

TRIBUTE TO THE CARTOONIST LIAO BINGXIONG 廖冰兄 (1915- Sept.22, 2007)

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Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 is not only one of the greatest of the Chinese cartoonists of the twentieth century, his work may also serve as a mirror of twentieth century political sensibilities. It allows us to appreciate Chinese artistic and political subjectivities. Like the Buddhist cartoonist Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898-1975), but in his own totally different way, Liao Bingxiong allows us to appreciate intensely Chinese sensibilities through the medium of art. (Liao Bingxiong spoke with immense affection of Feng Zikai: I detected a touch, even, of philosophical envy in Liao's remarks on his deep and subtle predecessor in the art of the philosophical and lyrical cartoon.)

Political scientists are wont to study political history as the history of politically important events, of politically significant movements, of important political parties, of significant political ideologies, of powerful political personalities, of political propaganda, and of political economies, the power game of politics.

In this paper I propose a different angle on political history: I want to concentrate on the political sensibilities of the artist Liao Bingxiong.

For unlike Feng Zikai, Liao was indeed a thoroughly politicised person. His artistic engagement was profoundly political, even politically combative, from the anti-Japanese war onwards, and until the end of his life. Liao Bingxiong was a paragon of engaged political sensibility, his cartoons are one extended Bulletin of a Concerned Artist. His art reflects political history. It also constitutes vivid flashlight artistic reflections on (and of!) that political history.

In this commemorative paper I want to present some examples of Liao Bingxiong's works, starting in 1936 and ending in 1994.

Shortly before his death, barely able to speak any longer, Liao Bingxiong is said to have summoned his energy to state energetically that “the Chinese cartoon is dead” “中国的漫画死了”. I did not personally hear him say this. But I can vividly imagine that he said it. He truly SUFFERED from the impression that not only his own life was coming to a close, but that also his artistic tradition, which began with the generation of of such artists as Zhang Guangyu 張光宇 and his extraordinarily talented brother Zhang Zhengyu 張正宇 in the 1920ies has come to a close.

However, the immense popularity of Liao Bingxiong bears eloquent witness to the fact that the memory of this grand tradition is very much alive in contemporary China.

Liao Bingxiong's recent collection of short essays has the title *I Have a Brush*: his brush was for painting rather than for writing. In conversation, he was a remarkably - almost explosively - outspoken man, someone who often articulates what he immediately realises he should have kept to himself, but in writing he is the man of the pithy aphorism suitable for calligraphy rather than any extended discourse.

Out of sympathy with those who are good and are made to suffer harm, out of pent-up anger against the wickedness of those who make others suffer harm, most of what he made were *cartoons of sadness and of pent-up anger*, the title of one of his many editions of collected cartoons. At bottom, his anger is always a quite traditional Chinese anger. Anger at injustice perpetrated against

the underprivileged.

Liao Bingxiong was born in 1915 into a destitute family in the northern suburbs of Canton. His mother had lost her father early in life and spent her childhood trying desperately to care for her severely ill mother. At the age of 16 she was married off to a soldier serving under (and soon dismissed for *wuni* 忤逆 "insubordinacy" from the service of) a warlord in the distant province of Guangxi, in a region called Wuxuan which was to become notorious under the cultural revolution for its extended and actually well-documented practice of politically motivated literal cannibalism. (But this is another story, well told by Zheng Yi 鄭義, *Hongse Jiniandai* 紅色紀念碑, 台北：華視文化公司, 1994.)

It appears that Liao Bingxiong remembered clearly the traumatic day - he was four years old at the time - when a dramatic letter arrived from his father, who was then waiting to be executed in the process of a political vendetta of which he was not part in the southern coastal city of Shantou. In his farewell letter, the father advised his 23-year-old wife (Liao's mother) to remarry. Destitute, his mother suffered a nervous breakdown, spent some time in the Canton lunatic asylum, and when her health had improved sufficiently she was married off, with her two children into the Yu family in Guangxi Province, as the third wife of a moderately rich man. The five-year-old Liao Bingxiong was not at all welcome in the Yu family, and he was even prevented from so much as seeing his mother, to begin with. He always continued to be regarded as a little good-for-nothing. His little sister did not fare much better: at the age of six she had to be pawned off in order to finance her mother's necessary trip from Canton to Guangxi Province. (She was bought back a year afterwards.) All these, and many more were bitter early memories for the little boy Liao Bingxiong. Liao was always to remain a bitter man, as well as a highly emotional person. Even politically he was always emotionally charged and almost frighteningly intense in his attitudes and opinions. In 1953, Liao Bingxiong's mother committed suicide: her husband Yu Enpu 余恩浦, a minor landlord, was killed in the land reform campaign against landlords of those times. Liao Bingxiong's mother herself was "struggled against". When her son from that second marriage, Yu Guangyi 余光儀, Liao Bingxiong's stepbrother, was also killed as part of that same campaign against landlords, all this became too much for her. She took her own life.

The young Liao Bingxiong threw all his love on his little sister, Liao Bing 廖冰, whose death in a traffic accident many years later was perhaps, after all, the greatest of the many tragedies of Liao's life. It was on this occasion that he changed his name from the original Liao Dongsheng 廖東生 "Liao born in the east" to Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 "Liao, elder brother of Bing".

Back in the early 1920ies, while his mother was serving as a minor wife to a warlord in distant Guangxi, Liao Bingxiong lived the life of a pauper in the northern suburbs of Canton. Fortunately, an uncle ran a *mengguan* 蒙館 "traditional primary school" in a temple, where Liao Bingxiong received an elementary education, and where, moreover, he took the opportunity to practise elementary martial arts 武術.

At the time, there was only one book in his home: a traditional Chinese almanach. The folkloric art of these almanachs profoundly influenced his artistic sensibilities. An additional influential artistic influence, surprisingly, were the protestant propaganda postcards of the Christian missionaries. Lbs was proud of all this and called himself a graduate of the staircase bricks, and in typical style he called himself a *yesheng dongwu* 野生動物 "wild animal".

At fourteen he entered a teacher training college, graduated from this at 17 and began to publish

anti-Japanese cartoons in Canton newspapers. At the same time he earned his living by a wide variety of minor jobs. In 1934, at the age of 19, Liao had his breakthrough as a cartoonist with a series of philosophical cartoons in the major cartoon journals *Shidai Manhua* 《时代漫画》、《独立漫画》、*Manhuajie* 《漫画界》、*Shanghai Manhua* 《上海漫画》、*Zhongguo Manhua* 《中国漫画》 which flourished in the 20ies and 30ies, and which may serve to give an idea of the flowering of cartoons in Shanghai during that time. At the age of 21 he became the cartoon editor of a Canton journal, and he organised his first exhibition of *Cartoons for the Masses*. His career was made. He joined the anti-Japanese communist forces in Yan'an, as a propaganda worker, and his anti-Japanese cartoons established him firmly as one of the rising group of outstanding Chinese masters of the cartoon.

In 1946, at the age of 31, he organised another exhibition which contributed to his name, the *Maoguo chunqiu manhuazhan* 猫国春秋漫画展 "The Cat Annals Cartoon Exhibition" of which the edition by the Shangdong Huabao Chubanshe 山東畫報出版社 of 1999 gives a very good account. This is not the place to recount in detail Liao Bingxiong's career, which is laid out in graphic detail in the biography by Zhang Hongmiao and Liao Ling'er listed below. A brief summary must suffice. After 1949, Liao earned his living as a stage designer for puppet theatre, something which gave him rich opportunities to cultivate traditional Chinese graphic folklore. His huge production of Chinese graphic folklore paintings deserves a magnificent anthology of its own.

He joined the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1956 with enthusiasm. Perhaps this movement towards socialist freedom (in 1956) showed Liao Bingxiong at his very best. Liao's masterpieces from this period are indeed unforgettable and they have become an integral part of the nation's political imagination.

From 1966 onwards, Liao became the target of public political attack: "Cultural spy; second rate man of letters, outrageous rightist, counterrevolutionary cartoonist, counterrevolutionary siding with the revisionists, his relations intimate with the counterrevolutionary 'old fellow' of the film world Xia Yan 夏衍 and with the Guomindang spy Ye Qianyu 葉淺予".

The highly successful cartoonist Zhao Hongben 趙宏本 who made his career in the 30ies told me that even when the Red Guard knocked out all his front teeth at their first interview with him, he never for a moment lost faith in his fundamental communist creed. Liao Bingxiong was like this. He earnestly tried to believe he was being justly struggled against. He engaged in painfully honest self-criticism. His children became convinced adherents of the Great Cultural Revolution. Like Lao She 老舍 he supported the fundamental idea of the Cultural Revolution. He even seriously believed he needed to be re-educated by the "great masses of the people" in order to become a true socialist. With meticulous docile care he copied Chairman Mao's account of the medical doctor Norman Bethune: we have a copy of this. It is heart-breaking to look at this calligraphic effort, in its docile neatness, clearly in the hand of the great calligrapher. (It has to be said that Liao Bingxiong must count as one of the great masters of deviant calligraphy. But here, on this occasion, we can see that he could indeed write like a schoolboy.)

In the summer of 1968 Liao Bingxiong was incarcerated in a cell so overcrowded that there was only just space for everyone to lie down. (The head of a Canton Children's Hospital was a late arrival in the cell, and spent most of his time "enthroned" on the toilet bucket, yielding his privileged seat to users as the need arose. Liao Bingxiong had many stories to tell of his time in jail.)

All this, Liao Bingxiong suffered apparently still convinced that it was necessary for his political education.

From the prison (We have a photograph of its formidable walls: no visitors inside.) he was eventually moved to confinement in a Cadre School, for re-education, at which point he was even given days off to visit his wife, who by this time had become a lonely woman (All her children had been moved elsewhere) in a tiny flat (She did not think she could afford the larger flat she had occupied together with her husband.)

Liao's past as a propaganda fighter against the Japanese came under close scrutiny for contacts with the Guomindang. His position as vice president of the Canton Artists Association was taken as evidence of his corrupt ambitions.

He was released in 1972, after four years in detention.

