

*From Virtual Space to “Third Space”:
Mickey Mouse in Shanghai During the 1930s and 1940s*

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Abstract

Mickey Mouse made his Chinese debut in the Shanghai illustrated magazine *Liangyou* in 1932. Since then, urban audiences in Shanghai began to see both authorized and unauthorized Mickey Mouse cartoons in entertainment mediums, including magazines, newspapers, and films. Through the analysis of images in various Shanghai media, this paper explores how the cultural identity of Mickey Mouse in Shanghai went through a fundamental shift from a citizen of the world to a distinctly American figure in the late 1930s and 1940s. The paper has two sections. The first section focuses on Mickey Mouse images in early 1930s Shanghai. These images portray a universal character with no distinct definition of age, race, class, nationality, or local identity—a figure that can only exist in virtual space. The second section turns the focus towards the late 1930s and 1940s when unauthorized comic strip adaptations of Mickey Mouse created by Chinese cartoonists spring up in Shanghai. One such comic strip, *Milaoshu you Shanghai* (Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai, 1948), exemplifies how Mickey Mouse shifts from being a symbol of cosmopolitanism to becoming a character with a specific national and racial identity: a white American man. By setting this white American male Mickey Mouse in 1940s Shanghai, *Milaoshu you Shanghai* depicts a world full of contradiction between the East and the West constructing a world that can be called, to use Homi Bhabha’s term, a “third space” – a hybrid space emerged from the interface between existing cultural forms.

Keywords: Mickey Mouse, Early 20th Century Shanghai, *Liangyou* Illustrated Magazine, Third Space

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Introduction

The cartoon character Mickey Mouse created by Walt Disney was born in the United States in the late 1920s. Mickey Mouse was introduced to China only 4 years later. Mickey Mouse made his Chinese debut in the Shanghai illustrated magazine *The Young Companion* (*Liangyou*) in November 30, 1932 (Fig. 1). Although the magazine has done some editing on the image of Mickey Mouse, the figure of Mickey Mouse is faithful to the original animation and manuscripts created by Walt Disney.¹ Since the late 1930s, unauthorized comic strip adaptations of Mickey Mouse created by Chinese cartoonists has sprung up in Shanghai. Mickey Mouse has changed a lot in these local comics. A good example is the *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* (*Milaoshu you Shanghai*) comic series. The two sets of *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* comic strips were first drawn by cartoonist Fan Lang and published in the magazine *Shifeng*. They were published in January and February 1939. Later in 1948, fifteen more sets of *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* created by Gong Chao and Shun Tian were sequentially published in another magazine *Children's World* (*Ertong shijie*). This article focuses on the images of Mickey Mouse seen in the Shanghai mass media from the 1930s to the 1940s to explore how Mickey Mouse's visual characters, identity and cultural meaning altered during this period, and to uncover the social and political reasons behind these changes.

1. The global visual language in Early 1930s: Debut of Mickey Mouse in Shanghai

The Young Companion is a large-scale comprehensive illustrated magazine born in Shanghai in 1926, its content involves everything such as news, advertising, movie, literature, art, sports. It is also a successful international publication.² There is a report about *Mickey Mouse* in *The Young Companion*. *The Young Companion*, no.72 (November 30, 1932) page 28 (Fig. 3) published the pictures of Mickey Mouse and the working photos of Disney and its team producing Mickey Mouse, including eight pictures. There are also some short English and Chinese introduction to the pictures. On the top right corner is a picture that Mickey Mouse and his pet dog Pluto are reading a magazine; interestingly, the cover of this magazine is that of *The Young Companion* (Fig. 1). This picture has a caption "Mickey Mouse is also a reader of *The Young Companion*". At that time, there was a post-retouching technique called

1. *Plane Crazy* is the first black and white silent short film of Mickey Mouse directed by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks in 1928. There is a scene where Mickey is reading a book about how to fly, which is very similar to the image of Mickey Mouse reading a magazine in *The Young Companion*. The two images of Mickey Mouse are three-quarters of the side holding a book.

2. *The Young Companion*, a large-scale illustrated magazine that values image arrangement, needs a chief editor with fine art and professional art editors to deal with it. Therefore, Liang Desuo 梁得所 and Ma Guoliang 马国良, the editors of *The Young Companion*, are both highly skilled in art. A Lingnan student, Ma Guoliang 马国良 found Wan Laiming 万籁鸣, father of Chinese cartoon films, as the art editor during his time as an editor. Li Xudan, a graduate of Shanghai Xinhua Art College, and cartoonist Ding Cong 丁聪, also served as assistant editors during Liang Desuo's 梁得所 editing period. They are the tractor behind the modern sight of *The Young Companion*, see Huang, G. (2017) "Yizhong modeng shixian de yingjie—lun *liangyou* huabao de xiandai bianpai fenlei" 一种摩登视线的引介——论《良友》画报的现代编排分类 (An Introduction to Modern Sight—On the Modern Arrangement and Classification of *The Young Companion*). *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中国文学研究, 44, 145-190.

