



**WILLIAM SCHAEFER**

PHOTOGRAPHY, WRITING, AND  
SPACE IN SHANGHAI, 1925-1937

# SHADOW MODERNISM

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William Schaefer

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## INTRODUCTION

This book argues that images and ideas about images formed an unstable, fraught, and contested ground of debate about culture, the past, and modern China's place in the world in Shanghai, the center of China's media culture during the 1920s and 1930s. While this debate was waged in many arenas in the print media, it was crucial to the making of modernist photography, art, and literature in Shanghai. Surveying a world of new media technologies in 1934, the critic Fu Lei concluded:

Our reality . . . is not as stable as it was in the past. . . . A number of scientific discoveries—such as film, the phonograph, etc.—have made it possible for us to take an image we have captured of a person and decompose it: thereupon any singer can send his voice from Paris to Tokyo, and simultaneously, his face, gestures, and actions—not, that is, his fleshly body—can travel by transatlantic ocean liner to the capital of Argentina or New York to greet the masses on the silver screen. Ordinary people have not yet paid much attention to the seriousness of this situation: for it is proof that one kind of connection holding together the particles of the universe has been eliminated; or in other words, humanity itself has disintegrated, and is simply lost in space.<sup>1</sup>

The anxiety driving intertwined questions of new media, modernism, and the cultural geography of modernity is palpable in Fu Lei's text, whose rhetoric in the final sentence of this passage is as overblown as that of more utopian, if similarly themed, avant-garde and modernist manifestos by the Italian Futurists or by the Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. The transformation of Chinese visual culture at this moment by photography and related technologies for making, printing, and circulating pictures provoked in the



print media urgent questions of what images are and what they do. Such questions concerned the nature of differing modes of picturing and image-making and the media in which they take form, as well as the relations between images and the peoples, places, cultures, histories, and material realities they represent.

In this disorienting global geography of traveling images, however, it was place itself that was most widely depicted as composed of fragmented, circulating, and projected images — and no place more so than Shanghai. In 1933, the modernist writer Mu Shiying described Shanghai's streets as “transplanted from Europe” and “paved with shadows.”<sup>2</sup> Photomontages published between 1934 and 1937 in the satirical magazine *Shidai manhua* (Modern sketch) depicted the Shanghai landscape as a violent assemblage of body parts and colonial artifacts; or Shanghai's racetrack as occupied by village huts juxtaposed against the city's high-rises; or a collapsed geography of Japanese colonialism in which Mount Fuji looms as a new background for the Shanghai waterfront. Shi Zhecun composed surrealist fictions of Shanghai's suburban landscapes and China's borderlands out of montages of projected images, remainders, and traces of the past, such as shadows, Egyptian mummies and tombs, and the bodily relics of figures from Chinese history. In these and many other photographs and texts scattered throughout the print media during this period, there is a sense that images circulating from around the globe and through Shanghai were taking on an uncanny materiality and even sentience, at the same time as the “real” people, places, and landscapes of Shanghai and China were taking on the immaterial and ghostly qualities that were associated with images.

Such depictions clearly struck a nerve. The critic Lou Shiyl claimed that a modernist like Shi Zhecun “deeply feels the collapse of the old society,” but rather than “sense any danger in this collapse, discovers from within it a novel beauty,” so that Shi “can only see the dark side of collapse, and never sees another layer rising from beneath the earth.”<sup>3</sup> Lou dismissed such modernist literature and art as an “escape into abnormal fantasies.”<sup>4</sup> But what if it was not? What, this book asks, did it mean to think through the formal experiments of modernist photography, art, and literature in terms of projected images and shadows, relics of the past and unstable landscapes? And what did it mean, as Fu Lei urged later in his 1934 text, to think photo-

graphic and montage practices as modes of critically engaging with what Fu called the “new fantastic” of modernity as experienced in Shanghai?

During the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was vividly experiencing the disjunctive spatial power of colonialist capitalism. This power was invisible (its centers were located in metropolises on other continents) and, at the same time, overwhelmingly present, having literally fragmented Shanghai into an old Chinese district and several foreign concessions. Furthermore, the modernizing and nationalist May Fourth Movement, which in the 1910s and early 1920s had called for a break with the past through Western science, realist literature and art, and cultural iconoclasm, had faltered by the late 1920s, while fragments of the rejected past seemed to remain stubbornly and uncannily present. At the same time, Shanghai was a center of conservative debates over “national essence” (*guocui*) and “ordering the national past” (*zhengli guogu*), debates that sought to rearrange these fragments into an authentic and seamless whole of cultural and even racial purity.