From June 1972 to 1980 Liao Bingxiong continued to practise his trade as a stage designer for his Canton puppetry troupe and re-emerged, at the same time, as a formidable and highly professional loner among the cartoonists. I recall that when I admitted to my friend Fang Cheng 方成, himself a leading practitioner of the art of the cartoon at the People's Daily, how much I preferred Liao Bingxiong's work to his own (I admitted this after much white "wine" and the excellent mutton soup he was so good at making), Fang eagerly concurred that Liao was in an intellectual class all of his own: not as well known, perhaps as his Peking colleagues, but much their superior in originality and above all in energy and explosiveness of artistic vision.

Liao Bingxiong continued to be productive until 1994, and his home city has honoured him with a museum dedicated to himself. Indeed, he ended his life in a very comfortable large flat not so far from the museum dedicated to him. But even in his old age he was less concerned with his own heritage. His attention, then as ever, was focussed on those who - like himself in his youth - had a hard time struggling for survival or for artistic self-realisation. He was an inordinately generous man.

Here, then, instead of more talk about Liao Bingxiong, is a little gallery of his work. It is uninterrupted - I hope - by too much commentary from my part. For these cartoons speak for themselves. They speak of the China of the past century. They also allow me to pay tribute to one of the most remarkable persons that I have met in my life. They speak so well that I gratefully leave the floor to these splendid cartoons.

The list of books on Liao Bingxiong at the end of this little offering will allow the reader to imagine how small and inadequate my selection must remain. It is estimated that Liao Bingxiong produced something like 10 000 cartoons in his long life.

Books on Liao Bingxiong and Chinese cartooning

Note: the asterisks indicate that the book in question is in my personal collection. For full information about Liao Bingxiong see [http://art-Liao Bingxiong.avl.com.cn/](http://art-Liao-Bingxiong.avl.com.cn/) (廖冰兄艺术网站), a site which has been invaluable for the preparation of this paper. This brief bibliography excludes the vast literature on Chinese comic strips and on Chinese jokes and humour, but I thought the surveys of the history of Chinese caricature might be of general interest to the readers of this article on Liao Bingxiong.

廖冰兄,《冰兄漫画》,岭南美术出版社,1984 (Cartoons 1932-82)

*《我看冰兄》 岭南美术出版社,1992年 (Collection of essays by Liao Bingxiong fans of all kinds.)

*《中国漫画书系——廖冰兄卷》,河北教育出版社,1994年 (Cartoons 1932-94)

*《冰兄漫谈》,河北教育出版社,1997 (Essays by Liao Bingxiong dating from 1938-1994)

*《猫国春秋》,山东画报出版社,1999 (Reprint of a famous serial cartoon dating from 1945-46 together with a wealth of other contemporary material. This little book is a veritable treasure.)

Selected Cartoons of Liao Bingxiong, 《香港时期漫画》,香港高意设计制作公司,2000 (Cartoons from 1947-50)

《漫画人间廖冰兄纪念封》(附其中两个纪念封),广州市邮政局,2000

《廖冰兄漫画作品——生肖系列纪念封》,广州市邮政局,2000

收录了廖冰兄创作的“十二生肖图赞”画作,画作以浪漫主义的手法与中国民间艺术色调相结合,具有独特的艺术风格。

*《廖冰兄艺术馆藏品》,广东旅游出版社,2000 (Catalogue of over 200 works given by Liao to the Canton Museum of Art)

*张红苗 廖陵儿《给世界擦把脸——廖冰兄画传》,花城出版社,2002 (Splendidly illustrated detailed bibliography)

*《廖冰兄“三劣”同乐集》,广东教育出版社,2003 (Rich collection of cartoons)

*廖冰兄、陈舫枝《廖冰兄、陈舫枝—彩墨寄深情》,出版时间:2004年 (Collection of recent paintings and cartoons, in cooperation with the oil-painting artist Cheng Fangzhi.)

*廖冰兄,《我有一支笔——廖冰兄各时期漫画精选》,暨南大学出版社,2005 (Selection of cartoons.)

*陵儿 刘中文《漫画家廖冰兄的童年》,暨南大学出版社,2005 (Sentimental children's comic strip on Liao's childhood experiences.)

*《廖冰兄画字集》 岭南美术出版社,2005

*《悲愤画神——廖冰兄的漫画艺术》,现代出版社 2005 (A comprehensive collection of Liao's cartoons accompanied by a selection of writings about Liao Bingxiong.)

General historical works on Chinese cartoons:

*霍修勇,内政春秋,长沙:岳麓出版社,2004 (Learned interpretive historical anthology of early cartoons providing patriotic historical background to cartoons upto early Republican times.)

*王佩良,外交风云,长沙:岳麓出版社,2004 (Learned interpretive historical anthology of early cartoons providing patriotic historical background to cartoons upto early Republican times.)

*李日负,官场百态,长沙:岳麓出版社,2004 (Learned interpretive historical anthology of early cartoons providing patriotic historical background to cartoons upto early Republican times.)

*阳信生,社会万象,长沙:岳麓出版社,2004 (Learned interpretive historical anthology of early cartoons providing patriotic historical background to cartoons upto early Republican times.)

*森哲郎编,中国抗日漫画史,济南:山东画报出版社,1999 (Careful historical survey, nicely illustrated)

*张文标,老漫画收藏,杭州:浙江大学出版社,2006 (Exquisite collection of superb illustrations with little else)

*谢其章,漫画漫话,北京:新星出版社,2006 (Splendid survey of cartooning in China down to the 1950ies)

- *甘險峰,中國漫畫史,濟南:山東畫報出版社, 2008 (Very large detailed authoritative survey, moderately well illustrated)
- *畢克官,中國漫畫史話,濟南:山東人民出版社, 1982 (Brief illustrated historical survey)
- *畢克官,中國漫畫史話,北京:百花文藝出版社, 2005 (Profusely illustrated and nicely printed historical survey)
- *畢克官,中國漫畫史,北京:文化藝術出版社, 1986 (Massive and massively illustrated systematic authoritative survey)
- *畢克官,中國漫畫史,北京:文化藝術出版社, 2006 (Slim but very original survey with many original important illustrations. 畢克官 is himself a famous artist and great specialist in the field.)
- *畢克官,漫畫的畫與話,北京:中國文史出版社, 2002 (Entertaining collection of biographic material on cartooning in China)
- *畢克官,過去的智慧.漫畫點評1909-1938,濟南:山東畫報出版社, 1998 (Splendid anthology)
- *李炬,論漫畫,哈爾濱:哈爾濱出版社, 2003 (Massive 640-page compilation, indispensable)
- *李闡,中國漫畫史,台北:世系出版社印行, 1978(Useful, but unillustrated, discussion from a Taiwanese perspective)
- *劉枕青,漫畫概論,上海:商務印書館, 1938 (Fascinating slim survey at a crucial time in the history of Chinese cartooning)
- *洪石,漫畫藝術探求,哈爾濱:黑龍江美術出版社,1993 (Essays on cartooning by leading cartoonists.)
- *庸非,中國當代漫畫家辭典,杭州:浙江人民出版社, 1997 (This is the decisive indispensable large-format handbook, authoritative, comprehensive, well-illustrated, one might even say: exhaustive. This is the first thing that students of Chinese cartooning should buy.)

Selected works on Chinese humour:

- *滑稽論叢, 上海:上海文化出版社, 1958, 96頁
- *陳望道編,小品文和漫畫,上海:上海書店,1981 (Excellent selection of essays.)
- *段寶林著,笑話。人間的喜劇藝術, 北京:北京大學出版社, 1991, 279頁Detailed bibliography on Chinese jokes pp. 263-276 (The classic work on the Chinese joke.)
- *方成著,幽默,諷刺漫畫,北京:三聯出版社, 1984, 215頁
- *方成著,笑的藝術,北京:春風文藝出版社, 1984, 196頁
- *方成著,滑稽與幽默,北京:中國華僑出版社, 1989, 238頁
- *方成著,高價營養,長沙:湖南文藝出版社, 1989, 218頁
- *方成著,方成談幽默,石家莊:河北教育出版社,1999 (Fang Cheng being a leading cartoonist in China, it is particularly nice to have such a rich collection of works by him on Chinese humour.)
- *王學泰,中國人的幽默, 1998, 151頁
- *徐智策等著,幽默心理學,上海:上海人民出版社, 1989, 352 頁
- *薛寶琨著,笑的藝術,北京:百花文藝出版社, 1984, 271頁
- *趙文編譯,幽默心理學,北京:文化藝術出版社, 1989, 132 頁
- *譚大容,笑話,幽默與邏輯,北京:北京大學出版社,2005
- *龔維才,幽默的語言藝術,重慶:重慶出版社,1990
- *譚達人,幽默與語言幽默,北京:三聯書店,1997

On Feng Zikai one may consult the bibliographies in:

Geremie Barmé, *An Artistic Exile, A Life of Feng Zikai (1898-75)*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 (The definitive work on the social background of Feng's work)

*C. Harbsmeier, *Social Realism With a Buddhist Face: The Cartoonist Feng Zikai*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984

*何莫邪著，張斌譯，豐子愷：一個有菩薩心腸的現實主義者，濟南:山東畫報出版社 2005 (Much expanded translation of the English original.)

