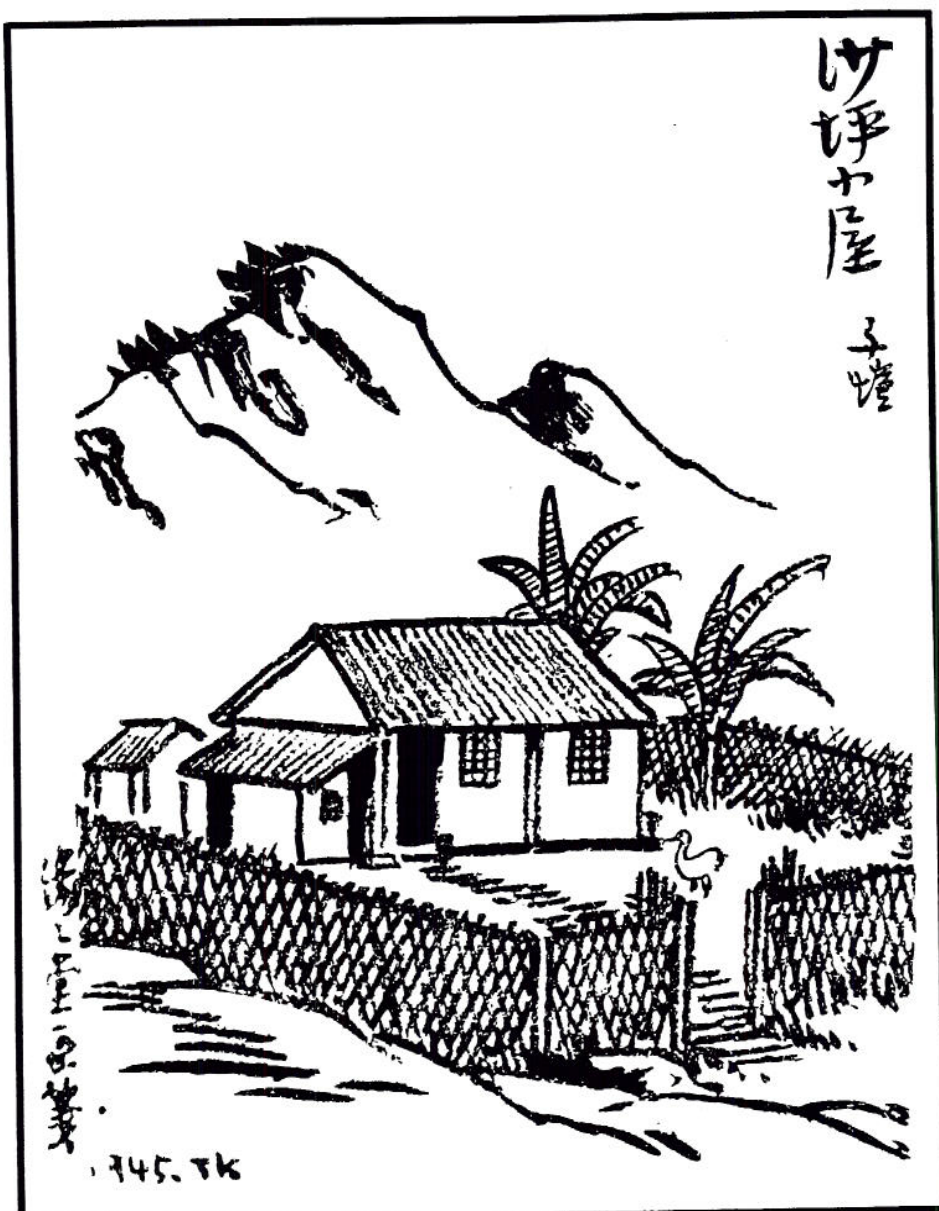
緣上堂更愁

*I tried to drown
my sorrow in
wine, but the
sorrow became
even more
sorrowful (1942?)*



*Examining the
patient (1946)*

The doctor is worried, but helpless. What indeed can one do if the world is a hopeless case?



