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## Cityscape, Urban Nobodies and War: Modern Transformation of Nianhua in Suzhou-Shanghai

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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Cityscapes, Urban Nobodies and War: Modern Transformation of Nianhua in  
Suzhou-Shanghai, 1730s-1900s

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Hua Huang

Graduate Program in History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the continuities and ruptures of the *nianhua* practice and representations in the Suzhou-Shanghai region during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century. It explores a city-based *nianhua* tradition in Jiangnan's urban centers that supplements current scholarship, which focuses geographically on northern print centers, economically on village-based production, and thematically on religious, auspicious and moral subjects of universal value. Challenging current scholarship that treats *nianhua* as a folk tradition rigidly adhering to an established pictorial vocabulary and conventional symbols of religious and moral significance, this study demonstrates the adaptive and innovative energies within the *nianhua* industry.

Taking *nianhua* as a medium of place-making that actively and innovatively participated in a globalized visual culture and art production, this dissertation explores how 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou *nianhua* industry developed a special interest in and pictorial language for visualizing its prosperous cityscape, and how that tradition was transformed after the industry was dislocated into post-Taiping Shanghai, where *nianhua* was adapted to define the treaty-port by addressing issues particularly pertinent to local society. With the importation of Western printing technologies, publishing and image-making practice in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, *nianhua*'s global interaction was further intensified, and began to develop a style based on pictorial borrowings from China and the West, both contemporary and past. Moreover, an increasing popular awareness of China's foreign crises created a growing market for depictions of China's recent wars in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai. With the incorporation of battlefields and frontier areas, *nianhua*'s visual reach

of territory expanded from the “city” to the “state,” which marked a dramatic departure of the *nianhua* tradition from a site of city-making to that of nation-making.

**Keywords:** *nianhua*, woodblock printmaking, Suzhou, Shanghai, city-making, mundane realism, news illustration, nation-making



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Hua Huang, writing at Social Science Center at UWO, December 18, 2015

## Introduction

This dissertation investigates the fortunes of a Chinese popular woodblock printmaking industry, commonly known as *nianhua* 年畫 (New Year Pictures), centered in the ancient city Suzhou 蘇州 (Soochow) and later in nearby Shanghai 上海 in the region historically known as Jiangnan 江南, or South of the Yangzi River, during the period of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century. Late imperial Suzhou was a center of commerce and cultural sophistication with an empire-wide reputation. For centuries, Suzhou was noted for providing the greatest number of successful imperial Civil Service Examination candidates, for its beautiful landscape of canals, gardens, and temples, and for its wealth produced by its prosperous handicrafts industry and interregional trade.<sup>1</sup> There *nianhua*-making industry had flourished by the High Qing time before it was devastated by the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64). That war reshaped the economic and cultural geography of Jiangnan, leading to the quick decline of traditional Jiangnan urban centers and the rise of Shanghai, where persons, wealth and cultural energies of other Jiangnan cities were transferred. As a result, Suzhou's *nianhua* industry was relocated to the treaty-port Shanghai, where it began a second life. This study explores the relocation, resurgence and innovation of the *nianhua* industry as it crossed the Suzhou-Shanghai region during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century. Taking *nianhua* as a medium of place-making, I study regionalism and local variations by charting continuities and discontinuities in printmaking practices and representations as the industry traversed geographical and temporal boundaries. It shows how the transformation of the printmaking industry reflected and was circumscribed by historical conditions relating to the Suzhou/Shanghai (early modern-modern) transition. In so doing, it sheds light on the dynamism

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Marmé, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

of traditional Chinese printmaking culture and its interplay with social structures that laid the foundation for the rise of Shanghai as China's center of modern print culture during the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Past scholarship has defined *nianhua* as a folk tradition rigidly adhering to an established pictorial vocabulary and conventional symbols of religious and moral significance.<sup>2</sup> The history of *nianhua*-making in the Suzhou-Shanghai region, however, shows the creative and adaptive energy within the printmaking industry. It is true that there existed a set of shared subjects, especially those closely connected to seasonal festivities and religious ceremonies. Door pictures, images of the Kitchen God, and illustrations of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Journey to the West*, to name just a few, were produced in every *nianhua* workshop across China. However, Suzhou and Shanghai were different from other printmaking centers in that print shops of the region were enthusiastic about visualizing their surroundings – urban space, contemporary people and events – into their designs, transforming the *nianhua* medium into a site of place-making. This type of aesthetic preference and artistic sensibility held by regional print artists contributed greatly to the resurgence and flowering of the *nianhua* industry after it was nearly wiped out by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Taiping Rebellion. By tracing the fortunes of the printmaking tradition in this region, this dissertation also intends to reveal the complex relationship between the “traditional” and “modern” print culture, the continuities and discontinuities of artistic creation and print trade, and the historically significant Suzhou/Shanghai transition, as seen through the shifts in *nianhua* business and representations.

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<sup>2</sup> A classic study that characterizes *nianhua* as a rigid and unchanging tradition with timeless designs is Bo Songnian and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

## 1. Defining *Nianhua*

The artistic genre currently known as *nianhua*, literally “New Year pictures”, comprises a broad range of mostly printed-paper items that were mass-produced in major printmaking centers throughout the country.<sup>3</sup> Mainly produced for domestic consumption, *nianhua* were typically displayed in the home, on doorways and walls, near the windows, at the bedside and in various other locations within the domestic space was an essential part of the New Year festival. The annual rite of putting up new *nianhua* in place of the old, meaning to “eliminate the old and welcome the new (*chujiu yingxin* 除舊迎新)”, was believed to “exorcise evil spirits and bring in auspicious blessings (*quxie nafa* 驅邪納福).”<sup>4</sup> Although certain items held a special significance for the New Year, *nianhua* were employed throughout the year and were important too for many other rituals and festivals. Wang Shucun expands the realm of *nianhua* to encompass a vast variety of painted and printed pictures used throughout the year, including those for ancestral worship, weddings, birthdays, seasonal rituals, theatres and the like. In Wang’s definition, *nianhua* include all the pictures produced in regional printing workshops that reflect “their local customs and unique methods of production.”<sup>5</sup>

In his comprehensive history of Chinese *nianhua*, Bo Songnian argues that the origins of *nianhua* can be traced to the Han dynasty when military door gods were painted on tomb entrances, serving to protect the sites from negative forces while attracting auspicious ones.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to Suzhou, other famous *nianhua* producing centers are Yangliuqing near Tianjin, Yangjiabu of Shandong, and Mianzhu in Sichuan.

<sup>4</sup> Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhua shi* (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1986), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo nianhua shi* (Beijing: Gongyi meishu chubanshe, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Bo 1986, pp. 1-7.

Written and visual records dating from the Song dynasty documented the practice of posting door god images at the New Year time. In his well-known reminiscences of life in the Northern Song (960-1126) capital Bianliang (Kaifeng) during the years 1102-1115, Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 (1090-1150) recalled that during the days just before the New Year, pictures of door gods, Zhong Kui, lions and tigers as well as paper cuts were sold in the street market.<sup>7</sup> Later, Zhou Mi (1232-1308) described the urban life in Lin'an (Hangzhou), the capital city of Southern Song (1127-1279), in 1280-1290, reporting that all kinds of door gods began to be sold from the 10<sup>th</sup> month on.<sup>8</sup> Li Song's (active ca.1190-1230) painting *New Year Offerings* (*Suichao tu* 歲朝圖) further affirms the practice of putting up door gods on the entrance gate and on the side panel of the main door during the New Year. Although it is unclear exactly when the practice of putting up door god images began, many would agree "door guardians" were the earliest type of the *nianhua* genre,<sup>9</sup> and the practice of posting door god *nianhua* had become routine by the Song dynasty.<sup>10</sup>

The woodblock printing technique had become the primary method of producing texts and images in China by the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Over the centuries, the technique was used to make

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<sup>7</sup> Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing menghua lu zhu*, annotated by Deng Zhicheng, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), p. 249.

<sup>8</sup> Zhou Mi, "Wulin jiushi, juan 3" in *Dongjing menghua lu (wai sizhong)* (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p.384.

<sup>9</sup> A Ying, *Zhongguo nianhua fazhan shilue* (Beijing: Chaohua meishu chubanshe, 1954), pp. 1-2; Bo Songnian, "Menhua xiaoshi" *Meishu yanjiu* vol. 1, (1982): 49-54; Wang Shucun, *Nianhua shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1997), pp. 14-26.

<sup>10</sup> The origins of door gods could be traced to the Han dynasty legendary deities Shen Tu 神荼 and Yu Lei 鬱壘. The story of Shen Tu and Yu Lei was recorded by the now lost pre-Qin classic *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (Classic of the Mountains and Seas). Han philosopher Wang Chong (27–c.100) quoted the story in his *Lunheng* 論衡 (Critical Essays). However the most commonly seen door gods in late imperial China were two deified Tang generals, Qin Qiong (also known as Qin Shubao) and Jinde (a.k.a Yuchi Gong). For a discussion of the iconographies and historical development of door gods see Mary H. Fong, "Wu Daozi's Legacy in the Popular Door Gods (Menshen) Qin Shubao and Yu Chigong" *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 42 (1989): 6-24.

illustrations for books, copies of paintings, as well as almanacs, prayers, ritual guides and other decorative images. It was the sophistication of the printing technique that propelled the ongoing development of the woodblock-printed *nianhua*. Wu Zimu, in his description of urban life in Southern Song Hangzhou, reports that printed door gods, “peachwood charms”, Zhong Kui and other images were sold in the market and that door god images were replaced on New Year’s Eve.<sup>11</sup> The continued advancement of printing technology, especially the development of techniques for color printing since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, eventually led to the flourishing of the *nianhua* industry. Print workshops were established all over the country, making inexpensive colorful images that were used to decorate individual households, wine shops, restaurants and teahouses in cities and villages. In his *Country Sayings to Smile At* (*Xiangyan jieyi* 鄉言解頤) (1849), a *biji* 筆記 account of the folk traditions and customs in Baodi 寶坻 of Tianjin 天津, Li Guangting recorded the practice of putting up New Year pictures as of one of the ten must-do things to celebrate the New Year. Li comments that it was an occasion particularly exciting for the children as well as a good chance to educate the children by letting them view pictures illustrating “Filial Piety 孝順圖” and “Busy Work in the Field 莊稼忙”. The *nianhua*, in Li’s

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<sup>11</sup> Wu Zimu, “Meng liang lu”, juan 6 in *Dongjing menghua lu (wai sizhong)* (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), pp. 181-2. The cult of Zhong Kui is thought to have begun in the Tang dynasty under the Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-755). Bedridden of illness, Xuanzong had a dream encounter with the demon afflicting him. A fearsome spirit appeared and seized the demon. The demon-queller was then identified as Zhong Kui, who in his mortal committed suicide for failing to earn high honors in the civil service exam. Recovering from illness, the emperor ordered the famous painter Wu Daozi to paint an image of Zhong Kui according to the emperor’s impression of the dream and then the emperor had court painters produce copies to be sent to the emperor’s favored courtiers as New Year’s gifts. By the Song time, the demon-queller himself became the major component of medical prescriptions recorded by the great Ming herbalist and naturalist Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518-93) in his epic work *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目. Li found that the practice of eating images of Zhong Kui in medication resulted from the mistake caused by confusions of homophones– the *zhongkui* 終葵 fungus and the demon-queller Zhong Kui. See Richard Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c 2004), pp. 122-8. Sherman E. Lee, “Yan Hui, Zhong Kui Demons and the New Year” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 53, No. 1/2 (1993): 211-227. For a discussion of the medical use of Zhong Kui’s image in Li’s *Bencao gangmu* see Carla Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot: Natural History and Its Transformations in Early Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 84-5.

words, “cheered up the children and brightened up the house (賺得兒童喜，能生蓬蓽輝)”.<sup>12</sup>

The audience for those pictures was certainly not limited to children; adults also enjoyed viewing and talking about them. Most of the *nianhua* would remain in the same spot for a whole year, only to be replaced in the next New Year, so would be viewed repeatedly throughout the year that allow for careful investigation, detailed interpretation, and multiple angles of reading. Stories were told, knowledge and values created, conveyed, interpreted and confirmed in the process.

Exactly when Suzhou’s *nianhua* industry started is unclear, but it is believed to have been no later than the late Ming. In his gazetteer of Southern Song Suzhou, Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1207) explained that door gods and peach wood charms were replaced on New Year’s Eve. However, as in Kaifeng and Hangzhou, none of the Song dynasty door god images survive. A colored print depiction of the Longevity Star (Shouxing 壽星) that dates from the 1592 and another dated 1597 are believed to be the earliest Suzhou *nianhua*.<sup>13</sup> The sophistication of the prints suggests an earlier start of the industry. Zheng Zhenduo has proposed the publication of the *Pictorial Catalogue of A Hundred Odes* (*Baiyong tupu* 百詠圖譜) by Gu Zhongfang 顧仲方 in about 1596 as the starting point of Suzhou *nianhua* industry, because Wu (Suzhou) had excellent cutters, exploiting techniques of their late Ming Anhui predecessors who had been in rapid decline since the Qianlong reign. John Lust thus concluded that Suzhou “prints of the

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<sup>12</sup> Li Guangting, *Xiangyan jieyi in Qingdai shiliao biji congan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), juan 4, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> The prints are reproduced in Mary H. Fong, ‘The Iconography of the Popular Gods of Happiness, Emolument, and Longevity (Fu Lu Shou),’ *Artibus Asiae* 44 (1983), figure 1; Chen Qilu et al eds., *Zhongguo chuantong nianhua yishu tezhan zhuanji* (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1992), p. 76, figure 8.

1660s must have a Ming past behind them.”<sup>14</sup> Zheng did not reveal more about his discoveries, but modern scholars have frequently cited this conclusion.<sup>15</sup>

Little is known about the production process and business arrangements in Suzhou’s *nianhua* industry. Most of what we know concerns the procedures followed in the *nianhua* shops in Yangliuqing of Tianjin as recorded by Bo Songnian, which may be applicable to *nianhua* shops in other regions. According to Bo’s findings, a single print was the result of cooperation involving several people, with one person creating the design, one cutting the block, and another making the impressions on paper. Oftentimes, a colorist was involved in adding details such as faces and eyes. Occasionally, a mounter was also needed. The *nianhua* shop decided the subjects, and asked the designer to make a draft (*fenben* 粉本 or *digao* 底稿). The painter then drew his design on the *maobian* 毛边 paper using incense or charcoal. After receiving the draft, the shopkeeper displayed it in the shop asking for opinions about it. Then the draft was returned to the painter for revision. Upon the approval of the revised draft, it was sent to the block cutter. For the production of color prints from woodblocks, the painter had to provide four or five draft copies of each color, which were traced on a transparent paper that was placed upside down on the woodblock. The carver then cut the lines from the block surface. After the design was cut into the block, a black outlined copy was firstly printed out and then other colors were printed. The process was complex and required fine craftsmanship. Depending on the colors and gradations of the picture, the number of blocks and printing times varied. Specifically, a pigment was brushed over the designated block registered in position, and then the paper was placed upon the block. A brush was used to help transfer the color to paper. The procedure was repeated for

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<sup>14</sup> John Lust, *Chinese Popular Prints* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Gu Gongshuo, Liu Lufeng and Gu Kaer, and Western scholar John Lust have taken Zheng’s conclusion.



the transfer of each of the colors. For better visual effect, the colorist was recruited to fill colors for face and other details. After that treatment, some large prints especially those for hanging in the central hall had to be mounted. Each *nianhua* shop had its distribution networks. Some had branch stores in other regions; some had routes for traveling peddlers.<sup>16</sup>

One of the decisive factors that established Suzhou as China's major printmaking center was its proximity to pigment materials and its well-developed ink and paper manufacturing. The soil near Taohuawu was said to be the major ingredient for the red pigment.<sup>17</sup> Local gold and silver foils were also available in Suzhou. Suzhou was also noted for its mineral gold dye known as "Suzhou gold (*sujin* 蘇金)."<sup>18</sup> The famed ink store Jiang Sixu Hall 姜思序堂 was established in the Duting Bridge 都亭橋 near the Chang Gate 閶門 during the Qianlong reign of the Qing dynasty by a descendent of Jiang Tuxiang 姜圖香, a *jinshi* degree holder of the late Ming dynasty. The high quality inks it produced earned the Jiang Sixu Hall a national reputation. It even provided pigments and papers, via the Grand Canal transport route, for *nianhua* shops in the north such as Yangliuqing. After the Taiping Rebellion, Huang Shiyi 黃石齋, once an apprentice in the Jiang Sixu Hall, resumed the business by opening the Huang huilin Hall 黃繪林堂 ink store in Dongzhong Market, which later moved to Shanghai and became the basis on which the Shanghai local ink production businesses were built.<sup>19</sup> Suzhou was also renowned for its paper production. According to one local source, in 1757, at least 34 papermaking factories

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<sup>16</sup> Bo 1986, pp. 59-64.

<sup>17</sup> Pan Yuanshi, "Suzhou nianhua de jingkuang jiqi tuozhan," in ed., *Suzhou chuantong banhua Taiwan shoucang zhan* (Taipei: Xingzheng yuan wenhua jianshe weiyuanhui, 1986), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Yu Fei'an, *Zhongguo hua yanse de yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhaohua meishu chubanshe, 1955).

<sup>19</sup> Suzhou shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Suzhou shi zhi*, vol2 (Suzhou: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1995), pp. 202-3.

were operating in the districts of Shangyuan, Changzhou and Wu County in the prefecture of Suzhou. By 1794, up to 36 paper-factories with more than 800 employees operated in the same districts. Most of the workers were from Nanjing and Zhenjiang. Workers received a monthly allowance of 7.2 *qian* in 1757 and 1.2 *liang* of silver in 1794.<sup>20</sup>

The operations of Suzhou *nianhua* shops can only be partially reconstructed from oral history of the 1850s-60s taken down from a veteran in his eighties and from early nineteenth century folklorist writings. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were shops selling hand-painted *nianhua* for mass consumption in the outskirts of Suzhou on Tiger Hill and along the Shantang 山塘 riverbank. Shops selling woodblock-printed *nianhua* clustered in the area of Taohuawu and North Temple Pagoda.<sup>21</sup> According to Wang Huanwen 汪煥文, once the *nianhua* retailer at the Sanqing Hall 三清殿 of the Xuanmiao Taoist Temple 玄妙觀, in its heyday, Suzhou had over 50 *nianhua* shops scattered in and outside the walled city, with an annual production of more than one million pictures marketed in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Shandong provinces and southwards to Southeast Asia. Best known shops of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century were the three hes—Liu Sanhe, Xie Sanhe and Yao Sanhe—along lineage lines. Descendants of Liu Sanhe were still active as late as the 1950s. According to their account, in the 1860s the Suzhou *nianhua* industry was virtually destroyed by the war fought between the Qing army and the Taiping rebels. The *nianhua* shops in Tiger Hill and Shantang were burnt to ground, along with their old blocks.

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<sup>20</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, machine-made foreign papers (*yangzhi* 洋紙) began to be imported, although mass production and use of *yangzhi* only gained momentum during the Republican era. They were cheaper and could be produced in large amount within relatively short time. Imported wrapping paper cost 15 cents per pound and Chinese *maobian* 毛邊 paper priced at 26 cents a pound. See Tsien Tsuen-Hsuei, “Paper and Printing” in *Science and Civilization in China: Volume 5, Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, Part 1, ed., Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Gu Lu, *Tongqiao yizhao lu* (1842) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), p. 379.

After the war, only a few shops resumed production in Taohuawu.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, many *nianhua* artists and shops moved to nearby Shanghai to start new careers there (to be discussed in chapter 2). Fortunately, many of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century prints reached overseas countries and were preserved in Japan and Europe. |

## 2. Sources and State of the Field:

Produced for practical use and as ephemera, *nianhua* was not seen as high art in traditional China and so was rarely recorded in literati writings. It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that printmaking was elevated to the status of art on par with painting. Although progressive intellectuals and the Chinese state later sought to define a national folk art form and “rediscovered” *nianhua*, the interest in collecting and researching *nianhua* was initially developed outside of China.

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, efforts to collect and preserve *nianhua* were very few. Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), a German naturalist and physician, was perhaps the first to bring 17<sup>th</sup> - century Suzhou prints to Europe after his short service as the medical officer with the Dutch East India Company on the island of Deshima in Japan in 1691-2. He probably bought those prints in or near Nagasaki, Japan’s only port for trade to Holland and China at the time. Most of the prints are illustrations of flowers, fruits and birds, and the selection seems to reflect the collector’s botanical interests.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gu Gongshuo, “Suzhou nianhua” *Wenwu*, no. 2 (1959), p. 13; Liu Lufeng and Luo Shuzi, *Taohuawu muban nianhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1961), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> The “Kaempfer series” were unearthed in the British Museum manuscript collections in 1906. Basil Gray, “Sloane and the Kaempfer Collection,” *British Museum Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1, Sir Hans Sloane (Mar., 1953), pp. 20-23.