"darkroom technology" which can merge different pictures into the same picture.³ The picture used this technique to put the cover of *The Young Companion* into Mickey Mouse hand.⁴ *The Young Companion* published a picture of Mickey Mouse reading *The Young Companion* which turns this picture into a self-referential one. More intriguingly, the image of Mickey Mouse using similar visual language appeared on the cover of a magazine on the other side of the world almost at the same time—*Film Selectos*, a weekly film magazine in Barcelona, Spain. The *Film Selectos* in December 1932 used the image of Mickey Mouse as the cover (Fig. 2). The Mickey Mouse in the image is reading a magazine and the cover of the magazine is *Film Selectos*. As we can see from Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, Mickey Mouse in those two pictures have a high degree of resemblance—both appear at almost the same angle and direction, both smiling with an open mouth. Also similarly, this self-referential Mickey Mouse image in *Film Selectos* has a caption below, too, which reads “Mickey Mouse during the filming breaks of his celebrated films read our magazine as can be seen in this picture sent by the great cartoonist and animator Walt Disney.” By underlining the Mickey Mouse image as a photo sent by Walt Disney, *Film Selectos* ensures the authenticity of their cover image. It can be seen that the ideas behind the self-referential Mickey Mouse in these two magazines, *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos*, are very close. According to their captions, both the two magazines set Mickey Mouse as a world famous star, and are proud of the fact that this film star reads their publications. Why did Mickey Mouse images using similar visual language appear at the same time in two cities far apart—Shanghai and Barcelona?



Figure 1: Mickey is also a reader of *the Young Companion* (Mickey Mouse is also a reader of *the Young Companion*), *The Young Companion* no.72 (November 30, 1932)

3. Li, X. (2005). “Hualong zhongzai dianjing—qiantan anfang jishu dui sheying zuoping de yingxiang” 画龙重在点睛——浅谈暗房技术对摄影作品的影响 (The Finishing Point—On the Influence of Darkroom Technology on Photographic Works). *Xinjiang shiyou jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 新疆石油教育学院学报, 1, 95-97.

4. First use a blade to scrape off the unnecessary parts of the two films, then repair them with a brush, and finally stack the two films together for shooting. This technique corresponds to matting, brush repair and multiplying in modern times.

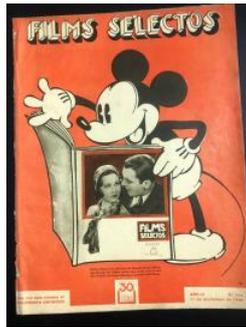


Figure 2: Films Selectos cover December 16,1932



Figure 3: *The Young Companion*, no.72 (November 30, 1932)

1.1. Mickey mouse self-referential image

In *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos*, Mickey Mouse is reading a magazine, which is the magazine that the Mickey Mouse image is printed on. The self-referential image of Mickey Mouse is actually very common in early Disney publications. For example, the cover of the inaugural issue of *Mickey Mouse Magazine* in January 1933 (Fig. 4) uses the same visual language. Its publish time is very close to *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos* discussed above. In this picture, Mickey and his girlfriend Minnie are frolicking on the seesaw, with a self-referential *Mickey Mouse Magazine* in their hands. An earlier example can be found in the *Mickey Mouse Story Book* published by Disney in 1931 (Fig. 5), on the cover we can see that Mickey Mouse is telling the story to two child-like Mickeys. From the details of the exposed book pages, Mickey is telling stories from the *Mickey Mouse Story Book*. The other types of Disney books such as the product sales catalog- *Mickey Mouse Merchandise* (fig. 6) also use the same self-referential image.

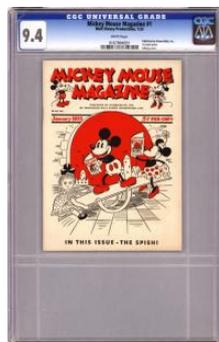


Figure 4: *Mickey Mouse Magazine* 1933.1.

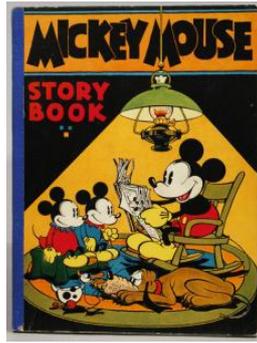


Figure 5: Hardcover book from 1931.