The terms of debate over colonialism, modernity, the place of the past, and the places of ethnic others, however, were dramatically altered by the transformation of picturing and the surge in the production and circulation of images made possible by photography. Since the turn of the twentieth century, photography had become an increasingly pervasive presence in everyday life. Cheap and easily portable cameras were newly available by the 1920s and 1930s. More important, the development during these decades of new technologies for reproducing photographs and other images in print both enabled and was driven by an explosion in the production of illustrated magazines, or *huabao*. These magazines became the most capacious of spaces for the collection, juxtaposition, and display of images that were produced, circulated, and reappropriated from across China and the world. This development of technologies for printing photographs and other images in illustrated magazines was inseparable from both a quest for immediacy of representation and an acute consciousness of just how mediated such new modes of representation really were. Illustrated magazines such as *Liangyou huabao* (The young companion) and *Dazhong* (The cosmopolitan) often featured demonstrations of how photographic technologies could make possible kinds of images never produced before. These included images that explored the realms of the momentary through ex-

tremely rapid exposure times or photographic blur; images that brought close the geographically distant; and images that rendered the most familiar objects strange, metamorphic, and abstract. Other images in the print media were made, in layouts that were a pervasive feature of such illustrated magazines, to produce binary oppositions of the traditional and the modern, the urban and the rural, the so-called civilized and the primitive, the Chinese and the foreign.

Many writers, photographers, and artists in Shanghai struggled to come to terms with the changing relations between texts and images brought about by these technologies and by their implication in a rapidly expanding world of images through which the transmission of China's own cultural past now appeared to be mediated. Nowhere was this perception more apparent than in the exploration of verbal and visual modernist aesthetic practices in both the literary and art journals and the popular illustrated magazines published in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s. The very complexity, materiality, fragmentation, mutability, and circulatability of modernist images and image-making practices displayed in illustrated magazines and art and literary journals in Shanghai opened to question the territories and boundaries of essentialist cultural geographies. Critical practices of modernism were animated by a dialectic of the dematerialization and rematerialization of Shanghai's place and the past through composites of images that were themselves understood as fragments or projections of divergent cultures, geographic locations, and historical moments. As I show throughout the book, experimental photographers and writers excavated and configured images whose cracks would make visible the shadows of modernity in Shanghai: the violence, the past, the ethnic and cultural multiplicity excluded and repressed yet hidden in plain sight.

This was particularly the case in the work of writers such as Shi Zhecun (1905–2003) and Mu Shiying (1912–1940); critics such as Fu Lei (1908–1966), Feng Zikai (1898–1975), and Zong Baihua (1892–1986); painters such as Pang Xunqin (1898–1975); and practitioners of various forms of composite photography ranging from Lang Jingshan (1892–1995) to the anonymous photomontage artists active in *Shidai manhua* during the early 1930s. At the crux of their work was the expression of geographic and cultural dislocation by means of formal experiments with images and texts

implicitly or explicitly informed by photography. They understood the material qualities of images and image-making technologies as fundamental to the mediation, transmission, and shaping of ideologies of history, ethnicity, and geographic space. Hence modernists in Shanghai debated such ideological foundations by constructing experimental images and texts deeply informed by photography's power not only to represent but also to transform that which it depicts into unstable and proliferating shadows and projections, spatial abstractions, or fragments to be juxtaposed in radically disjunctive combinations.

The career of Shi Zhecun, for instance, whose presence threads throughout this book, was particularly crucial to creating modernism in Shanghai and mapping its global context. Indeed, his own life was exemplary of the geographic dislocations and displacements his texts addressed in both formal and thematic terms. He was born in Hangzhou, a city with ancient and powerful associations with classical Chinese literature and art. When he was eight years old, his family moved to Songjiang, which at the time was a small country town just outside of Shanghai. After a high school education in which he was steeped in classical Chinese poetry, Shi attended Aurora University in the French Concession in Shanghai. Aurora was a Catholic institution established by the French in order to transmit French culture as part of their colonialist project in Shanghai; as Shu-mei Shih has observed, at Aurora one could gain access to Western languages and culture without traveling abroad.<sup>5</sup> Shi Zhecun learned French from priests who, as Leo Ou-fan Lee reports, assigned the works of Hugo and Balzac even as Shi secretly devoured the “decadent” symbolist poetry of Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud.<sup>6</sup> By his late twenties, Shi had collaborated with friends and writers such as Mu Shiying, Liu Na'ou, and Dai Wangshu on several small, short-lived periodicals devoted to modernist literature and art, such as *Xin wenyi* (also given the French title, *La nouvelle littérature*), before he served as editor of the much larger-scale *Xiandai* from 1932 until 1935. Shi's career as an editor was short-lived, however, cut short by war with Japan and the Communist revolution; for much of his long life and until his death in 2003, Shi was a prominent scholar of classical Chinese literature.