Rich collections of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou *nianhua*, known today as the Gusu *ban* 姑蘇版 or Gusu prints, were preserved in Japan through the Qing-Tokugawa trade. Japanese trade records show that “Chinese prints” were listed among the “imported goods” in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the print trade is believed to have begun by the 1660s.<sup>24</sup> Suzhou was an important port on the Grand Canal, and was close to seaports such as Hangzhou 杭州, where Western imports were gathered to be disseminated into neighboring cities and countryside, and Zhapu 乍浦, the only port of the Qing for trade to Japan and Korea.<sup>25</sup> According to documents written by Dutch traders in Nagasaki, Chinese prints entered Japan in an even greater number after the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1760, for example, up to 60 thousand prints were imported and the trading ships were from Nanjing, Ningbo and Zhapu.<sup>26</sup> The Japanese seemed to have developed an interest in collecting Gusu prints during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although what they have preserved might only a portion of the export-oriented Suzhou *nianhua*. In other words, Japanese collectors might have chosen to import only what they liked, so the Japanese collections should not be taken as representing the whole scenario of Suzhou’s printmaking industry of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The rare survivors, however, do provide us with a general sense of the *nianhua* industry in old-Suzhou, notably its fascination with the urban landscape of prosperity (to be discussed in chapter 1).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in Wang Zhenghua, “Qianlong chao Suzhou chengshi tuxiang: zhengzhi quanli, wenhua xiaofei yu dijing suzao,” *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindai shi yanjiusuo jikan*, 50 (2005), p. 146; Lust 1996, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Wang 2005, p.147. These were fragmentary records, could not reflect the whole Qing-Japanese trade, but do provide an impression that by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese prints had been imported to Japan in a grand scale.

<sup>27</sup> Most of the Gusu prints are published in “Japanese collection” and “Taohuawu” in the *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng* series, edited by Feng Jicai. See Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan*

Systematic collection and academic study of *nianhua* did not start until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when it captured the interest of Christian missionary scholars and Western Sinologists. Bringing their own ideological and religious agendas, these pioneering Orientalists collected large quantities of popular prints, paintings and other artifacts. Among them, French Sinologist Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918)<sup>28</sup> and his student, the Russian V.M. Alekseev (1881-1951) were the most prominent. Alekseev's researches were published in *The Chinese Gods of Wealth* (1928) and *Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Kartina (Chinese Popular Prints)* (1966).<sup>29</sup> Following Chavannes and Alekseev, missionary scholars interested in Chinese popular religion began to research *nianhua* as a means to study the religious mentalities of the Chinese people, the result of which were Henri Dore's *Researches into Chinese Superstition* (1914-38), Clarence B. Day's *Chinese Peasant Cults* (1940), and Anne Goodrich's *Peking Paper Gods: A Look at Home Worship* (1991), which was based on the materials she purchased in 1930s Beijing.<sup>30</sup> More important to this dissertation are the Shanghai prints collected by German-American Sinologist Berthold Laufer (1874-1934) during his 1901-04 China Expedition, and preserved in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Between 1895 and 1931, Henri Dore

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(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011); Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Edouard Chavannes, *De l'Expression des vœux dans l'art populaire chinois* (Éditions Bossard, 1901) translated by Elaine Spaulding Atwood in *The Five Happinesses: Symbolism in Chinese Popular Art* (New York, Weatherhill, 1973), pp. 149-50. This is a problematic translation, in which Atwood leaves out all the original cuts with some misunderstanding. A discussion of the problems could be found in Schuyler Cammann, "Review of The Five Happinesses: Symbolism in Chinese Popular Art" *Artibus Asiae* vol. 37, no. 1/2 (1975): 139-42.

<sup>29</sup> V. M. Alekseev, *Chinese Gods of Wealth: A Lecture Delivered at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1926* (London: London School of Oriental Studies and the China Society, 1928) and Alekseev, *Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Kartina* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966).

<sup>30</sup> Henri Dore, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. M. Kennelly (1914-38, reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Co., 1966); Clarence B. Day, *Chinese peasant cults; being a study of Chinese paper gods* (1940, reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng Wen, 1969); Anne Goodrich, *Peking Paper Gods: A Look at Home Worship* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1991).

also collected large numbers of Shanghai *nianhua*. These are preserved in the Shanghai Library, including 178 items published in *Qingmo nianhua huicui*.<sup>31</sup> All the Shanghai prints discussed in the dissertation are from this book and from the Laufer collection.

The activities of Western missionaries and Sinologists also inspired early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese intellectuals, who saw the need to define a folk culture of and for the people that was untouched by modern civilization and linked to the primitive past.<sup>32</sup> Although they did not place a high priority on collecting, these scholars “rediscovered” the woodcut medium as an indigenous cultural form to be appropriated and adapted to serve the new nation-state. Within the folk art paradigm, during the 1950s print reforms,<sup>33</sup> more collections and research activities took place under the state imperative in China. As a result, a series of investigations of regional *nianhua* producing centers across China were carried out and subsequently a series of surveys were published.<sup>34</sup> At this time, A Ying 阿英 (Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 1900-77), a Communist literary critic and playwright, published the first art-historical study on the subject *A Simplified History of the Development of Chinese New Year Pictures* (*Zhongguo nianhua fazhan shilüe* 中

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<sup>31</sup> Shanghai tushu guan ed., *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 1-178.

<sup>32</sup> On the emergence of the idea of folk art in China, see Felicity Lufkin, “Folk Art in Modern China, 1930–1945” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> For the Communists’ 1950s print reform activities see Chang-tai Hung, “Repainting China: New Year Prints (Nianhua) and Peasant Resistance in the Early Years of the People’s Republic,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 4 (2000): 779-810.

<sup>34</sup> These surveys include Zou Ya, “Nianhua diaocha 年畫調查” in *Tianjin Daily* 1949; Jin Ye, “Yangliuqing he Tianji de nianhua diaocha 楊柳青和天津的年畫調查” *People’s Art*, no. 2, 1950; and East China Revolutionary College, “Guanyu taohuawu jiu nianhua diaocha 關於桃花塢舊年畫調查” *People’s Art*, no. 4, 1950 cited in Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo nianhua shi*, p. 30.

國年畫發展史略) in 1954, which covers the period from the earliest antecedents of Han dynasty to the Civil War years, setting the basic pattern of writing the history of *nianhua*.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, Wang Shucun 王樹村 and Bo Songnian (Po Sung-nien 薄松年), based in Beijing, began to establish their careers as China's leading folk art historians and put together the most extensive collections of *nianhua*. Both their collections and writings tended to reflect the historical trajectories of north China. Bo, an art historian trained at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in the 1950s, published the most comprehensive account of the history of *nianhua* at the time, *History of Chinese New Year Pictures (Zhongguo nianhua shi 中國年畫史)* (1986).<sup>36</sup> His collaborative work with David Johnson is actually more familiar to English readers, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China* (1992).<sup>37</sup> It is an exhibition catalogue of religious *nianhua* and paper cuts from Bo's personal collection. In the book, the authors attribute the *nianhua* community's rigid adherence to established iconographies and lack of innovation to "perennial favorites" in the marketplace and the high price of creating new designs that might be rejected by the consumers. The production process itself is characterized as one of the major causes of the industry's lack of creativity: "when block carvers did have to make a new design, they frequently relied on pattern books, which by definition preserved older styles."<sup>38</sup>

A native of Yangliuqing, one of the most prominent *nianhua* production centers in North China, Wang Shucun is perhaps the most prolific and authoritative *nianhua* researcher in China.

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<sup>35</sup> A Ying, *Zhongguo nianhua fazhan shilue* (Beijing: Chaohua meishu chubanshe, 1954).

<sup>36</sup> Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhua shi* (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1986).

<sup>37</sup> Bo Songnian and David G. Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> Bo and Johnson, p. 17.

His researches and collections predated and survived the difficult years of the Cultural Revolution as well as those of Bo's. As early as in the 1950s, Wang published an award-winning anthology of *nianhua* prints, *Yangliuqing nianhua ziliao xuanji* 楊柳青年畫資料選集 (1959), perhaps the first Chinese-language book of polychrome *nianhua* reproductions; it was claimed that all 93 *nianhua* works were produced during the period from early Ming through the Guangxu reign of the late Qing.<sup>39</sup> In the same year, Wang also had two topically organized catalogues published; *Woodcuts of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom* (*Taiping tianguo banhua* 太平天國版畫) contains prints produced during the Taiping era and *Woodcuts of Peking Opera* (*Jingju banhua* 京劇版畫) was a collection of theatric prints.<sup>40</sup> Until recently his publication, *Catalogue and History of Chinese Folk New Year Pictures* (*Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tulu* 中國民間年畫史圖錄) was by far the richest catalogue of *nianhua* reproductions from all over China including Taiwan and Southwest China, and from his own collection. In addition to *nianhua*, this book contains other pictorial genres including lantern paintings (*denghua* 燈畫), paper-cuts (*guaqian* 掛錢, *chuanghua* 窗花) and paper-cards (紙牌).<sup>41</sup>

Building on A Ying's art-historical paradigm, Bo and Wang further established the standard narrative of historic *nianhua*. Both accounts took the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as the golden age of *nianhua* production and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as the turning point when *nianhua* industries experienced a quick decline. This decline was attributed to the coming of Western printing technologies and the state-led print reforms of the 1910s-20s by the Republican government, and

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<sup>39</sup> Wang Shucun, *Yangliuqing nianhua ziliao xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1959).

<sup>40</sup> Wang Shucun, *Taiping tianguo banhua* (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1959); Wang Shucun, *Jingju banhua* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1959).

<sup>41</sup> Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tulu* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991).



again by the Communist government during the 1950s-70s. This narrative pattern has also been repeated in Western scholarship, which largely builds on the writings of Wang and Bo.

John Lust's *Chinese Popular Prints* (1996) is the first comprehensive Western introduction to late imperial Chinese *nianhua*, and has two useful appendices serving as guides to Chinese symbols and visual puns, and to religious images in relation with domestic cult and festival rituals. Lust's book, however, relies too much on Chinese secondary literature, which makes it no more than a reference book of *nianhua* in English.<sup>42</sup> Art historian Tanya McIntyre's 1997 PhD dissertation focuses on *nianhua* production in Fengxiang 鳳翔 of Shaanxi province over a time span of a century from the end of the Opium War in 1842 to Mao's 1942 Yan'an Talks, with the last chapter touching on the post-1949 situation, suggesting the continuity of a "visual language" that survived the transformative years of great change.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Ellen Johnston Laing has published inventory catalogues of *nianhua* from the London-based Muban Foundation (2002) and of the German Gerd and Lottie Wallenstein collection at the National Museums in Berlin (2010).<sup>44</sup> Her book on the advertising calendar posters of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai touches upon the *nianhua* production in Suzhou and Shanghai in bridging traditional

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<sup>42</sup> John Lust, *Chinese Popular Prints* (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Tanya McIntyre, "Chinese New Year Pictures: The Process of Modernization, 1842-1942" (PhD thesis, Faculty of Arts, Arts, University of Melbourne, 1997). McIntyre contributes one chapter of her thesis, a revised version of which is in Antonia Finnane's *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture* (1999), to a discussion of the changing images with regards to both physical appearance and social status of women in the "reformed" *nianhua*, in Tanya McIntyre, "Images of Women in Popular Prints in the Early Modern Period" in Antonia Finnane, Anne McLaren eds., *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture* (Clayton, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 58-80.

<sup>44</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, *Art and Aesthetics in Chinese Popular Prints: Selections from the Muban Foundation Collection* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); and Laing, *Divine Rule and Earthly Bliss: Popular Chinese Prints: the Collection of Gerd and Lottie Wallenstein* (Berlin: Museum fur Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2010).

Chinese calendar posters with the new lithographic posters that largely feature modern women as advertisements for Western products, notably cigarettes.<sup>45</sup>

Thus far, the most important departure from the folk art / art-historical paradigm is a study by James Flath, who focuses on the production and representations of *nianhua* in rural north China from the late Qing to the early 1950s.<sup>46</sup> Flath situates *nianhua* within the “print culture” realm, which he defines as “a means of understanding the world through print” that includes the physical “act of producing, disseminating, obtaining, displaying and reading print” as well as social “abstraction of the world created by the repeated and systematic application of ink to paper, and the penetration and transformation of social relations by print.”<sup>47</sup> In writing a cultural history of rural north China, Flath has treated *nianhua* as a historical text with an intention to examine how “perceptions of the social and physical world were put into print and how print, in turn, configured perceptions of the social and ethical world.”<sup>48</sup> Limiting his focus to north China, Flath outlines the history of the *nianhua* medium that developed from a village-based and home-centered industry to one catering increasingly to commercial interests and eventually falling under Communist political dictates. Accordingly, the representations also evolved from subjects related to domestic cults and theatrical performances to ones advocating socialist revolution. However, in characterizing the production process and representational system, Flath makes the central argument that “the single most important aspect of the village-

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<sup>45</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), Chapter 2 ‘Chinese popular prints in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai’.

<sup>46</sup> James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art and History in Rural North China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Flath 2004, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Flath 2004, p. 4.

based print industry was that it engaged in prescriptive mass production—a process by which a uniform object was collectively produced using a defined set of tools and techniques and in deference to collectively defined social values.”<sup>49</sup> He further expands this view to consumption, where the “prescriptive ethic was carried by *nianhua* through markets and into the homes of their consumers.”<sup>50</sup> Picking up on Po and Johnson’s argument, the “prescriptive view” remains a widely accepted consensus, the view that traditional printmaking process and products lacked creative agency and motivation.

This study challenges this argument and acknowledges the innovative aspect of the *nianhua* industry, which has continuously developed and adapted to changing conditions of the built environment and marketplace. Whereas a prescriptive approach might be appropriate in describing the printing process, Suzhou’s and Shanghai’s workshops of the 18<sup>th</sup> throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century display variation and experimentation in brushwork, continuously coming up with new designs to describe the urban environment and everyday activities of the urban people. Flath’s approach provides an important foundation for the present study, especially in describing *nianhua* in connection with the social and economic conditions and acknowledging the regional specifics of the industry. However, even in the limited area of North China, namely Yangjiabu of Shandong, Yangliuqing and Wuqiang of Hebei and Zhuxianzhen of Henan, regional variation in prints are not sufficiently explained. One wonders why Yangliuqing was noted for its elegant designs while Yangjiabu was noted for its more rustic themes.

This study will press for an alternative perspective that acknowledges regional variations in relation to respective local cultures and historical conditions. Stylistic variation existed even in the same city. In Suzhou before the Taiping Rebellion, Shantang and Tiger Hill markets were

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<sup>49</sup> Flath 2004, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Flath 2004, p. 32.

known for sale of painted *nianhua* while printed *nianhua* were sold in Taohuawu and North Temple Pagoda. Relocating to post-Taiping Shanghai, *nianhua* artists were actually forced to make novel designs when the old blocks were destroyed by the fire of war, and more importantly the market shifted with competition from prints produced by foreign printing machines. With the rise of Shanghai as the leading printing and publishing center and the introduction of new printing technologies and ideas, the industry reached its peak to invite Shanghai-based commercial artists-newspaper illustrators and calendar poster designers- providing designs catering to a changing audience and commercial interests.

### **3. Contribution to the Field**

A major contribution of this study is that it moves beyond the national view of Chinese *nianhua*, focusing on the important but less studied Suzhou-Shanghai region. It explores a city-based *nianhua* tradition in Jiangnan's urban centers that supplements current scholarship of *nianhua*, which focuses geographically on northern print centers, economically on village-based production, and thematically on religious, auspicious and moral subjects of universal value. Focusing on a regional printmaking industry allows us to examine more closely the local business and how artists responded to and helped to shape markets, artistic trends and national politics. A study of the regional qualities and aesthetics of *nianhua* will highlight the importance of local society within which the industry developed, prospered, declined, recovered or disappeared, bringing to life the printmaking industry and illuminating the wide range and variety of the visual materials now blanked out by the category *nianhua* within their immediate contexts. Print artists working in 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou made prints defining the image of High Qing Suzhou, catering to the merchant residents of the city. To better visualize the cityscape of Suzhou, they innovatively appropriated Western pictorial techniques, experimenting with

complex architectural designs. Dislocated to Shanghai after the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century war, *nianhua* was adapted to define the image of Shanghai. With the subject of the “city” shifted to the treaty-port, perceptions of urban experiences shifted accordingly. Figures replaced architectural designs as the major subjects of *nianhua* representation. When visual reach of the “place” was expanded from the “city” to the “state”, with the production of *nianhua* prints representing China’s “victories” in foreign wars, *nianhua* was further transformed to a site of nation-making. Place-making practices and representations characterized and helped define the vitality of Suzhou-Shanghai *nianhua* industry, which was more than what auspicious signs and religious icons could signify.

Secondly, I study the interconnectedness of the High Qing and late 19<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* industry through its continued involvement in globalized visual culture and art production, from 18<sup>th</sup> century appropriation of perspectival images to late 19<sup>th</sup> century journalistic illustration styles. In so doing, this study reveals the openness of Chinese traditional printmaking culture. It also complements current scholarship that is directed toward delineating how late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* anticipated Communist propaganda arts of the 1930s-50s, and the consistency of an iconographic system and aesthetics, by pushing the examination of visual politics in China back to the High Qing time.

Thirdly, this study critiques the “Shanghai modern” and inquiries into the complex issue of tradition and modernity. The rise of Shanghai came at least partly from its tolerance and absorption of traditional woodblock print culture and printmaking traditions that had contributed to the prosperity of late imperial urban centers of Jiangnan. The flexibility and creativity of that industry, in turn, helped transform Shanghai into China’s print center. Challenging existing scholarship that tends to define China’s modern print culture as a result of the importation of

Western printing technologies, publishing practices, and print commodities, this study reveals the role of traditional woodblock printing and prints in making modern print culture through its ongoing borrowings, appropriation and self-modification, which anticipated modern pictorial press in Shanghai. Western printing especially lithography was instrumental in creating an industry and demand for the production and consumption of images, promoting the prosperity of a graphic print market within which *nianhua* retained an important place. Chapter 5 reveals that military paintings of the Manchu court and traditional graphic storytelling provided the basic visual formula for *nianhua* representations of China's "victories" in recent wars, which prompted the publication of the first Chinese illustrated newspaper, testifies to the power of "tradition." The idea of making a timely "report" of war, however, came from the West. With the participation of news illustrators, *nianhua* representations became increasingly similar to pages in illustrated newspapers. Shanghai's print artists thus created a hybrid genre, retaining a long-established printing technique and graphic genre but adjusting themes in accordance with the trend of the city's cultural productions of the time. *Nianhua* prints became disseminators of the image and narrative production systems of Shanghai toward a broader and increasingly standard audience. In general, this study proposes to complicate the issue of tradition/modernity.

#### 4. Nomenclature

The term *nianhua* had a much shorter history than the genre that it refers to. It first appeared in the above-mentioned book *Country Sayings to Smile At* of 1849. The term, however, was not widely used until the 1950s after the Communist "Nianhua Reform Movement", and has since become the standard denomination.<sup>51</sup> Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, designations varied from

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the "Nianhua Reform Movement" and the "new *nianhua*" see Julia Frances Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994),

time to time, place to place, and according to subject matter. Many were identified per se as the identities of the portrayed figures, such as Zhong Kui and door gods (Menshen). In Song dynasty Kaifeng, *nianhua* works were locally called *zhihuaer* 紙畫兒. In early Qing Beijing, they were called *weihua* 衛畫 (Tianjin pictures) or *huapian* 畫片. In the south, Hangzhou people used to call them *huanletu* 歡樂圖 at least during the Qianlong. In Mianzhu of Sichuan province, they were called *doufang* 斗方. In Suzhou, by the 1830s, they were locally dubbed *huazhang* 畫張.<sup>52</sup> I keep the term *nianhua* in the dissertation because of the established field of research and for the convenience of reference. In so doing, my dissertation complicates the *nianhua* regime by expanding its representations and pictorial practices.

Several terms used to describe the techniques of printmaking also need some explanation.<sup>53</sup> Traditionally, prints have been made in China using blocks of carved wood, known as *muke* 木刻 or woodblock printing, the origins of which are now dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. The earliest extant woodblock printed image is the frontispiece of the *Diamond Sutra* dated A.D. 868. Despite the long history of woodblock printing in China, no detailed technical description in Chinese of the procedures of printmaking has survived from before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, there are two types of woodblock printmaking. The most common method, known as ‘*mumian muke* 木面木刻’ or ‘woodcut’, involves cutting the image

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pp. 58-64; James A. Flath, “‘It’s a Wonderful Life’: Nianhua and Yuefenpai at the Dawn of the People’s Republic,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* vol.16, no. 2 (2004): 123-59.

<sup>52</sup> A brief discussion of the evolution of the term since the Song through the Qing dynasties is in Wang Shucun, *Nianhua shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1997), pp. 4-8.

<sup>53</sup> For a good discussion of Chinese printmaking techniques see David Barker, *Traditional Techniques in Contemporary Chinese Printmaking* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005). A comprehensive discussion of techniques used in Western printmaking is in Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints: A Complete Guide to Manual and Mechanical Processes from Woodcut to Inkjet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

into the soft side grain (which is exposed on a block cut plank-wise). The second method is to cut the hard end grain of the wood (which is exposed on a block cut in cross section). This method is called ‘*mukou muke* 木口木刻’ or ‘wood engraving’ in English. In general practice, the terms “woodblock print” and “woodcut” are often used interchangeably. The printed pictures are called *banhua* 版畫 or *muke hua* 木刻畫.

## 5. Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 will investigate Suzhou’s printmaking tradition of the High Qing time, focusing particularly on mid-18<sup>th</sup> century cityscape prints and the city-making practice. Featuring a mercantile taste, Gusu prints *visualized* local landmarks of commercial significance and “commercialized” classic scenic spots into representations, emphasizing “urban prosperity” that was closely associated with the merchant enterprises in the city. Transforming traditional rustic imagery of Suzhou defined by literati and high-profile professional painters into city views featuring complex architectural designs, High Qing Suzhou print artists innovatively borrowed Western pictorial techniques and representational modes to define the image of a city immersed commercial and mercantile spirit, giving material and visual forms to the merchant-residents civic pride and love of the city.

