

The Cultural Legacy of Disney

A Century of Magic

Edited by Robyn Muir, Rebecca Rowe,
Hannah Helm, and Emily Aguiló-Pérez

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Contents

Introduction: The Wonderful(?) World of Disney <i>Robyn Muir, Rebecca Rowe, Hannah Helm, and Emily Aguiló-Pérez</i>	1
SECTION 1: DISNEY AS A COMPANY	23
Chapter 1: Mickey Mouse's Trip to Republican China: Pictorial Culture and Transnational Media-Mix <i>Muyang Zhuang</i>	25
Chapter 2: Brandcasting Pixar: Corporate Allegory as Corporate Strategy in the War for the Disney Succession <i>Jamie Clarke</i>	43
Chapter 3: Disney+ as a Platform for Franchise Expansion <i>Jason Scott</i>	63
SECTION 2: DISNEY'S REPRESENTATIONS	87
Chapter 4: No-body Like U: Disney Boy Bands from the Jim Crows to 4*TOWN <i>Jennessa Hester</i>	89
Chapter 5: Representations of Dwarfism: How to Laugh with Us, Not at Us <i>Erin Pritchard</i>	107
Chapter 6: From Los Caballeros to La Familia: Ideology and the Construction of Latin America in Disney's Animated Feature Films <i>Abigail Fine</i>	123

SECTION 3: RELATING TO DISNEY	143
Chapter 7: “You Must be Bold, Daring!”: How Fashion Is Interpreted and Presented Through the Lens of Costuming in Disney’s Animated Films <i>Maxey Henry</i>	145
Chapter 8: Geotransmedia: Space, Memory, and Branding in the Magic Kingdom <i>Ana Carolina Almeida Souza</i>	167
Chapter 9: Inheriting My Ears: Disney Fandom and Identity Formation in Infancy <i>Cariad Martin</i>	187
Conclusion: The Power of a Mickey Mouse Topic <i>Rebecca Rowe and Hannah Ham</i>	205
Acknowledgments	223
Index	225
About the Editors	233

Chapter 1

Mickey Mouse's Trip to Republican China

Pictorial Culture and Transnational Media-Mix

Muyang Zhuang

Since the screening of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928, Mickey Mouse, who was created by Walt Disney and his studio, has become one of the world's most famous movie stars. Consequently, Mickey, along with Disney, has become a central focus in academic research, particularly in the fields of pop culture, film, media, and cultural studies. German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin devoted extensive discussions to Disney and the studio's artworks in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," contemplating the condition of modernity and mass culture. Additionally, Miriam Hansen recounts the debates between Benjamin and Theodore Adorno regarding the role of "Mickey Maus,, (and Donald Duck) concerning the relationship between media, technology, and the issue of modern subjectivity.¹ These serve as reminders of how Mickey Mouse and the early Disney cartoon films became pivotal transnational and transcultural phenomena, sparking serious discussions among noteworthy intellectuals.

The renowned Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein also passionately praised early Disney cartoons for their capacity to generate what he termed as "plasmaticness," which refers to cartoonish figures' "ability to dynamically assume any form."² This influential notion has become crucial in the analysis of the ontology of animated media, and it was anticipated by Eisenstein as the power to reject "once and forever allotted form."³ Eisenstein's fascination with the revolutionary potency offered by Disney cartoons implies the

influence of Disney and American animation in the Soviet Union, despite sharp ideological contrasts. In fact, American cartoon animation, particularly Disney's early works, had a significant impact on the cultural production system in the early twentieth-century USSR.⁴

In early twentieth-century China, Mickey Mouse quickly became a prominent presence on screens and pages, particularly in urban Shanghai. During the Republican era (1912–1949), Mickey Mouse and many other Disney cartoon characters became the most well-received film stars in the country. Even influential and respected Chinese intellectual Lu Xun (1881–1936) was captivated by Disney animation.⁵ Similar to Soviet animators, Chinese animation pioneers, such as the Wan brothers, also began creating animations in the Americanized style, and they even imitated character designs from early Disney pictures.⁶ As a result, Disney and Mickey Mouse influenced not only the film industry but also, more broadly, visual culture and cultural production in Republican China. Mickey Mouse, like other renowned film stars, frequently appeared in news reports, cartoons, and comic books.