As the editor of the influential literary magazine *Xiandai*—literally, “modern,” but given the alternative title *Les Contemporains*—Shi explored

surrealist fiction, imagist and futurist poetry, and montage aesthetics, among other experimental techniques. Shi Zhecun's own fiction grapples with the intertwined questions of a global image culture and the constitution of colonialist modernity in China by fragmenting and reconstructing ancient and recent pasts. His texts do not, however, purport to visualize what really happened in the past, as a nationalist, positivist writing of linear historical narratives claimed to represent.<sup>7</sup> Rather, his narratives are composed—or describe the creation—of remainders, traces, and relics from China's geographic and ethnic margins and abroad, through which the past has been transmitted, or which reappear to haunt the urban present. These remainders of the past appear in Shi's fiction as various forms of images, ranging from the severed head of a half-Chinese, half-Tibetan general to Egyptian-style mummies to scenes of foreign pasts projected onto the landscapes of early twentieth-century China, and haunting, mutating photographs and shadows that dematerialize the bodies and objects that project them and take on lives of their own.

Other writers and artists experimented during the early 1930s with formally discontinuous texts and images in order to depict modern Shanghai as an unstable place of speculation, consumption, and desire. In his highly disjunctive urban fictions, for instance, Mu Shiying treated sentences and paragraphs as a series of photographic and cinematic images fragmented and juxtaposed on the page. Similarly, Pang Xunqin experimented with paintings depicting Paris and Shanghai with a technique evocative of a collage of overlapping projected images. By contrast, Lang Jingshan, who began his career as one of China's first photojournalists, experimented with modernist urban photography before developing a mode of composite photographs that consciously departed from contemporaneous uses of photomontage in advertising and the politically engaged art of the Dadaists, and instead reproduced the visual effects of Song dynasty Chinese ink landscape paintings. The painter and critic Feng Zikai, politically progressive unlike Lang, drew upon Chinese ink and brush painting to pioneer *manhua* cartoons that expressed both urban uprootedness and rural nostalgia with a gentle humanism. Feng was an equally influential educator and widely published writer on art, whose texts were often preoccupied with the nature of modernist painting, the place of traditional Chinese art in modernity and vis-à-

vis modernism, and the transformation of picture-making by photography and the commercial art of capitalist modernity. While hardly a conservative, Feng was highly conflicted about modernism: in some of his essays he claimed that the origins of pictorial abstraction lay within classical Chinese aesthetics, while in others he displayed an increasingly contentious, dismissive, and even hostile reaction to the most radical aesthetics of fragmentation and disjunction associated with cubism, futurism, Dadaism, and expressionism.<sup>8</sup>

Debating the nature of images was, of course, central to the cultural politics of modernity across the globe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in part given the rapid developments I have mentioned in such new media technologies as photography, illustrated magazines, and cinema. In the West as well as in China, this radical transformation and the questions of images it provoked were inseparable from the kinds of anxieties Fu Lei's and Feng Zikai's texts expressed over cultural difference as articulated across the changing global geography of colonialist modernity.<sup>9</sup> Certainly in China during the early twentieth century, pictorial forms based in a variety of photographic practices rapidly came to coexist with pictorial media with long histories, such as ink painting and printing. Photography's powers of recording, of radically extending the limits of perception, and its mass reproducibility and rapid circulation in print — all hallmarks of modern culture globally — were hence seen by critics such as Feng Zikai and the aesthetic philosopher Zong Baihua (1897–1986) not only as universal, or as the universalizing qualities of a supposedly transparent medium. More important, such critics saw these qualities as at the same time culturally specific in ways Western commentators did not. Chinese critics attributed to the West modes of picture-making such as single-point perspective and the depiction of minute detail, even as photography seemed to have a tremendous power to conceal or even naturalize such pictorial assumptions within an apparently objective and transparent transcription of the world. Photography at once assumed a tremendous degree of authority in China; inspired widespread exploration, experimentation and reflection; and provoked substantial resistance.