Chapter 2 describes the relocation of the Suzhou *nianhua* business to Shanghai after the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) and the rise of a *nianhua* market centered on the Old Parade Ground within the walled Chinese city in Shanghai. History changed the economic geography of the region. Cultural and business production was reshaped with the movement of crafts and resources associated with *nianhua* making. Transportation routes and trade networks shifted



from Suzhou to Shanghai. All these factors helped set the foundation for a new era of the printmaking industry centered on Shanghai.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the new cityscape prints. Shanghai now replaced Suzhou as the principal subject for *nianhua*. Meanwhile, a new set of pictorial devices were developed among Shanghai's *nianhua* artists, who defined Shanghai through ordinary and even peripheral urban characters – the urban poor and sensational imagination of the city's women. Although the interest in *visualizing* the lived environment continued, the focus shifted from architecture to figures, so the shifting definition of the “city.” A sense of fragmentation and contradiction permeated the visual formulation of the city image.

Chapter 5 discusses *nianhua* representation of contemporary wars from the Sino-British conflicts during the Opium War (1839-42, 1856-60) to the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Drawing on a variety of pictorial and stylistic sources, both Chinese and Western, *nianhua* representations of China's recent wars intrigued the publication of the first Chinese illustrated newspaper *Dianshizhai huabao* (1884-98). From hero-making and anticipating “victories” to timely “report” of “victories”, *nianhua* became increasingly integrated into Shanghai's modern periodical and visual culture. National politics and “current events” entered the *nianhua* reservoir. Visual reach of territory expanded from the “city” to the “state” that included frontier areas and battle fields. All these marked the modern transformation of the dynasty and *nianhua* industry.

## Chapter 1 Gusu Print: Commercial Sites and Urban Prosperity

As the cultural and economic center of the lower Yangzi region, Suzhou was a key city for the state recruitment of officials. The city provided one tenth of the empire's civil service exam graduates, and significantly subsidized the government revenues through taxes during the late imperial time. Despite Suzhou's beneficially strategic position at the core of the Grand Canal and Lower Yangzi trade and transportation networks, it had been, since the Ming at the latest, conventionally represented as a rustic landscape ideal for literary gatherings, sightseeing and other cultural pursuits. That image was cemented in the common imagination through literati writings and paintings. The manifestation of its economic power, however, scarcely appeared in pictorial renditions of Suzhou until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when local print artists turned the city's image from lyric ideals of "mountains and waterways" into urban spaces of commercial sites. This chapter explores this shift in the pictorial representation of Suzhou and considers how *nianhua* redefined the city's image. Continuing local artistic tradition of visualizing the built environment, 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou woodblock print artists distinguished themselves from their literati and professional predecessors of the late Ming by transforming the image of Suzhou from suburban scenery into urban prosperity. This pictorial "urbanization" of Suzhou, I argue, has to be understood in the context of mercantile culture in local society.

Founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE as the capital of the state of Wu, Suzhou had become the center of commerce and manufacturing in the lower Yangzi region by the time of the Song dynasty (960-1279). Suzhou reached its peak during the Ming dynasty when "a Suzhou-centered world system" was formed.<sup>1</sup> A unique society was emerging. One of the consequences of the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Marmé, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

commercialization of the Suzhou society was that great families of the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century preferred to have both merchant and scholar descendants in their lineages, creating a “common local culture” that embraced both profit and virtue.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, China’s domestic and export economy underwent substantial growth. Markets and population proliferated together. Foreign craving for Chinese tea, silk, porcelain and cotton stimulated the growth in exports and the inflow of silver from abroad. Contributing to this continued prosperity, the Lower Yangzi area, endowed with fertile land, plentiful water and a humid climate, served as the major rice basket for the whole empire. Its cotton and silk industries “clothed the nation.” In this setting of overall prosperity, Suzhou, a key node in the overlapping networks of commerce, transportation and communication in the Lower Yangzi region, was the marketing center for rice as well as a manufacturing center for silk, cotton and other handicrafts such as paper and candles.<sup>3</sup>

Past historical scholarship has revealed the commercial vitality and economic significance of Suzhou in late imperial China.<sup>4</sup> Art historians, however, have held higher opinions for cultural products and artistic creativity of Ming Suzhou than for that of the Qing.<sup>5</sup> The cultural achievements of Qing Jiangnan has been explored mostly through the city of Yangzhou and its high profile salt merchants, who were known for patronizing the arts and interacting with literati-

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<sup>2</sup> Marme 2005, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Cook Johnson, “The *Decline of Soochow* and Rise of Shanghai: A Study in the Economic Morphology of Urban Change, 1756-1894,” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1986), pp. 61-73.

<sup>4</sup> Marme 2005; Li Bozhong, *Duo shijiao kan jiangnan jingji shi, 1250-1850* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2003); Qiu Pengsheng, *Shiba shijiu shiji Suzhou cheng de xinxing gongshangye tuanti* (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban weiyuanhui, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> On Ming arts see for example Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

scholars and officials.<sup>6</sup> The cultural life of 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou, however, has been largely ignored or simply summarized as the continuity of the Ming paradigm. In this chapter, I will argue that the cultural vitality of 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou was distinctive and expressed through its prosperous woodblock print market, which was characterized by spectacular representations of local sites demarcating commercial urban space. I argue that the middle class urban residents, the mid-level merchants who were the readers of merchant manuals studied by Richard Lufrano,<sup>7</sup> were the potential consumers of these prints. Gusu print artists were aware of the aesthetic preferences of their targeted clients, and so consciously depicted their favored subjects using appropriate techniques. Unlike literati landscapists, commercial artists including print designers were free from Confucian pictorial conventions, and thus became one of 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou's the most vibrant sources of creativity.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Gusu prints have been described as extremely “Western” due to frequent use of techniques including linear perspective, dimensional illusion and chiaroscuro, techniques that were uncommon in traditional Chinese painting or in the picture-making industry. Scholarly attention has been placed on the issue of the origins of “Western influence” on 18<sup>th</sup> century Gusu prints. Some attribute it to the impact of Western prints brought by missionaries active in the Jiangnan region since the 17<sup>th</sup> century on or to foreign trade centered on the southern port Guangzhou. Others argue that the returned court painters brought back the foreign styles they had

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<sup>6</sup> The classic study on Qing Yangzhou and the salt merchants is Ping-ti Ho, “The salt merchants of Yangzhou: a study of commercial capitalism in eighteenth-century China” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 17 (1954): 130–168; On salt merchants and the painting markets in 18<sup>th</sup> century Yangzhou see Ginger Cheng-chi Hsu, *A Bushel of Pearls: Painting for Sale in Eighteenth-Century Yangchow* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Richard John Lufrano, *Honorable Merchants: Commerce and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997). Operators of print shops also belonged to this group.

learnt under royal patronage.<sup>8</sup> No direct historical evidence, however, has been unveiled to support any of these arguments. Another possible source is the famous treatise *Illustrations of Farming and Weaving* (*Gengzhi tu* 耕織圖), which was produced at the request of Kangxi 康熙 emperor. The final product was known as the *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* 御制耕織圖 (1696, later versions commissioned by Yongzheng 雍正 and Qianlong 乾隆 were based on the Kangxi version). It acted as a practical reference for farming and weaving, and more importantly as a symbol for a productive and ordered Confucian society. Executed in Western techniques, *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* was the work of the court artist Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞 (active 1680-1720). Following the painted albums, Kangxi issued an edict to engrave, print and distribute woodblock printed versions among regional officials. The widespread circulation of the illustrations was evidenced by the images' appearance on porcelain and other decorative arts exported to European collections.<sup>9</sup> Those cultural products may have worked together to “influence” Suzhou’s print artists, although this

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<sup>8</sup> Takimoto Huroyuki 瀧本弘之, “Soshu hanga gairon 蘇州版畫概論,” Kita Yuji 喜多祐士, ed., *Soshu hanga: Chugoku nenga no genryu* 蘇州版畫-中國年畫の源流 (Tokyo: Shinshido shupan, 1992), pp.135-44; Kobayashi Hiromitsu, “Suzhou Prints and Western Perspective- The Painting Techniques of Jesuit Artists at the Qing Court and Dissemination of the Contemporary Court Style of Painting into Mid-Eighteenth Century Chinese Society through Woodblock Prints,” in Johan W. O’Malley ed., *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 262-286.

<sup>9</sup> The original *Gengzhi tu* was compiled by Lou Shou 樓璣 (1090-1162), who served as a county magistrate near Hangzhou during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). It was first published around 1237 and contained 45 illustrations - 21 on rice cultivation and 24 on rearing silkworms for manufacturing silk- accompanied by poems. Many subsequent emperors produced new editions of these illustrations, and the pictorial form reached its highest development during the Qing. During his southern inspection tour of 1689, the Kangxi emperor was presented with a version of the *Gengzhi tu*. Duly impressed, he decided upon his return to Beijing to commission an updated set, for which he would contribute a preface and poems to accompany each picture. The artist selected for this task was Jiao Bingzhen, who is serving the Imperial Board of Astronomy (Qintian jian), where he studied Western perspective and chiaroscuro under European missionary artists also serving on the board. The woodblock-printed version was cut by Zhu Gui 朱圭 and Fei Yufeng 梅裕鳳. For a recent discussion of *Gengzhi tu* and its tradition see Francesca Bray, “Agricultural Illustrations: Blueprint or Icon?” in *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: The Warp and the Weft*, ed. Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillé (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), pp.522-35.

chapter concerns the more pertinent questions concerning why 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou's woodblock print artists adopted Western pictorial techniques and how they domesticated foreign techniques to represent particular subjects.

Central to 18<sup>th</sup> century Gusu prints was the city itself and its commercial space and sites in particular. I argue that those cityscape prints catered to an urban and merchant audience and that Western pictorial techniques better served that purpose. Combining traditional Chinese *jiehua* 界畫 or “ruled-line” rendering of architectural subjects with Westernizing elements,<sup>10</sup> Suzhou's print artists created the image of “prosperous Suzhou”, which the urban audience identified with and invested with meaning. As art historian Craig Clunas has argued, the fame of a site (i.e. garden) does not stem from its “enduring intrinsic features” but from literary and visual representations of it and the reputation of the personalities associated with it.<sup>11</sup> Drawing on Clunas, Tobie-Meyer Fong, in her discussion of the cultural restoration of Yangzhou in the early Qing, has demonstrated the importance of literary representations especially poetry in the building/rebuilding of local “famous sites”, in addition to physical repairs and constructions.<sup>12</sup> I agree that representations, literary and visual, were crucial in determining the significance of a site. In a regional metropolis whose residents came from all over the country, woodblock print artists created a unique

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<sup>10</sup> A recent discussion of the revival of the *jiehua* tradition in the Qing court and the Jiangnan city Yangzhou is in Anita Chung, *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Clunas' discussion has focused on Chinese gardens, but his argument can be applied to other sites of fame. See Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), pp.31-7.

<sup>12</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

topographic vocabulary in depictions of site-specific views to distinguish a visual experience that was immersed in mercantile culture.

In the following analysis, I will first introduce the local pictorial conventions of visualizing countryside landscapes before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then explore print artists' "creation" and "re-creation" of local sites of Suzhou: how old and new commercial sites such as Chang Gate (Changmen 閶門) and Wannian Bridge (Wannian qiao 萬年橋) were made into "famous sights", how historical "famous sites" such as Stone Lake (Shihu 石湖) and Tiger Hill (Huqiu 虎丘) were "urbanized" and "commercialized", and above all how commerce and culture interacted to create a unique urban culture, of which the sites and their representations became essential parts.

### **1. The Tradition: Countryside Scenic Spots of Suzhou**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Gusu print industry was based on local artistic and business traditions. Visualization of the built environment had been a common practice among Suzhou's artists, amateur-literati and professionals alike, since at least the Ming dynasty, with a focus on scenic sites in the countryside of Suzhou and around the Lake Tai area.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the Ming dynasty paintings of Suzhou's sites were produced by a great variety of artists, including leading figures of the so-called Wu School such as Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509), an affluent artist who claimed to paint for personal amusement or for cultural exchange with friends, and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), the scholar amateur who painted but did not publicly claim his identity as a painter, as well as trained artists who practiced painting to earn a living, such as Zhang Hong 張宏 (1580-

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<sup>13</sup> A recent study on late Ming Suzhou's topographical paintings see Elizabeth Kindall, "Visual Experience in Late Ming Suzhou 'Honorific' and 'Famous Sites' Paintings," *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 36 (2009), pp. 137-177.

after 1650).<sup>14</sup> Wen Zhengming's *Spring Trees after Rain* (*Yuyu chunshu* 雨餘春樹 1507), for example, is an expressive work executed in the classic blue-and-green style that renders the poetic subjects of mountains, rivers, pavilions and pine trees covered in mists. It was a gift for a parting friend of Wen to alleviate his homesickness.<sup>15</sup> The basic tone is carefree leisure. Along the winding river layered slopes intersperse with rock outcroppings. Pine trees scatter the surface. Scholars are walking at leisure chatting and enjoying the beauty of nature. The Confucian amateurs, using their expressive brushstrokes, transformed Suzhou into cultivated countryside landscapes. Borrowing from great works of the past, literati site paintings such as Wen's were personalized topography (as well as figures and events), and abstract expression of personal emotions and identities oftentimes with literary allusions. Natural scenes of idyllic mountains, trees, and rivers fill the majority of the space, while architectural elements are minimized and oftentimes concealed amidst forests and mists against the backdrop of the green-and-blue landscape traditionally associated with the distant past.

The professional artists of late Ming Suzhou, as James Cahill has suggested, "not their scholar-amateur contemporaries," however, were "the artists of their time who best achieved the

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<sup>14</sup> For a study on the issues concerning painting and money see James Cahill, *The Painter's Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Shen Zhou's album 'Twelve Views of Tiger Hill' is published in Wai-kam Ho, Sherman E. Lee et al., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 188-90.

<sup>15</sup> Shih Shou-chien, "Yuyu chunshu yu Mingdai zhongqi Suzhou zhi songbie tu," *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan*, vol. 62, no. 4 (1993), pp. 427-67. The painting is now kept at National Palace Museum of Taipei, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 94.3 x 33.3 cm, and is published in Guoli gugong bowu yuan bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Chunjing shanshuihua tezhan tulu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1987), p.50. Literary records show that Wen Zhengming visited and painted a number of these famous sites including Pond of Heaven, Tiger Hill, Stone Lake and Mounts Tianping and Zhixing. See Wen Zhengming, *Wen Zhengming ji* vol.2, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), pp.1046-50. The painting *Four Views of Gusu* by Wen Zhengming is discussed in Kenneth Ganza, "The Artist as Traveler: The Origin and Development of Travel as a Theme in Chinese Landscape Painting of the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1989), pp. 123-4.



lyric ideal of portraying a scene as if observed, and responses to it as if felt, immediately by a living individual, instead of as quotations from some remote past.”<sup>16</sup> Suzhou’s lesser-known professional artists of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century such as Yuan Shangtong 袁尚統 (1570- after 1661), Zhang Hong, and Qian Gong 錢貢 (active 1573-1620) specialized in topographic paintings, and have left us a great number of painted scrolls and albums rendering specific sites in Suzhou. In their renditions, scenic sites in the surrounding countryside of Suzhou, typically Panchi 盤螭, Hushan 虎山, Dengwei 鄧尉, Pond of Heaven 天池, Mount Lingyan 靈巖山, Mount Tianping 天平山, Mount Zhixing 支硎山, Mount Shangfang 上方山, Stone Lake, Tiger Hill and Xukou 胥口 are the most represented subjects.<sup>17</sup> These paintings of local “famous sites” were routinely assumed to be works circulated “within the context of upper-class tourism.”<sup>18</sup> The appearance of site paintings in great number during the late Ming paralleled the rise of the elite culture of travel and movement, consumption of space and picturing the personal visual experiences as one of the most conspicuous parts of elite status.

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<sup>16</sup> James Cahill, *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Many of the site paintings were produced by individual artists such as the album *Gusu shijing* by Wen Boren, others were made by groups of artists, such as the album *Sutai guji* by a group of six artists each produced what may have been the subject (i.e. the site) he specialized in. Two of the most prominent site painters of the time, Yuan Shangtong and Zhang Hong produced a great number of paintings and albums rendering famous local sites. See Yuan Shangtong, *Twelve Views of Sutai (Sutai shier jing)*, undated album, ink and color on paper, each leaf 24.7x29.3 cm, Shanghai Museum, reproduced in *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, 3:1-1532; Zhang Hong, *Sutai shier jing*, 1638, ink and color on silk, each leaf 30.5x24 cm, Palace Museum of Beijing, which is published in Wai-kam Ho ed., *The Century of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang* (Kansas: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Arts, 1992), vols. 1 and 2, pl. 102. Site paintings/albums were common gifts for retiring official, departing friends and as birthday gifts. See, for example, the 10-leaf album *Paintings for Suzhou Prefect Kou Shen’s Resignation (Suzhou Taishou Kou Shen quren tu)*, ink and color on paper, 1626, each leaf 32.7x64.5cm, Suzhou Museum), which was painted by a group of 8 painters including Zhang Hong, Yuan Shangtong, Qang Qujun, Feng Ting, Chen Si, Zhu Zhi, Zheng Fengyi and Ming Xu, for the official Kun Shen (1573-1620) on his retirement. Many of the ‘famous site’ paintings, however, were not explicit in information about the buyers or recipients.

<sup>18</sup> Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 83.

While scholar-amateurs may have painted for officials and literati friends, many of the “famous sites” paintings appealed to the economic elites of Suzhou who aspired to elevate their social status by purchasing paintings of cultured subject matter. For them, the cultural capital of the “famous sites” captured in paintings offered even more appeal than personalized experiences of touring the actual sites. That economic elites were clients of those paintings is suggested by the artists’ apologies for selling to merchants, a common discursive device among those who were forced to paint for livelihood. Local merchants of the time were said to be able to acquire the best works of Zhang Hong when he and his dependents were in the most desperate situation, so dealers in rice and salt were able to acquire large collections of his paintings.<sup>19</sup> Many late Ming descendants of Wen Zhengming sold their painted and calligraphic works to earn a living. Wen Dian 文點, for example, was known to have resided at the Huiqing Monastery 會慶僧寺 near Chang Gate, where he sold his calligraphy and paintings.<sup>20</sup> Earlier, Wen Congchang 文從昌 (1541-1516) made a fan painting of Suzhou’s “famous sites” for which he and other Wen family members including Wen Chongguang 文寵光, Wen Zhenghen 文震亨 (1585-1645), Wen Congjian 文從簡 (1574-1648), and Wen Qiangui 文謙光 (1541-1616) wrote poetic inscriptions.<sup>21</sup>

The complex society of Suzhou, however, made it difficult to define the “merchant” group as many of the local officials and elite gentry participated in businesses. As one contemporary has commented “the official gentry in Suzhou often consider doing business as something urgent...

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<sup>19</sup> James Cahill and June Li, *Painting of the Zhi Garden by Zhang Hong: Revisiting a Seventeenth-century Chinese Garden* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996), p.10.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, “Wen Tien and Chin Chun-ming,” *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong*, viii/2 (1976), p.412.

<sup>21</sup> On Wen Chongguang, see Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian* (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), p.40.

from lending, pawn broking, and trade, to selling salt and wine, their methods extract double profits from commoners.”<sup>22</sup> Despite that, we can still roughly define the audience of those “famous site” paintings as the upper-level merchants or Confucian merchants, who were closer to the Ma brothers of Yangzhou,<sup>23</sup> and who had the capital and desire to buy paintings of Wen Zhengming and probably more of Zhang Hong and his colleagues.

The commerce and art connection in Suzhou was further promoted by the well-developed Suzhou forgery business, known as the *Suzhou pian* 蘇州片 (Suzhou forgeries), centered on Shantang Street, Tiger Hill as well as Taohuawu Street and Zhuanzhu Lane within the walled city. Works of famous artistic personalities had been frequently copied and imitated. Qiu Ying, among other artists, was the most popular among Suzhou’s fakers. Forged paintings that claimed to be Qiu Ying’s catered to an urban audience of the contemporaries, and made trouble for any audience intending to restore his oeuvre.<sup>24</sup> Some site albums bearing inscriptions ascribed to famous personalities such as Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636) and Wei Shizhong 魏時中 (fl. 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jr-lien Tsao, “Remembering Suzhou: Urbanism in Late Imperial China,” PhD dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1992), p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> Ma Yueguan (1688-1755) and Ma Yuelu (1697- after 1766), salt merchants of Yangzhou, played a key role in patronizing scholars and artists in Yangzhou. They were most active as literary hosts, collectors of antiques and artworks, bibliophiles, and owners of the most impressive libraries in Jiangnan. On Ma brothers see Ho 1954, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> On the late Ming forgery market in Suzhou, see Ellen Johnston Laing, “‘Suzhou Pian’ and Other Dubious Paintings in the Received ‘Oeuvre’ of Qiu Ying,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 59, No. 3/4 (2000), pp. 265-295; Shan Guoqiang, ‘The Tendency toward Mergence of the Two Great Traditions in Late Ming Painting,’ in Wai-ching Ho ed., *Proceedings of the Tang Ch'i-Ch'ang International Symposium* (Kansas: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1991), pp. 3:6-9.

century) that were actually “written” by Suzhou’s fakers,<sup>25</sup> although the paintings appear to be genuine works by the artists who signed them.<sup>26</sup>

Suzhou’s “famous site” representations were developed within the context of the prosperous commercial publishing and printing markets, especially of the fine woodcut prints. Publication of illustrated fiction and drama, as well as art books such as painting manuals (*huapu* 畫譜) and letter-paper design manuals (*jianpu* 箋譜) turned Suzhou into the production center of colored woodblock printed images. Much of its artistic legacy was due to the famous block-cutters from Huizhou who were active across Jiangnan, and made great presence in Suzhou’s woodcut scene. Most notable among the Huizhou cutters was the Huang lineage from the Qiu village in Shexian. From 1430 to 1832, the Qiu Huang lineage produced about four hundred block-cutters, whose finely produced prints covered a great variety of subjects.<sup>27</sup> The shift of the publication location of the famous art book *Painting Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* (*Jieziyuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳), first published in Nanjing in 1679, to Suzhou in 1782 testifies to the rise of Suzhou’s woodblock printmaking and publishing business.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dong Qichang himself commented on forgeries of his own work made by people of Suzhou: “whenever I visit scholar-officials, they always show me their collections (of my own works). Although I know that many of them are fakes, I never argue with these collectors.” See Wai-kam Ho ed., *The Century of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang* (Kansas: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Arts, 1992), vol.1, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> The 10-leaf album *Wuzhong shenglan tu* by Zhang Hong appears to be such work, with original paintings and faked inscriptions. It is dated 1632, measuring 25.2x37 cm, ink and color on paper, reproduced in *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tulu*, 1:12-063.