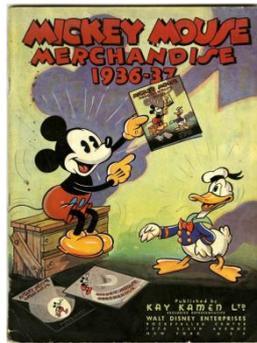


Figure 6: *Mickey Mouse Merchandise 1936-37*. Published by Kay Kamen, Ltd., Exclusive Representative, WaltDisney Enterprises, New York." 84 pages...

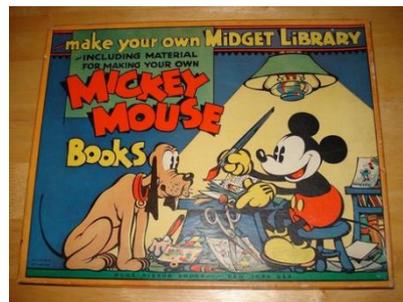


Figure 7: *Blue Ribbon Books*, The Mel Brinkrant Collection 1933.



Figure 8: This promotional photo from the mid-'40s shows Walt returning to his first love: drawing. He acted mostly as a producer and story man for Disney, but he grabbed a pencil to pose for the cameras.

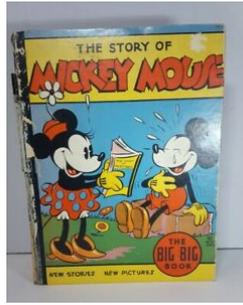


Figure 9: Walt Disney. *The Story of Mickey Mouse and the Smugglers*. Racine: Whitman Publishing, 1935. *The Big Big Book*. 316 pages.

This kind of self-referential image in many cases appears on the cover of the printed Mickey Mouse books, which aims to introduce the readers into the narratives (or products) in the books.⁵ In these pictures, Mickey Mouse is an intermediary between the story world and outside of it. As a medium, Mickey Mouse plays various roles in these self-referential pictures. First of all, he is a performer, or the one being viewed. The content of the magazine that Mickey Mouse guides us to read is the stories about Mickey Mouse. In other words, the Mickey Mouse on the reading covers mentioned above is the performer in the book stories that serves as a preface to the world of the story to attract audiences. Secondly, Mickey Mouse in these self-referential images sometimes also plays the role of a creator. Fig. 7 is an illustration printed on the top of the box of Mickey Mouse book set, in which Mickey Mouse is drawing on a page of a book. What he draws is Mickey Mouse's own image, as if he is introducing the set of books to readers, with a posture very much like Mr. Disney (Fig. 8) sketching Mickey Mouse on the paper. Here, as a creator, Mickey Mouse invited us to read the stories. Thirdly, Mickey is also a reader in some of the self-referential images. For instance, we can see in Fig. 9—Minnie playing the role as a reader is telling Mickey a story, the content of which is mostly likely that of *The Story of Mickey Mouse*. Mickey thus connects the real world and the story one, guiding the audience into the space inside the story.

Therefore, *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos* apparently adopted the common self-referential visual language we see in the Disney-created Mickey Mouse books. But one question that remains to be answered is why these two similar images of Mickey Mouse appear in different corners of the world almost at the same time?

1.2. The global citizen in virtual space—Mickey Mouse

The popularity of Mickey Mouse's self-referential image, as I will demonstrate, reflects the interchangeability of Mickey Mouse's identity to a certain extent. The interchangeability of Mickey Mouse's identity is a feature that differs from many other cartoon characters of the same period. In the first Mickey Mouse animated short film *Plane Crazy* created by Disney in 1928, Mickey Mouse is a creative pilot who builds airplanes with the assistance of farm animals. Released in November of the same year, Mickey Mouse in *Steamboat Willie*, the first sound Mickey Mouse animation, was a crew who was able to sail. The short movie shows the interesting story that occurred among him and his animal crews on the boat. In the following year, Mickey Mouse in the Disney animated short film *The Karnival Kid* plays a

5. Li, X. (2019) "Cong mixieer de 'yuantuxiang' dao nanxi de 'zizhu'—dangdai tuxiang lilun de ziwo zhishe" 从米歇尔的“元图像”到南希的“自主”——当代图像理论自我指涉 (From Michel's 'Meta-image' to Nancy's 'Autonomy'——The Self-referentiality of Contemporary Image Theory). *Wenyi pinglun* 文艺评论, 4, 50-58.

small vendor who sang and sold hot dogs at the animal playground and pursued Minnie in a brave show. In the 1930s, Mickey Mouse also played many other roles in Disney short films, he could be a worker in the building site, a conductor of a band, or a cleaner for the clock tower. Mickey Mouse can be anyone you can think of and go to any imaginable space.