*張斌,豐子愷詩畫,北京:文化藝術出版社,2008

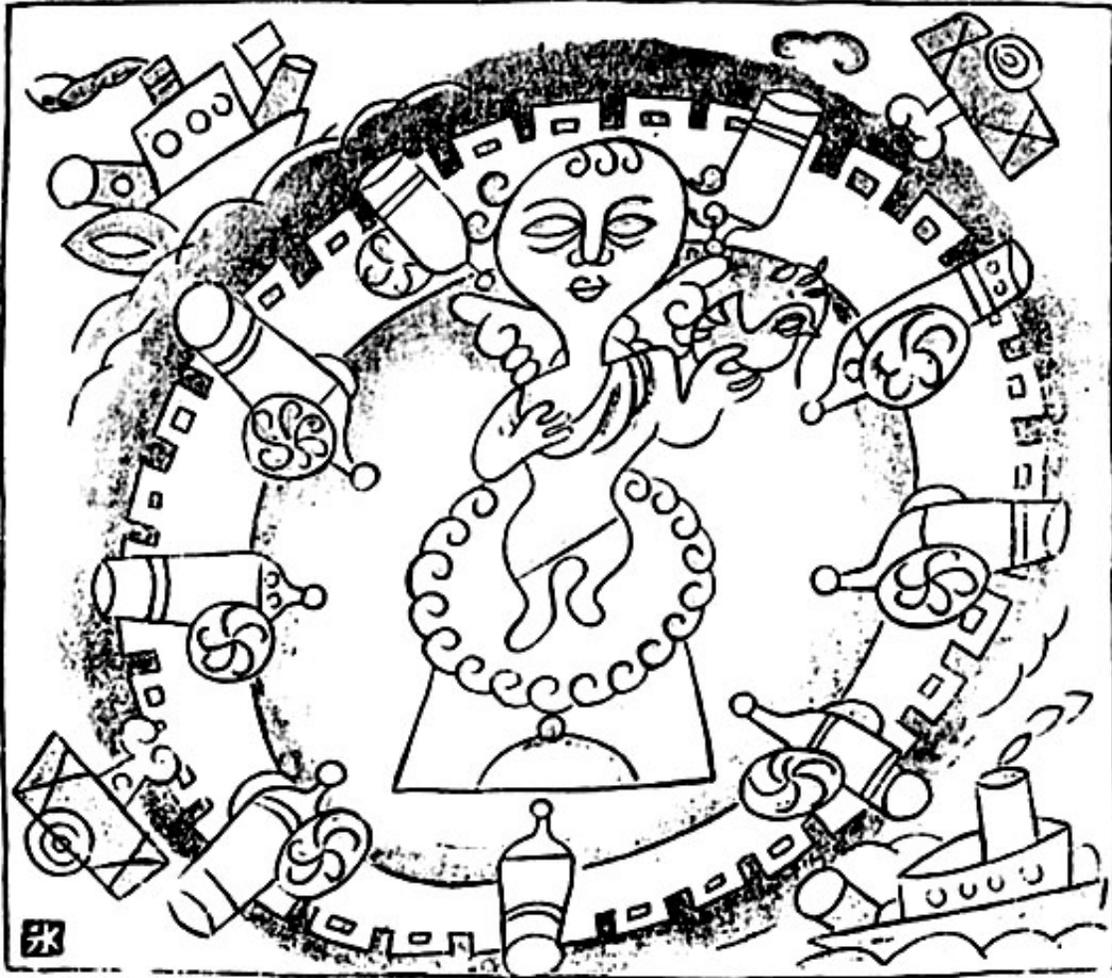
On caricature in general, the unparalleled masterpiece remains the very concise:
Ernst Gombrich and Ernst Kris, *Caricature*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1940

In the first one is looking at the blood and fire of war, in the distance Japanese attack planes, battle frigates... Facing China's mortal danger, there is finally a distinguished man of letters, unmoved. The gentleman produces a distinguished poem for the occasion: "The elegant person mumbles: The falling haze mingles with the lonely bird; The autumn water the same colour as the unending sky."



炮口闲吟图(1936年) Mumbling Poetry on the Mouth of a Gun (1936)

Liao Bingxiong does not pretend to be or aspire to become an "elegant man of letters". He is very much a politicised artist.
Preserving peace, in the eyes of Liao Bingxiong, is a task of defensive and offensive warfare in all directions: Peace, with dove in hand and on lotus-like pedestal is well-defended with guns and pointing aggressively in all directions:

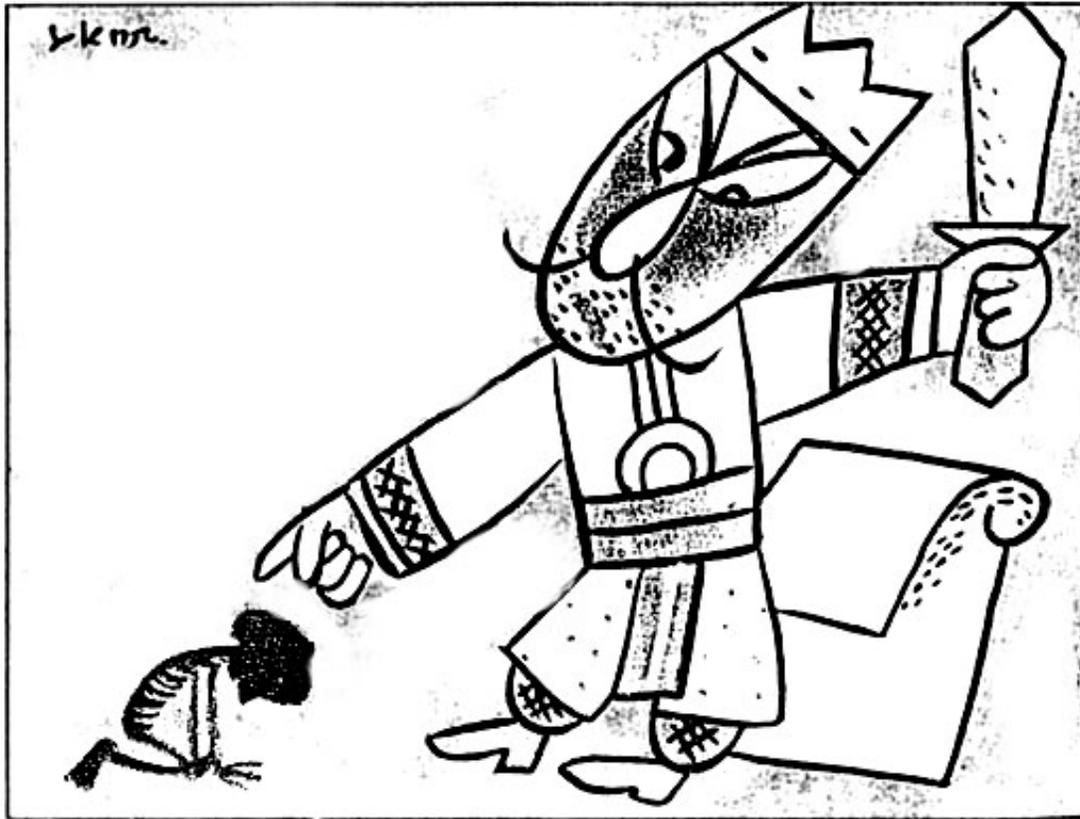


保護和平

廖冰兄作

保护和平(1936年) Preserving the Peace (1936)

Under conditions of civil war and impending Japanese invasion the old cultural aristocracy shows no mercy to the common people:



小民：「唔唔唔……」
大王：“當此太平盛世，你們還喊貧喊餓，瘦得非人非鬼。實在有辱國體！”

廖冰兄作

1937

Poor bastard: "Em, em, em, em"

Great King: "Even in these thriving times of great piece you still shout your protests about poverty, shout your protests about famine! Moreover you're emaciated beyond description. Indeed your physical condition is a shame on the state."

In an early work, Liao Bingxiong complains of everyone dealing expertly with the imagined shortcomings of others while unable to see their own, a thoroughly traditional theme which he felt was disconcertingly relevant in his own day:



1935

The omniscient pose of the the paternalistic ruler is portrayed with considerable poetic assurance, placing rulership into a truly cosmic context, in exact accordance with the hallowed historical tradition of Chinese rulership ideology. The only important difference is the prominence of the sword.



统治者(1935年)

统治者：“大家安静地睡觉吧，我什么都会替你们照管的。”

Ruler: “Sleep well you all. I shall take care of everthing for you!”

The world may be well taken care of. But what no one takes care of, in China, is self-defense.

Indeed, Liao Bingxiong diagnoses self-defeating suicidal self-defense:



中国人的自卫枪(1936年)

The self-defence gun of the Chinese

说明：讽刺国民党军队在外籍侵入之际，却不遗余力的剿共。

Already in 1936 Liao comments picroesquely on the irresponsible response of emigrating, which

was then a common way out of the terrors suffered by the Chinese.



假如中国亡了(1936年)
“If China is lost...”



亲善图(1936年)

“A Portrait of Intimacy”

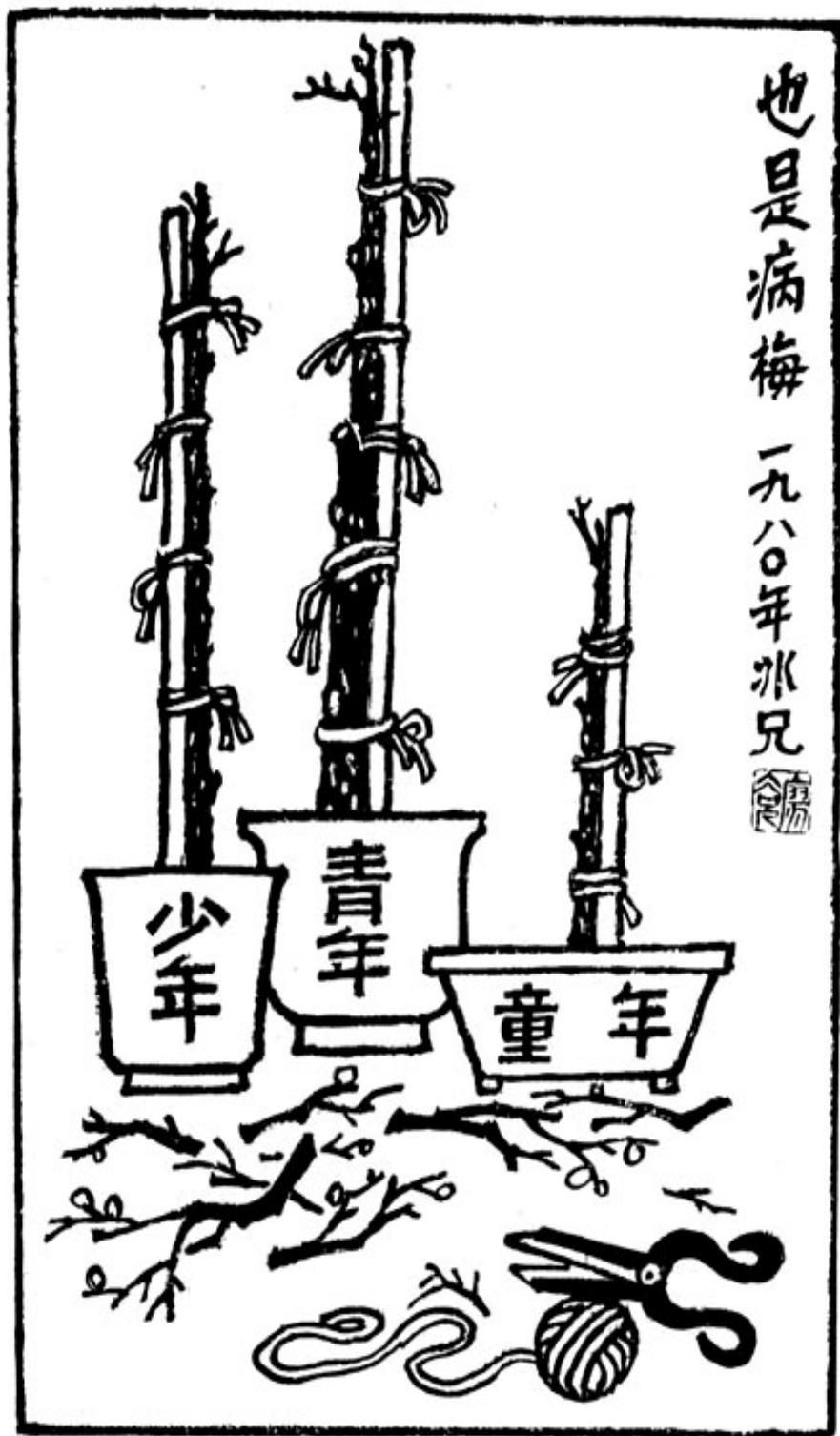
老虎说：“吾爱，我们接个吻吧。”