<sup>27</sup> Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) p.15. On the rise of Huizhou block-cutters, see Wang Bomin, ‘Yijun tuqi the Huipai kegong ji qita mingshou,’ in Wang Bomin, *Zhongguo banhua shi* (Taipei: Lanting shudian, 1986), pp. 85-100.

<sup>28</sup> Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth Century China: Society, Culture and Modernity in Li Yu’s World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 95. The manual is considered to be one of the most influential treatises on painting from the early Qing period. The first part was composed in 1679 by the literati painter Wang Gai, with the help of Li Yu (1611-c.1688), who wrote the

Woodblock printed images of Suzhou continued to focus on the countryside and the historically established “famous sites”. In the fine woodcut publication *Wonderful Sights within Four Seas* (*Hainei qiguan* 海內奇觀, 1609), illustrations of Suzhou, like those site paintings in the above discussion, are “famous sites” in the outskirts of Suzhou.<sup>29</sup> The block-cutter was Wang Zhongxin, from the Wang lineage of Huizhou with no less reputation than the Huang lineage, which equaled art books in terms of both quantity and quality of illustration. Researchers have estimated that an art book cost between 5 and 8 *qian* depending on the size of the publication.<sup>30</sup> *Wonderful Sights within Four Seas* contains 10 volumes so must have cost a bit more, probably around 1 tael (*liang* 兩), sharing customers with the art books. Similarly, in the famed Ming encyclopedia *Collected Pictures of Three Realms* (*Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會, 1609), “Illustration of Wu (*Wumen tu* 吳門圖)” represents the landscape of suburban Suzhou, with only a trace of the city wall in the upper right. Other illustrations of Suzhou include a map and renderings of the historic “famous sites” including Tiger Hill, Mount Linyang and Stone Lake outside the walled city.<sup>31</sup> Compilers of such books claim that they assembled illustrations of “famous mountains and

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preface, and his son-in-law Shen Xinyou who published the manual. The second and third parts, composed with the help of Wang Gai's brothers, Wang Shi and Wang Nie, were published in 1701 in both Hangzhou and Nanjing, which was followed by the well-known Qianlong edition of 1782, published in Suzhou.

<sup>29</sup> Yang Erzeng ed., *Hainei qiguan* (1609) reprinted in Zheng Zhengduo, *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan*, vol.2, no.8 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), pp. 202-03. The illustrator is Chen Yiguan of Qiantang in Hangzhou.

<sup>30</sup> For studies of book price of the late Ming see Zhang Xiumin, *Zhongguo yinshua shi* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1989), p.518; Shen Jin, ‘Mingdai kefang tushu zhi liutong yu jiage,’ *Guajia tushuguan guankan*, vol. 85, no.1 (1996), pp. 101-18; Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit: the Commercial Publishers of Jianyang Fujian: 11<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 190-2.

<sup>31</sup> Wang Yi and Wang Siyi eds., *Sancai tuhui* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), pp. 207, 233, 253-8, 316-9.

great rivers” or “all the wonderful sites throughout the landscapes” for readers’ appreciation during their “armchair travels” or “travel on the desk.”

Suzhou’s artists and commercial publishers of the late Ming transformed local sites into pictorial representations, with various aims; for personal enjoyment, as gifts for friends, or to make profits. Their subjects were shared, focusing on the historically developed “famous sites” in the countryside of Suzhou. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the commercial woodblock print artists inherited the cultural tradition of visualizing local sites. Their subjects, however, were different, thus the image of Suzhou in large was transformed from a place of “famous sites” to that of “commercial markers”.

## 2. Remapping Suzhou: Urban Prosperity and Commercial / Commercialized Sites

The bustling economy of 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou created a distinct urban culture in local society. Its legendary status was summarized in the common saying that “above there is heaven and below are Suzhou and Hangzhou.” A contemporary account adds, “Suzhou was famous for its shops and markets.”<sup>32</sup> The appeal of Suzhou was not its scenic sites and natural landscapes but its trades and markets, so implicitly the activities of merchants. As “the wealthiest place,” “the most important intersection of the canal based transportation networks” and “the most populous place” of southeastern China (東南財富，姑蘇最重。東南水利，姑蘇最要。東南人士，姑蘇最盛。), Suzhou attracted merchants from various localities of China such as Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Shandong, Anhui and many other places. The majority of the resident merchants (*zuogu*

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<sup>32</sup> Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu* (1795) (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), p.151. The complete quotation compares and describes the three most prosperous Jiangnan cities of the time— “Hangzhou is famous for its lakes and hills, Suzhou is famous for its shops and markets, and Yangzhou is famous for its gardens.”

坐賈) in Suzhou were from other regions.<sup>33</sup> As a result, *huiguan* 會館, a type of mercantile organization which functioned both as a business administration and a native-place association, began to boom in Suzhou, reaching its peak during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only three *huiguan* were built in the Ming dynasty, whereas at least six were built in the 1670s and 1680s and at least thirteen were constructed between 1690s and 1740s.<sup>34</sup> The gathering of a multitude of merchants and the construction of mercantile associations transformed local landscape in both its physical forms and symbolic structures, creating a unique commercial culture that manifested itself not simply in the economic domain but also in the cultural realm. Suzhou's *nianhua* artists, in depicting local sites that were closely associated with merchant activities and desires, helped negotiate and create a shared urban identity. "Urbanizing" and "commercializing" the classic image of Suzhou, local print artists offered an alternative mundane perspective of looking at Suzhou, co-existing with, if not replacing, the literati imagery.

## **2.1 Chang Gate**

The Chang Gate, located at the northwest of Suzhou, straddles the junction of Changmen canal and Xu River 胥河 that connects to the Grand Canal, the chief artery of trade and transport of late imperial China. It is said that the gate was one of the eight city gates of the Helu Dacheng 闔閭大城 erected during the Spring and Autumn period based on the cosmic *fengshui* principles.<sup>35</sup> Since

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<sup>33</sup> Zhen Ruozeng, "Su Song fufu yi", cite in Wang Weiping, *Ming Qing shiqi Jiangnan chengshi shi yanjiu: yi Suzhou wei zhongxin* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), p.66.

<sup>34</sup> Fan Jinmin, *Ming Qing Jiangnan gongshang ye de fazhan* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1998), pp.286-95. In addition, Tongwang huiguan and Ningbo huiguan were not listed in Fan's list but appear in *Gusu cheng tu* of 1745.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the cosmic scheme of the Chang Gate see Yinong Xu, *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2000) pp. 50-1.

the early Ming, the area around Chang Gate had become a bustling trading center complete with shops, warehouses and a grain-processing industry.<sup>36</sup> Tang Yin (1470-1523), the great Ming painter and poet of Suzhou, had a description of the Chang Gate area in his poem “Changmen jishi:”

Paradise in this world is Wuzhong (Suzhou),  
Wherein most remarkable (is the area around) Chang Gate.  
Thousands of emerald green sleeves are seen round and about the mansions,  
Millions of golden pieces are flowing along the canals running in east-west direction.  
Have the merchants and businessmen ever taken a break throughout the whole night,  
Who come from the four quarters (of the world) with utterly different dialects? <sup>37</sup>

世间乐土是吴中，  
中有闾门更擅雄。  
翠秀三千楼上下，  
黄金百万水西东。  
五更市卖何曾绝，  
四远方言总不同。

The economic centrality and the concentration of regional and interregional trade around the Chang Gate area led to sustained prosperity. In the Qing, Cao Xueqin (?-1763) started his *Dream of the Red Chamber* story by describing the Chang Gate area as “the most dissolute and wealthiest place of the red dust (the mundane world)”. Few historical landscape or site paintings, however, represented the Chang Gate in its commercial manifestation until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the local

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in Marme 2005, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Xu 2000, p. 153.



print workshops “re-created” the site for a new representation of its full-scale economic significance.

Chang Gate was not a popular subject in literati and professional paintings of Suzhou, although several paintings do exist that share the single theme of an early morning scene of Chang Gate, in which the site functions as a passage for people to enter and leave the city. *Boats Crowd into the Pass at Daybreak* (*Xiaoguan zhouji* 曉關舟擠) by Yuan Shangtong (1586, ink and color on paper, 114.5 x 60cm, Palace Museum of Beijing), for example, depicts the busily engaged people and boats jostling about at Chang Gate and its water gate in the early morning. Chang Gate is in the middle ground before which the drawbridge is crowded with people carrying loads on their shoulders. The foreground section depicts the busy scene of the water gate where boats loaded with goods are crowding the entrance, only to confront a bigger boat whose owner, a scholar or merchant, is standing on the deck coming from inside the city. Chang Gate in this depiction has not been marked as an event that could happen at any city gate and the emphasis is on the temporality— the early morning— when crowds of people and boats came to break the quiet of the city. The scene forms a dramatic contrast to the tranquil landscape where mist covers the mountains and the distant temple pagoda of Tiger Hill. The scene inside Chang Gate is not depicted.

A similar theme appears in Chen Si’s 陳思 *Departing at Daybreak at Jinchang* (*Jinchang xiaofa tu* 金閭曉發圖, figure 1.1), a leaf from the album *Paintings for Suzhou Prefect Kou Shen’s Retirement from Office*. This panoramic depiction locates Chang Gate at the left corner with busy crowds on the drawbridge in front and in connection with the broader landscape of mountains and waterways. As a commemorative painting for a retiring official, the overall theme is to present personalized sites, figures and events in connection with good governance, so rustic landscape of

mountains, waterways, trees and mists occupy the majority of the composition, conveying the message of integrity and goodness, while architecture and figures are minimized. Site paintings from artists like Yuan and Chen placed the bustling bridge market and boat scene against the backdrop of natural landscapes traditionally associated with literati discourse of peaceful and productive space perfect for secluded life and cultural pursuits. Therefore both the motif and the composition were loaded with “symbolic meanings” and “literati tastes”, although both Yuan and Chen were professional artists whose works were more “realistic” than works of their “Wu School” literati counterparts.



Figure 1.1 Chen Si, *Departing at Daybreak at Jinchang*, 1626, ink and color on paper, 32.7x64.5cm, Suzhou Museum.

The historic site was given a new life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou prints. Two prints, the *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations* (*Sanbai liushi hang* 三百六十行, figure 1.3)” and the now named *Chang Gate of Gusu* (*Gusu changmen tu* 姑蘇閶門圖, figure 1.2), are perhaps the earliest extant Gusu prints, dated 1734. Together they provide a complete image of the bustling scene of Chang Gate and its environs, offering a panoramic view of the city seen from outside the

walled city. An approximation of linear perspective offers a long-range view to encompass the Nanhao Street in the foreground, the drawbridge and Chang Gate in the middle ground, and penetrating to Changmen Street inside the city wall and even allowing visual access to Shangtang Street and the distant Yunyan Pagoda of Tiger Hill dimmed by mountains and clouds.



Figure 1.2 Baohuixuan zhuren, *Chang Gate of Gusu*, 1734, 108.6x 55.9 cm, woodblock print with hand-colors, Umi-Mori Art Museum in Hiroshima, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng*: Taohuawu juan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 36.



Figure 1.3 Anonymous, *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations*, probably 1734, woodblock print, 108.6x 55.9 cm. Umi-Mori Art Museum in Hiroshima, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 37.

Compared to aerial perspective used in traditional Chinese paintings to gain a broad view at the cost of depth and details, the ‘foreign’ linear perspective adopted and adapted in the rendering of the Chang Gate enables the artists to elaborate on space, especially the foreground. The Chang Gate Street inside the city wall and more importantly out along the Grand Canal was

central to the commercial vitality of Suzhou. The foreground space displays the street scene of the prosperous Nanhao 南濠 (the Southern Moat) district, geographically situated along the west moat between Chang Gate and Xu Gate, and which had become the interregional trade center since the mid-Ming.<sup>38</sup> The prosperity of the area impressed the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century scholar Wang Xinyi (*jinshi*, 1613), who found that

The scene (outside the Chang Gate) resembled an intricate embroidery. Shoulders rubbing against one another and carriages bumping into each other, the rectangular boats of the Maple River followed one right after the other. The goods of Nanhao were piled up like a mountain. It is because of that one refers to Suzhou as the first city of Jiangnan.<sup>39</sup>

The approximation of linear perspective, a mode imparting depth and spatial elaboration, allows the representation of details such as signboards, goods, shops and the street characters. Most of the stores are two-story buildings flanking the street. The viewer can clearly identify a great variety of shops, trades and products catering to a wide range of business — “Heavenly Precious Metal Button”, “Su Wood”, “Red Sandalwood and Golden Cypress,” “Hangzhou Pigment shop,” “Noodle in three delicacies and chicken broth,” “Sichuan and Guangzhou Cooked Medicinal Herbs,” “Plain floral and white cloud decorated pipe” and “The second branch of the Gu shop” etc. The drawbridge, as in traditional renditions such as Yuan’s and Chen’s, is crowded with traveling people, and boats are moving in the river under the bridge. The detailed rendering of trades and markets in the foreground sets the tone for the whole image, that is, the commercial vitality of the city.

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<sup>38</sup> Xu 2000, p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Marme 2005, p. 32.

The see-through composition of the image allows the reader to observe space inside the Chang Gate, the bustling Changmen Street that is also packed with stores and traders, in the middle plane. Changmen Street was the center of commercial activities and the most prosperous district within the walled city. The street was conventionally depicted in literature in terms of politically important organizations including administrative and bureaucratic offices,<sup>40</sup> religious facilities such as Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian temples, as well as academic institutions such as schools, libraries and various private academies. In the pictorial rendition, however, the administrative and religious facilities are reduced and visually diminishing in clarity in the backdrop in great contrast to the concentration of commercial activities near the Chang Gate. Reversing the Confucian hierarchy of administrative and commercial spaces, print artists seemed to suggest that commercial power came first and perhaps guaranteed the political and administrative functions of Suzhou. Demarcating the inner and outer commercial space, Chang Gate is visually marked as a symbol of prosperity. In connecting Chang Gate with the walled city, the print artists elevated the gate to the status of symbol for Suzhou, indeed the “prosperous Suzhou.”

Meanwhile, the traditional motif of Chang Gate as a port was also emphasized. Activities of boats figure prominently in the image, waterways consisting of the moat, the harbor just outside Chang Gate and out along the route of the Grand Canal are teeming with large and small boats. Indeed, Suzhou had a proliferation of canals around and inside the city, so the port situated correspondingly around the city, while the area of the Chang Gate and out along the Grand Canal was the most prominent. Water transport was a vital means of Chinese trade in traditional times. As a main port on the Grand Canal, Suzhou was the principal point of the Canal commerce route

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<sup>40</sup> Suzhou housed the seat for prefectural government of Suzhou *fu*, and seats of three counties: Yuanhe, Wuxian and Changzhou.

for southern goods such as tribute grain to be transported to the north and for northern products to be distributed in the south.<sup>41</sup> The port, and above all Chang Gate, was central to the commercial vitality of Suzhou.

The inscription in *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations* further explains the incomparable prosperity of the Chang Gate district.

Tens of thousands of merchants gathered at Chang gate of Wu (Suzhou);  
 Crossing the sea and mountains, they come from all four directions.  
 Great mansions and traveling carriages occupy the best land;  
 With a dense population, (the city) resembles a beehive.  
 Embroidery chambers and red tiles are decorated with damasks;  
 Flower stands and willow streets are filled with songs and music.  
 Steeds and painted boats are coming and going;  
 Like comb teeth and fish scales, a multitude of trades congregate.  
 With no difference from Bianjing (Kaifeng) of the Song dynasty;  
 Wuzhong (Suzhou) has the most famous sights in the universe.  
 The golden city is forever fortified (so that) people are living in peace;  
 Abundant produce in the age of peace and tranquility acclaims good governance.

萬商雲集在吳閶，  
 航海梯山來四方。  
 棟宇輦飛連甲第，  
 居人稠密類蜂房。  
 繡閣朱甍雜綺羅，  
 花棚柳市擁笙歌。

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<sup>41</sup> A discussion of Suzhou's importance in the Grand Canal based commerce see Linda Cooke Johnson, "The Decline of Soochow and Rise of Shanghai: A Study in the Economic Morphology of Urban Change, 1756-1894," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Santa Cruz, 1986), pp. 64-6.

高駟畫舫頻來往，  
 櫛比如鯪貿易多。  
 不異當年宋汴京，  
 吳中名勝冠瀛寰。  
 金城永固民安堵，  
 物阜時康頌太平。

In this statement, Suzhou is on a par with the capital city Kaifeng of the Northern Song dynasty. The same description of the full flourish Suzhou was also repeated in the local gazetteer.<sup>42</sup> Print artists not only used literary references to evoke a sense of similarity between Suzhou and Kaifeng, but also drew on the pictorial vocabulary of the famous *Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖 and its various imitations that made the ancient capital visually prominent throughout history. Perhaps the idea of cityscape representation, the way the bridge and the wall is drawn, and more interestingly the motif of tightrope walking all suggests pictorial borrowings.<sup>43</sup> Although tightrope walking does not appear in the original painting, it would be repeated in later versions, suggesting the close connection between the performance and urban setting. In Suzhou, tightrope walking was performed to celebrate special occasions, especially the New Year festival.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the incorporation of the tightrope walking motif in the image of Chang Gate not only shows urban prosperity concentrated at the district around Chang Gate but also compares the mood of festivity to the joy of the New Year celebration.

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<sup>42</sup> Jiang Shunjiao and Ye Changyang eds., *Wuxian zhi* (Qianlong), vol.8, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> As discussed above Suzhou had a prosperous fake painting market near Shantang and Taohuawu known as *Suzhou pian*, where *Qingming shanghe tu* was one of the most popular artworks frequently copied and remade. Many of the *Suzhou pian* copies were claimed to be works by Qiu Ying.

<sup>44</sup> Gu Lu, “Xinnian,” in *Qing jia lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), p. 43.



Both textual and pictorial references draw an analogy between the regional city of Suzhou and the Northern Song capital city Kaifeng. Even the contemporary capital Beijing, according to a written record of the day, could not compete with Suzhou in commercial prosperity.<sup>45</sup> As the inscription states, guest merchants from all over the country and especially those who conducted trade at the port near Chang Gate helped establish the fame of the gate and above all Suzhou as the most prosperous and famous place “in the universe”. In connecting merchants and trades with Chang Gate and the overall prosperity of Suzhou, print artists created a pictorial ideal of urban abundance, metaphorically not so much different from the rustic ideal created by and for their literati counterparts. Visualizing a commercial site of economic significance shows a kind of confidence in the role that merchants and trade played in making the city as it was and as it was represented. They created an urban ideal that was built, celebrated, and desired by an audience who were not economic elites who followed or imitated the rustic ideal of the literati elite, but more likely the middle class merchants and urban residents situated between the extremely wealthy and the poor and who themselves contributed to creating the city and its representations. As the title “three hundred and sixty trades and occupations” (every walk of life) suggests, the prints represent and appreciate all trades and occupations of Suzhou, which were themselves creators and consumers of the commercial culture sharing the prosperity of Chang Gate district. As a matter of fact, more than half of the population residing near Chang Gate consisted of non-native merchants and traders,<sup>46</sup> as a result, many merchant *huiguan* including the Tongwang and Ningbo were built around the Chang Gate.<sup>47</sup> Establishing the status of Chang Gate as the upmost landmark in the

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<sup>45</sup> Sun Jiajin, *Nanyou ji*, cite in Fan 1998, p.145.

<sup>46</sup> Jiang Shunjiao and Ye Changyang, *Wuxian zhi*, vol. 8, 1a.

<sup>47</sup> Fan 1998, pp. 286-95.

commercial landscape of Suzhou, and centralizing it in the pictorial configuration of the city, the prints *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations* and *Chang Gate of Gusu* were likely targeting those guest merchants, both the itinerant and resident traders, and their organizations in the Chang Gate area, addressing their principle role in making urban prosperity.

Although Chang Gate had a history over centuries, it was not classified as a “famous sight” or “historic site” in literati discourse, and so made little appearance in traditional topographic/landscape paintings. Even the Ming depictions emphasized the lyric theme of the daybreak scene. A third Gusu print titled *The Historic Site of Jinchang* (*Jinchang guji* 金閶古蹟, figure 1.4) transformed Chang Gate into a *guji* or historic site. By referring to something as a *guji*, one means to define it as a culturally and historically important site or artifact. As recorded in a local gazetteer, the only historic site and scenic spot near Chang Gate is the Jinchang Pavilion, originally built during the Han dynasty, and with which the print artist Ding Lianxian (active late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century) and his studio were associated.<sup>48</sup> The print, however, substitutes Jinchang Pavilion with the bustling street markets and waterways near Chang Gate and thus seems to suggest that the commercial site played the same, if not a more significant role in the cultural landscape of Suzhou.

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<sup>48</sup> The Jinchang Pavilion no longer existed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Li Mingwan and Feng Guifen eds, *Suzhou fu zhi* (1883) (reprint, Taipei: Chengwen, 1970), p.104. Ding Lianxian and his family studio were active during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century and were specialized in birds and flowers printmaking, and appear to have been associated with Jinchang Pavilion as evidenced by the signature “Ding Family of Jinchang Pavilion.” Many of the print works of the Ding family are now in the British Museum collection.