*The little
house
at Sha Ping
(1945)*

Feng Zikai always was a very soft and vulnerable person. The horrors of the anti-Japanese war and of the civil war against the Guomindang were too much for him. Physically he withdrew to a fairly miserable, lonely little house in the countryside, and artistically he withdrew into bucolic naturalism and came remarkably close to traditional landscape painting. We have a portrait of the little house he lived in, with the goose he loved so much prominently in the foreground.

春江水暖鴨先知



*When in spring
the water gets
warm, the ducks
know it first
(1941)*

Feng Zikai also indulged in idyllic scenes like *When in spring the water gets warm, the ducks know it first*. He returns to his old habit of illustrating striking lines of poetry as in *Fortunately I have come along so the mountain is not alone*, or *The day before yesterday my friend has left in a snowstorm*. But Feng Zikai's more traditional works deserve an anthology to themselves.

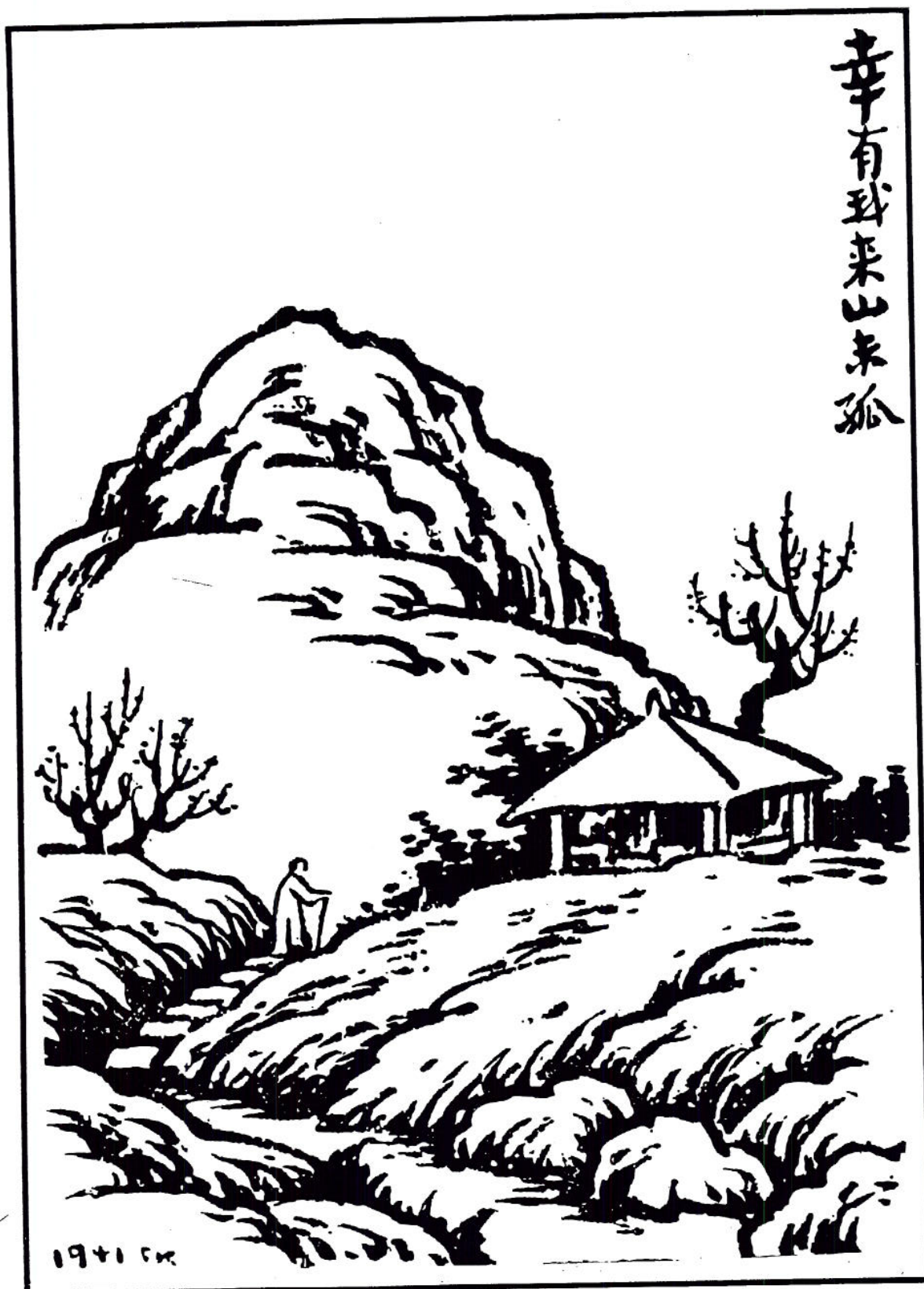


The transformation of clouds (1941?)