The tiger says: “Give us a kiss, my love!”

Within the narrow confines of traditionalism, there is no room for more than bonzai education at all levels. Institutions of higher education become “Halls for Sick Miniature Bonzai Plums”.

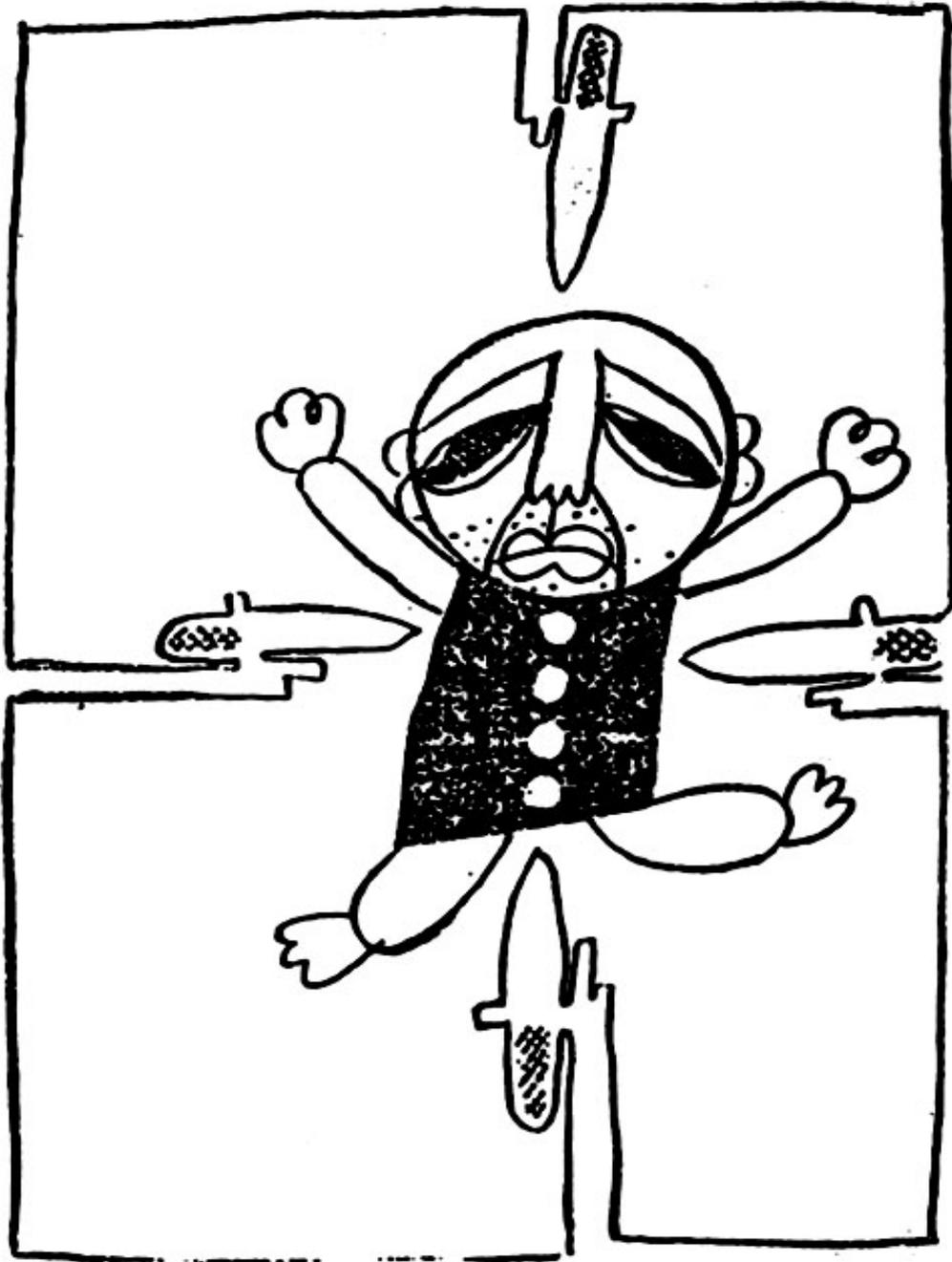


病梅(1936年)
“Sick Plum”



也是病梅（1980年）
“This Is Also a Sick Plum”

Freedom, under these circumstances is strictly – shall we say: - circumscribed:



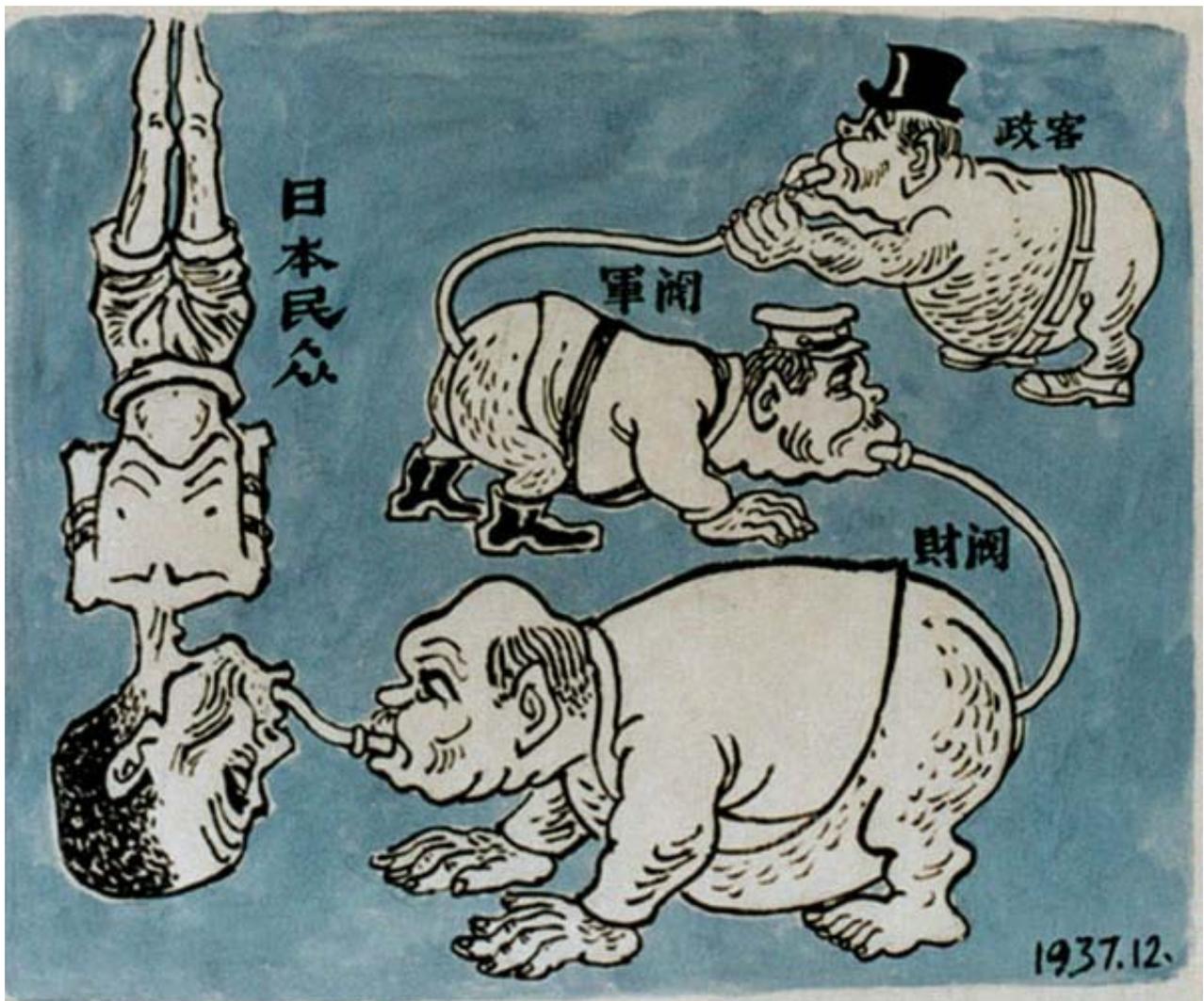
自由的范围 廖冰兄作

自由的范围(1937年)

“The Range of Freedom”

Liao has a structured analytical vision of blood-sucking Japanese”, with the politicians at the end of

the food chain:



日本猪猡吸血图(1937年)
“Japanese Swine Sucking Blood”

Liao's engagement in the anti-Japanese war was mainly graphic only, but none the less fiery and emphatic for that.