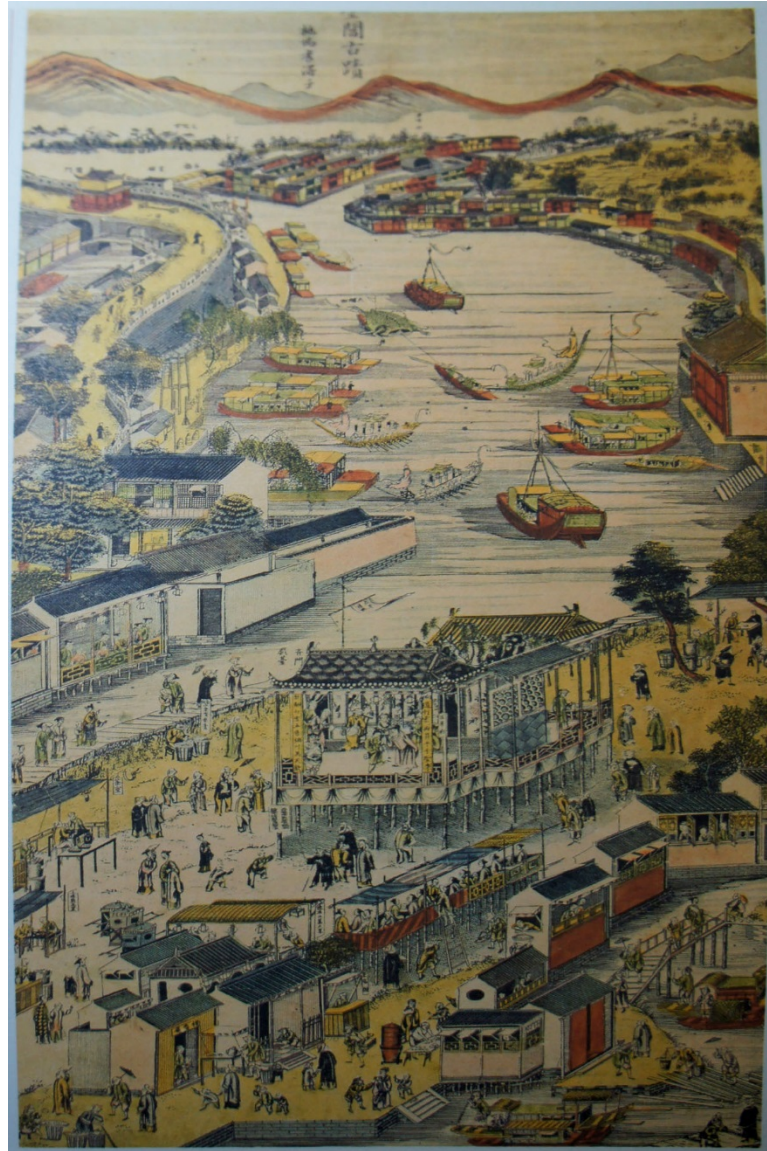


Figure 1.4 Anonymous, *The Historic Site of Jinchang*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 99x51.9 cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 123.

As the Chang Gate appears in the top left corner of the image, the viewer could identify the scene as the Beihao area located along the moat to the north of the Chang Gate. Beihao, along with Nanhao as well as Shantang and Xiatang, were already famous markets in Suzhou by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup> The middle ground depicts the dragon-boat race, suggesting that the print depicts the

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<sup>49</sup> Marme 2005, p. 32.

celebration of the Dragon Boat Festival in the fifth month, when dragon boats could be found in rivers near Chang Gate, Xu Gate and Feng Bridge.<sup>50</sup>

At the center of the composition is a theatre. While plays were performed in various festival occasions in Suzhou,<sup>51</sup> however, during the fifth month, the most prominent spectacle was the theatrical performance organized by merchant *huiguan* for the worshipping of Guandi, the god of wealth.<sup>52</sup>

The 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month is the birthday of Guandi.... Merchants from other provinces established Guandi shrines in the west of the city, where native and guest merchants hold business meetings. The buildings are magnificent and known as *huiguan*. Before the 13<sup>th</sup> day, they already conducted sacrifices of livestock, and organized theatrical performance. Tens of thousands of luxurious lamps were put up. All are done for serious worship.<sup>53</sup>

The theatre at the center of the print therefore represents the religious practice associated with the cult of Guandi among guest merchants and their *huiguan* settled near Chang Gate. Making social practices of resident merchants near the Chang Gate as the content of the “*guji*” of Jinchang, the print acknowledges the cultural contribution of the merchants to local society. Chang Gate, therefore, is now more than an economic landmark, but a cultural symbol as well. Associated with the Chang Gate, the merchants and the print consumers created a shared identity that traversed birthplaces. From a port “visible” at daybreak in the discourse of literati representations of the site to a “*guji*” of commercial and cultural significance, Chang Gate was re-created in resonance with

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<sup>50</sup> Gu Lu, *Qing jia lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Gu Lu, p.54.

<sup>52</sup> On the Guandi cult see C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1961), pp. 76-80; Prasenjit Duara, “Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (1988): 778-795.

<sup>53</sup> Gu Lu, pp. 116-7.

a urban culture that boasts its commercial prosperity and cultural openness, in which foreign techniques were employed, economic activities were emphasized, and literati styles were deprived from its dominance in site representations.

## **2.2 Stone Lake**

In addition to elevating the commercial site to the status of a “historic/famous site”, print artists also pictorially redefined the conventional “famous/scenic sites” by connecting it with commercial space. A collage style of representation was deployed in re-defining the old scenic sites. *Stone Lake of Gusu* (figure 1.5), for example, portrays the beautiful scenic spots around Stone Lake with topographical features of mountain, river, bridge, pavilion and temple in the middle and upper planes, while the prosperous market scene at Chang Gate is portrayed in the lower plane at the foreground.

Stone Lake is situated in the southeast of Suzhou and is a tributary of Lake Tai. It was famous for its natural beauty and more importantly its cultural association with famous personalities from the past.<sup>54</sup> The Stone Lake area includes a series of scenic spots and historic buildings. Famous scenic spots include the long nine-arched Xingchun Bridge 行春橋, Mount Shangfang (previously Mount Lengqie 楞伽山, a ridge running along the western flank of Stone Lake), and the Lengqie Pagoda 楞伽塔 atop Mount Shangfang. Prominent historic buildings feature the Mountain Villa at Stone Lake (Shihu shanzhuang 石湖山庄) built by the renowned scholar-official Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193) of the Song dynasty (960-1279), where he composed much of his greatest poetry, as well as the Thatched Hut at Stone Lake (*Shihu caotang*

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<sup>54</sup> J. D. Schmidt, *Stone Lake: The Poetry of Fan Chengda (1126–1193)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

石湖草堂, 1522), where Wen Zhengming and his literati friends frequented and held literary gatherings.



Figure 1.5, Genyan shi, *Stone Lake of Gusu*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 71x53cm, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 124.



Stone Lake had become a place of resort since at least the Southern Song period and frequently appeared in literary and pictorial representations since the mid-Ming.<sup>55</sup> The conventional image of Stone Lake is a diagonal composition portraying a wide sheet of water framed by bridges (the Xinchun Bridge and the Yue Bridge) to the horizon at bottom and wooded hills (Mount Shangfang) in the background on the right. The scenery is of tranquil nature. Figures, boats and simple houses are reduced to the minimum. Many great artists of the Ming including Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin, Shen Zhou, Lu Zhi, Zhang Hong, and Yuan Shangtong painted Stone Lake.<sup>56</sup> Lu Zhi's (1496-1576) *View of Stone Lake* (dated 1558, ink and color on paper, 29.7x 95.1 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston),<sup>57</sup> for example, follows the pattern with a diagonal composition. Directed by the movement of the sailboats, the viewer starts the journey from the upper right to the foreground, where cottages under willow trees and the Yue Bridge can be seen. Unrolling the scroll further, the lake broadens, and the Xingchun Bridge appears in parallel with the Yue Bridge in distance, reaching across the remaining of the length of the scroll. Boats and figures, either walking or occupying the boats alone and in pairs, are leisurely enjoying the scenery. The application of ink and color is sparse. Light colors and neat lines add to the tranquil mood of the

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<sup>55</sup> On literary representation of Stone Lake see for example, Wang Chong, *Eight Poems on Stone Lake*, dated 1527, fan mounted as an album leaf, framed; ink on paper, 19.1 × 53.3 cm. The eight poems celebrate the beauty of Stone Lake. The poems were originally written to accompany Lu Zhi's painting of Stone Lake. The work can be viewed online from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (<http://metmuseum.org/exhibitions/view?exhibitionId=%7B432572F9-1955-42FA-95D5-0E66F6FC9127%7D&oid=633300>).

<sup>56</sup> Wen Zhengming, *Stone Lake*; Tang Yin, *Xingchun Bridge* (Palace Museum of Beijing); Shen Zhou, *Scenic Sites of Wu* (Nelson-Atkins Museum); Zhang Hong, *Stone Lake*, leaf from *Twelve Views of Sutai* (Shanghai Museum); Yuan Shangtong, *Stone Lake*, leaf from *Twelve Views of Sutai*.

<sup>57</sup> An introduction of Lu Zhi and his *View of Stone Lake* is in Kojiro Tomita and A. Kaiming Chiu, "Shih Hu (Stone Lake): A Chinese Scroll Painting by Lu Chih (1496-1576)," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Vol. 49, No. 276 (1951), pp. 34-39.

scenery, making it an ideal retreat away from the mundane world and a perfect spot for the literati to live a reclusive life while pursuing cultural and moral cultivation.

Pictorial language dramatically changed in printed images of Tiger Hill in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *Stone Lake of Gusu* at first appearance maintains the classic motif- with the depiction of bridges across the lake, which is dotted with sailboats, buildings at shore and mountains in the background- in the upper plane. However a close examination shows the shift in the point of view that resulted in the shift in composition in which the two bridges are placed at the same side on the right and Mount Shanghai is reduced at the top, so the lake occupies the whole middle plane. The villa complex replaces the simple cottage houses under willow trees. Common tourists are in place of the scholars at leisure. The tranquil scenery is further broken with the incorporation of the business commercial district, marked as “Chang Gate scene 閶門景” in the foreground. This new composition had a double function- “commercializing” the historical/ scenic site Stone Lake as well as “culturalizing” the commercial site Chang Gate. Commerce and culture are combined to convey the message that merchants and mercantile activities played a role that was as important as that of the cultural elites in making Suzhou’s prosperity. In addition to inserting bustling commercial scenes into the conventional rendering of old scenic spots, print artists also introduced new sites while appropriating traditional subjects and motifs.

### **2.3 Tiger Hill**

In conventional renderings of Tiger Hill, it is either represented in its entire mountainscape in a vast landscape seen from above or in the view of several topographical sections, notably the Tiger Hill Pagoda (aka Yunyan Pagoda 雲岩塔) and Thousand Man Rock (*Qianren shi* 千人石). In their renditions of Tiger Hill by Yuan Shangdong and Zhang Hong, for example, the artists



present a frontal view of Tiger Hill featuring a large monastery complex, two flat stones, waterfall and a pagoda. The viewer is directed to move from the foot up toward the summit of the Tiger Hill reaching the climax at the pagoda. A particularly popular custom associated with Tiger Hill is to enjoy full moon on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, so “night moon over Tiger Hill (*Huqiu yeyue* 虎丘夜月)” was a popular theme in pictorial representations of the site including Yuan’s and Zhang’s. Indeed, seasonal and climatic references in site paintings were a common strategy to evoke imagination about the site, such as the above-mentioned “mists and rain”, “daybreak” and the like.

Print artists adapted the literati subject of festival activity but introduced a new site at the eastern foot of Tiger Hill, where the Puji Bridge is located and at which to enjoy the night moon on the mid-Autumn day. Entitled as *Night Moon over Puji Bridge at Shantang on the Mid-Autumn Festival* (*Shantang Puji qiao zhongqiu yeyue* 山塘普濟橋中秋夜月) (figure 1.6), the print appropriated the classic imagery of mid-Autumn festival celebration without actually depicting the traditional topographic elements associated with the imagination and practice. Despite that the foreground scene depicting several people looking at the reflection of moon in the river on the Puji Bridge and at the bank of Shantang canal, as well as a luxurious “painted boat” (*huafang*) roaming the surface of the water, Tiger Hill and the temple complex along the ridge in the background are diminishing, and the conventional marker of the site, the Tiger Hill pagoda, is not shown at all. Puji Bridge was a traffic convenience crossing the Shantang Canal, but had never been elevated to the status of a “famous site” as Tiger Hill. What the print artists intended to emphasize is the building complex, from which the bridge derived its name, at the center of the image.



Figure 1.6 Taowu Xingtaozi 桃塢杏濤子, *Puji Bridge at Shantang on the Mid-Autumn Festival*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print with hand-color on paper, 103.9x55.7, Kobe Museum, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (2011), 120.

This building complex at the center of the composition should be the Puji Hall (Puji tang 普濟堂), a charitable organization erected in 1710 by local gentry Chen Mingzhi 陳明智, Gu Rulong 顧如龍 and others, who, following the example of Puji tang in Beijing, collected private

donations for the construction.<sup>58</sup> It was originally built to help the sick and desperate non-natives in Suzhou, especially traveling merchants and traders, who were rejected by the merchant *huiguan*, as well as the local poor who were unable or unwilling to enter the state-run Yangji yuan 養濟院, especially during time of famine and other natural and social disturbances.<sup>59</sup>

Targeting primarily the non-native merchants and traders, Puji Hall and its operation reflected the dark side of the commercialized economy from the Ming onward. While economic elites could rely on political connections and wealth, the middle class businessmen had to navigate through a dangerous environment, battling with a conservative ideology that limited social mobility, increasing numbers of thieves and criminals in a corrupt world, and local governments that provided no legal protection of their business. Facing competition, these vulnerable merchants relied more on personal connections and stressed self-cultivation. According to Lufrano, these mid-level merchants were unlikely to seek help from the merchant *huiguan*, so an ethic of self-reliance and reciprocity was emphasized.<sup>60</sup> No wonder they were the initiators as well as targets of charitable organizations like Puji Hall. Moreover, as Liang Qizi has pointed out, late imperial merchants believed that commitments to philanthropy and community welfare could help accumulate moral merits, which would keep criminal elements at bay and so protect their business and personal property.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Li Mingwan and Feng Guifen eds, *Suzhou fu zhi*, 1883, 24: 578. Cited in Jr-lien Tsao, “1992, p. 107.

<sup>59</sup> Tsao 1992, pp. 108-9.

<sup>60</sup> Lufrano 1997, p. 129.

<sup>61</sup> Liang Qizi, *Shishan yu jiaohua: Ming Qing de cishan zuzhi* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1997), p.

Such beliefs encouraged merchants to engage actively in local charity. State competed with local society on the management of charitable organizations. In 1716, the Kangxi Emperor bestowed a plaque ‘Xiangyan puji’ on Puji Hall.<sup>62</sup> In 1724, the Yongzheng emperor decreed that Puji tang should be established in localities all over the empire (along with *Yuying tang* 育嬰堂, orphanage). The Board of Revenue ordered that officials be responsible for managing them, and the funds should come from both public sources and private donations, especially from merchants.<sup>63</sup> However, with the rapid growth of the poor in local society, funds from the government were insufficient to meet the needs. Local government resorted again to merchants for donations.<sup>64</sup> The history of Suzhou’s Puji Hall, therefore, reflects the dynamism of interaction between the state and local society, and more importantly the merchants’ close association with local community.

Emphatic reference to the Puji Hall in *Night Moon over Puji Bridge at Shantang on the Mid-Autumn Festival*, therefore, directs the viewer’s attention to merchants’ contribution to local society. Without directly marking the charitable organization, the print artists also avoid any possible conflicts with political authorities over the management of local charity. Appropriating the auspicious motif of moon-viewing practice, the print not only catered to the festive mood, but also proposed, however implicitly, the connection between the goodness of mercantile activities and local communal welfare. Visually constructing nobility and reputation, print artists did not stop at implicitly referencing a site/ building complex associated with merchants’ philanthropic

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<sup>62</sup> Yuan-lin Chao, *Medicine and Society in Late Imperial China: A Study of Physicians in Suzhou 1600-1850* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> Lilian M. Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 235.

<sup>64</sup> Wang Guoping and Tang Lixing eds, *Ming-Qing yilai Suzhou shehuishi beike ji* (Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 361-3.

business in local community. They also provided direct depictions of a newly erected landmark in local society.

## **2.4 Wannian Bridge**

Wannian Bridge over the city moat outside the Xu Gate of southwestern Suzhou was constructed in 1740. Its strategic position facilitated trades and business on both sides of the moat, connecting the western side of the city from the city wall through Xu Gate, shaping the Xu Gate commercial district. The Xu Gate district was second only to the Chang Gate district, as the common saying describes: “golden Chang Gate and silver Xu Gate.” The idea of constructing the bridge was originally proposed in the Kangxi period, but was rejected due to the objection of the *fengshui* masters, and was not put into effect until 1740 under prefect Wang Dexin. Construction took about seven months at the cost of ten thousand and six hundred *liang* of silver, all from private donations.<sup>65</sup> Despite controversies around its building before 1740, the bridge certainly made the life of the local people much easier. Provincial governor Xu Shilin, in his memoir, recalled the troublesome days before the bridge was erected, when over ten thousand people had to be ferried across the river every day.<sup>66</sup> The construction process and its eventual completion demonstrated the power of local corporate groups, although the eventual outcome was largely determined by the intervention of local government. The importance of Wannian Bridge for local society was clearly evidenced by the frequent appearance of the bridge in Suzhou prints. At least three prints depicting Wannian Bridge were issued within five years after its construction— one was produced in the same year of 1740, the other two were made in 1741 and 1744 respectively.

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<sup>65</sup> Xu 2000, pp. 228-36.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.231.

The 1740 print (figure 1.7) contains a foreground picture similar to that of the *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations*, depicted in perspective with the application of shades and shadow. However, it was portrayed in a more traditional aerial view in which the Wannian Bridge, though located at the upper part in distance, did not appear smaller in proportion. Architecture on both sides of the river also looked similar in size. Produced immediately after the construction, the print was probably made to commemorate the completion of the grand project. Therefore, the linear perspective that would proportionately reduce the size of the bridge in the middle ground was not universally adopted. Instead, perspective was selectively applied, especially in depicting details of the bridge including the guardrails with decorations, the memorial archway and even the stone steps. Not surprisingly, the inscriptions on the stone seat and archway steles were clearly recorded: “Wannian Bridge was constructed by Suzhou prefecture on the auspicious day of *gengshen* year”; “A new key was added to the water surface; projecting at the heart was still the old bridge”; “The best bridge in the Wu region”; “Auspicious clouds and fine mists embraced the Han River; Imperial bounty was vastly spread to all corners of the country.” These inscriptions appear as official steles praising the state and its agents for such magnificent achievements.

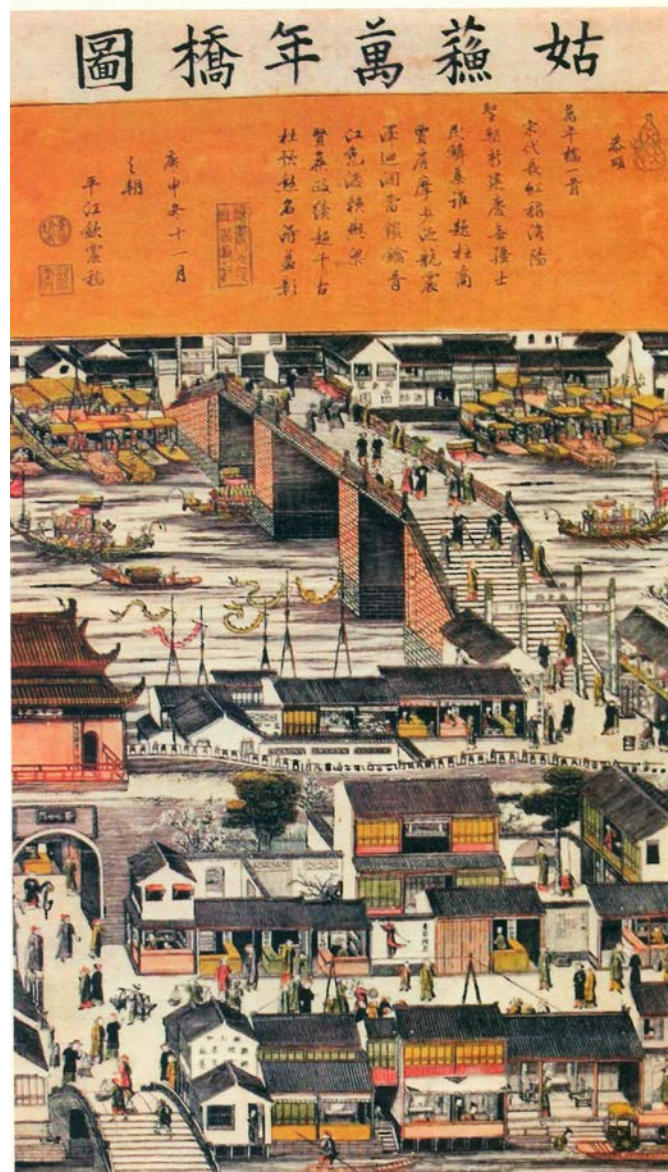


Figure 1.7 Pingjiang qinzhen, *Gusu Wannian Bridge*, 1740, woodblock print, 82.3x53.5cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (2011), 118.