Attap huts all round the western building (1947)

幸有我来山未孤



Fortunately I have come along so the mountain is not alone (1941)



The day before yesterday my friend has left in a snowstorm (1941)

Cartoons under communism: A difficult adjustment

Feng Zikai was a progressive intellectual, but he was not a militant communist until 1949. Even during the anti-Japanese war he opposed the total abandoning of humanism in favour of an all-out artistic war-effort. He refused to devalue his art into a political tool. He knew that his cartoons had to be heart-felt and honest to be any good. He had no flair for unsubtle, rousing graphic propaganda of the one-dimensional kind.



*The horse won't eat hay.
It'll only eat cake (after 1949)*

Feng's adjustment to the artistic climate in Communist China was not an easy one. But his relief at the communist liberation is obvious in his cartoons. Increasingly he uses fresh water colours after 1949. And the relaxed play of the children in *The horse won't eat hay. It'll only eat cake* expresses his joy and relief. Even the child on horse-back knows to whom he owes the newly-won liberty: he carries a red flag. The symbol is unobtrusive. Feng's cartoon is much more than crude communist propaganda. It is personal and convincing in a way that state-sponsored propaganda never can be.

哥之帶點笑，
妹之頭抬高，
弟之別吃糕！
子謹畫



*Smile, elder brother, smile
Raise your head, little sister
And little brother, stop eating cakes (after 1949)*

Another coloured cartoon *Smile, elder brother, smile* describes a beautifully observed everyday scene in an increasingly prosperous urban China after liberation. The picture has all the delightful subtlety of Feng's early children's cartoons. The willow and the cat are back again. Feng Zikai is full of hope.



Heroes' tales (1961)

The story of the war of liberation is now a matter of the romantic past. It is a subject for romantic *Heroes' tales*. Only, the raised arm of the story-teller and the exaggerated attention *all* the children seem to be paying to what she is saying begins to be worrying. Something trite and artificial is beginning to creep into Feng's cartoons. If the story really is as moralistic as the gesture of the story-teller suggests one would expect some of the children to lose interest . . . But perhaps the story *was* as absorbing as it appears. One is beginning to have lingering doubts whether this picture is really *quite* honest, quite as heart-felt as Feng Zikai's best cartoons.



The enthusiastic workers II (1960)

Such doubts begin to grow upon one in such cartoons as *The enthusiastic workers II*. One remembers Feng's glorious cartoon of the enthusiastic workers which he made in 1926, with children at play. But now these children have become *real* little workers. Their work is dead serious. One can't even be quite sure whether the little girl on the far left isn't explaining the benefits of collectivization to the little boy opposite her. An unchildlike working spirit prevails in the picture. It seems that the little workers are enthusiastically building communism. Before 1949 Feng Zikai was a prolific advocate of realism, but it seems that in *The enthusiastic workers II* his realism has degenerated into socialist idealism of the uninteresting kind: children don't *really* work like that! I hasten to add, though, that within the rigid framework of socialist realism in China this still is a lively and a well-observed cartoon.



*Careful economy at home:
A new one for the eldest
An old one for the next
And a mended one for the little boy (1958)*

I feel sure that Feng Zikai was aware of the change I have just mentioned. He *knew* that the messy and naughty children he liked were just not on in Communist China. In *Careful economy at home* he gives a very sensitive portrait of the domesticated variety of children of the new China. The coat of the boy in the middle is like a straitjacket. His impeccable hair-style leaves no doubt that the boy is not being given undue freedom. Soon the little one on the right will be similarly streamlined, but there still is something faintly clownish in his way of putting on the coat that is far too large for him. The girl on the left stands to attention. She will move if and when she is told to. She is frozen stiff by her excellent and disciplined education. There is something deeply unsettling about this cartoon and about its trite message, especially when one sees it against the background of Feng's earlier work.