One common and problematic response in Chinese critical discourse was, I argue, to mark out and defend civilizational differences by declar-



ing an isomorphism of geography and culture, of national territory and modes of producing pictorial space. Such essentialism evacuated all difference and contradiction from within such culturally defined spaces even as it posited absolute differences between them. As I claim throughout these pages, thinking about (and through) photography was central to debates over images and their imbrication in the supposed civilizational differences between “East” and “West”; the writing of literature; the presence of the past in modernity; ethnicity and cultural identity; and the nature of space, place, and landscape in a world at a foundational moment of what is now known as globalization, namely, colonialism. Feng Zikai dismissed what he described as the photographic precision and detail of the representation of bodies, objects, and spaces in Western pictorial practices as “coldly objective imitation,” a “deadly work,” and argued that “the pictures Chinese people make are not transcriptions made in light of reality, but rather are made by deeply observing nature, stripping it of all unnecessary waste and grasping its most necessary essence.” Hence Feng claimed the abstract painting of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) to be not a manifestation of modernism but rather a sign of the “Easternization” of “Western” art. Feng and the aesthetic philosopher Zong Baihua, among others, resisted such new visual media by insisting that a mythic identity of image and writing was an essential civilizational marker of Chinese cultural identity. They did so by repeatedly appealing to, for instance, how ink painting and calligraphy share the same materials and many of the same techniques, and such clichés of Chinese aesthetics as the ideal that “in paintings there are poems, in poems there are paintings” (*hua zhong you shi, shi zhong you hua*).<sup>10</sup> The photographer Lang Jingshan concealed the fragmentation of place and the past by redefining in his theoretical writings modernist techniques such as composite photography and photomontage within traditional landscape aesthetics, and by using composite photography to overcome the perspectivalism of conventional photographs and produce what appear to be traditional ink paintings. These pictures were composed of projected and juxtaposed fragments of photographs Lang had made in the countryside, so that his “traditional Chinese landscapes” did not, strictly speaking, depict anywhere but virtual places that only existed, displaced and reassembled, in his Shanghai darkroom.

More radical photomontage artists associated with *Shidai manhua* as well as writers such as Shi Zhecun, however, used photography as a figure to think verbal and visual images as traces and projections of different places and times, and to create collages and montages whose disjunctions would disturb mainstream discourses of culture, history, ethnicity, and geography. The terms that were adopted to translate “photography” into Chinese provide a glimpse at what photography’s capacities were understood to be. Photography did not seem to have been conceived, as it frequently was in the West, as a writing or inscription with light (photo-graphy).<sup>11</sup> The two terms used most widely in the texts examined in this book define photography’s images in relation not to writing but to light and shadow. The first, *zhaoxiang*, combines the character *zhao*, meaning to illuminate, light up, shine, reflect, or mirror, with *xiang*, whose meaning includes looks, appearance, countenance, facial features, bearing, and posture, and, as a verb, to look at and appraise. By contrast, *sheying* is composed of the characters *she*, to summon, absorb, or assimilate, and *ying*, meaning primarily a shadow or reflection, a projected image.<sup>12</sup> *Zhaoxiang*, then, seems to conceive of the making of pictures as a matter of illuminating the external appearance of something, emphasizing not the image created by the photograph but the external appearance of the object itself (from which some evaluation of its internal nature might be derived).<sup>13</sup> *Sheying*, on the other hand, may have been coined, as the 1937 edition of the dictionary *Cihai* (Ocean of words) claims, as a Chinese equivalent of the English term “picture taking,” but its semantic range suggests something more like what one of the inventors of photography, William Henry Fox Talbot, called “the art of fixing a shadow.”<sup>14</sup> This ambiguous term seems to conceive of a photograph as a shadow, a projected image, an image cast off by the object represented and then absorbed by a photosensitive surface; alternatively, it seems to imagine images as free-floating things that are out there to be captured.<sup>15</sup> The etymology of these terms, taken together, discloses an emphasis on the material qualities of photographic representation that insists upon light, illumination, and projection rather than the inscription of traces.

Elsewhere in his 1934 text on modern literature’s pursuit of the real from which I quote in the opening of this introduction, Fu Lei used the term *zhaoxiang*, emphasizing the illumination of an appearance or a flash

of insight. Shi Zhecun and a modernist poet and critic published in *Xian-dai*, Xu Chi (1914–1996), both of whose texts were haunted by the traces of photographs, preferred terms such as *sheying* and *beiying*, designating photographs as shadow-images. While photography might not have been conceived of as a kind of writing, modernists such as Fu, Shi, and Xu did, as I will show, conceptualize writing as a kind of photography. This association of shadow and photography was a trope that decisively influenced emerging modernist discourses of writing and literature in Shanghai. It informed experimental photographs, fiction, and literary criticism in which shadows are images that do not depict but metamorphose the objects projecting them or the spaces on which they take form, or even — as in Mu Shi-ying's figure — constitute virtual spaces or come alive, uncannily independent of space and object.