The 1741 print (figure 1.8) executed with stricter linear perspective presented the Wannian Bridge as a political stage, where an official inspection tour was highlighted at the center of the Bridge and the core of the picture. The diagonal composition made the impression that the official tour that lasted from the Xu gate at the bottom of the print image through the bridge to the other



side of Xu River at the top right of the picture was a consistent thread connecting the visual episodes in presentation. The official line occupied the whole bridge and dominated the picture. This was different from the 1740 one in which officials occasionally appeared and always scattered among various commoners, as they were in the *Three Hundred and Sixty Trades and Occupations* print.

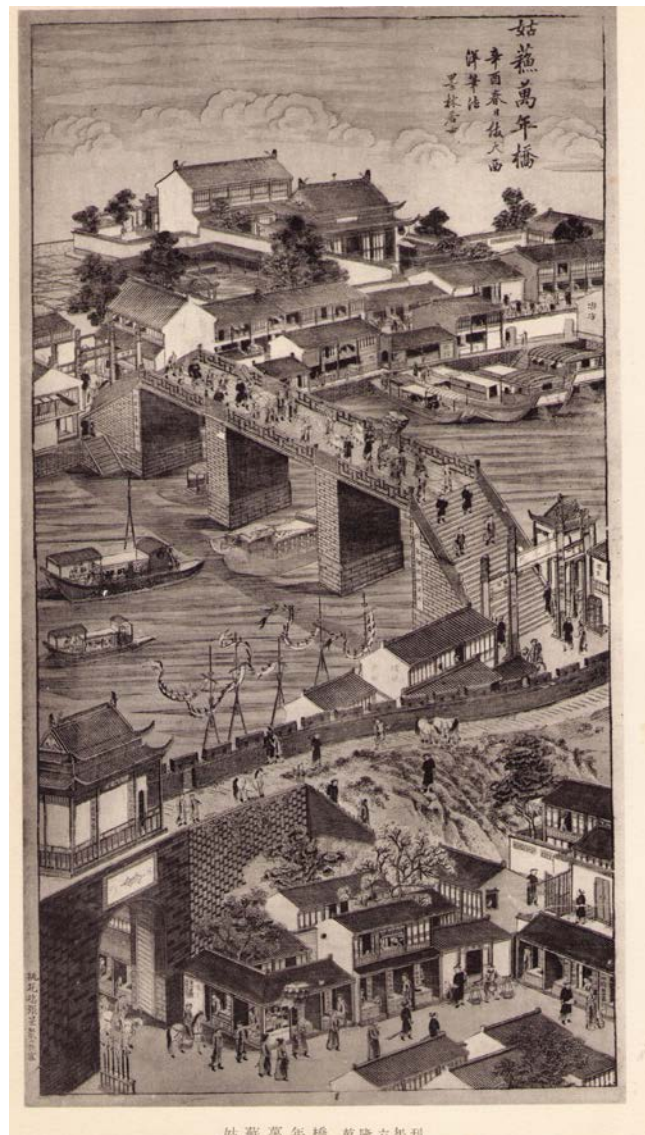


Figure 1.8 Anonymous, *Wannian Bridge*, 1741, woodblock print, Japan. After Genji Kuroda and Isaburō Okada, *Shina kohanga zuroku* 支那古版畫圖錄 (Tōkyō: Bijutsu Konwakai, 1932): figure 16.



The Wannian Bridge prints complete with political imprints are suggestive of some degree of political intervention, censorship and patronage in their production. Possibly, Suzhou's merchants, who relied on governmental protection and support for their business on the one hand, and on the other hand, feared the potential official suppression derived from the ambition for economic power, would have liked to make pictures documenting political power as long as their commercial benefits were not impacted. They would not mind showcasing the official power on the bridge once the foreground space was left for exhibiting the vibrant commercial activities and market scenes. No one could determine whether the viewers would be attracted more by scenes of economic prosperity or by the image of the official tour.

Furthermore, the construction of the bridge was dependent on the donations from local philanthropists; many of them must have been Suzhou's merchants. Jiangnan merchants, especially those of Suzhou, had fame in organizing philanthropic works and participating in communal projects, like the erection of the Puji Hall and other charitable organizations in local society. Therefore, approval of the project itself entailed the affirmation of merchant contribution to the well-being of the local society. Picturing a project that involved the political and economic powers of Suzhou was not simply a market-driven act but also a display of the cooperative achievements of the merchants and the Confucian scholar-officials.

## **Conclusion**

Picturing sites, whether historical or contemporary, in popular prints was more than documentation or commemoration. It was a process of meaning-making and symbolic communication by connecting physical sites to social relations that involved interactions between commerce and art, merchants and scholar-officials, and eventually the cultural past and

consumerist present. The enthusiastic use of Western art techniques, sometimes clearly stated in the captions such as “imitating the Western brush method (*Fang taixi bifa* 仿泰西筆法)” in *Puji Bridge at Shantang on the Mid-Autumn Festival*, was due partly to their effectiveness in “realistic” depiction of buildings, bridges and streets as the organic unity of the cityscape, and partly because the curiosity about the foreign became an important driving force in art market. Shantang as a market for the sale of “Western pictures (*yanghua* 洋畫)” demonstrates the popularity of foreign techniques in the commercial art market of Suzhou. These high quality prints, compared to later Suzhou prints, targeted middle-class urban dwellers of Suzhou, who were neither the Confucian merchants as followers of literati tastes, nor the extremely poor peasants struggling for surviving. Artists developed a specific taste for urban space and monumental sites and granted their work meaning by using new techniques.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century war would almost destroy the Gusu print industry. The creative energies that allowed artists to interpret changes in local society through prints, however, continued among later generations of print artists. City people and urban life continued to be major subjects in later Suzhou and Shanghai *nianhua* representations, and meeting with the outside world in a more dramatic manner in the 19<sup>th</sup> century further contributed to the transformation of the industry in a new urban environment.

## Chapter 2 Relocation: From Suzhou to Shanghai

As discussed in the previous chapter, Suzhou's *nianhua* business reached a high degree of artistic excellence during the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the reigns of Yongzheng (1722-35) and especially Qianlong (1735-96), when Suzhou was the economic and cultural center of the Qing Empire. Targeting urban and middle-class merchants, Suzhou print artists focused on visualizing the built environment and were open to techniques that could better represent subjects that they favored. In doing so, they formed a type of pictorial cosmopolitanism. By the end of the Qianlong reign, Suzhou still occupied the top position for print production in the Lower Yangzi region, but was gradually losing its competitive edge with regard to artistic creation and print quality due to the changes in the regional geopolitical economy since the 1820s. This chapter traces the changing geopolitical economy of Jiangnan, and within that context follows the shifting location of *nianhua* production from Suzhou to Shanghai.

In so doing, this chapter adds to current scholarship on the role of “indigenous” elements and internal changes playing out in China’s early modern period. While Shanghai has been dubbed “the other China”, as Michael Marmé suggests, the same concept could be applied to Ming Suzhou, which experienced “sprouts of capitalism” arising from an ongoing and flexible urban tradition.<sup>1</sup> From the perspective of *nianhua* production, we find that the rise of Shanghai as a commercial center was built upon the cultural traditions of imperial Jiangnan cities, especially Suzhou. Where conventional discourse of Shanghai’s modernity has focused on industrialization and mechanical

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<sup>1</sup> On “the other China” see Marie-Claire Bergere, “‘The Other China’: Shanghai from 1919 to 1949” in Christopher Howe ed., *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-43. Michael Marmé, “Heaven on Earth: The Rise of Suzhou, 1127-1550” in Linda Cook Johnson ed., *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), pp. 17-45.

production,<sup>2</sup> the case of woodblock-printed *nianhua* in Shanghai provides an alternative history of “modernity”, one that was not tied to mechanization.<sup>3</sup> Building upon the Gusu print tradition, by creating and disseminating images and ideas the *nianhua* media contributed to the cultural construction of Shanghai in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the dynamic interaction between commercial printmaking and the cosmopolitan environment that laid the foundation for an ongoing and flexible *nianhua* tradition.

### 1. The Historical Context: A New Geopolitical Economy

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a dramatic restructuring of the Jiangnan urban system with the cultural and commercial core shifting to the periphery. Previous scholarship has treated that change, if not progress, as a result of the interaction between China and the West in terms of imports— materials and ideas— via Shanghai. The paradigm of “Western impact and Chinese response” has “impacted” scholarly literature on the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China so much that even scholarship that criticizes the theory is constrained by it. As a response to the Eurocentric view of world history as extensions of Western history, a China-centered approach has been adopted to look for the internal vitality of Chinese society and historical continuities between “tradition” and “modernity”.<sup>4</sup> An increasing number of historians in the past decade have convincingly demonstrated that Shanghai’s economic development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries depends much

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<sup>2</sup> On Shanghai’s print modernity based on Western mechanical production, see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004). Reed argues that Western printing technologies and industrial practices transformed traditional Chinese print culture (literary and book culture) into modern print capitalism.

<sup>3</sup> On the persistence of block printed book culture in China’s hinterland, see Cynthia J. Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the “impact-response” model and “China-centered approach” is in Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

more on internal changes in Qing society than on “Western influence”.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the Opium War, the city was not, as is often suggested, a fishing village but actually an international port.<sup>6</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the further rise of Shanghai and decline of other Jiangnan cities resulted from changes in the administration of the salt monopoly in the Liang-huai region of northern Jiangsu,<sup>7</sup> and a shift in grain transport from the Grand Canal- and Yangzi River-based transportation networks to a sea transport system that involved Shanghai as the transshipment port.

Before Shanghai there was Suzhou. Late imperial Suzhou, as Marme has pointed out, was a “hegemonic center” of a “world system” that stood as both “regional metropolis that integrated (and dominated) its macro-region” and “the focus of a loosely coupled urban system that transcended the boundaries” of its region.<sup>8</sup> Suzhou owed its centrality in the Lower Yangzi region and beyond to excellent transportation and communication facilities. The Grand Canal was the artery of this network that connected Jiangnan commercial centers with the political center in the North. The Yangzi River was the second important route that connected Suzhou with the grain producing and

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<sup>5</sup> On trade organizations and their cross-regional networks see Bryna Goodman, *Native place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); on the city’s underground world see Brian G. Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang: politics and organized crime, 1919-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); on Shanghai’s police system, see Frederic Wakeman, *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937-1941* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); on ordinary urban dwellers and their neighborhoods see Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: everyday Shanghai in the early twentieth century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Linda Cook Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Tomas A. Metzger, “The Organizational Capabilities of the Ch’ing State in the Field of Commerce: the Liang-huai Salt Monopoly, 1740–1840,” W. E. Willmott, ed., *Economic Organization in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp.9-45. See also Ping-ti Ho, “The Salt Merchants of Yang-Chou: A Study of Commercial Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1/2 (Jun., 1954), pp. 130-168.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Marme, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 3.

commercial centers in the upper and middle Yangzi. Since the Yuan dynasty, the Su-Song-Tai circuit had been subjected to an unusually high tax in the form of tribute grain to the capital. A record dated 1395 shows that Suzhou alone contributed almost one tenth of the total tax for the entire Ming Empire. The extremely high grain quota for Suzhou remained well into the Qing period.<sup>9</sup>

In the 19th century, as early as 1803, flooding had silted up the Grand Canal, causing problems for grain shipment to the North and boosting reform proposals for developing a reliable sea route. Interest in the sea transport system declined with the end of the flood, but was revived in the 1820s when a section of the Grand Canal was seriously damaged. The first use of the sea transport, from Shanghai to Tianjin, was in 1826. However, in the following year, the inland transport route was used again after repairs to the canal. By 1840, the Grand Canal was again un-navigable and the sea route was revived. For several years, shipments alternated between the canal when passable and the sea route when necessary. The situation deteriorated in 1842 after British troops waging the Opium War cut off the grain shipment at Zhenjiang, and with the subsequent designation and development of Shanghai as a treaty port, the city was increasingly recognized as the principal port for embarkation and the new home to the headquarters of the grain tribute fleet, which had previously been Suzhou.<sup>10</sup> Along with the Grain Tribute, cotton processing, papermaking and many other manufacturing industries disappeared from Suzhou. Cloth manufacturing, which had contributed greatly to Suzhou's economy

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Cook Johnson, "Shanghai: An Emerging Jiangnan Port, 1683-1840," in Linda Cook Johnson ed., *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson 1993, p. 173.

in the Ming and early Qing, was relocated to nearby Songjiang and Shanghai as well as to the southern port of Guangzhou.<sup>11</sup>

At least as significant as Western colonial activities to the restructuring of Jiangnan since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was the Christian-inspired Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), which devastated vast areas throughout south China and major Jiangnan centers of Chinese culture, including Hangzhou, Yangzhou and Suzhou, and ended all talk of reviving the Grand Canal.<sup>12</sup> The devastation transformed the once-wealthy Jiangnan into a have-not region compelled to seek charity from its traditionally poorer neighbors in Jiangbei. *Iron Tears From Jiangnan* (*Jiangnan tielei tu* 江南鐵淚圖, 1864), published by Yu Zhi 余治 (1809-74), a gentry moralist from Wuxi, is one example of a text that sought to enlist such donations. Containing 42 illustrations and texts written in both classical and vernacular Chinese the work appealed to the educated as well as the semi-educated and illiterate.<sup>13</sup> For three years from 1860 to 1863, Suzhou was under the control of the Taiping armies led by Li Xiucheng 李秀成 (1823-64), the Loyal King of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Although it was among the few places where Taiping reforms were somewhat effective, Suzhou, like other Jiangnan cities, experienced a level of devastation not seen since the Qing conquest. Many of those who were able to escape with their lives made their way to Shanghai, taking their wealth, skills and aesthetics to Shanghai where

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<sup>11</sup> Linda Cook Johnson, "The Decline of Soochow and the Rise of Shanghai: A Study in the Economic Morphology of Urban Change (1756-1894)" PhD dissertation (University of California, Santa Cruz, 1986), p. 421.

<sup>12</sup> Two recent publications on the Taiping Rebellion are Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19<sup>th</sup> Century China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> For a brief discussion of *Jiangnan tielei tu* see Tobie Meyer-Fong 2013, pp. 51-62.

the foreign concessions provided shelter. The soaring population, as well as the transfer of social and economic capital, made Shanghai the center of economic and cultural production. Nanshi, the walled Chinese city became home to a great variety of Chinese artists and artisans. There the woodblock-printed *nianhua* business found its footing, joining the prosperous commercial art market centered on the City God Temple – Yu Garden area.

## 2. Shifting Locations of *Nianhua* Production

The Taiping war had posed a serious challenge to the popular print industry in Suzhou. Military ravages killed millions including print artists and traders, destroyed print markets, workshops and tons of printing blocks. One of Suzhou's major *nianhua* markets on Shantang Street, a flourishing entertainment district and art market along the canal running from Tiger Hill in the northwest suburb to Chang Gate, was destroyed during the war and never revived. Prior to the war, Suzhou had more than fifty *nianhua* shops operated in Fengqiao, Shantang, Huqiu and Taohuawu.<sup>14</sup> *Nianhua* shops clustered at Shantang were especially famous for hand-painted *nianhua* (locally known as *huazhang* 畫張 or picture-sheets) with a great variety of subjects including religious themes such as Heavenly Official (Tianguan 天官) and Three Stars<sup>15</sup>, figures and stories, as well as landscapes, birds and flowers, and especially beautiful women. In the walled city inside the Chang Gate, block printed *nianhua* were produced in shops concentrated

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<sup>14</sup> Gu Gongshuo, "Suzhou nianhua" *Wenwu*, no. 2 (1959), p. 13; Liu Lufeng and Luo Shuzi, *Taohuawu muban nianhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1961), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> On the iconographic development of the Three Stars see Mary H. Fong, "The Iconography of the Popular Gods of Happiness, Emolument, and Longevity (Fu Lu Shou)," *Artibus Asiae* 44 (1983): 159–199.



on Taohuawu Street and around the North Temple.<sup>16</sup> However, as international and interregional trade was concentrated in Suzhou's western suburb, the fact that none of Shantang's painted *nianhua* survive, even in overseas collections, suggests that the majority of the *nianhua* in the marketplace at the time were the block printed *nianhua*.<sup>17</sup> Suzhou *nianhua* not only decorated private households, restaurants, and wine shops of local society, but also targeted an audience outside the locale. One record from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century notes that Suzhou *nianhua* were popular souvenirs for travelers coming to Suzhou from distant places.<sup>18</sup>

After the war, neither Suzhou nor its *nianhua* industry was able to regain their pre-19<sup>th</sup> century status, even after the Restoration. Only a few shops, notably Chen Tongsheng 陳同盛 and Wang Rongxing 王榮興 on Taohuawu Street resumed production on a relatively small-scale.<sup>19</sup> Many *nianhua* artists and traders who survived the war went to Shanghai where they reestablished the *nianhua* business. The relocation was not simply because Shanghai was a haven from the Taiping war, but also because Shanghai had been a part of the Suzhou *nianhua* market, perhaps one of the ports through which Gusu prints were distributed to overseas countries such as Japan and Southeast Asia. In addition to traditions of cultural consumption, proximity to source materials of paper, ink

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<sup>16</sup> Gu Lu, *Tongqiao yi zhao lu*, juan 10 (1842, reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), p. 379.

<sup>17</sup> One may argue that Japanese buyers preferred the printed *nianhua*, however, considering the deep-rooted Confucian impact on Japanese cultural production and aesthetic traditions, it stands to reason that hand-painted *nianhua* should be more valuable and collectable. Since no painted versions appear in the extensive Japanese collections, it appears that the market for painted *nianhua* was quite limited, perhaps to a small segment of the population consisting of affluent and literati families.

<sup>18</sup> Gu Lu, *Qing jia lu* (1830, reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), p. 224.

<sup>19</sup> By the 1930s before the Sino-Japanese War, only Hongyun Ge, Wang Rongxing and Wu Jingzeng on the Taohuawu Street continued producing *nianhua*, but without any new designs. See Liu Ruli and Luo Shuzi 1961, p. 5.

and wood as well as creative artists and artisans supported by a rapidly developing commercial economy, Shanghai became the perfect soil for the rebirth and revival of Suzhou's print industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Suzhou continued to be the home to several talented print artists, the creative energy of the industry was now drawn from post-Taiping Shanghai.

As early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai already had a small market for imported Suzhou *nianhua* sold by proxies, such as the Old Wenyi Zhai (Lao wenyi Zhai 老文儀齋),<sup>20</sup> near the City God Temple in the north part of the walled Chinese city. Originally dedicated to the spirit of Mount Jin, an island off the coast of Shanghai, the temple was converted into the City God Temple in 1403. During the Qing dynasty, the temple became popular among local residents and people from nearby villages and towns, reaching its peak during the Daoguang 道光 reign (1820-50). Throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, the temple was frequently expanded and renovated, but also suffered from several fires. In 1748, for example, the Qingong 寢宮 was burnt down and rebuilt by Wang Jian, then the magistrate of Shanghai. Again in 1836, the western galleries and the theatre stage were destroyed by fire, and then rebuilt by local merchants.<sup>21</sup> Consecutive fires in 1842, 1853 and 1860 sparked by British forces, the Small Sword Society and Qing forces respectively continued to threaten the temple. However, the site quickly recovered after the suppression of the mid-century rebellions, and continued to be popular. People living in and near the old walled city came to visit the temple, where collective ceremonies were held on such occasions as celebrating the birthday of the City

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<sup>20</sup> Pan Yuanshi, "Suzhou nianhua de jingkuang ji qi tuozhan," Pan Yuanshi ed., *Suzhou chuantong banhua Taiwan shoucang zhan* (Taipei: Xingzhengyuan jianshe wenhua wenyuanhui, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Huo Xueming, *Shanghai Chenghuang miao* (Shanghai: Qingchun wenxueshe, 1928), p. 4.

God and the lunar New Year festival. During these occasions the City God Temple and the surrounding environs bustled with all kinds of activities: the burning of incense, street performances, huge crowds, the noise of fire crackers, drums, gongs and the cries of food peddlers. Eventually a thriving marketplace blossomed.

The City God Temple's connection with the Yu Garden next door further expanded the market, catering to the garden visitors as well. With its cultured tradition and increasing atmosphere of commerce (guildhalls), Yu Garden began to develop as a prosperous art market that attracted a great number of artists, both commercial and traditional. It was originally constructed as a private garden by the Ming official Pan Yunduan 潘允端 (*jinshi*, 1562) on land just to the north of the county yamen to please his elderly father Pan En 潘恩 (1496-1582), the hero of the city-wall construction, and so was named Garden to Please. Started in 1559, the garden was finished in 1577, and covered some 40 *mu* of land. After Pan En's death, the garden was dedicated to his memory.<sup>22</sup> The garden later passed to different owners. During the Qing, merchants from one of the transport guilds bought the Yu Garden and donated it to the City God Temple.<sup>23</sup> Later common-trade associations renovated the courtyards and gardens and built halls and pavilions of the old Yu Garden and the East and West Gardens of the City God Temple.<sup>24</sup> The original structure of the garden was almost destroyed during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century wars. In 1868, the West Garden was assigned to some trade guilds, and each guild was responsible for collecting money to restore the area they occupied. Teahouses

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<sup>22</sup> Linda Cook Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson 1995, p. 122.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

and wine shops began to appear and commercial activities rapidly increased in this area. The land in the southwest of the lotus pond held regular temple fairs, attracting street performers, wandering showmen and vendors of various products. By 1875 more than 20 guildhalls such as the soybean-rice guild, sugar guild, and cloth guild had been established at Yu Garden. According to a contemporary account, teahouses and shops had been gradually established in the West Garden, which was becoming a market place that gathered various walks of life – fortunetellers, scholars, street-performers and the like, so the author lamented that “the atmosphere (of Yu Garden) was totally changed (to one characteristic of the vulgar).”<sup>25</sup>

It was in the context of the commercial prosperity associated with the City God Temple and Yu Garden that print shops increased in number and formed a specialized market. The *nianhua* market in Shanghai, however, only began to boom after the Taiping Rebellion following the dislocation of Suzhou’s print artists and business operators to the Old Parade Ground to the west of the City God Temple. The Old Parade Ground was constructed in 1514 of the Ming dynasty under the tutelage of the Shanghai magistrate Huang Xiying 黃希英 (*jinshi*, 1505). It was discarded during the Qing when the Kangxi Emperor (r.1661-1722) ordered the construction of a new and larger Parade Ground on the southeastern side between Jiangyin Street and Lujiabang Road of the city. Therefore, the old one was out of official use, and was gradually occupied by shops and residential houses, and so became part of the commercial district around City God Temple.