Mickey Mouse has no clear age, race, class, nationality, political affiliation, or local identity. Such a universal character cannot be found in the real world. In other word, Mickey Mouse only exists in the virtual space. The virtual space here refers to a space that does not have a specific geographic location or exists in a specific country. His changeable identity enables him to travel through a variety of virtual spaces with different identities. Mickey Mouse can shuttle in virtual spaces such as farms, ships, playgrounds, and even skyscrapers, the universe, ocean and so on.

The versatility and interchangeability of Mickey Mouse's identity are the reason why he crossed national boundaries and spreads widely all over the world in the 1930s. Every civilization can embrace Mickey Mouse because of his simplicity and universality, as the critic Alva Johnston says:

“Charlie Chaplin and Mickey Mouse are the only universal characters that have ever existed. The greatest kings and conquerors, gods and devils, have by comparison been local celebrities. Mickey’s domain is today even more extensive than Chaplin’s. Charlie’s mustache, hat, pants, shoes and cane belong to western civilization and make him a foreigner in some regions. Mickey Mouse is not a foreigner in any part of the world.”⁶

It is this charm of “not a foreigner in any part of the world” that earns it fame in Shanghai and many other cities outside the United States. Mickey Mouse was a dose of medicine for the Americans at that time who were living at the bottom of their lives, since the gloom of the economic depression always hangs over people’s eyebrows from time to time.⁷

The Mickey Mouse images in the early 1930s showed that he could become anyone in any virtual space. He was a world citizen—in another word, a symbol of cosmopolitanism. It is precisely for this reason that Mickey Mouse was welcomed all over the world, and quickly appeared in publications in different parts of the world, such as *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos*.

1.3. Mickey Mouse illustration of *The Young Companion* in Global Pictorial Culture

As shown in the case of the report in *The Young Companion*, the Mickey Mouse mania in the 1930s was also flooded into Shanghai, China. As we read the Mickey Mouse article written by Chen Binghong in *The Young Companion* (1932 November), it is clear that the Chinese audience at that time fully realized the versatility and interchangeability of Mickey Mouse's identity.⁸ Mickey in this article is presented with many different identities and roles. Firstly, Mickey Mouse is a film star, the article says that “The name of Mickey Mouse and those of the big stars are hung on the cinemas’ commercial lightings.” However, Mickey differs from other stars, since he can be someone omnipotent: “This star can do anything that no one else can do. For example, he can play various musical instruments. He can run faster than anyone

6. Alva, J.(1934). Mickey Mouse. *Woman’s Home Companion*, 7, 108.

7. Bao, Y., Zhong, D. (2009) “Meiguo xuezhe dui “Disney disini” de yanjiu yu piping (zhiyi)” 美国学者对 “国学者对 “ ” 迪斯尼” 的研究与批评(之一) (American Scholars' Research and Criticism on "Disney" (Part One)), *Dianying pingjie* 电影评介, 8, 5-7.

8. Chen, B. (1932) “Yishu chengming zhi huajia,” 以鼠成名之画家 (The Painter Who Became Famous With the Mouse). *Liangyou huabao* 良友画报,72.

else. He can climb the highest mountain without much effort and swim across the ocean.” Secondly, Mickey Mouse in the article is also understood as a creator, as Chen says: “Walt Disney is Mickey Mouse himself”. Thirdly, Mickey Mouse is nothing but ink paintings created by Disney, as the article ends with the meaningful sentence “It is strange to say that all the fame and popularity (that Mickey earns) come from ink! ”

In the early 1930s, Shanghai was involved in a global culture of illustrated magazine. Thanks to the help of the advanced printing technology at this time, A good number of pictures and texts were printed and copied in high quality.⁹ At the same time, the free and loose political environment and international cultural atmosphere enabled Shanghai illustrated magazines participants of this global illustrated magazines trend. *The Young Companion*, as a typical representative, was founded in 1926 in Shanghai. Its monthly sales reached the number of more than 40,000 in two years. With an international vision, Wu Liande, the founder of *The Young Companion*, takes the Western publishing industry as a reference and aims to create an international newspaper and magazine.¹⁰ He not only borrowed the concept of the international illustrated magazine *London News Illustrated*, carefully arranged the pictures and text, but also aligned with the *Saturday Evening Post* published in the United States, improving the quality of printing and improving the content. This international vision made *The Young Companion* show international communication concept, which was finally recognized by readers at home and abroad.¹¹

Illustrated magazine uses pictures as a means of public communication. This visual communication method makes it easier to cross different languages and text, which becomes a “world language” to spread easily. The pictorial crossed area limitation to sale widely around the world, which constructed a complex global information network using the pictures as the main approach to transfer information. Readers from different regions can quickly obtain information from all over the world through this pictorial network, which builds a globally shared public communication space for urban audience all over the world. In the early 1930s, Shanghai’s *The Young Companion* was a part of global illustrated magazines culture network. As a world citizen, Mickey Mouse was apparently quite active in this globally shared virtual space of illustrated magazines.