他又占领了一块地方了(1938年)

“He Has Occupied Yet Another Piece of Territory” (1938)

But even in the case of the Japanese enemy, Liao's satirical sympathy was with the gun-fodder

ordinary Japanese soldiers:



它说：这儿是生路(1938年)
The Thing Says: "Here Is the Way To Life." (1938)

At this point in history, Liao was certainly not beyond producing plain propaganda posters – of remarkably high quality.



大家起来保卫中华民族和国土(1938年)

“Everyone Rise Up to Defend the Chinese Nation and Territory!”

But his in no way diminished the fierceness of his attack on the domination of politics in art during the Hundred Flowers period. Some of the most memorable attacks on degenerate art reduced to graphic propaganda in the twentieth century are from the hands of Liao:

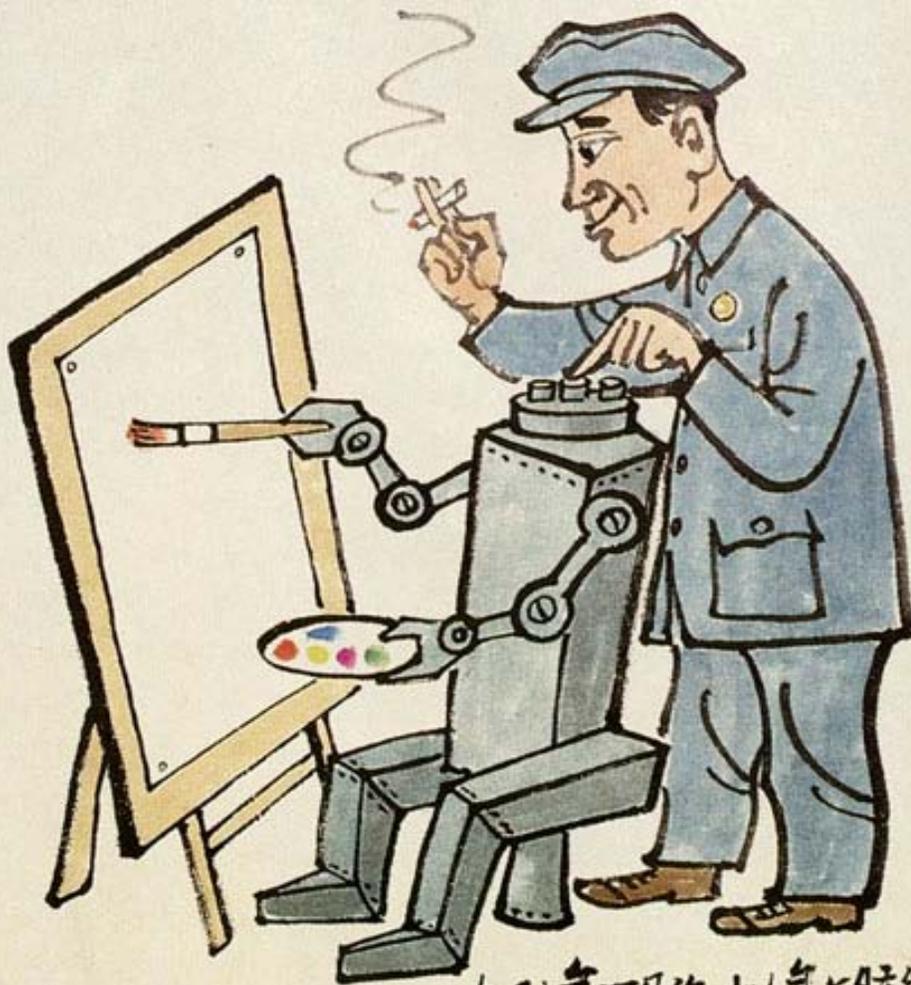


“Flowers must go straight up, the sun may only just be rising...”

技巧必須如此。
題材不可那般。
爾為畫匠我為官，
創作應加嚴管。

最好人如機器，
沒頭沒腦簡單，
指揮操縱按机关，
百順千依好办。

——調寄《西江月》



一九五七年四月作 七九年六月繪

技巧必須如此

“Virtuosity Must Be Like This!” (April 1957, redrawn June 1979)

And there must be concerted literary (western-inspired) attack on deviation like this:

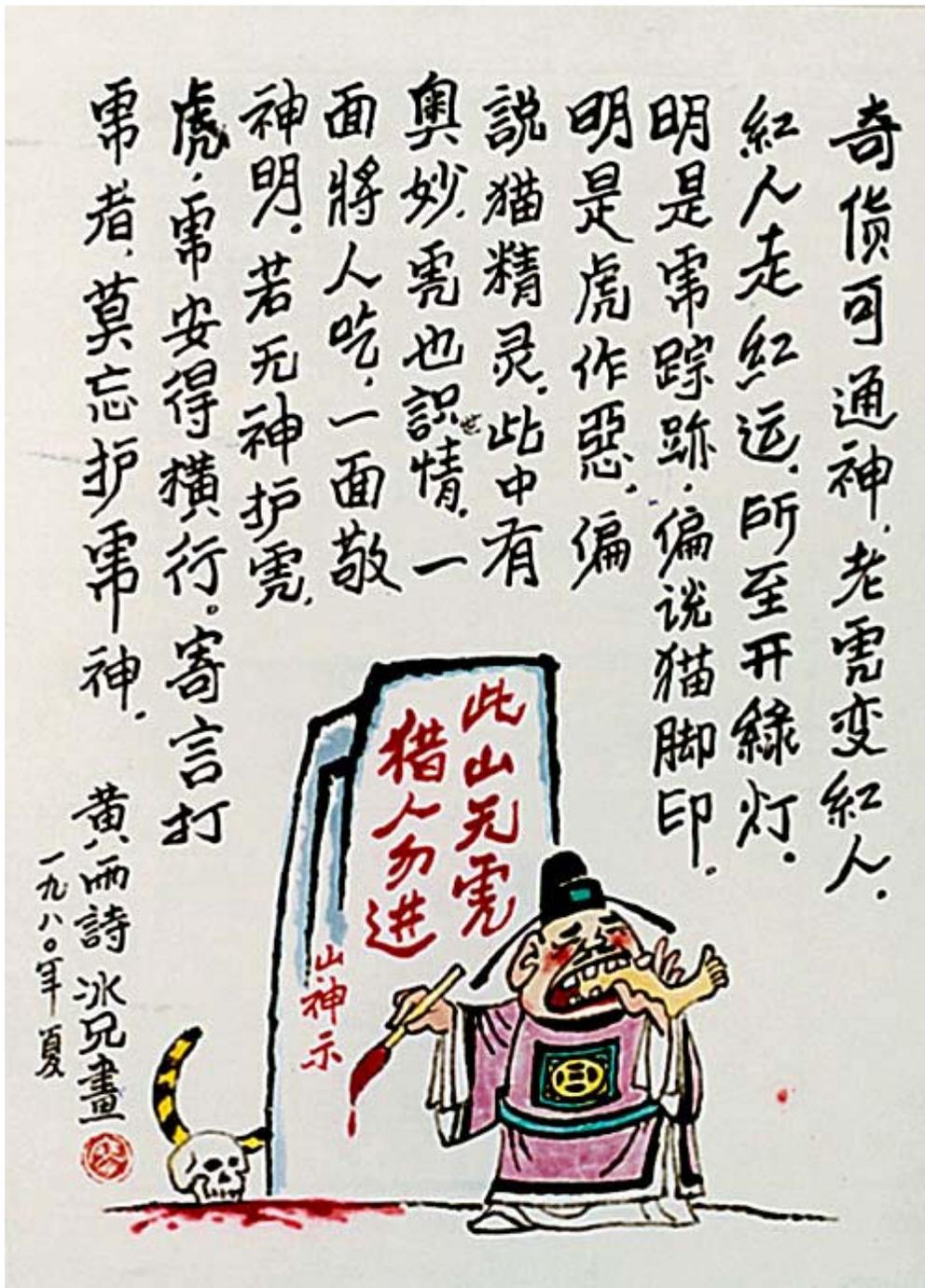


But beware: such attack must always be directed at the defenseless and hopeless culprit: the fatties

must remain free to persevere in their infamous practices:



也是武松（1980年）
Also a Wu Song (1980)



护虎神 (1981年)

Guardian Spirit of the Tiger (1987)

"The Guardian Spirit of the Tiger"

The really big sinners must be defended, although the inanity of such defense often sounds delightfully absurd, like a joke: "On This Mountain There is No Tiger; Hunters Keep Away!"

And again, indeed, official cant is so immobilising, multifarious and contradictory that only caricature can adequately convey the intricate complexity of the situation:



手足无措 (1980年)
“Unable to Move”

But he who cannot move, can always BE CARRIED along, indeed be borne on fatuous flattery and ianane swagger, within a whole hierarchy of sycophancy.



抬轿谣（1979年）

And it is not as if there were not those who - disregarding the Chinese proverbial truth that when there are three monks, they will carry no water – do make an honest political effort. But these come in for harsh criticism from their more wisened political peers:



暗角流言（1982年）

“Rumours In Dark Corners”

“Oh, just got his job and already playing the hero!” “Fake positive attitude!” “Shady ambitions, I suppose!”

Incompetence is not simply and unambiguously a matter of overt pride: sometimes the bureaucracy makes a show of popular common sense. But real expertise is always out of place in these official contexts, and – certainly! – it is made to feel out of place in such official outings.



出“羊”相（1986年）
“An Image Of Outing a Goat”

For, to be sure, official status has its overwhelming rewards which could not possibly be shared by ordinary individuals, and which occasionally do overwhelm even those with the best of “connections” within the hierarchy, and even during the very outings that are such a natural part of hierarchical privilege.