On the one hand, these comic pictures of Mickey Mouse and his cartoon “colleagues” served as an extension of the funny, entertaining Disney animated films beyond the screen. On the other hand, similar to Marc Steinberg's astute analysis of the combinations between postwar Japanese anime, print, and commercial industries, Chinese cartoons and comic stories featuring Mickey Mouse led to a form of “media mix,” during the heyday of comic and cinematic arts.⁷ Chinese publishers not only translated original Disney comic books from English but also made every effort to incorporate Disney cartoon figures into their advertisements. Cartoonish drawings of various Disney characters were printed in popular pictorial magazines and published as *manhua* (Chinese cartoons or comics). These images not only expanded Disney's influence from the screen to the page but also revitalized cartoon culture in Republican China, demonstrating that cartoons could be more than just political caricatures. Some Chinese comic authors even created a serial cartoon titled “*Milaoshu you Shanghai*” (“Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai”), garnering attention not only for Mickey's stardom but also for the political messages conveyed through these images. In essence, these Chinese versions of Mickey Mouse comics or cartoons raised issues of transnationality, as they also encouraged Chinese authors and cartoonists to adapt the Americanized cartoon star into the local context.

While most current scholarship tends to focus on Disney's impact on Chinese screen culture, this chapter will instead examine the localized appropriations of Disney characters in printed materials. I argue that Mickey Mouse and Disney's popularity in Republican China represented a form of transnational media-mix. By employing methodologies from visual culture and media-mix studies, I will investigate comic stories featuring Mickey

Mouse that were produced and circulated in Republican China. This investigation will showcase how Disney cartoon characters permeated the pictorial world of a different country. Furthermore, I will analyze several localized Mickey Mouse stories to demonstrate how this transnational media-mix functioned within the international circuits of pop culture during the early twentieth century. The examination will also shed light on the nuances in different strategies used to adapt Mickey Mouse into the local Chinese context. Of particular interest will be a detailed analysis of the two versions of "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai": one created during the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945) and another after. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide a refreshing perspective on Disney's global impact during its early days, showcasing how Mickey Mouse and Disney characters not only influenced Chinese visual culture but also played a significant role in shaping the transnational dynamics of pop culture.

WELCOME TO CHINA, MICKEY!

In 1932, *Liangyou* (*The Young Companion*), one of the most popular pictorial journals in Republican Shanghai, featured an advertising cartoon in which Mickey Mouse and his Pluto are depicted reading an issue of *Liangyou* (figure 1.1). Undoubtedly, the magazine sought self-promotion by leveraging the influential faces of movie stars in this cartoon titled "Mickey Mouse is also an Enthusiastic Reader of *Liangyou*."⁸ In their efforts, *Liangyou*'s editors aimed to showcase the journal's cosmopolitan characteristics.⁹ Interestingly, while other local or Hollywood actors were portrayed as realistic figures, Mickey Mouse remained a cartoonish character. Despite this, he achieved a significant status. This raises the question: How did Mickey Mouse attain such prominence, and what can we discern from these appropriated Mickey images, published and circulated in the pictorial world of metropolitan Shanghai?

In 1930s Shanghai, Mickey Mouse found its largest stage in early twentieth-century East Asia. Combining animated cartoonish drawings and "Mickey-Mousing,, music that matches characters' movement to music,"¹⁰ Disney cartoon films rapidly occupied not only theaters but also pictorial journals in China. Given that cinema and pictorials were the two most well-received media in early twentieth-century China, Mickey Mouse was arguably one of the most frequently seen figures in the lives of urban Chinese residents. Even Lu Xun took his family to cinemas to watch Disney cartoon films very frequently. The writer recorded his experiences of watching these funny movies in his diary, noting that they were especially enjoyable for kids. Lu Xun's wife, Xu Guangping (1898–1968), also mentioned their memories of watching Disney cartoons in 1930s Shanghai.¹¹ Xu then pointed out that these