The Young Companion and *Film Selectos* have borrowed the self-referential schematism which appeared common on the Mickey Mouse book covers created by Disney. The reason why this kind of self-referential schematism quickly appeared in mass media in China and Spain simultaneously is that the illustrated magazines from different regions in the 1930s constructed a globally shared public space, and Mickey Mouse often appears in this virtual public space as a symbol of cosmopolitanism. *The Young Companion* and *Film Selectos* also imagined Mickey Mouse, a popular world citizen, reading their own magazines to promote their own illustrated magazine, since Mickey’s interests proved the popularity and, more importantly, the cosmopolitanism of their illustrate magazines. Indeed, Mickey Mouse in *The*

9. Tang, H. (2021) “kan de zijue yu shuangchong ‘shijie-tuxiang’—jindai zhongguo de shijue xiandaixin” 看的自觉与双重 “世界-图像” ——近代中国的视觉现代性 (The Consciousness of Seeing and the Double "World-Image"—The Visual Modernity of Modern China). *Kuawenhua Yanjiu* 跨文化研究, 1, 1-30.

10. Liu, Y. (2007) “Zuwei shidai tuxiangzhi de Liangyou huabao” 作为时代图像志的《良友画报》 (The Young Companion as an Iconography of the Era). (PhD diss., Huazhong University of Science and Technology), 5, 131.

11 Shi, J. (2018) “《Liangyou》 huabao de guojihua yanjiu” 《良友》画报的国际化研究 (The International Study of The Young Companion). Xiangtan University.

Young Companion and Film Selectos promoted not only these illustrated magazines, but also the very act of viewing illustrated magazines itself, which is understood as an act of cosmopolitan viewers.

2. Mickey Mouse image from late 1930s to 1940s in Shanghai



Figure 10: "Mickey Mouse" serialized in *Funny Illustrated magazine (Huaji huabao)* in 1936



Figure 11: Foreign Mickey Mouse, visit Mr. Wang. From *Xianshi Bao*, vol.53, 12

When Mickey Mouse was introduced to China from the United States in the early 1930s, the images of Mickey Mouse we see in Shanghai's print media were very faithful to the original manuscripts and animations created by Disney. Mickey Mouse has also appeared in other media many times after his debut in *The Young Companion*, some of which imported Disney's original comics on it.¹² For example, *Humor Illustrated magazine (Huaji huabao)* translated and published the Disney comic strip series of Mickey Mouse in the 1936 (Fig. 10). Indeed, Mickey Mouse we see in the early 30s' Shanghai publications was always a global citizen without specific national restrictions and cultural identity that only exists in the virtual space. However, since the late 1930s, local cartoonists in Shanghai began to adapt Mickey Mouse cartoons. Mickey Mouse in these mostly unauthorized comic strip adaptations was no longer a character in the virtual space. Instead, he began to enter reality, in which his identity and cultural meaning altered during this period.

2.1. Mickey Mouse comics adaptations in Shanghai

Most of the mickey mouse comics adaptations created by Shanghai local cartoonists in the

12. Shanghai tushuguan wenxian tigong zhongxin. (2016). "Dishini Shanghai wangshi: minguo shiqi de chengshi jiyi" 迪士尼上海往事: 民国时期的城市记忆 (*Disney's Past in Shanghai: The Memory of the City During the Republic of China*). Shanghai Keji Wenxian Chubanshe.

late 1930s exhibit a binary relationship in their visual and narrative structures. Mickey Mouse in the comics is no longer a global citizen, but converted into a white American man. For example, there was a comic published in *Modern News (Xianshi bao)* in 1939 (Fig. 11). In this comic, Mickey Mouse and Mr. Wang—a lower class citizen that is a comic character created by Mr. Ye Qianyu—stand against one another, which forms a dichotomous relationship. In this comic, you can see that Mr. Wang is an old and skinny man with triangle-shaped bald head and a handle-bar beard, who wears traditional clothes and stands in a stiff and twisted posture. His appearance gives people a nasty and conservative impression. In the same space, Mickey Mouse opens his mouth and points his fingers at Mr. Wang, whereas Mr. Wang is retracting his head and leaning back in a trembling posture. The caption underneath the image reads:

Foreign Mickey Mouse, visiting Mr. Wang, has a big mouth and a high nose. How creepy he is! When Lao Wang (Mr. Wang) sees him, he is so scared that he calls: “Mister, please don't pull my leg. I'm frightened with tears.” The mouse refuses and slaps him. Mr. Wang maintains no resistance by force. He is unable to stand and dies immediately.