Indeed, informed by this understanding of photography, critical and theoretical texts by Fu Lei and others consciously represented visual and literary modernism in and of itself — particularly the formal procedures of abstraction and of fragmentation and juxtaposition — as a spatial, geographic, and global aesthetic. Not only did modernist aesthetic practices become in Shanghai means of conceptualizing the changes in global space wrought by colonialist and capitalist modernity. Such practices themselves traveled and, arguably, were produced out of their global circulation. But if modernism's aspirations are often universal, its articulations are intensely local. Hence modernist practices were largely used to compose Shanghai's location as a center of modernity in China vis-à-vis China's own historical, geographic, cultural, and ethnic margins, even as Shanghai itself was thought of as lying on the margins of global modernity.

From its position in a city at once center and margin, at once on the edge of modernity and haunted by the past that, unlike the ancient cities of Beijing and Xi'an, it seemed to lack, modernism in Shanghai questioned the historical and geographic assumptions that motivated such familiar modernist themes as alienation or sensory overstimulation in the modern city, breaking with or essentializing the historical and cultural past, or the construction of exotic and “primitive” others against which to define modernity or provide an escape from modern life. Here is the crux of the politics of modernism in Shanghai — evinced, as I shall argue throughout this book,

not only in its thematic concerns but crucially in its formal experiments. Michel de Certeau eloquently claimed that discourses of the modern are themselves founded upon a “discourse of separation” that strives to create pure boundaries with which to manage troubling relationships between the self and the Others of the past, other places, and other peoples. This discourse of separation (de Certeau has in mind specifically the writing of history)

promotes a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility. But whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant — shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication — comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: “resistances,” “survivals,” or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of “progress” or a system of interpretation. . . . They symbolize a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable.<sup>16</sup>

Such remainders, de Certeau argues, annihilate “the self-identity that had been acquired through the elimination of a ‘remainder.’ . . . Identity is not one, but two. *One and the other*. In the beginning, there is the plural.”<sup>17</sup> In its later chapters, this book will claim that Shi Zhecun’s surrealist urban fictions of projected pasts and his modernist historical fictions of border violence return through their subject matter and disjunctive formal experiments precisely the remainders, the survivals, the relics that had become unthinkable for both Chinese conservatives and iconoclasts, and which they had repressed or ejected from the texts and images through which they transmitted the past or defined modernity. But as I shall show throughout the book, writers such as Mu Shiying and Fu Lei, as well as Shi Zhecun, and artists experimenting with photography and photomontage, all sought out the relics, the projected images, and the fractures in landscapes that perturbed the cultural, historical, and geographic boundaries with which modernity was commonly made thinkable — or they cut across these boundaries with their juxtapositions of such shards and remainders. These artists and writers redefined the modern by means of close attention to how new forms of image-making could make visible the strange transfor-

mations, the dark and distorted shapes projected by artifacts of the modern city as well as the past: the shadows of modernity.

Now, this interpretation of modernism in Shanghai I am sketching departs significantly from its depiction in the scholarship of recent decades. Indeed, it is striking the degree to which this scholarship, while creating crucial maps of Chinese modernist art and literature, reproduces the early reception of modernism without always engaging critically with its terms. In his *Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, first published in 1989, Michael Sullivan rehearses precisely the same logic of East versus West, and the same conflation of Kandinsky's aesthetic program and the empathy theory of Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer with Xie He's sixth-century artistic principle of spirit resonance (*qiyun*), that had animated texts like Feng Zikai's on Chinese painting and modernism from the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen's more recent history, *The Art of Modern China*, situates "aesthetic or theoretical questions" along a line of progress, a narrative of the "path toward China's modernization" that seems to propose that one of the great challenges of modern Chinese art was to fulfill "the twentieth century's historical burden of restoring China's cultural stature in the world," while measuring modern Chinese art against "the course of development from realism to nonobjective art that had occurred in the art world of Europe."<sup>19</sup> Their map of modern Chinese art is unmatched in its comprehensiveness, and yet it is largely structured by a series of binary oppositions, namely, between "artistic connections to the universal, the international, the global, the central, [and] the present," on the one hand, and on the other, "ties to the personal, the national, the local, the peripheral, and the past."<sup>20</sup> Andrews and Shen observe that such dualisms—as well as that of "Chinese" and "modern"—"have comprised the fundamental concepts around which the art of the twentieth century has revolved." But, they add, "these are essentialist questions that a postmodern society may someday leave behind."<sup>21</sup> Such essentialist binaries did indeed structure much artistic, literary, and cultural discourse in early twentieth-century China, but I do not agree that we have to await a postmodernist future for them to dissipate, nor must we replicate them in current critical analysis. The fact is that such polarities were clearly under great stress and pressure in the 1920s and 1930s when they were being used or, more to the point, demar-

cated. And, as I argue throughout this book, central to modernist aesthetic practices in Shanghai was a *questioning* of such binaries, a crossing or dismantling of them. Thus it is crucial, it seems to me, not to perpetuate or reify those polarities but rather to critically examine them, to ask just what pressures and tensions and conflicts such differences were used to clarify or obscure. What differences were being suppressed? What differences were being reified? What differences do such differences make?