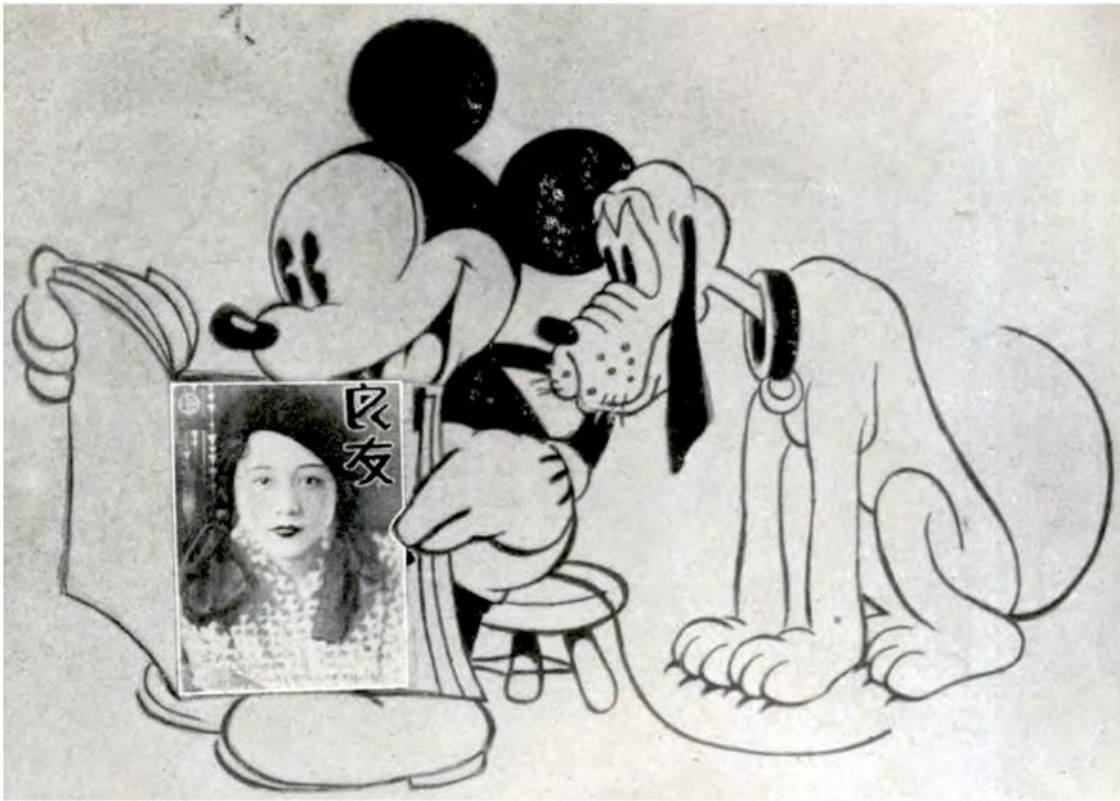


Figure 1.1. *Liangyou* editorial, "Mickey Mouse is also an Enthusiastic Reader of *Liangyou*."

Source: *Liangyou* no. 72 (1932): 25.

animated shorts mostly lacked any profound meanings, yet they somehow reflected the creators' "spirit" and "interest" or, in other words, their attitudes towards art and popular culture.¹²

In 1933, in a short introduction to Hollywood published in another pictorial journal also produced by the *Liangyou* publishing company, the anonymous editors declared that a new era of cinema was dawning in light of the popularity of Disney's animated works and Mickey Mouse's stardom. The journal titled *Xiaoshijie*, literally translated as "Little world," was established a year prior with the aim of presenting prevalent global cultural topics, particularly emphasizing Western trends and fashions. In the introductory essay, Mickey Mouse and Disney cartoon films were also considered the most popular cultural phenomenon then and thus highly valued by the editors. This short introduction then compared the old-fashioned age characterized by D. W. Griffith's silent feature films with the new cinematic era led by Walt Disney's animated cartoons.¹³ One factor that marked the decline of Griffith's cinema was the advent of sound pictures, whereas Mickey Mouse and Disney's sound cartoons had been attracting more and more audiences globally.

To comprehend the stardom of Mickey Mouse in urban Republican China, I adopt an approach suggested by John Crespi, focusing on the pictorial

turn and visual modernity in the Chinese context. Crespi argues that we should contextualize modern Chinese cartoons or *manhua* within the pictorial environment to fully understand how these images function in shaping spectatorship.¹⁴ By examining the entire page on which *Liangyou's* Mickey Mouse advertisement was published, I argue that this cartoon was not solely an advertisement for the journal itself. Instead, it was part of a visual-based introduction to the success of Mickey Mouse and its creator, Walt Disney. The overall title of this pictorial page is "Mickey Mouse: The Brightest Movie Star in the U.S."¹⁵ In addition to the advertising cartoon, there is another comic drawing featuring a dance scene with Mickey and Minnie. Moreover, the page includes photos of Walt Disney himself, acclaimed as "the painter famous for drawing a mouse,"¹⁶ showcasing how the Disney studio prepared for rotoscoping and composing background music for their cartoon films, and displaying numerous letters sent by Mickey Mouse's enthusiastic fans.¹⁷ Thus, Mickey received equal treatment as a real film star in the Chinese pictorial world, even though people knew he was merely a cartoonish mouse created and brought to life by comic authors and animators. This explains why the journal utilized the cartoonish character to promote itself.