Business and cultural connections between Suzhou and Shanghai were more complicated than one might expect, although increasingly over time Shanghai surpassed

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<sup>25</sup> Ge Yuanxu, *Huyou zaji* (1876, reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1989), p. 4.

Suzhou as the creative and wholesale center. Taohuawu print shops invited designs from artists active in Shanghai and printed them in Suzhou. Prints then would be sold in both Suzhou and Shanghai. Shanghai shops could send their designs to Suzhou where they were printed and sent back to Shanghai for sale.<sup>26</sup> Therefore the shop names on the prints do not necessarily refer to the place where the prints were actually designed or produced. Gradually, however, Shanghai became the predominant center of creative artists and innovative designs and Suzhou shops, in turn, became proxies of Shanghai *nianhua*. One Yunxiang zhai print carries the information that Shanghai became a wholesale center of *nianhua*. By the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1875-1908), dozens of *nianhua* shops operated in the City God Temple commercial district. Extant Shanghai *nianhua* of the time have left us records of 39 shops.<sup>27</sup> A bamboo branch ballad (*zhuzhi ci* 竹枝詞) written in 1906 gives a good description of the busy *nianhua* market in Shanghai: “(Nianhua shops are) lined up making pictures as if fighting a battle, parading horsemanship and swordsmanship. Visitors are often attracted, buying several pictures to entertain children.” (密排爭戰畫圖張，鞍馬刀槍各逞強。引得遊人多注目，買歸數紙慰兒郎。)<sup>28</sup>

The rise of local *nianhua* production in Shanghai owed much to Suzhou's print traditions and more importantly the creativity of print artists – among others, Wu Youru 吳友如 (1840?- 94?) and his colleagues Zhou Muqiao 周暮橋 (1868-1923) and Zhang

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<sup>26</sup> Ge 1989, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> For the record of print shops and art shops in Shanghai during the Qing, see Zhang Wei 張偉, “Shanghai xiaojiaochang nianhua de lishi yanbian 上海小校場年畫的歷史演變,” Feng Jicai 馮驥才 and Zhang Wei eds., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: xiaojiaochang juan* 中國木版年畫集成：小校場卷, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), pp. 11-3.

<sup>28</sup> Yi'an zhuren 頤安主人, “Tiemai huazhang 貼賣畫張,” in *Hujiang shangye shijing ci* 滬江商業市景詞, juan 4, cited in Gu Bingquan, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhi ci* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996), p.180.

Zhiying 張志瀛 – who were Suzhou natives but made their living in post-Taiping Shanghai as commercial artists engaging in news illustrations and advertising images. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century military havoc redrew the geography of the Jiangnan region, giving rise to Shanghai as the most prominent center producing a rich amalgam of regional Chinese cultures. Meng Yue has pointed out that traditional Jiangnan urban centers such as Hangzhou, Yangzhou and Suzhou played a significant role by providing models for cultural production.<sup>29</sup> Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with the shifting locations of *nianhua* production from the classic regional center Suzhou to the new treaty port Shanghai at the periphery, the traditional print business was given a second life in the new urban environment. That environment, however, would also drain the creativity of the *nianhua* industry as talented print artists were eventually attracted to the prosperity and technology of the commercial art market, where they made illustrations for periodicals, popular fiction and advertising posters. Having deprived the previous *nianhua* center of its talent, the Shanghai *nianhua* market would be deprived of its talents by the developing market for lithographs and “modern beauty” calendar posters (*yuefenpai*) in the 1920s.

### 3. Shanghai as the Center of Convergence Culture and *Nianhua* Production

Aside from the dislocation of the Suzhou print industry, Shanghai had its technological and artistic advantages in furthering the development of its local *nianhua* business. The introduction of lithographic printing technology into China by 1876 played an important role in promoting the development of the printing industry and in particular

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<sup>29</sup> On the transfer of elite cultural and intellectual production from traditional Jiangnan cities to Shanghai see Meng Yue, *Shanghai at the Edges of Empire* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

its graphic component.<sup>30</sup> The photo-lithographic process, which allowed rapid reproduction of images that were said to be more faithful to the original paintings, changed the way in which illustrations were consumed by China's emerging mass culture.<sup>31</sup> Focusing on the book publishing industry, Christopher Reed contends that the evolving traditional "literary culture of China" actively and selectively interacted with "Western mechanized industry" to create a unique form of Chinese print culture that was neither mere cultural continuity nor Western import.<sup>32</sup> In his discussion of painting and publishing in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, Jonathan Hay further notes that the advantages of lithography encouraged the active participation of Chinese painters in the publishing industry of Shanghai, especially in pictorial press, advertising images, literary illustration and art books.<sup>33</sup>

Because the new print technology was not universally available during the early stages of print industrialization, woodblock illustration continued to be an influential force at least into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> Ignorance of color lithography continued in China until 1906 when Wenming Book Company and later Commercial Press invited

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<sup>30</sup> Shanghai's Tushanwan Printing Office in Xujiahui run by Jesuits was among the first to use lithographic printing in China. According to Christopher Reed, Guangzhou's Xu Ya'ang (active 1810s-1840s) was the first to operate a lithographic print shop in China around 1832, and in 1850, Ningbo's APMP acquired a lithographic press. And Tushanwan print shop began to use lithographic printing in 1876. See Reed 2004, pp. 61-2.

<sup>31</sup> On the role of novels and newspapers in shaping China's mass culture in late Qing and early Republican see Leo ou-fan Lee and Andrew J. Nathan, "The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journalism and Fiction in Late Ch'ing and Beyond," in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 360-95.

<sup>32</sup> Reed 2004, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Hay, "Painters and Publishing in Late Nineteenth Century Shanghai," *Phoebus* 8 (1998): 134-188.

<sup>34</sup> Few Chinese knew the operation of the new printing technology in Shanghai. The only Chinese technician of lithographic printing by the 1880s was Qiu Zi'ang who firstly worked for the missionary established Tushanwan publishing house and then was employed by Major to work in his printing company.

Japanese technicians to work in Shanghai using color lithography to reproduce Chinese “paintings”.<sup>35</sup> This fact also explains why traditional woodblock printing maintained an important role in image-production in Shanghai prior to and during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the cultural tradition associated with woodblock illustration as a medium for the dissemination of knowledge, ideas and artistic aspiration, and its ability to effectively display the artisanal printmaking craftsmanship contributed to continuing popularity.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the portability and simplicity of woodblock printing allowed children and women to be involved in the process, thus extending the viability of the industry.<sup>37</sup> With an evolving Chinese popular print culture and the imported pictorial knowledge and techniques, Chinese print artists created a unique hybrid form of *nianhua* culture that was flexible, evolving and cosmopolitan.

### 3.1 Missionary Pictorial Press and Journalistic Illustrations

European illustrations began to be introduced to China since as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Jesuits under Matteo Ricci (1552-1660), who brought Western arts and illustrated materials to Chinese emperors and local gentry for the purpose of evangelical proselytism. Some of the images even found their way into Chinese publications. An

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<sup>35</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p.56.

<sup>36</sup> The earliest extant woodblock illustration was the frontispiece for *Diamond Sutra* made in 861. Most of the Tang woodblock prints illustrated religious themes. By the Ming dynasty, with the development three-colored printing techniques, a great variety of subjects were to be included in woodblock prints.

<sup>37</sup> Yangliuqing *nianhua* industry is said to have women and children involved as printers and colorists. See James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art and Print Culture in Rural North China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p.18. Flath notes that in north China woodblock printing remained economically viable into the late-1920s, and even 1930s. On woodblock printing of books, the *Shunde County Gazetteer* of 1853 notes that block cutting requires little training, techniques and even literacy that “women and children could all do it.” See Cynthia Brokaw, “Commercial Woodblock Publishing in the Qing (1642-1911) and the Transition to Modern Print Technology,” in Christopher Reed and Cynthia Brokaw eds., *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, circa 1800 to 2008* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 42.



often-cited example is a set of four Christian images that were reproduced (accommodated) in the Chinese ink design book *Mr. Cheng's Ink Garden* (*Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑, 1606). The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the circulation of European prints of landscapes and scenic spots in China that even influenced the Chinese depiction of landscapes.<sup>38</sup> However, it was during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that foreign illustrations began to be mass produced through print media, firstly as by-products of missionary educational activities, then appropriated by the Qing state in its effort to translate technical and scientific works as part of the Self-Strengthening Movement.<sup>39</sup>

From the 1860s onward, missionary institutions accommodated the Chinese wish to acquire Western science and technology, publishing Chinese-language religious pictorials alongside translated Western technical and scientific works. Many missionaries were themselves scientifically curious “natural historians”, and others were medical missionaries, using technology and science as part of their proselytizing. *Jiaohui Xinbao* (*Church News*, 1868-74), for example, was one of the earliest illustrated periodicals published by missionaries in Shanghai. According to Adrian Bennett:

In the first two volumes, especially, [Young J.] Allen supplied his readers with pictures of many animals and plants, as well as illustrations of biblical passages. In later volumes, scientific illustrations appeared more frequently on such subjects

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<sup>38</sup> Though lacking direct evidence, James Cahill argues from circumstantial evidence that novel motifs, compositional types and representational techniques appeared in paintings of Chinese landscape paintings at the same time when European prints that became accessible to Chinese. See James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p15. On Western arts and their influences in China during the Ming-Qing time, see Mayching Kao, “European Influences in Chinese Art,” in Thomas H.C. Lee, *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), pp. 251-303.

<sup>39</sup> Adrian A. Bennett, *John Fryer and the Introduction of Western Science and Technology into Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

as the universe, trains, mining techniques, and the physiology of the human body.<sup>40</sup>

In an announcement for the publication of *Gezhi Huibian* (*The Chinese Scientific and Industrial Magazine*, 1876-77, 1879-81, 1890-91) of 1875, John Fryer wrote, “the magazine will contain as many illustrations and engravings as can be procured.”<sup>41</sup> Most of the illustrations of these early publications were made from engraved plates donated by foreign publishers.<sup>42</sup>

The first true illustrated newspaper that focused on illustrations published in China was *Yinghuan huabao* 瀛寰画报 (*Worldwide Illustrated News*), which appeared irregularly for five issues between 1877 and 1880, with all the illustrations supplied by British illustrators and Chinese texts added in Shanghai. Chinese artists were not involved in news illustrations until 1884 when the first true Chinese pictorial journal, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報, 1884-98) was published as a supplement to *Shenbao* (*Shanghai News*, 1872-1949) founded by the British merchant Ernst Major (1841-1908), using photo-lithography.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary material life and current affairs became subjects of representation at the hands of a team of specialist illustrators. They adopted elements of Western pictorial techniques combined with Chinese brushwork traditions to create a hybrid form of representation. Following early

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<sup>40</sup> Adrian A. Bennett, *Missionary Journalists in China: Young J. Allen and His Magazines, 1860-1883* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Bennett 1967, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Ji Shaofu, *Zhongguo chuban jianshi* (Shanghai: Xuelin, 1991), p. 332.

<sup>43</sup> For an introduction of the *Dianshizhai Huabao*, see Xiaoqing Ye, *Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2003).

missionary publications, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* also included reproductions of illustrations from Western prints, while also including traditional “paintings” and pictorial storytelling that gave it a complex and innovative character.

Formal knowledge about Western drawing was spread through translated art books and art education. Drawing manuals such as *Lunhua qianshuo* 論畫淺說 (*Introductory Remarks on Drawing*) and *Huaxing tushuo* 畫形圖說 (*Aids to Model Drawing*, by F. Calmady Richardson) were published under the missionary auspices,<sup>44</sup> which supplemented the drawing classes, woodcarving and printing crafts taught at Tushanwan workshops under Liu Bizhen 劉必振 (1843-1912) by a staff of both Western and Chinese artists. In addition to religious images, Western secular illustrations were also copied in classes. Mayching Kao argues that the art studio of Tushanwan was perhaps the first institution in China to provide training in Western art on a systematic basis.<sup>45</sup> Although there is no evidence of a direct link between the first generation of China’s news illustrators such as those on the staff of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and the Tushanwan painting studio, there is no doubt that Chinese artists had access to Western pictorial arts and art theories thanks to the commercial publishing industry. With the increasing importance of the pictorial component in the publishing industry in Shanghai, traditional woodblock artists also supported and perhaps were forced to participate in the trans-media dialogue with artists from various kinds of image production system, from journalistic illustration to pictorial advertising.

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<sup>44</sup> Hay 1998, p. 137.

<sup>45</sup> Mayching Kao, “Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-style Painting Movement in China,” in Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen eds., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), p.152.

### 3.2 Wu Youru and His World of Print Artists

Wu Jiayou 吳嘉猷 (circa 1840-circa 1894, alternative name You 猷, courtesy name Youru 友如), perhaps the most prominent commercial print artist of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, was a Suzhou native who fled to Shanghai during the Taiping occupation of Suzhou (1860-1863). In Shanghai, Wu made his name as a news illustrator, initially through his employment as the chief illustrator for *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, and later as the owner of the *Feiyingge Pictorial* (*Feyingge huabao* 飞影阁画报) and *Feiyingge Album* (*Feiyingge huace* 飞影阁画册). For his contemporaries, his fame also came from his participation in a court project to paint the Qing victories over the Taiping rebels (1886). Belonging to the lower class of professional painters and artisan designers, Wu Youru and his colleagues were not recorded in mainstream art histories of the time. Little is known about Wu, aside from a few anecdotal accounts of dubious authenticity. Rudolf Wagner has painstakingly sorted through the scant evidence to reconstruct a sketch of his life dates and circumstances.<sup>46</sup> Fortunately, Wu Youru himself provided a short autobiography in 1893.

In my youth, I have been benefited from the largeness of my late father and frittered my time away playing without achieving anything. After I reached my twentieth year, I came upon the Red Bandits (Taiping) troubles (in Suzhou), and, to get out harm's way, I went to Shanghai where I took up the study of painting. Each time when I saw an original by a famous painter, my eyes, thoughts, and mind would be fixated to the point that sleep was gone and I could not eat. After delving into them for a long while it seems that I (myself, too) arrived at some insight (regarding painting). Only then I went out and made a name for myself, relying (on painting) for a living.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Rudolf G. Wagner, "Joining the Global Imaginaire," in Wagner, *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 126-31.

<sup>47</sup> Wu Youru, "Feiyingge huace xiaoqi", *Feiyingge huace* 1, (August 1893), 1, cited in Wagner 2007, p. 127.

Born in Suzhou and trained in Shanghai, Wu had not studied painting in Suzhou's *nianhua* shops, an experience that was repeated in his bibliographical sketches by his admirers such as Zheng Yimei.<sup>48</sup> Before entering into the lithographic print industry, Wu appeared to have been associated with the art world centered on Yu Garden. Several of his extant works prior to 1884 make reference to Yu Garden, including one *nianhua* design titled *Acrobatic Performance at Yu Garden* (credited to Chen Tongsheng) (figure 2.1), and a documentary painting *Banquet at Yu Garden* (*Yuyuan yanji tu* 豫園宴集圖) (figure 2.2). An oral source suggests that Wu Youru took up painting in Zhang Chenji Letter-Paper and Fan Shop (*Zhangchenji jianshan zhuang* 張臣記箋扇莊) in a small street west of the Yu Garden.<sup>49</sup> Fan shops had existed since Ming times but took on a new prominence in late Qing Shanghai and were significant in the operation of the city's art market. Fan shops became a noted Shanghai attraction and were recorded in guidebooks of the time. Ge Yuanxu's *Huyou zaji* 滬遊雜記 (1876), for example, made it clear that, by 1876, fan shops were important features of Shanghai's art world.<sup>50</sup> Aside from providing art works and stationary, they also served as agents and places of lodging and gathering for artists.<sup>51</sup> Famous fan shops in the Nanshi include the Deyue Lou,

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<sup>48</sup> Zheng Yimei, "Wu Youru he *Dianshizhai huabao*," in Zheng Yimei, *Qingyu manbi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1982), pp. 38-40.

<sup>49</sup> This information was provided by Wu Zude, whose mother's grandfather is Zhang Jinfu 張錦甫, manager of the branch store of *Zhangchenji jianshan zhuang* in the International Settlement. See Huang Ke, "Shishi fengsu huapai de fayuan," *Wenhui bao*, October, 1996. Cited in Wagner 2007, 128 and note 97, 166.

<sup>50</sup> Ge (1876) 1989, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> James Cahill, *The Painter's Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 32-70; Kuiyi Shen, "Patronage and the Beginning of a Modern Art World in Late Qing Shanghai," in Jason C. Kuo ed., *Visual Culture in Shanghai 1850s-1930s* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007),

Feiyun Ge and Lao Tongchun. A prosperous art world was developing, featuring the many fan shops centered on the Yu Garden area, where Wu Youru and other sojourning artists painted for a living.



Figure 2.1 Wu Youru, *Acrobatic Performance at Yu Garden*, accessioned 1901- 04, likely reprint of circa 1880s, woodblock print, 55x31.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A60.

*Banquet at Yu Garden* was an official commission to document the occasion on which the Shanghai Daotai Liu Ruifen 劉瑞芬 (1827-92) hosted the Prussian Prince Heinrich at a grand dinner at Yu Garden in 1880. This is the only known painting of this sort done by Wu before he officially entered the realm of news illustration in 1884. *Shenbao* reported this event in the issue of April 19, 1880:

*Guancha* (Daotai) Liu Zhitian (Liu Ruifen) and the local officials held banquets with both Chinese and Western cuisines for the Prussian Prince at Cuixiu Hall in the Yu Garden near the City God Temple. The hall was decorated with lanterns and colorful hangings. Military officials and armies were lined up at the entrance

of Yu Garden and the New Northern Gate, along with forty Huai Army soldiers and Western musicians at reception. At eleven o'clock, the prince arrived by a sedan chair with a green curtain. He was about 20 years old with a straight and impressive look. They also had guest consulates from other countries, their translators and military officers, 23 altogether, and all were riding sedan chairs. The music was followed by a warm reception.... However what exactly happened and what they talked about during the dinner cannot be reported here, as uninvited persons were not allowed in the hall.<sup>52</sup>

The inscription composed by Chen Fuxun, the judicial sub-prefect of the Mixed Court, reveals that Chen was among the guests in the banquet and he commissioned the painting. The inscription also refers to Wu Youru as a *huagong* 畫工 (artisan painter), implying that he was not recognized as a member of the mainstream Shanghai painters. Wu himself never mentioned this experience in any of his accounts, so it may not have been a pleasant experience for him, as he was not even given the privilege of signing his name on the painting. Neither did any documents by and about him record why and how he was picked to do such a painting. It may have been through personal networks, such as those that revolved around the fan shop, or it may have been Chen Fuxun's personal preference.

Wu Youru's pictorial record, however, differed from the *Shenbao* report of the same event regarding the place. In the newspaper it was Cuixiu Hall, but in Wu Youru's rendition, it was Yangshan Hall. He did more than just depict the hosts, guests and the place, but also recorded the operatic performance within the hall. Chances are that Wu's depiction was more accurate than the *Shenbao* report, as Chen Fuxun and possibly Wu himself attended the banquet. Just as the newspaper reporter indicates at the end of the report, he could not provide any details about the event as *Shenbao* journalists were "unrelated" persons so not admitted to the hall. This suggests that Wu might have been close to local political figures, perhaps serving as a *muliao* (secretary) to Chen Fuxun.

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<sup>52</sup> *Shenbao*, April 19, 1880.



Figure 2.2 Wu Youru, *Banquet at Yu Garden*, 1880, ink and color on paper, 64.7x 64.5 cm. Nanjing Museum.

At the time, even Cixi's court painters had to sell brushwork to augment their income,<sup>53</sup> so it is not surprising that Wu and most of his contemporaries had to experiment with different kinds of picture-making techniques and media. In fact, during his early years in Shanghai, Wu Youru painted a variety of subjects. The earliest extant work by Wu Youru was the hanging scroll *Picking Plum Blossoms for the New Year* (*Zhemei dusui* 折梅渡歲) (figure 2.3), dated 1864, which shows his grasp of the painting idiom of traditional Chinese literati landscapists. Another known early work by Wu was a

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<sup>53</sup> Miao Jiahui, one of Cixi's most favored court painter and ghost-painter for the Empress, is believed to have produced works for sale in the Liulichang market street in Beijing. See Ka Bo Tsang, "In Her Majesty's Service: Women Painters in China at the Court of Empress Dowager Cixi," in Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland ed., *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 43; Pan Yaochang, "Cong Suzhou dao Shanghai, cong Dianshizhai dao Feiyingge: wanQing huajia xintai guanKui," *Xin meishu*, 2 (1994), p. 66.



set of four hanging scrolls, dealing with the auspicious motif *A Hundred Children* (*Baizitu* 百子图) dated 1878, which Wagner reckoned was set in Yu Garden and served as a visual primer for young boys and their teachers.<sup>54</sup> A distinct shift in styles and contents was visible in his work in the years of 1860s-80s. Probably, Wu began his painting career by imitating literati painting but failed to compete with his fellow painters of the Shanghai School, or found it tedious and difficult to make a living by simply imitating, and so gradually shifted his focus from the cultured landscapes to the mundane world. He probably had seen and liked the Western illustrated periodicals such as the short-lived *Yinghuan huabao*. Easy access to foreign illustrations as well as art manuals and classes might also have encouraged Wu to turn to the emerging market of commercial arts focusing on material life and realistic depiction.