自恃官高势大，何妨放胆贪污。更兼我有
护官符，出事靠山会保。岂料靠山未
手，无情法网难逃。巨赃尽吐入囚牢，
笑你算盘打错。

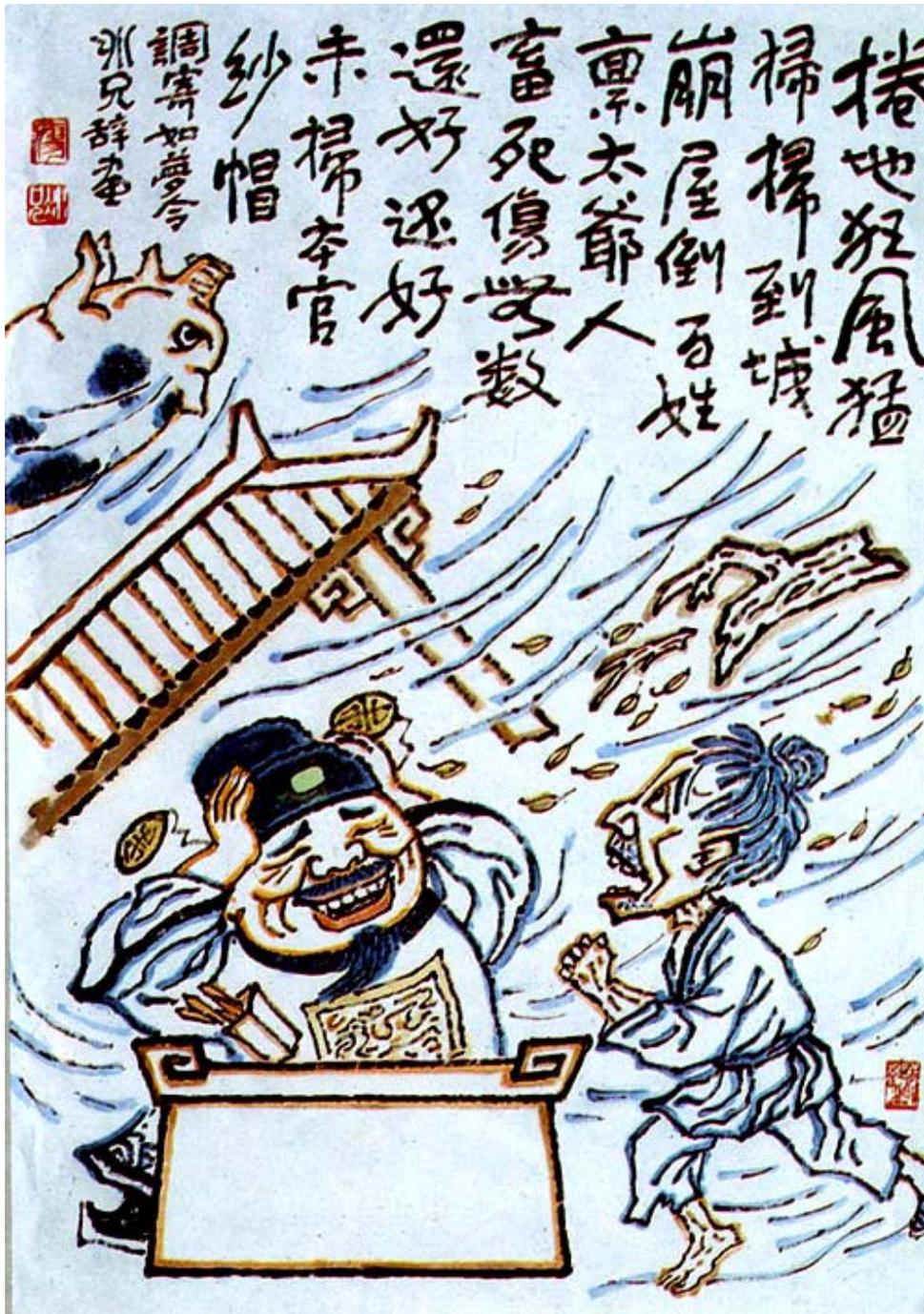
——调寄西江月



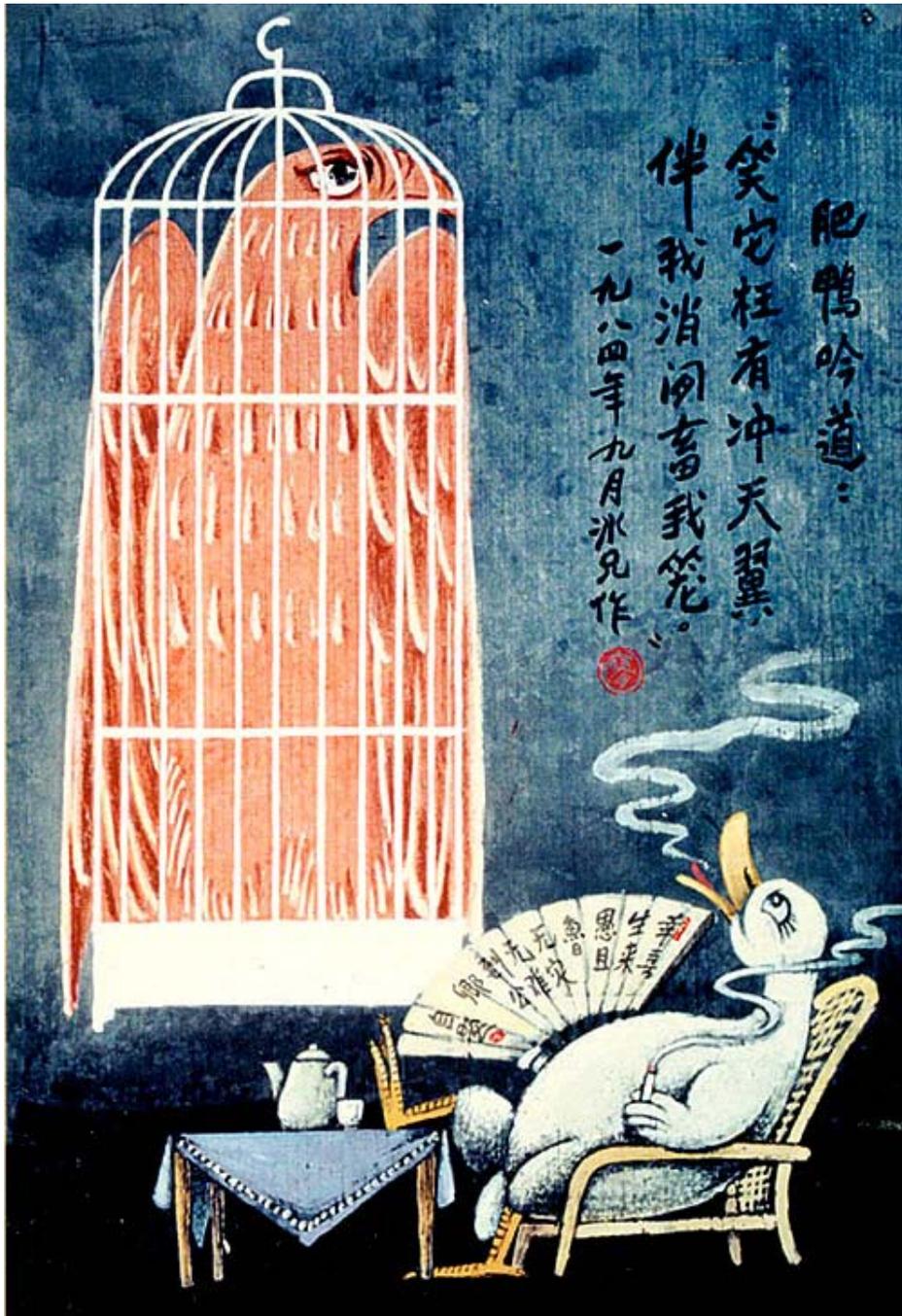
打油词画——笑你算盘打错（1982年）

Cartoon on Profiteering -- Laughing At Getting the Calculations Wrong (1982)

The art of officialdom is to retain one's composure in all situations, those of surfeit as well as those of turmoil, also when approached by those who are distraught:



泰然自若 (1979年)
“Retaining One's Supreme Composure”



肥鸭闲吟图（1984年）

“Fat Duck Humming at His Ease”

The Fat Duck official, ducky foot on table, takes good care that his underlings do not exceed their station. His sense of poetry is unimpaired: “I laugh at his wanton growth of ambitious wings; He keeps me company to while away my time, and I rear him in his cage.

Even in times long gone and nostalgically uncluttered, Liao had distinct nightmares on what was to come in China and in particular in his home Guangdong Province.