*Spring grass grows in front of the home
Willows hang their long branches
Out in the fresh air
The children learn their lessons well (1960)*

By contrast, *Spring grass grows in front of the home* is so openly remote and idyllic, almost timeless, that there is no pretence at realism. Here, it seems to me, Feng combines artistic subtlety with a propagandistic purpose. *Of course* children in the new China don't look like this. But wouldn't it be nice if they did?



1936 TK

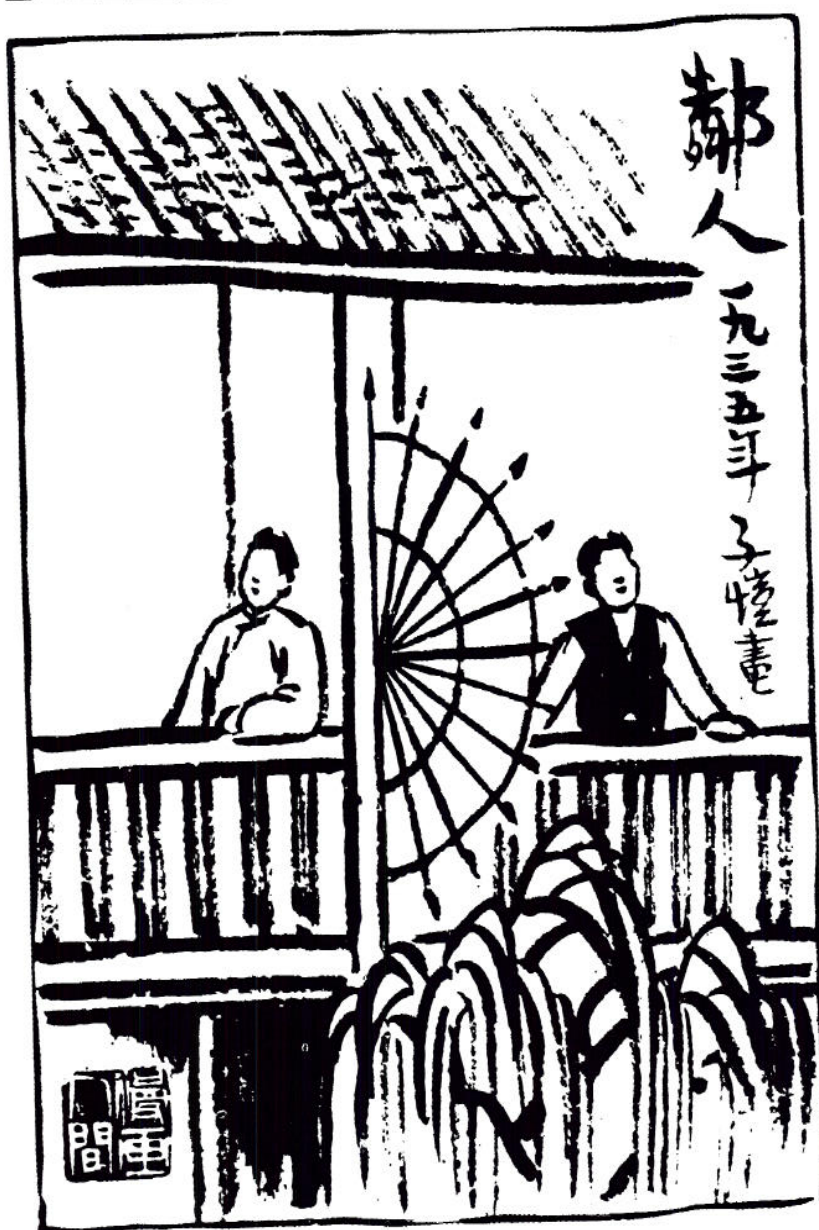
*The cart has turned over
Those who help me are few
Those who eat the melons are many (1936)*

One of Feng's famous cartoons was his *The cart has turned over* of 1936. A friend who has lived in China assures me that the scene is all too familiar. Vandals turning over carts to steal some of the load. Passers-by pilfering the odd bit here and there. The owner of the cart desperate to protect his property. This was by no means unknown also after 1949, but in 1962 Feng Zikai produced a new edition of this cartoon.