Liangyou's cartoon advertisement raises another aspect to consider the transmediality of Mickey Mouse in Republican China: the mouse's image was continuously appropriated or adapted into various media forms beyond cinema. Cartoonish characters are often simplified, whether they appear in pictorial or animated formats, making it convenient to copy, appropriate, or recreate these images. While the *Liangyou* editors did not have access to Photoshop or generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) at that time, they cleverly inserted their journal's cover page into the advertisement by replacing the book cover that Mickey and Pluto were originally reading. This showcases how Chinese editors and authors recognized that a comic drawing is not a singular image; rather, it comprises different parts that can be (dis)assembled as desired. Bubbles and dialogues in Mickey Mouse comic stories were also considered components that could be replaced or recreated.

As more American comic stories featuring Mickey Mouse were published and circulated during the early twentieth century, some Chinese editors went a step further and directly removed the original English dialogues in the bubbles, replacing them with Chinese-language conversations to ensure local readers could understand the stories. This reproducibility of the Mickey image, therefore, facilitated the proliferation of Mickey's face within Chinese pictorials.

From cinema to comic books and cultural goods, and from America to China, the reception and popularity of Mickey Mouse witnessed a process of transnational media-mix. In his analysis of the success of Astro Boy in the postwar Japanese media environment, Marc Steinberg employs the term

“dynamic immobility” to indicate how media mix enables limited or low-frame rate animation to “generate movement across media forms.”¹⁸ While Steinberg’s analysis pertains to a different historical period and a different country, a similar pattern of transmedia movement of the image can also be observed in Mickey Mouse’s adventure in Republican China. More importantly, Steinberg’s analysis focuses on the media mix of a Japanese anime within its local media industries, whereas Mickey’s journey in China suggests an expanded vision for understanding media mix in a transnational context.

In the following sections, I will primarily introduce and analyze the translation, localization, and reinvention of Mickey Mouse in the form of comic stories in 1930s and 1940s China. I will showcase how the American cartoon mouse was incorporated into the local Chinese pictorial culture, thus quietly conveying some cultural and political meanings through the process of transnational media mix.

LOCALIZED MICKEY MOUSE

In Republican Shanghai, numerous Mickey Mouse comic stories were translated from English into Chinese, offering readers an array of seemingly up-to-date and entertaining Mickey and Disney stories. Many pictorial journals adopted this relatively straightforward strategy to cater to their audience. For instance, in *Tuhua Shijie* (*Pictorial World*), editors and translators simply replaced the original dialogues in speech bubbles with Chinese versions in their pirated Mickey Mouse comics.¹⁹ However, a significant portion of these Chinese-version Mickey Mouse comics lacks a clear title, only featuring headings such as “Milaoshu” (“Mickey Mouse,”), “Milaoshu chahua” (“Illustrations of Mickey Mouse”), and “Katong gushi: Milaoshu” (“Cartoon stories of Mickey Mouse”). Evidently, with access to American magazines and Disney comic books, Chinese journal editors were able to continually produce or reproduce Chinese Mickey Mouse comics, allowing these endearing characters to maintain a prominent presence in the local pictorial culture.

Chinese translation is undoubtedly a typical strategy for localizing Mickey Mouse comics in the domestic pictorial world. However, in addition to the aforementioned advertising cartoons, there were other nuances in terms of the localization of Mickey Mouse. From the late 1930s to the early 1940s, some Mickey Mouse comics were published as serialized stories in certain Chinese journals, primarily targeting a children-oriented audience. Unlike the previously mentioned Mickey Mouse cartoons lacking precise titles, these serial comics had their own distinctive titles and were no longer direct translations (or pirated adaptations) of original Disney comics.

In 1936, a journal titled *Xiao Pengyou* (*Little Friends*) published a serialized comic story called “*Milaoshu Piaoliuji*” (“Mickey Mouse’s Adventure”) created by Chinese author Han Xiang. In the previously mentioned Chinese Mickey Mouse cartoons, readers were assumed to already know who Mickey Mouse and other Disney cartoon figures were, and thus, the comics provided straightforward visual pleasure without specific titles. However, “Mickey Mouse’s Adventure” differed from other Chinese-version Mickey cartoons. This serialized story comprised more text and fewer images. Instead of continuous comic strips, the story utilized single-panel cartoons that were likely extracted or copied from original American comics. The readers were encouraged to read the story, rather than just enjoying the funny images. In other words, Mickey’s images here served a more ornamental role, supporting the relatively more localized narrative.