Perhaps one reason that Shanghai modernism's critical relationships to the antagonisms and contradictions of its own historical moment have been largely overlooked (beyond questions of nationalism, modernization, and utilitarianism) is because of the rather broad brush of political apathy with which modernism has often been painted. Writing in 1931, as I have mentioned, the critic Lou Shiyl decried what he saw as Shi Zhecun's fascination in his fiction with darkness and the collapse of the old as escapist fantasy. In her otherwise rigorous, illuminating, and theoretically nuanced analysis, published in 2001, of the complex political and cultural relationships between modernism and semicolonialism in China, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*, Shu-mei Shih similarly claims that Shi Zhecun's surrealist historical fiction had only "remote connections to [its] contemporary situation." While "at most," she writes, "one could read [such] stories about racial and national conflicts as allegories of Shanghai cosmopolitanism's ambivalent stance toward nationalism and national cultural identity," at the same time in Shi Zhecun's fiction history is "'modernized' and made ahistorical . . . negating the historicity of that past."<sup>22</sup> One of Shih's most suggestive insights is that the relationships between "the multiple, layered, as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China's colonial structure" and the "fragmentation in the political and cultural spheres . . . [enabled] the paradoxical emergence of culture in the fissures among different agents of control."<sup>23</sup> And yet her analysis of how fiction by Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying, and others engaged with this situation is hampered by her reliance on binary oppositions between "high" modernism and mass culture, leftist politics and "pure aesthetic formalism."<sup>24</sup> As a result, while throughout her book Shih carefully situates Chinese modernism within the cultural politics and present-day theoretical discourses of semicolonialism and race, at the same time she argues, for instance, that



Mu Shiying's "emphasis on textuality — which contributes to, and is intimately linked to, the experience of urban simulacra as a series of stimulating images — can also be seen as a strategy of disengagement from the real world."<sup>25</sup> This even though the images that structure key moments of one of Mu's representative fictions, "Yezonghui li de wuge ren" (Five in a nightclub), are structured according to a racialized binarism of black and white that Mu's text explicitly links to both Africans abroad and black American jazz musicians in Shanghai. Perhaps one reason for this is that while Shih provides an illuminating discussion of the centrality of visuality, images, simulacra, and the phantasmagoric in Shanghai modernist literature, she does so without attention to the actual images that were there to be seen in Shanghai and that might elucidate how the relations between modernist literature and visual culture actually worked. Rather than assuming a linkage between images, form, and political disengagement, then, one might ask instead how we might take seriously the persistent claim in Shanghai modernism that critically immersing oneself in images in all their insistent materiality (by composing experimental texts, photographs, photomontages, paintings, and the layouts of illustrated magazines) was precisely a strategy of engagement with the "real world."

A fundamental assumption of this book is that modernism in Shanghai was deeply engaged with the cultural politics or, rather, the politics of the image culture of its time. This engagement, I believe, becomes visible if we look beyond the borders of art and literature whose defense seems implicit in much of the scholarship on this period. Hence this book does not cover the range of artists and writers already surveyed with such admirable breadth by Lee, Shih, Andrews and Shen, and others. Instead, limiting the number of artworks and literary texts I examine in this book allows me to expand the scope of what I mean by modernism well beyond the terrain that is the focus of such scholars' work. That is, I believe a crucial move in thinking about modernism in Shanghai at this historical juncture is not to focus exclusively on literary texts or art images (whether paintings, films, or graphic art) but instead to expand the range of texts and images under critical consideration. To focus one's analysis on literary texts without exploring the many other kinds of texts and images with which they intersect and out of which they are woven is to render invisible how literature engages with