*The melon cart is going up-hill,
passers-by give a hand (1962)*

After the communist take-over things have changed completely. In *The melon-cart is going up-hill, passers-by give a hand* there is no question of toppling the cart over. The vandals of pre-1949 are now helping to push the cart up-hill and against the wind. The delightful party-cadre on the right is eager to give a hand, but of course he has a bag with official papers and he is not quite swift enough to get his hand to the cart. His raised hand is as much a gesture of embarrassment as an offer to help. Still, times have changed. The cadre can't be seen just to walk by.



Neighbours
(1935)

Neighbours is again one of Feng's haunting comments on social life in the thirties. The go-ahead westernized man on the right is as empty-headed as his traditionalist neighbour. The iron fence between them is symbolic, and it is, of course, still common at least among the overseas Chinese. Feng tells us that this cartoon is based on his own bitter experience from the time when he moved from the countryside and provincial Hangzhou to impersonal Shanghai with its westernized coldness.



Boat trip in spring (1960)

Swapping newspapers is easily the most depressing of Feng's cartoons that I have seen. Compare the beautiful *Boat trip in spring* where the boat is being punted past a well-kept people's commune. Here we have Feng's revolutionary romanticism at its best. And the colours strengthen the bright and hopeful atmosphere of the picture.



Minding the spring while drinking the water (1961)

Again *Minding the spring while drinking the water* is a propaganda piece. The founder of the well is of course Chairman Mao as it says on the poster. It is a bit absurd that everybody has to be staring at the poster, but if one is going to have propaganda by Feng Zikai, this is quite an acceptable piece of it.

楊柳青黃金

子瞻書



When the willows are green, dung is like gold
(A proverb from Zhejiang) (after 1949)

One point on which Feng was completely in agreement with the communist authorities was in glorification of the peasants. *When the willows are green, dung is like gold* is a wonderfully enthusiastic piece. Feng was obviously delighted to illustrate this proverb from his home province Zhejiang.



*If you want to make money, don't work hard
If you work hard you won't earn money (1961)*

There obviously were many points where Feng's natural sentiments were in perfect accord with the government line after 1949. But precisely because of their obvious orthodoxy, Feng was somehow reluctant after 1949 to draw many cartoons like this one.

勞動節特別的讀者
不是勞動者
六十一



On workers' day it is not the workers who read the special supplements for workers' day (1961)

Bibliography

This bibliography lists the first editions of Feng Zikai's *anthologies of cartoons*, his *collections of informal essays*, his *books on art*, and his *books on music*. Within each of these categories, the arrangement of the titles is roughly chronological.

Finally, there is a selected bibliography of material relating to Feng Zikai, arranged alphabetically by the present author.

Much of the material presented in this bibliography was made accessible to me by Feng Zikai's children.

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Feng Zikai translated in all 33 books from Japanese, English, and since 1949, especially from Russian. Among other things he translated Turgenjew's *First Love* (Kaimingshudian, Shanghai 1931), and his *Hunter's Notes* (Renminwenxuechubanshe, Beijing 1955). He also translated Stevenson's *Suicide Club* (Kaimingshudian, Shanghai 1932). However, by far his greatest achievement in literary translation was his three-volume

complete translation of the medieval Japanese classic *Genji Monogatari*¹, which was published posthumously in 1982 by the Renminwenxuechubanshe in Beijing. Apart from the *Genji Monogatari* Feng has also completed translations of the *Taketori Monogatari*², the *Ochikubo Monogatari*³ and the *Ise Monogatari*⁴. It remains to be seen whether these translations will be published in the future.

A meticulous translation by Feng of a plain Japanese commentary on the *Dasheng qixin lun*⁵ (Discourse on the rising of the Mahayana faith), covering over 400 manuscript pages, has been privately published in Singapore in 1973. The *Dasheng qixin lun* is a central text for, among others, Zen Buddhists and adherents of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism.

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|--------|---------|
| 1 源氏物语 | 4 伊势物语 |
| 2 竹取物语 | 5 大乘起信论 |
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