In the story texts, the author Han Xiang provided more background information about Mickey. In this adventure, Mickey was portrayed as the son of a wealthy father, residing in a “mouse village,” where he enjoyed a happy life and nurtured his ambition to sail overseas.²⁰ Following an accident, Mickey drifted to a new continent, where he, akin to Robinson Crusoe, encountered his own Friday and endured through riots and wars on the isolated island.²¹ Eventually, Mickey Mouse and his Friday managed to escape and return to his hometown.²² Evidently, this narrative is a parody of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and is quite likely a translated version of the comic titled *Mickey Mouse, Crusoe* (1936) and the animated film *Mickey’s Man Friday* (1935). However, it is essential to differentiate this Chinese comic story from the translated comics mentioned earlier. The Chinese story texts, while inspired by Defoe’s novel, were essentially recreated for the local market, specifically targeting Chinese children. In comparison to other translated and/or pirated Disney comics, “Mickey Mouse’s Adventure,” prioritized storytelling through text and aimed to erase the original American background of Mickey Mouse cartoons.

While it is true that the original versions of these Chinese Mickey stories can be easily found, similar to “Mickey Mouse’s Adventure,” the Chinese authors and journal editors collaborated to reshape the stories into more localized versions. This involved reducing the reliance on original cartoonish images, adding more textual content to emphasize the narrative, and discarding the original American background accordingly. Consequently, in these stories, Mickey was depicted as a typical cartoon mouse existing not in the United States, but as a character within an illusory world.

However, this strategy of incorporating Mickey Mouse into the Chinese context brought about an awkward situation, as the Chinese pictorial world grappled with the challenge of localizing Mickey Mouse to appeal to Chinese readers. Some Chinese authors and editors explored another

approach to emphasize Chinese elements in the recreated Mickey Mouse comic stories. A typical example is a story titled “*Milaoshu Cangzhou duo-bao*” (“Mickey Mouse’s Treasure Hunting in Cangzhou”), published in 1941.

Unlike the previously analyzed “Mickey Mouse’s Adventure,” “Mickey Mouse’s Treasure Hunting in Cangzhou” stands out by highlighting in its title that the story is set in Cangzhou, a town located in China’s Hebei province. Once again, this comic story contains more texts than images, with the latter largely pirated and reprinted from American Mickey comics. A noteworthy aspect is that despite the title’s emphasis on Cangzhou, the actual mention of this location occurs only once in the story. As part of the plot, when Mickey Mouse is desperately searching for more clues to find the hidden treasure, the Chinese author He Shouwen inserted a narrative that our protagonist mouse eventually stumbles upon a map of Cangzhou, where the treasure is believed to be hidden.²³ This exemplifies the awkwardness faced by Republican Chinese journal editors and comic authors: while they had to rely on the original Disney comic stories and images, they made considerable efforts to localize Mickey Mouse as much as possible. The entire story structure is based on a more Western adventure novel format, yet it was skillfully adapted to be delivered in a relatively Chinese literary fashion and set within a Chinese city.

With that being said, I am not suggesting that “Mickey Mouse’s Treasure Hunting in Cangzhou” was a pointless case. In fact, the efforts to localize Mickey into the Chinese context offered local readers a sense of modernity. John Crespi, in his analysis of Republican Chinese cartoons, points out that *manhua* circulated in Shanghai pictorials could serve as guidance for immigrants who had recently relocated to the city.²⁴ By providing this visual modernity, pictorial cartoons introduced not only urban scenery but also the modern lifestyle to newcomers.

“Mickey Mouse’s Treasure Hunting in Cangzhou,” a blend of American cartoon images and localized background information (albeit limited), created a fusion of local context and Americanized modern lifestyle. This fusion included showcasing cars, Western suits and dresses, and two-story buildings, among other elements. Consequently, this limited localization of Mickey Mouse in Cangzhou comics resulted in an unexpected outcome of transnational media-mix: it not only acted as a window to the lifestyle of the West but also implied to local spectators that such modern fashion could be embraced in China as well.

Regarding localization, the three Chinese Mickey Mouse comics discussed above grappled with the issue of local identity. However, in the late 1930s, some Chinese comic authors took a step further and embarked on the path of recreating or reinventing localized Mickey Mouse stories, where everything except the classic image (and in some cases, only the face) of Mickey Mouse was entirely created by their own imagination. One such example is Fan

Lang, the editor and comic author for the journal *Shifeng* (*Introduction to the World*), who published his work titled "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai" in 1939. By providing information about the place and time, and without denying Mickey's origin from the United States, readers were encouraged to view the encounter of East and West through this more localized Mickey comic story.