The picture caption emphasizes the foreign identity of Micky Mouse, and Mr. Wang created by Mr. Ye is a typical representative of the low class in Shanghai. The text above also describes how Mr. Wang is frightened by Mickey Mouse, and yet Mickey Mouse slaps him and Mr. Wang dies. Mr. Wang's timidity and passive obedience contrast sharply with Mickey Mouse's boldness and violent behavior. The fact that “Mr. Wang maintains no resistance by force” reflects the social background of the Anti-Japanese War at that time, and satirizes this conservative idea of non-resistance. In the late 1930s, Shanghai urban audiences saw Mickey Mouse's entering into the real space of Shanghai. Mickey Mouse is no longer a global citizen in a virtual space. He represents the western culture, contradictory to the Chinese traditional one. During this period, why did the image of Mickey Mouse in Shanghai have such a big shift?

2.2. Mickey Mouse in the United States and Japan during the late 1930s to 1940s



Figure 12: Aircraft worker victory button worn by a worker at the Lockheed Martin munitions factory in Burbank, California (just over the hill from the Disney Studio), where thousands of aircraft were manufactured during the war. (Division of Political History)

The great transformations in the global political situation in the late 1930s to 1940s is likely an important factor that reshaped Mickey Mouse.¹³ In fact, the shift of Mickey Mouse's visual characters and cultural identities in this time period took place not only in China, but also in Disney's original creations in the United States, as well as other places such as Japan. Mickey Mouse in the late 1930s to 1940s around the world, either authorized or unauthorized,

13. Filreis, A. (2021). *1960: When Art and Literature Confronted the Memory of World War II and Remade the Modern*. Columbia University Press.

shared a common feature that is Mickey began to move from the virtual space to the real one.

Since the capitalist country fell into a serious economic crisis in the 1930s, unbalanced economic development led to military and political conflict between the capitalist countries. Germany and Japan embarked on a fascist path, and they determined to seize the world market by war. To oppose the fascist countries, Britain, France, the United States, and other countries jointly formed an alliance group, which led to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, drawing the United States into World War II. The very next day U.S. Army troops requisitioned half of Walt Disney's Burbank, California, studio for their use.¹⁴ Participated in the activities of war propaganda, Walt Disney himself and many artists and animators reshaped Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and other beloved Disney characters.¹⁵ At this time, Mickey Mouse symbolically entered the real space of the United States as supporter or participant of world war II. The round badge in Fig. 12 is a badge made by the Disney company for American workers during the war. The badge has a capitalized English title: "Airplane Worker," and at the bottom, there is the text "Building an Airplane for Victory". With a line-drawn airplane in the background, the center of the badge is Mickey Mouse wearing working suit with manufacture tools in his hands which represents American aircraft workers. Such a Mickey Mouse badge is worn on the aircraft worker. As when the workers wears these badges, we can imagine that Mickey entered the real space—the American military factory—by means of the workers' bodies, and became part of the factory community.



Figure 13: *Evil Mickey Mouse Attack Japan* 1936

In Japan during the late 1930s to 1940s, similar as Shanghai China, we also see many local adaptations of Mickey Mouse animations and Mickey Mouse derivatives (such as posters, dolls, etc.). Mickey Mouse during this period in Japan also entered the real world, and his national identity has become more and more specific. A typical example is the 1936 Japanese Mickey Mouse animated short film *Evil Mickey Mouse Attack Japan* (Fig. 13). In the film, Mickey Mouse becomes as flying bat—the evil enemy, and leads an army (snakes and crocodiles) to attack innocent people on the island. Some believe that the evil Mickey Mouse and other animals in this short film symbolize the evil American soldiers attacking Japan. After the expiration of the naval treaty in 1936, many Japanese were concerned that the expiration will cause the United States to launch an immediate attack on them. At the same time, the short film could also have other meanings. Japan invaded China, South Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia in the 1930s before the outbreak of World War II, massacring indigenous people, raping women, and plundering everything. This is similar to what Mickey Mouse did in the short film. Perhaps the evil Mickey Mouse here may also be a symbol of the

14. Jason, L. (2000). *Mickey Mouse and the Nazis: The use of animated cartoons as propaganda during World War II*. Film and Television York University.