its historical moment by means of its formal and aesthetic qualities. And to focus exclusively on art images creates too many blind spots in considering the history of images, particularly when art images are made to stand in for image and visual culture as such. Rather, it seems more productive, as James Elkins has powerfully argued in another context, to consider art as one specific and specialized form of image within a much broader domain of images that includes a wide range of informational, scientific, and other pictorial practices.<sup>26</sup> Hence, my text investigates how, in critical discourse and practice in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s, such images were imagined to operate, and to attend to the interventions modernist art and literary practices made within this expanded world of images of their historical moment. In addition to popular and scholarly discourses about images at this time — which, despite their centrality to modernism and modernity in China, have received very little scholarly attention — illustrated magazines form a crucial archive for my exploration. For many of the images published in such venues did precisely what has often been claimed for the kinds of images more conventionally regarded as modernist art: to explore and expand the field of perception and to explore what images might make seeable and thinkable through their abstraction, magnification, or deformation of everyday realities. Within this wider context, modernist art and literature become one crucial area of critical reflection within a much broader range of experimentation in modern image culture. This choice allows me to trace how the logic of the photographic medium pervaded the image and literary culture of early twentieth-century Shanghai.

The contextualist approach of my analysis throughout the book proceeds by engaging with images and texts as they appeared juxtaposed on the pages of the print media in Shanghai, rather than according to more conventional and familiar groupings of artists, critics, and writers. While the biographies of artists and writers such as Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying, Pang Xunqin, and Feng Zikai have been explored in the work of Leo Ou-fan Lee, Shu-mei Shih, Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, and Geremie Barmé, precious little is known about the makers and sources of the photographs I examine throughout the book.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, I have not found to be extant the kinds of information that connects the making and selection of photographs to particular individuals except for Lang Jingshan, and a modi-

cum of information about the photographer and theorist Chen Chuanlin, whom I discuss in chapter 2.<sup>28</sup> But to limit a discussion of photography to those works about which we have such information on photographers or sources would be to exclude a vast amount of art and nonart photographs from scholarly inquiry. And one of my book's fundamental contributions to the literature on modern Chinese visual and cultural studies is, I hope, to expand and not to limit the impact these photographs had, even given their nearly anonymous status, on the rethinking of pictorial practices; the representation of urban space; the relations of text and image; and the past, landscape, and ethnicity. By the same token, I do not think that knowing the identities and influences of photographers, though of course important, exhausts the definition of the historical and material conditions of a photograph, nor does such knowledge exhaust the possibilities of providing an interpretation of what was possible for photography in early twentieth-century Shanghai. To my mind, such materiality is as much a matter of how photographs are actually made (kinds of cameras, lenses, films, papers, compositional strategies, etc.). It would be illuminating to be able to see the negatives from which the photographs I examine were originally printed — but for the most part they are lost. In the absence of records indicating how specific historical figures manipulated photographic materials and processes, what is abundantly available, however, is the information that can be inferred from close inspection of the composition, appearance, placement and juxtaposition of the photographs on the printed pages of illustrated magazines, and of the rhetoric of captions and other texts that accompany the photographs.

I pursue my argument in this book, then, through a series of close analyses of photographs, paintings, cartoons, and literary and critical texts from the Shanghai print media in order to identify the tensions they excavate or conceal, manifest or trouble, and to try to understand what they tell us about the culture they emerge from. The organization of my argument necessarily draws upon the montage aesthetics of fragmentation and juxtaposition of images and texts practiced by the modernists, in order to identify and pursue the logic of the kinds of questions they asked of their historical moment. At the same time, I focus the book on a fairly circumscribed historical period, from roughly 1925 through 1937. The year 1937 was when

full-scale war broke out in Japan, and most of the book's protagonists either fled Shanghai or were killed soon after. The starting point of the book is a bit more nebulous. One does find in the mass media a new popular fascination and unease with the presence of the past around 1925 (stories of the aftermath of the 1922 opening of Tutankhamen's tomb in Egypt, for example, start to appear in the print media at that time). And while over the decades preceding this time, a variety of illustrated print media had already appeared — most famously *Dianshi zhai huabao* (Touchstone Studio pictorial), which featured elaborate lithographs starting in 1884, followed by short-lived magazines such as *Zhenxiang huabao* (The true record; 1912) experimenting with printing photographs — the year 1926 is when the influential illustrated magazine, *Liangyou huabao*, began publication, marking the use of new technologies for the mass reproduction and circulation of photographs. Most of the materials I examine in this book, however, were published in or around 1934 (between the Japanese bombing of Shanghai in 1931 and the outbreak of war in 1937); there seems to have been a crescendo of interest in the aesthetics of fragmentation and juxtaposition in the making of images and literature as illustrated magazines grew in circulation and complexity of layout, and as the sense of impending crisis increased as well. There is, to be sure, a trade-off in limiting the historical frame of the book in this way: to cover a brief temporal span runs the risk of seeming ahistorical, while covering a longer temporal span risks a thin and sometimes misleading analysis of texts and images because it can involve overlooking much of the texture of historical context (which is what this book tries to capture).