An intriguing aspect lies in the existence of two versions of "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai": Fan's version was published during Shanghai under Japanese occupation but before the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, while another version was published in 1948 Shanghai after the Anti-Fascist War and amid the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949) between the communists and nationalists. These divergent versions of the recreation of Mickey Mouse's image, along with the pictorial space in which they were used, reveal some hidden messages concerning cultural politics under different wartime conditions. It is precisely within such cultural and political circumstances that a clearer perspective is gained on how Mickey Mouse was transformed and localized into the Chinese context. He served as an observer in the comic worlds, while simultaneously becoming the voice of wartime entertainment and ideologies.

MICKEY'S TWO TRIPS TO SHANGHAI

Thus far, we have two episodes of "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai," from the 1939 version. In this comic, no plots were directly copied from any original Mickey cartoons; instead, Mickey Mouse and his partner Minnie were depicted as tired of life in Hollywood, leading them to relocate to Shanghai in search of a fresh start. The opening panel shows Mickey and Minnie driving a fancy car and arriving at their hotel. Eager for an adventurous exit from the hotel room balcony, reminiscent of slapstick cartoon films, Mickey's plans are swiftly thwarted by his local neighbor. As they walk along the city streets, Mickey and Minnie immediately become the center of attention for all passers-by, both men in suits and ladies wearing cheongsam (*qipao*), who recognize them as famous movie stars from America. The two cartoonish figures then embark on a rickshaw trip, which quickly turns into a comical crash, leading Mickey to even engage in a playful scuffle with the rickshaw man.²⁵ This concludes the first part of the story. In contrast to the aforementioned localized comics, Mickey (and Minnie) in Fan Lang's "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai" were not the sole protagonists. Instead, the comic's primary focus was on urban Shanghai itself. In every panel, elements

of modern Shanghai are easily recognizable, aligning with Crespi's assertion that these cartoons served as a city guidebook for readers and spectators.²⁶

The second episode of Fan Lang's comic consists of only four panels, but it appears to be more bizarre than the previous story, particularly regarding the character design of Mickey and Minnie. The body scale of the two characters is no longer in the original format; instead, their arms, bodies, and legs are all stretched to the same level as humans (figure 1.2). Moreover, they both dress up like urban Shanghai's affluent residents: Mickey wears a blazer, pants, and leather shoes, while Minnie dons her elegant dress. Informed by their local Chinese butler, Mickey drives and takes Minnie to the cinema, where they join a number of Chinese audiences and enjoy a film together during the Mid-Autumn Festival.²⁷

Once again, the second part of Fan Lang's localized Mickey comic does not focus on the exoticism associated with Mickey Mouse but rather situates the American cartoon stars in the context of modern Shanghai. The decorations of the flat room, the car, and the movie theater, along with the film culture itself, become the actual protagonists of this story. The purpose is no longer to enable readers to learn more about Mickey Mouse and the Western



Figure 1.2. A panel from Fan Lang, "Mickey Mouse's trip to Shanghai."

Source: *Shifeng* no. 2 (1939): 18.

or American culture it represents; instead, it centers on showcasing the modernity of Shanghai. In other words, readers are encouraged not to merely read translated Mickey comics or those based on the original American cartoons; rather, they are prompted to explore the lifestyle and city fashion within the local context.

Notably, this comic was published during the Japanese occupation of the city of Shanghai, excluding the concession. It is essential to pay attention to the fact that wartime Chinese visual culture and the pictorial world were not solely dedicated to direct anti-/pro-Japanese political propaganda.²⁸ While politicized content was present, many comics and other visual art forms in occupied Shanghai were encouraged by the Japanese to provide entertainment for Chinese people. This ambiguity of wartime entertainment was a characteristic of the Shanghai film industry during the war, and comic art, closely connected with the cinematic world, also aimed to offer less politically charged visual pleasure.²⁹

Nevertheless, amid this landscape of entertainment, we can discern the presence of local identity in the appearance of Mickey Mouse during his adventure in Shanghai. By situating Mickey in the urban scenery of Republican Shanghai, the Chinese pictorial world subtly erased the originally Americanized elements related to Mickey or Disney cartoon culture. This process of de-Americanization in the pictorial industry suggests that some Chinese journal editors and comic authors astutely targeted a smoother approach to appropriate and adapt Mickey Mouse into a localized media form. Instead of striving to attach more local-oriented story texts to the original comic drawings, some Chinese authors chose to retain only the character design of Mickey and completely reimagined a localized pictorial world in which the Disney superstar could embark on his dramatic adventure.