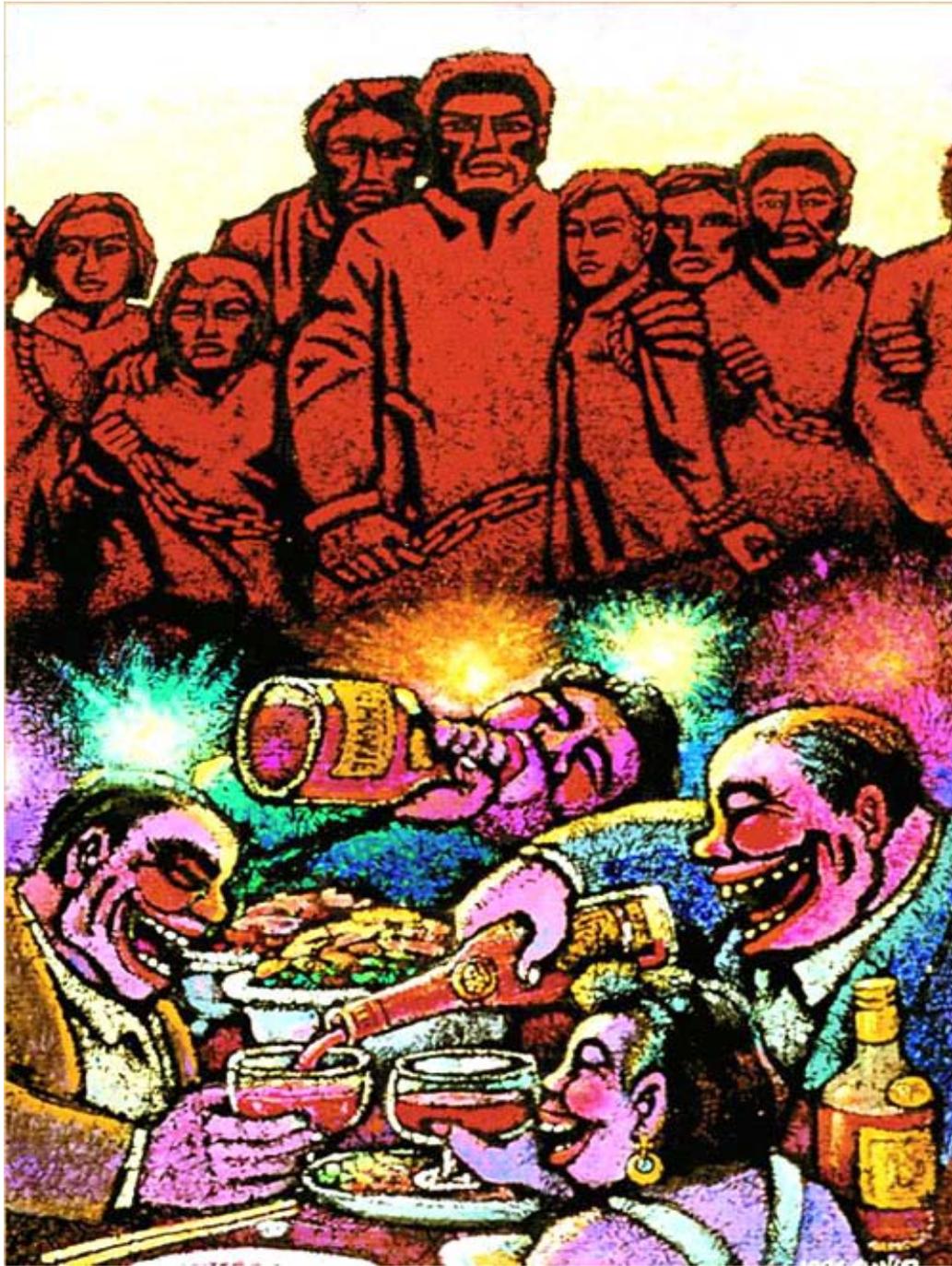


醒犹未醒（1984年）

“Waking Up As If One Hadn’t Woken Up”

“Capitalism is Back!”

Liao takes a defiantly old-fashioned Cultural Revolution style attitude to the affluent grotesquely surfeited barbarisation of his society:



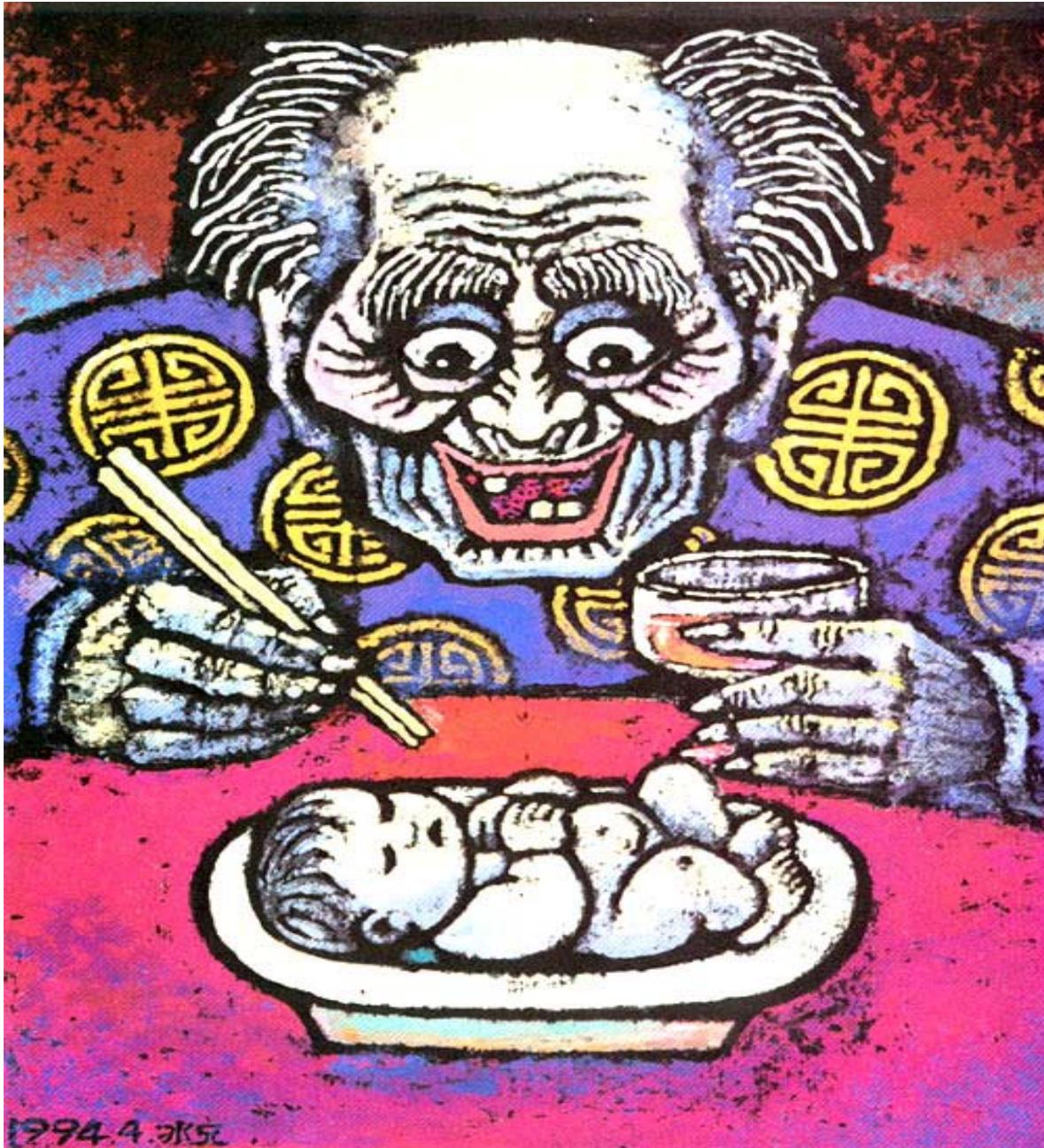
烈士刑场洒碧血，官家私宴倾公囊（1994年）

“On the Heroes’ Execution Ground There Is Blood All Over, At the Private Feasts They Pour the Red Wine From the Wine Bags????”

说明：以南京雨花台烈士纪念像为背景，痛斥当代腐败官吏们花天酒地、穷奢极侈挥霍公帑的恶行。

And Liao is much reminded not only of the cannibalism of Lu Xun’s famous *Madman’s Diary*, which in turn was based, of course, on a Russian model. But in Liao’s artistic vision these officials

literally eat small children for breakfast, incongruously, anachronistically in every way, and with chopsticks!



进补延年（1994年）
Working towards a Longer Life (1994)

Impeccable proletarian background, in Liao's vision, creates a special type of democracy which needs graphic depiction:

“I am basically a little man, but I have changed my ways and have become a leader; thus democracy has already won the day. When I am the leader that is people’s leadership/democracy. I hereby order you people not to clamour for democracy! Formally I make this order.”



开权渎职者（1988年）

“Throwing One’s Malfessant Weight Around”

说明：刊登于1988年12月6日《南方日报》的配诗画，刘军诗。

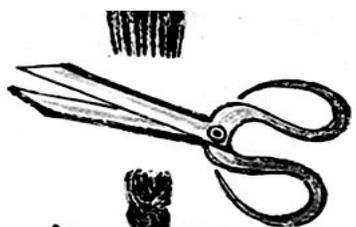
Within the cultural and artistic spheres the iconography of senseless autocracy takes on special forms. It is as paternalistic autocracy even has physiological consequences and leads to serious loss of perceptive faculties:



评花（1979年）

“Assessing Flowers”

Even when paternalistic autocracy is practised by those with impeccable proletarian backgrounds, it remains part and parcel of the immensely long feudal pigtail which still needs to be cut long, long after Sun Yatsen declared that this pigtail needed to be cut in the opening years of the twentieth century.



剪掉有形的辮子是中山先生當年的手功偉績
剪盡无形的辮子是我们當今的艰巨任务

革命尚未成功 同志仍須努力

为纪念孫中山先生誕生一百二十周年敬制 一九八六年夏 廖冰兄

剪辮子（1986年）

And what needs to stop is that those intellectuals who offer their services to the state in fact have to offer their brains on a plate, so as to sell their intellectual souls. Liao is dead serious and dead personal in this cartoon, I know. I have talked to him about this issue.