By means of these methodological choices, I provide in this book what might be thought of as a geologic core sample of culture in early twentieth-century Shanghai that will enable me to connect areas of cultural production conventionally overlooked, ignored, or held apart in scholarly discourses of Chinese modernity — materials that, as de Certeau might have put it, seem to resist those discourses from their edges. What did it mean for the most important spaces for the collection, display, and circulation of images in China during the first half of the twentieth century — illustrated magazines such as *Liangyou huabao* — to feature alongside their canonical images of the modern city photographs of shadows, or of geometric abstrac-

tions produced by photomicrographs, or photographs of Chinese landscapes evoking traditional ink paintings, or images of mummies excavated in Egypt and of the ethnic minorities populating the peripheries of China? How, for instance, might engaging with the pervasive images and texts concerning race and the “primitive” in the early twentieth-century Shanghai print media affect a reading of Shi Zhecun’s modernist historical fiction, or of Mu Shiyong’s depiction of African Americans in a story like “Five in a Nightclub”? Would Shi Zhecun’s surrealist tale, “Mo dao” (Demon’s way), narrated by a neurasthenic Shanghai man haunted by shadows and a mummy, appear quite so escapist if we account for the popularity of photographs of shadows or the Egyptomania so widespread in the Shanghai print media, and the ways they address the relations of colonialist modernity to the displaced past? How, for that matter, might our understanding of Feng Zikai’s arguments about modernist abstraction shift if we acknowledge that, while abstraction was not practiced extensively in Chinese modernist painting at this time, viewers of illustrated magazines would have encountered abstract pictures in the form of urban photographs or even scientific images presented as art? How were all such images as constitutive a part of modernity in Shanghai as more familiar images of the modern city, and how might addressing them transform our understanding of Shanghai modernism? It is out of such forgotten and overlooked fragments and shards that I piece together in this book an account of modernity and modernism that shadows the Shanghai modern.

The chapters of the book proceed as follows. Part I, “Modernism and Photography’s Places,” reconstructs the early twentieth-century critical reception of photography out of the pictures and writing about pictures that appeared in the print media of Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s. In the first chapter, “Picturing Photography, Abstracting Pictures,” I show how the critical discourse of images defined different modes of picturing in terms that mark off perceived differences in the cultural domains of “East” and “West.” This discourse, I argue, inadvertently revealed anxieties over how new image technologies undermined rather than reified such cultural essentialism. Critics such as Feng Zikai and Zong Baihua tried to differentiate

Chinese from Western modes of picturing on the basis of distinctions between a photographic transcription of reality and attention to perspectival depth they ascribed to the West, and various modes of abstraction and attention to the unseen and pictorial surface they ascribed to China; indeed, on this basis Feng saw modernism as the “Easternization” of Western art. And yet such stark civilizational binary oppositions were completely undone through actual practices of picturing in Chinese print culture at that time. This was particularly the case in illustrated magazines, which explored the power of photography not only to transcribe reality but also to transform it and render the unseen visible, demonstrations of the effects of cameras and darkroom techniques, and “design photographs” that abstracted everyday objects. As I shall show, the very pursuit of the transcription of reality in illustrated magazines through a faith in the transparency of photographs — a pursuit and a faith that Zong and especially Feng derided — led instead to a revelation of how photography’s mimetic powers were inseparable from the kinds of abstraction and attention to surface widely attributed to Chinese modes of picturing. Indeed, the painter Liu Haisu’s own essay in connecting Chinese painting and modernism — specifically the seventeenth-century painter Shitao and postimpressionists such as Paul Cézanne — skirts close to such an understanding of photography in ways that resonate with the conceptual and practical understandings of images and texts at work among modernists in Shanghai.

Chapter 2, “False Portals,” explores the implications of this unmooring of images from visible likeness in the print media in Shanghai for modernist conceptions of pictorial and textual spaces and the representation of urban, rural, and global spaces. An image conceived of not as a window onto a visual representation but as an opaque surface upon which things of the material world were dissolved rather than depicted was, as the painter Li Zhongsheng called it, a key “point of departure of twentieth-century painting.”<sup>29</sup> Such a mode of abstracting surfaces informed a formalist, modernist urban photography in illustrated magazines like *Liangyou huabao*. In such photographs, urban spaces and landscapes were frequently depicted as flat, abstract surfaces of lines and planes. The juxtaposition of images both based upon and abstracted from the visible forms depicted in such images was subsequently explored in another common feature in illustrated magazines,