Unfortunately, at this moment, we are unable to obtain further information about the ongoing story of Mickey Mouse's adventure in Shanghai as illustrated by Fan Lang. However, in 1948, another comic story featuring Mickey Mouse emerged in a Shanghai pictorial journal, *Ertong Shijie* (*Children's World*), with the same title as Fan Lang's works. This 1948 version of Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai was written by He Gongchao, while the comic drawings were created by Xing Shuntian. Presently, we have access to a fourteen-episode serial comic, with each episode consisting of four panels. Similar to the 1939 version, He and Xing's "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai," also functions as a pictorial guide to urban Shanghai. The illustrations showcase skyscrapers, shopping malls, radios, and Chinese men dressed in Western gentlemen's style, providing readers with a glimpse of the city's modernity.

Despite being published in a children-oriented magazine, the contents of this comic are politically ironic and may extend beyond the realm of serving

as children's cartoons. In the first episode, Mickey is portrayed as a respected American guest arriving in Shanghai on a US naval ship. He is welcomed by a local mouse dressed in long gowns and mandarin jackets, symbols typically associated with well-educated or powerful Chinese elites in the Republican era. Mickey expresses confusion over the absence of cats in Shanghai, to which the local elite mouse explains that rich ladies have been capturing cats for their fur coats.³⁰ Though ironic, this comic story emerges as a straightforward criticism of the Kuomintang's (KMT, the Chinese Nationalist Party) governance and the corruption it caused after the Anti-Japanese War. The comic also targets the inflation resulting from the KMT's financial policies. In another episode, a Chinese businessman is perpetually in pursuit of a US dollar due to the constant devaluation of the KMT's Golden Yuan Coupon.³¹

In addition to criticizing the KMT, the comic also aimed harsh criticism at the United States, reflecting a strong leftist political stance. The authors expressed great fury over the US decision to support the Japanese amid the outbreak of the Cold War. This support was deemed unacceptable to many patriotic Chinese people, considering the wartime rivalry with Japan and the suffering caused by their invasion. Furthermore, not only did the United States choose to cooperate with the Japanese, but the KMT also followed the diplomatic policies set by their American ally.³² In one of the episodes, Mickey becomes an observer of a large-scale anti-Japanese campaign, witnessing street demonstrations by the masses and listening to emotional speeches delivered by Chinese professors through the radio.³³ The authors even question whether this campaign might lead to the resurgence of fascism in another episode. In a four-panel cartoon, Mickey Mouse is depicted advertising in Shanghai, claiming that Hitler and Mussolini have been reborn and will soon arrive in the city. Surprisingly, many Chinese people express support for these two fascists and even organize a welcome ceremony for them. However, the comic reveals that Mickey has two nephews named Hitler and Mussolini, and it is Mickey himself who decided to play a trick on those fascist followers.³⁴

The two authors were not only dissatisfied with linking the United States to the potential return of fascism in China, but they also directly criticized the issue of racism in the United States. In one episode, a group of black-skinned people are seen taking a bus, but the driver becomes upset and asks them to get off. Mickey, as one of the passengers, intervenes and, with the help of a kind policeman, stops the racist behavior (figure 1.3). The black-skinned figures then complain about the situation in their country, where white men are the dominators, and all black people are forced to serve as slaves to these whites.³⁵ In another episode, a Chinese gentleman claims that everything in the United States is far better than in China. To counter his statement, Mickey throws a newspaper to the man, on which a headline news says that thousands



Figure 1.3. A panel from He Gongchao and Xing Shuntian, "Milaoshu you Shanghai."

Source: *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 10 (1948): 2.

of American workers are on strike due to injustices in the country, leaving the man embarrassed.³⁶

Despite the cute faces of Mickey Mouse, the 1948 version of "Mickey Mouse's Trip to Shanghai," goes beyond being merely children's entertainment or education. It is highly politicized, conveying messages of leftism, anti-racism, anti-imperialism, and anti-fascism. More importantly, this comic story is even more localized than all the previously mentioned ones, as

Mickey Mouse, the Disney star, continues to act as an observer of Chinese society. This thorough process of de-Americanization exemplifies how transnational media mix functions when incorporated into local cultural politics.

CODA

The localized Mickey Mouse comics published in Republican Chinese pictorials exemplify the process of transnational media mix. Initially hailed as a Hollywood superstar, Mickey Mouse's fame extended from the silver screen to the pages of popular magazines, thereby transforming the local pictorial industry with animated cartoons. Over time, Mickey came to symbolize not only American film and popular culture but also the role of an exotic observer and an ideal image of a sympathetic US citizen towards the Chinese people suffering under the KMT's rule. This portrayal of Mickey Mouse's journey in Republican China demonstrates how the local pictorial culture was shaped and influenced by the transnational media mix of these beloved cartoon characters. While further research is needed to fully understand the authors and gauge the reception of these magazines, the significance of Mickey Mouse in the Chinese visual culture of the era should not be underestimated. Amidst the focus on film culture and renowned cartoonists in Shanghai's modernity, these comics warrant more attention as they reveal the underlying currents of modern Chinese visual culture and the enduring global impact of early Disney cartoons.