独立思考
只服从真理

于光远文 冰兄画

「独立思考」，就是不盲从、不附和，不只是为他人的言论作注解，而不去想想自己应该持什么观点和态度。思考的本性就是独立的，不独立就谈不到思考。「只服从真理」讲的是服从什么问题，「能服从一己的利害得失吗？能服从真理之外的某种权威吗？」「独立思考只服从真理」这九个字是就认识而言的，至于行动则还要作其他的考虑。

小 拾
自 勉

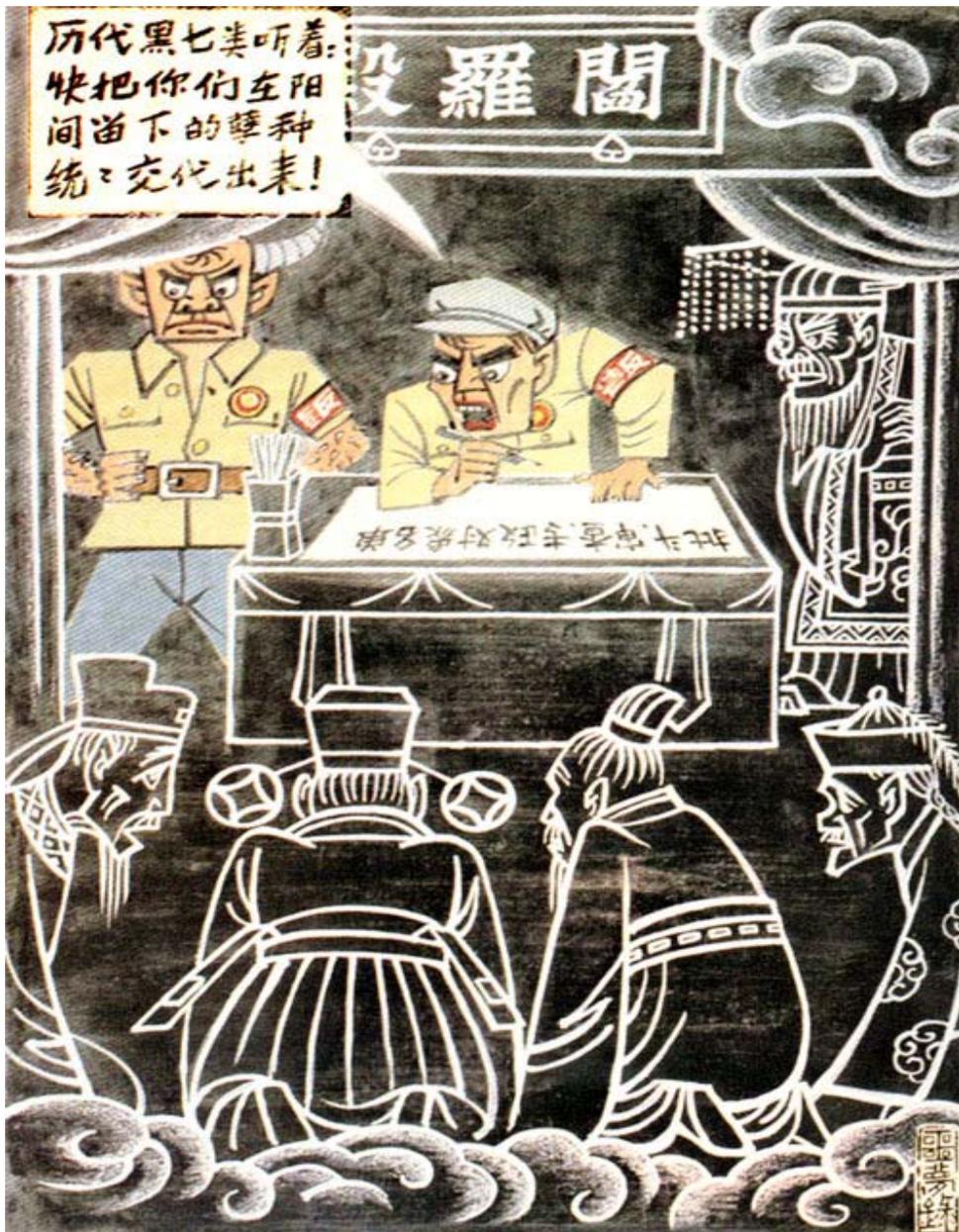
献脑（1993年）

Moreover, while it is true enough that the pigtail of paternalistic patronising autocracy needs to be cut, it is also true that old moral traditions like those of the famous detective and judge Bao, so splendidly obsessed with public justice and public interest, need to be continued.



贪官骂包公 (1994年)
 "A Greedy Official Scolds Judge Bao."

The good old tradition can scare the wits out of the New Masters:



标题：审鬼（1979年）

The past is not dead. It is not even past, at least in China it isn't. As Liao Bingxiong sees it: not past in his imagery, and certainly not only a matter of the past in the continuity of Chinese political behaviour.

Liao's parody of Buddhist supernatural self-assurance is exquisite and perhaps one of the finest and another one of the most intensely felt of his late works.



立地成佛（1994年）

Liao Bingxiong often comes close to an ebullient, jaunty salvation history full of nostalgic quotations from Chinese iconographic tradition linked into social history, to depict one overall social and cultural reality.



异想天开（1994年）

“Imagination Run Riot!”

20世纪50年代的中国曾经急于求成实现共产主义，1958年党的八大二次会议制定的“鼓足干劲，力争上游，多快好省地建设社会主义总路线”，反映了党和人民迫切要求改变我国落后面貌的愿望。在这总路线引信下发动了“大跃进”和“人民公社化”运动，当时所称的“三面红旗”，这是一个全党全民头脑发热的年代，人们真诚地以为天天敲锣打鼓，就可以以最落后的生产力进入共产主义天堂，由于这是反科学的不实事求是的运动，得到的是反效果的“大跃退”，其结果只会退到原始共产主义。

Liao has no trouble in characterising luxuriously the obsessive greed of officials:

此畜鼠身
貓首狂吞
公帑民資
縱容必招大禍
務須迅猛野之

五十年前山城烏天暗地
貓鼠朋比為奸，以人民為魚
肉，乃作《貓國春秋》展出為
民演憤，如今早已改天換地，
國中竟又出現貓鼠同体的
孽畜，人皆切齒，於是圖其形控其罪，
遙寄《重慶晚報》，使以如當年的貓鼠
在山坡示眾，一九九五年三月廖冰兄於廣州



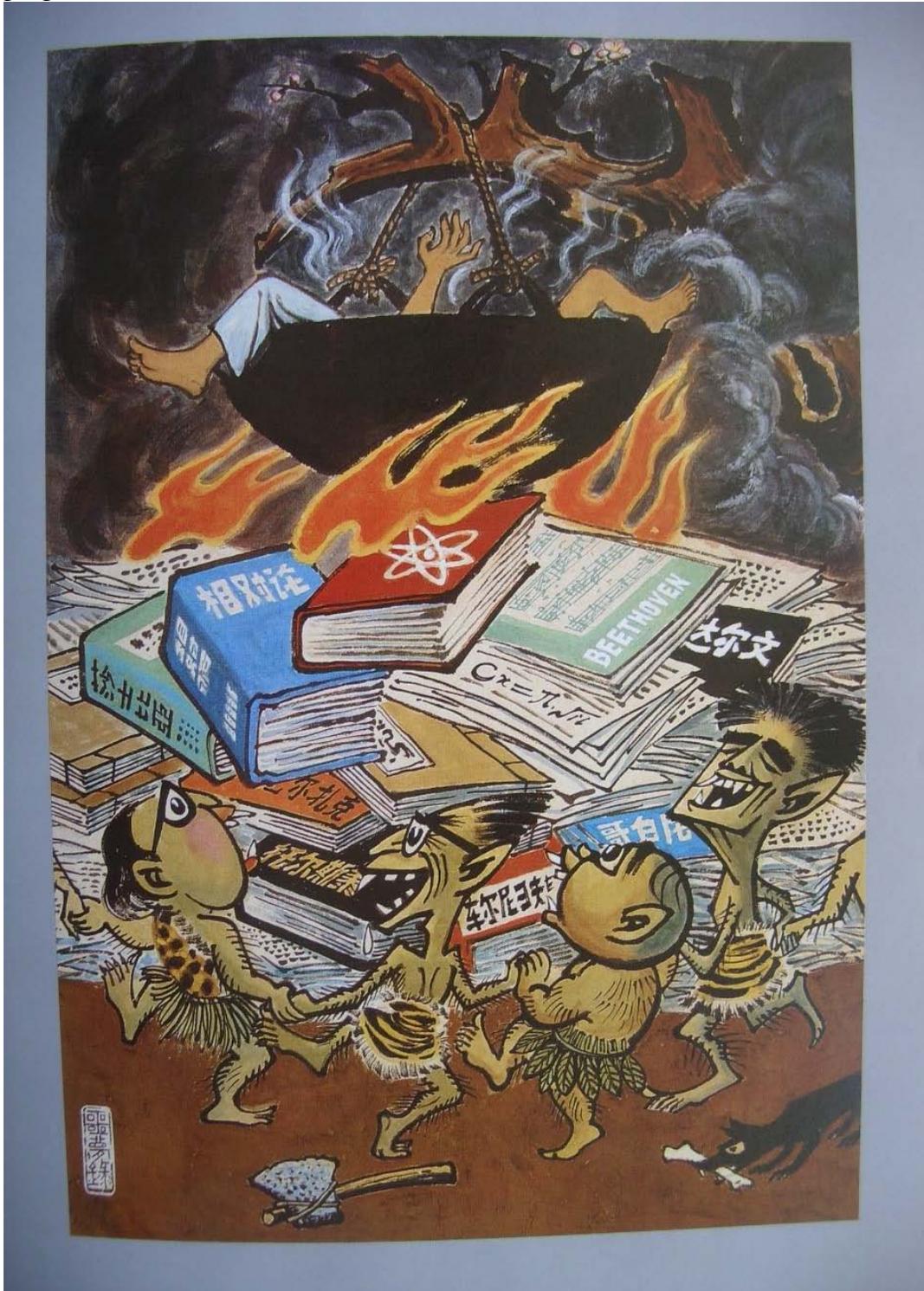
此畜（1995年）
“This Beast”

His portrait of the politicised arch-villain is unforgettable:



人·鬼·神（1990年）
“Man, Ghost, Spirit”

Shakespeare, Balzac, Darwin, the classics, Relativism, all these fire up under the hapless victim, being burnt like a witch, with the Gang of Four dancing happily as they survey the political progress:



How, then, does Liao Bingxiong himself fit into this picture? Here is how he saw himself after the fall of the so-called Gang of Four:



自嘲（1979年）



自嘲

There is even a Freudian internalised mortuary vase in Liao's vision of himself:

陈旧更新
 运转好瓦
 堤换了
 玻璃罩
 身手锥
 仍难动
 弹两眼却
 可往外瞧

一九八九年秋作此自慰
 冰兄



自慰 (1989年)

Not to speak of the cosy secure delight one seems to have enjoyed prematurely confined in that nostalgic vase:



高歌自乐图（1992年）

But, on the other hand, there is also the banal side of things:



昔我嘲今我 (1992年)
“The Old I Poking Fun At the New I”

The cartoon below acquires a special significance when one realises that Liao Bingxiong was studying these books with real enthusiasm, in both cases. He was a man of learning. But in both cases he got to be disappointed with what he learnt.



"In 1907, seven years old, I was learning books (the Four Books of Confucianism) by heart."

"In 1967, 67 years old, I was still learning books by heart."