15. Bethanee, B. (2018, April 18). *Mickey Mouse morale: Disney on the world war 2 home front*. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/ww2-disney>.

Japanese themselves.¹⁶ This Mickey Mouse short film adapted from Japan is undoubtedly closely associated with the rising international tension at that time. Mickey Mouse entered into the real space and became an evil invader. It can be found that Mickey Mouse was imbued with the ideology closely connected to the war. Mickey Mouse began to have a specific national identity, and step into reality and become a participant of the war.



Figure 14: *Special long comics: Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai (1)* (*Teyao changpian manhua: Milaoshu you Shanghai(1)*) Author: Fan Lang Title: *World Style (Shifeng)* Date: 1939 Issue Number: Issue 1 Page Number: 22-23.



Figure 15: *Special long comics: Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai: Multiple comics* (*Teyao changpian manhua: Milaoshu you Shanghai: manhua duofu*) Author: Fan Lang Title: *World Style (Shifeng)* Date: 1939 Issue Number: Issue 2 Page Number: 18.



Figure 16: *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai: (13) Swatting Flies: Four Comics* (*Milaoshu you Shanghai: pai cangying: manhuasifu*) Title: *Children's World (Ertong shijie)*(Shanghai 1945) Publication Date: 1948 Volume Number: Volume 5 Issue Number: Issue 2 Page Number: Front Cover 2.

16. James, B. (2014, June 4). *Evil Mickey Attacks Japan (1934) - You Cannot Escape the Evil Mouse!* <http://animatedfilmreviews.filmspector.com/2014/06/evil-mickey-attacks-japan-1934-you.html>

2.2. Mickey Mouse in the "Third Space": A Case Study of "Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai"

Before and after World War II, the visual characters and identities of Mickey Mouse in the United States and Japan were changed and specified as certain national symbols. As a result, Mickey Mouse entered into reality from the virtual world. From the late 1930s to the 1940s, China also experienced complex social changes.¹⁷ The Mickey Mouse in Shanghai had also entered the real world, and had a more specific foreign identity. But unlike Japan and the United States, the images of Mickey Mouse in Shanghai unveil more anxiety about self-identity. The Second World War inspired the Shanghai intellectuals to re-examine themselves—their society, their country's relationship with foreign ones, and their cultural identity.

A good example is the comic series *Mickey Mouse Travelling to Shanghai*, which can be divided into two groups according to their publication times. The first group is published in the magazine *World Style (Shifeng)* by Fan Lang in 1939. Mickey Mouse in these two sets of comics enters into the metropolis Shanghai as an “American guy” (*meiguolao*). In the first set (Fig. 14), Mickey Mouse has just arrived the Bund in Shanghai from Hollywood, and he says “We are tired of Hollywood. We come to Shanghai for some fresh air.” The second set (Fig. 15) is about “wearing Chinese costume.” The second group is published in *Children's World (Ertong shijie)* by Gongchao and Xing Shuntian in 1948, including fifteen different long comics such as “Slap the Flies,” and “Good Gifts.” The following will be a case study of these two groups of *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai*.

First of all, both the two groups of the *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* comics series used the gaze of Mickey Mouse, a white American man, to re-examine Chinese society. For example, in the “Slap the flies” (Fig. 16) published in 1948, Mickey Mouse, as an American bystander, witnesses that the bad people in China—the illegal vegetable vendor and the dishonest businessman—were brought to justice. However, in the meanwhile, Mickey also sees a Chinese official who bought a large western-style house abroad. Mickey Mouse thus concludes that “Only a few flies were slapped.” This comic satires the Chinese government only punished those people with small evils (flies), whereas the powerful evils were far from being overthrown.



Figure 17: *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai: (Eleven) Good Gifts: Four Comics (Milaoshu you Shanghai: (shiyi) hao liwu: manhuasifu)* Title: *Children's World (Ertong shijie)* Publication Date: 1948 Volume Number: Volume 4 Issue Number: Issue 12 Page Number: Front Cover 2

17. He, R. (2018) *Mingguo shiqi dishini kuawenhua chuanbo yu Shanghai chengshi wenhua (1930-1949)* 民国时期迪士尼跨文化传播与上海城市文化 (1930-1949) (Disney's Intercultural Communication and Shanghai Urban Culture in the Republic of China (1930-1949)). Shanghai Normal University.