NOTES

1. Miriam Hansen, "Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (1993): 27–61.
2. Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney* (Calcutta, India: Seagull Books, 1986), 21.
3. Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 21.
4. Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of 1960s: Not Only for the Children* (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2012), 72.
5. Qin Gang, "Yousheng katong shidai de Dishini donghua zai Minguo Shanghai" (Disney animations of the sound-cartoon era in Republican Shanghai). *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 7 (2017): 38–49.
6. Shanghai Library, ed., *Retrospections of Walt Disney in Shanghai: A City Chronicle of ROC* (Shanghai: Shanghai Scientific and Technological Literature Press, 2016), 84–87.
7. Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), viii.

8. "Mishu, yi wei Liangyou bao zhi aiduzhe" (Mickey Mouse is also an enthusiastic reader of *Liangyou*). *Liangyou* 72 (1932): 25.

9. Yingjin Zhang and Kuiyi Shen, *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis 1926–1945* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 3.

10. For more about "Mickey-Mousing" music in cartoon films, see Daniell Goldmark, "Sounds Funny/Funny Sounds," in *Funny Pictures: Animation and Comedy in Studio-Era Hollywood*, eds. Daniel Goldmark and Charlie Keil (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 257–271.

11. Qin, "Yousheng katong shidai de Dishini donghua zai Minguo Shanghai," 43.

12. Qin, "Yousheng katong shidai de Dishini donghua zai Minguo Shanghai," 43.

13. "Xinchendaixie: Mishu chuanguozhe Huade Dishini chuhua Mishu manhua gushi" (New and old: the creator of Mickey Mouse Walt Disney publishes his first Mickey comic). *Xiaoshijie* 35 (1933): 28.

14. John A. Crespi, *Manhua Modernity: Chinese Culture and the Pictorial Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 4–17.

15. "Mishu: Mieguo zuihong de mingxing" (Mickey Mouse: the brightest movie star in the U.S.). *Liangyou* 72 (1932): 25.

16. "Yishu chengming zhi huajia: Mishu de chuanguozhe Huade Dishini" (The painter famous for drawing a mouse: Mickey Mouse's creator Walt Disney). *Liangyou* 72 (1932): 43.

17. "Mishu: Mieguo zuihong de mingxing," 25.

18. Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 6.

19. "Milaoshu: duibuqi Botuo!" (Mickey Mouse: sorry Pluto!). *Tuhua shijie* 49 (1949): 9–10.

20. Han Xiang, "Milaoshu piaoliuji" (Mickey Mouse's adventure). *Xiaopengyou* 700 (1936): 74.

21. Han Xiang, "Milaoshu piaoliuji." *Xiaopengyou* 702 (1936): 28–36.

22. Han Xiang, "Milaoshu piaoliuji." *Xiaopengyou* 708 (1936): 28–37.

23. He Shouwen, "Milaoshu Cangzhou duobao" (Mickey Mouse's treasure hunting in Cangzhou). *Xiaozhuren* 6, no. 6 (1941): 13–16.

24. Crespi, *Manhua Modernity*, 23.

25. Fan Lang, "Milaoshu you Shanghai" (Mickey Mouse's trip to Shanghai). *Shifeng* 1 (1939): 22–23.

26. Crespi, *Manhua Modernity*, 23.

27. Fan Lang, "Milaoshu you Shanghai." *Shifeng* 2 (1939): 18.

28. Jeremy E. Taylor, "Cartoons and Collaboration in Wartime China: The Mobilization of Chinese Cartoonists under Japanese Occupation." *Modern China* 41.4 (2015): 406–435.

29. Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Redwood City, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 101.

30. He Gongchao and Xing Shuntian, "Milaoshu you Shanghai" (Mickey Mouse's trip to Shanghai). *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 2 (1948): 2.

31. For the issue of inflation in 1940s China, see Colin D. Campbell and Gordon C. Tullock, "Hyperinflation in China, 1937–49." *Journal of Political Economy* 62, no. 3 (1954): 236–245.

32. For postwar US-Japanese relationship, see Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9.

33. He and Xing, "Milaoshu you Shanghai," *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 11 (1948): 2.

34. He and Xing, "Milaoshu you Shanghai," *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 8 (1948): 2.

35. He and Xing, "Milaoshu you Shanghai," *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 10 (1948): 2.

36. He and Xing, "Milaoshu you Shanghai," *Ertong shijie* 4, no. 7 (1948): 2.

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