Secondly, there are several comics in *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* in 1948 that examines the relationship between China and foreign countries.¹⁸ These comics use Mickey Mouse to express their deep thoughts and worries about the subtle and complex relationship between China and the United States. Different from the early 1930s when cosmopolitanism came to the fore, in the 1940s the relationship between nations became more complicated as the Second World War reshuffled the international order. The relationship between China and foreign countries is not like the explicit hostile one we observe in the Japanese animation *Evil Mickey Mouse Attack Japan* mentioned early on, but is full of contradictions and complexities. A comic “Good Gifts”(Fig. 17) in *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* in 1948 highlights the complexity of the relationship between China and the United States. Mickey Mouse, as a white American man, goes to the local rat’s house to have a meal. He sees that the local rat eats the American rice, and thus he says to the local rat, “ You should be thankful to America, since the American rice feeds you.” The local rat tells Mickey Mouse: “The newspaper says one hundred thousand people were killed and a million mice were killed in the war. The planes and bombs were all shipped from America.” The group of comics shows that while the United States is offering food for China, it is also providing the weapons and bombs for Japan to attack China, which uncovers the complex relationship between the United States and China.



Figure 18: *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai: (six) The Moon is Better in American: Four Comics (Milaoshu you Shanghai: (liu) yueliang yeshi meiguo hao: manhuasifu)* Title: *Children's World (Ertong shijie)* Publication Date: 1948 Volume Number: Volume 4 Issue Number: Issue 7 Page Number: Front Cover 2



Figure 19: *Special long comics: Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai: Multiple Comics (Teyao changpian manhua: Milaoshu you Shanghai: manhua duofu)* Author: Fan Lang Title: *World Style (Shifeng)* Date: 1939 Issue Number: Issue 2 Page Number: 18

Thirdly, there are also some comics in *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* that show Chinese people’s anxiety and thoughts about their own cultural identity.¹⁹ A good example is

18. Zhu, G. (1995). Kangri zhanzheng shiqi de zhongmei guanxi 抗日战争时期的中美关系(China and the U.S. Relations during the War of Resistance Against Japan). *Shijie lishi* 世界历史, 4, 16-23.

19. Wang, P., Hu F. (1995). Mingzu wenhua rentong: neihan yu jiegou 民族文化认同:内涵与结构 (National Cultural Identity: Connotation and Structure). *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexueban)* 上海师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版), 1, 101-107.

“The Moon is Better in American” in 1948 (Fig. 18), this comic embodies the Chinese people's blind worship for Western culture and their doubts about their own identity. In the comic, a Chinese student studying in the United States sighs after seeing the moon: “America is good. The moon in the United States is always round.” Then Mickey Mouse shows him a night newspaper, on which we see a title says: “The lives of American miners are difficult, and hundreds of thousands go on strike.” This comic satires the blind worship of the students studying in the United States from the perspective of Mickey Mouse. The opposite example is the second set of *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* in 1939. We can see that Minnie, as an American, puts on a Chinese *cheongsam* and has also joint Chinese nationality (Fig. 19), which reflects the Chinese people's affirmation of their own identity and culture. Instead of blindly worshipping and pursuing, they inspire the readers to treat Western culture rationally and encourage readers to build up Chinese people's confidence in their own identity and culture.

In the comic *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai*, Mickey Mouse comes to Shanghai in reality as an American. In fact, he is never truly localized and is still a virtual character in animations, which embodies the intersection and fusion of reality and virtuality. At the same time, Mickey Mouse appears in the local comics as a symbol of Western culture, reflecting the conflict and collision of Western culture and local culture of Shanghai. The world constructed in the comics *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* can be called, to use Homi Bhabha's term, a “third space,” which is full of contradiction between the East and the West and between fictional figures and real-world places.²⁰

Conclusions

In the early 1930s, Mickey Mouse in Shanghai had no identity limitations—a character with no distinct definition of age, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, or local identity—a figure that can only exist in virtual space. Because of this, he could be a global citizen and travel in various virtual worlds. In addition, He was popular all over the world and existed in the virtual public space of global illustrated magazines. However, the great shift in the global political situation, most importantly the Second World War, caused Mickey Mouse to step out of the the virtual space, and entered the real world in which he was no longer a symbol of cosmopolitanism, but a figure that has specific national and racial identities. In the comic *Mickey Mouse Traveling to Shanghai* which was adapted by Shanghai local cartoonists, Mickey Mouse is often a white male through whom the Shanghai cartoonists re-examine the China society and Chinese people's cultural identity. Meanwhile, comics have constructed a “third space” full of a mixture of Eastern and Western cultures, and a fusion of reality and virtuality.

20. Wang, J. (2008) “Zarou yu quanqiu hua wenhua shengchan: yi dishini donghua wei li” 杂糅与全球化文化生产: 以迪斯尼动画为例 (Hybrid and Global Cultural Production: Taking Disney Animation as an Example). *Donghua daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 东华大学学报(社会科学版), 4, 263-266.

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