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<sup>54</sup> Wagner found a set of three hanging scrolls of the same topic dated 1878 in the Nanjing Museum, which I assume belong to the set of the four as the “four-paneled screen” (*si tiaoping* 四條屏), “six-paneled screen” or “eight-paneled screen” was the normal pattern. See Wagner 2007, p. 128.



Figure 2.3 Wu Youru, *Picking Plum Blossoms for the New Year*, 1864, ink and color on silk, 237×105 cm. Yachang yishupin paimai, “Zhongguo gudai shuhua,” 2006 *Qiuji yishu pin paimaihui*, fall 2006, catalogue no. 0427. (<http://auction.artron.net/paimai-art44450427/>)

With realistic detail, *Acrobatic Performance at Yu Garden* (Yuyuan baxi tu 豫園把戲圖), writes Wagner, “shows features of Wu’s later news paintings such as perspective, focus on the action in the center, and a crowd of spectators signaling the high interest of the action.” Along with *Banquet at Yu Garden* and the *nianhua* design *French Begging for Peace* (*Fanren qiu he* 法人求和, probably 1884) (Figure 2.4), as Wagner points out, “Wu Youru had an early affinity with the popular commercial print and the new urban fad of the actual, real, and sensational.”<sup>55</sup> The incorporation of journalistic

<sup>55</sup> Wagner 2007, pp. 128-9.

illustration into the *nianhua* repository gave the traditional art genre a new life that combines the old medium with new pictorial vocabulary.



Figure 2.4 Wu Youru, *French Begging for Peace*, accessioned 1901- 04, likely reprint of 1884, woodblock print, 55.5x 31.5cm, Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A48.

There is no evidence that Ernest Major had seen Wu's woodblock prints and early paintings or that Wu submitted his early works to Major for employment, although Major had advertised in *Shenbao* that he was looking for painters for his new publication a week before the launching of the pictorial.<sup>56</sup> At that time, Major must have secured Wu Youru as his illustrator, or at least acquired his illustrations for the first several issues. Earlier, in the publication of the *Yinghuan huabao*, Major had made it clear that his aesthetic preference was for Li Gongling of the Song dynasty, whose fine line drawings with great detail and likeness resemble Western illustrations.<sup>57</sup> Measuring up to Major's expectation,

<sup>56</sup> *Shenbao* May 8, 1884.

<sup>57</sup> Ge Boxi, "Huanying huabao kao," *Xinwen yu chuanbo yanjiu* no. 1 (1988), pp. 187-88.

Wu's works became a fashion in the realm of news illustration, setting the standard for his colleagues and followers.

The commercial success of the journal and the pictorial evidence must have convinced Major that Wu was his preferred artist, able to do both traditional Chinese painting and journalistic illustration in close proximity to Western style. In November 1884, Major sponsored the publication of *Illustrations of Scenic Spots of Shanghai* (*Shenjiang shengjing tu* 申江勝景圖), a pictorial city guide of a similarly journalistic character, with all illustrations supplied by Wu Youru. The Preface composed by Huang Pengjia called Wu a *huashi* 畫師 (master painter), showing his newly gained fame.<sup>58</sup> When Huang Shiquan's 黃式權 *Shadows of Dreams South of Song River* (*Songnan meng ying lu* 淞南夢影錄) was published in 1883, Wu Youru had not been recognized as a well-known painter, whose name otherwise should have been included in the section on "famous painters from outside Shanghai". Huang mentioned such painters as Ren Bonian, Qian Jisheng 錢吉生 (Qian Huian 錢慧安, 1833-1911) and Zhang Zhiying. The latter two had a strong resemblance to Wu with regards to their painting careers and genres. Like Wu Youru, Qian Jisheng, provided paintings for *nianhua* shops, although to the northern Yangliuqing of Tianjin rather than Shanghai or nearby Suzhou.<sup>59</sup> Zhang Zhiying, on the other hand, worked closely with Wu in both *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and later in Wu's own Feiyingge studio as a news illustrator. A pictorial equivalent to the popular guidebook literature of contemporary Shanghai, *Shenjiang shengjing tu* must also have been a commercial success as the images by Wu Youru were quickly imitated or pirated

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<sup>58</sup> Huang Pengjia, "Preface," *Shenjiang shengjing tu* (Shanghai: Shenbao guan, 1884), p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo nianhua shi* (Beijing: Gongyi meishu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 277-9; Flath 2004, p. 16.

in another illustrated guide, *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo*, published by Guankeshou zhai in the same year. The illustrations were also interpreted as *nianhua* prints, such as *Foreign Racecourse* (figure 2.5), signed Youru and published by Chen Tongsheng of Suzhou. Whether through his great success in Shanghai's commercial illustration industry or his networks with the political figures, Wu eventually attracted the attention of Zeng Guoquan (1824-90), who recruited him for the court painting project to document Qing military victories over the Taiping rebels in 1886.<sup>60</sup> This honor further promoted Wu to a status with imperial favor that laid the foundation for his later career.



Figure 2.5 Wu Youru, *Foreign Racecourse*, accessioned 1901- 04, likely reprint of circa 1880s, woodblock print, 55.5x 31.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A58.

In 1890, Wu left Dianshizhai to set up his own *Feiyingge Pictorial* (1890-93), which was published by Hongbao zhai and distributed through the networks of Shenbao guan.<sup>61</sup> The paper began by following *Dianshizhai Pictorial* with seven out of

<sup>60</sup> Hongxing Zhang, "Wu Youru's 'The Victory over the Taiping': painting and censorship in 1886 China," Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> On the Feiyingge publications see Yu Yueting, "Guangxu nianjian de Feiyingge huabao," *Chuban shiliao*, 7/1 (1987), pp. 32-5.

ten illustrations devoted to news, and the rest for three ongoing series of images—“contemporary Shanghai women,” “legendary and fictional women,” and “animals” respectively. After one hundred issues, Wu handed the paper over to a former Dianshizhai colleague Zhou Muqiao with a new name *Feiyingge shiji huabao* 飛影閣士記畫報 (1893-94).<sup>62</sup> Wu Youru, for his part, established a new journal *Feiyingge Album*, in which he discarded all news and current events to concentrate on traditional figure subjects. The journal died in 1893. Zhou Muqiao then followed Wu Youru in 1894, changing his *Feiyingge shiji huabao* to *Feiyingge shiji huace* 飛影閣士記畫冊 (1894-95) with all the news illustrations eliminated.<sup>63</sup>

This practice of moving back to the realm of traditional Chinese painting suggests that the artists were trying to claim a higher social status by distancing themselves from mundane and artisanal subjects. Christopher Reed considers Wu’s new venture as an effort to reach out to an educated audience “who was concerned less with the print commodities of news or entertainment than with traditional literati interests in brushwork and scenery.” In Wu’s view, states Reed, the *Feiyingge Album* was more closely associated with the book world than with the periodical culture.

I received a kind letter from a reader of the paper, which raises (the issue) of my news illustrations. They (news illustrations) are like trying to write examination poems. Even if you try really hard to hit the meaning, in the end you have to drop it because of time limits, and it is very hard to hand them down (to later generations). But if you illustrate books, as with famous authors’ works, you can reveal a new aspect (of them), yielding unique thoughts and providing a (new) starting place. Why not start over and follow new tracks, discarding the weakness

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<sup>62</sup> Under Zhou Muqiao, the paper expanded to twelve pages, with half of them devoted to news items and the other half to traditional figure subjects. Three additional pages were devoted to novel illustrations, illustrations for a sequel to the 17<sup>th</sup> century *Wushuang pu* (an illustrated album of famous historical figures), and pictures of contemporary women.

<sup>63</sup> Hay 1998, pp. 138-9.

(of illustrated periodicals), and adopt the strengths (of the Feiyingge Album), assisting like-minded persons in their aims? <sup>64</sup>

With the rising pictorial press market and new generations of commercial illustrators, Wu's choice might also be viewed as a response to the competitive environment by re-appropriating traditional subjects, or as Zhou Muqiao's experience demonstrates, by exploring new genres such as the advertising calendar poster. Wu's career may be not representative of the artists of his time, but it shows how personal choice was influenced by the time and place in which he lived. A pioneer in the foreign lithographic print industry, Wu, along with Zhou and other creative print artists of the time, was also a key figure in cosmopolitanizing the traditional woodblock print medium by adapting *nianhua* into the "Shanghai style" pictorial production system.

Although only three of his *nianhua* works are extant, the experience as a broadsheet artist must have influenced Wu Youru's operation of the Feiyingge studio, which published lithographic magazines but also designed and issued woodblock *nianhua*, most dealing with beautiful women and children, local attractions and scenic spots, and novels and plays.

A group of *nianhua* designers were associated with Wu's Feiyingge, including Zuiju 醉鞠, Yinmei 吟梅, and Yuebo xuanzhu 月波軒主 (figure 2.6). Most of their *nianhua* prints were painted around 1900. Among them, Zhou Muqiao was perhaps the most prolific *nianhua* designer and at least seven of his *nianhua* works are extant. Aside from one print depicting the demon-killer Zhong Kui, most of these prints, which the artist signed as Mengjiao, deal with the subject of beautiful women. *Pipa Player* (1900, figure 2.7), *Orchard Gives Birth to Nobal Sons* (1901, figure 2.8), *Official Cap and Belt*

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<sup>64</sup> Cited in Reed 2004, p. 96.

*Handed down from Generation to Generation* (figure 2.9) and *Roughhousing in the Nuptial Chamber* (1900, figure 2.10) are all representations of the auspicious beauty-children motif.<sup>65</sup> In addition, *Ten Famous Courtesans of Shanghai* (*Haishang mingji shimei tu* 海上名妓十美圖, figure 2.11) is a depiction of Shanghai's ten most famous courtesans (Shen Erguan, Xiao Yuanyuan, Hua Wenjuan, Lu Lanfen, Zhuang Xiufeng, Wu Xinbao, Hua Shi [quan?], Zhu Ruchun and Jin Xiaobao) as they casually lounge about rock gardens.<sup>66</sup> Ellen Laing notes that the female images painted by Zhou and other Shanghai print artists of the time were often set in luxuriant surroundings and represented fantasies about the lifestyles of the city's high profile courtesans.<sup>67</sup> The composition of *Ten Famous Courtesans of Shanghai* in close similarity to *Twelve Beauties of the Dream of the Red Chamber* (figure 2.12), issued by Wu Taiyuan print shop, confirms Catherine Yeh's finding that in the demimonde of late Qing Shanghai the story of *Honglou meng* was popular among the courtesans and their intellectual clients who liked to reenact the plots within the real world. In addition, famous courtesans took their flower names such as Lin Daiyu from the novel.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For an analysis of the motifs and symbols in Zhou Muqiao's *nianhua* of beautiful women is in Laing 2004, pp. 48-9.

<sup>66</sup> Although ten women are pictured, one remains anonymous. Zhu Ruchun, for example, was a noted activist for courtesan's rights while Jin Xiaobao (see *Shenbao* May 11, 1875, Xiao Jinbao?) was known as a "good girl", who stood for virtue.

<sup>67</sup> Laing 2004, p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), pp. 136-77.





Figure 2.6 Yuebo xuan zhu, *The Tongque Palace*, 1900, woodblock print, 50.3x 33.8 cm.  
 Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.  
 Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A40.



Figure 2.7 Zhou Muqiao, *Pipa Player*, 1900, woodblock print, 50x 33.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A42.



Figure 2.8 Zhou Muqiao, *Orchard Gives Birth to Nobel Sons*, 1901, woodblock print, 49x 22.4cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: ASIA/ 0553.





Figure 2.9 Zhou Muqiao, *Official Cap and Belt Handed down from Generation to Generation*, 1903, woodblock print, 46 x 28.5 cm. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 140.



Figure 2.10 Zhou Muqiao, *Roughhousing in the Nuptial Chamber*, 1900, woodblock print. Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 101.



Figure 2.11 Zhou Muqiao, *Ten Famous Courtesans of Shanghai*, 1900, woodblock print, 56x 31.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalogue No. ASIA/ 0574 B07.





Figure 2.12 Anonymous, *Twelve Beauties of the Dream of the Red Chamber*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of 1900, woodblock print, 55.5x 31.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A19.

Aside from beautiful women, Shanghai *nianhua* designers, as mentioned before, incorporated journalistic representations of material life and local attractions into their pictorial repertoire. In addition to Wu Youru's rendition of Yu Garden, *The Shanghai Railway Company Train Departs for Wusong* (figure 2.13) is a depiction of the South Station of Shanghai.<sup>69</sup> The Shanghai-Wusong railway was opened in 1876 and quickly became a local attraction.<sup>70</sup> The Shanghai correspondent for the *Times* comments:

Thousands of people from all the neighboring towns and villages crowded down every day to watch the proceedings and criticize every item from the little engine down to the pebbles of the ballast. All are perfectly good humored, and evidently

<sup>69</sup> The same print was published in Shanghai by at least two shops the Wu Wenyizhai and the Sun Wenya, and was also pirated (accommodated) in Suzhou, with the image in reverse, and the title changed to *Suzhou Railway Company Train Departs for Wusong*, issued by Zhou Hengxing.

<sup>70</sup> The plan for the construction of a railway from Shanghai to Wusong was put forward as early as 1865, but no real move was made until 1874, when Jardine, Matheson & Company took over the project.

intent on a pleasant day's outing. Old men and children, old women and maidens, literati, artisans and peasants— every class of society is represented.<sup>71</sup>

On July 1, 1876, all Chinese were invited to take a free ride on the line. Besides, the event attracted thousands of locals standing to watch the modern technological magic. The crowd was curious rather than frightened to meet the train, roaring with great excitement.<sup>72</sup> *Shenbao* sold photographs of the train “for the benefit of women and children, and people who live in distant areas and who have never seen a train.”<sup>73</sup> C. E. Darwent notes that a train trip to Wusong was an interesting thing to do in Shanghai: “it is very popular among Chinese. The carriages are good, clean and comfortable, and are fitted with sliding panels of blue glass to shade the eyes during the glare of the summer.”<sup>74</sup> The print focuses on the train and the station, along with a series of transports, passersby and the Sikh police along the railway. Although it is unknown if Wu Youru or any of his followers was involved in designing the print, the subject and the composition resembles that of Wu's illustrations.

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<sup>71</sup> Cited in Percy H. Kent, *Railway Enterprises in China* (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> *Shenbao*, July 7, 1876. A photograph of people standing along the railway to watch the train is reproduced in Deng Ming ed., *Shanghai bainian lueying, 1840s-1940s* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1996), p.150, and in Wu Liang, *Old Shanghai: A Lost Age* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2001), p. 236.

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Laing 2004, p. 48.

<sup>74</sup> C. E. Darwent, *Shanghai: A Handbook for Travelers and Residents to the Chief Objects of Interest in and around the Foreign Settlements and Native City* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, n.d.), p. 132.

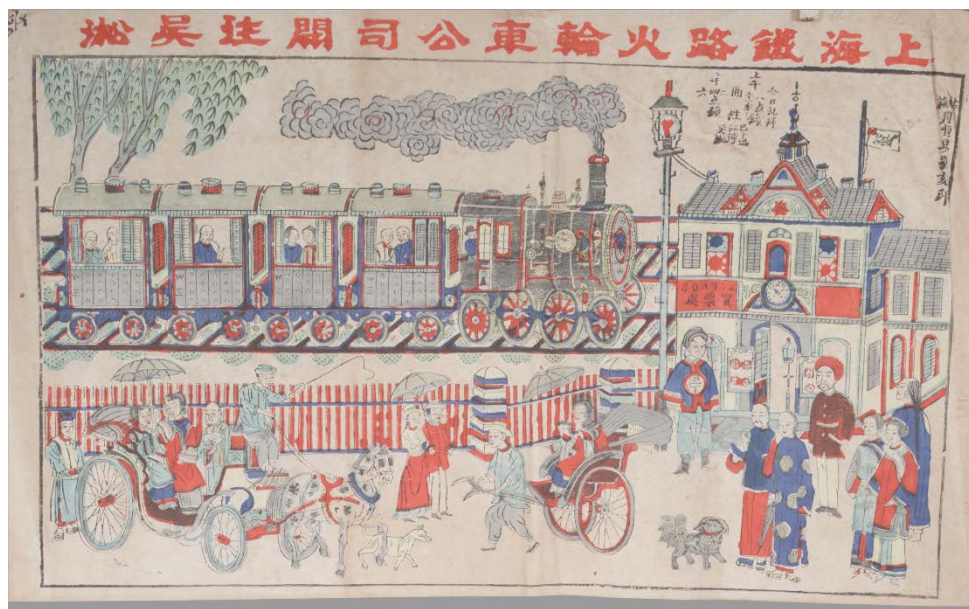


Figure 2.13 Anonymous, *The Shanghai Railway Company Train Departs for Wusong*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 55.5x 31.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A57

In addition to foreign technology, foreigners and their lifestyles also became pictured in *nianhua*. *Foreign Wedding* (*Waiguo ren zuoqin* 外國人做親) (figure 2.14) illustrates a foreign church wedding, while *A Foreign Woman Rides a Sedan Chair* (*Yang furen zuojiao* 洋婦人坐轎, designed by Songshan Daoren) depicts a foreign woman taking the traditional Chinese style transport with her husband walking at her side followed by a dog, catering to an increasing Chinese interest in foreign customs. *Sights on Fuzhou Road in Shanghai's Foreign Territory* (*Shanghai Simalu yangchang shengjing tu* 四馬路洋場勝景圖, figure 2.15) contains ten miniatures illustrating public women (factory women, prostitutes, foreign women), various transportations (man-pulled cart, carrier, sedan chair, bicycle, rickshaw, and horse-drawn carriage), the red-turbaned Sikh police (British employed) dragging a beggar, a foreign couple walking their dog, and a



foreign couple riding a tandem bicycle. All these scenes are captioned as “scenic views” of the “foreign territory”.

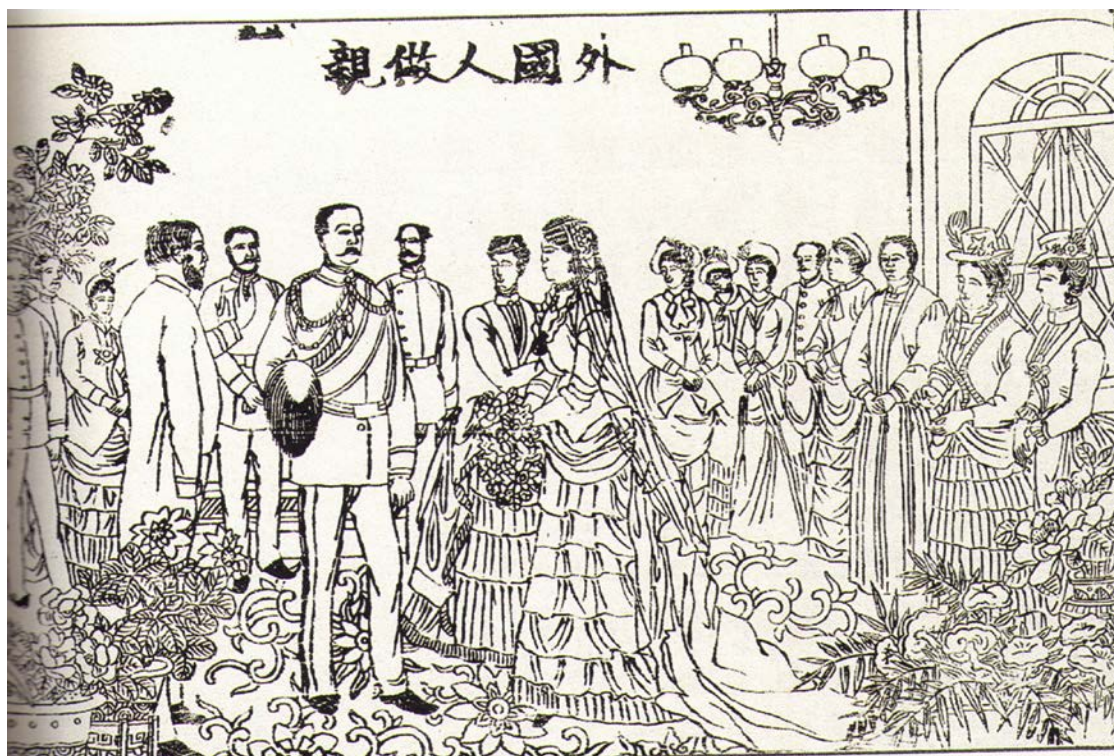


Figure 2.14, Anonymous, *Foreign Wedding*, circa 1890s, woodblock print, 36x 54cm, Suzhou Taohuwu Nianhua Society. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 379.



Figure 2.15 Anonymous, *Sights on Fuzhou Road in Shanghai's Foreign Territory*, circa 1890s, woodblock print. After Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 94.

Similarly, Zuiju, whose real identity is unknown, provided a depiction of the famous Qinglian Ge teahouse on Fuzhou Road in *Green Lotus Pavilion Teahouse and Opium Den* (*Haishang Qinglian ge chaguan yantang* 海上青蓮閣茶館煙堂) (figure 2.16). Teahouses with multiple stories usually provided space for entertainment along with tea-drinking. The Qinglin Ge, one of the most famous teahouses and entertainment establishments in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, sold tea on the upper floor and provided variety shows on the lower floor, serving as an amusement center and

gathering place for prostitutes.<sup>75</sup> It became a great attraction of Shanghai, being pictured in a city guide.<sup>76</sup> It was also illustrated in a *zhuzhi ci*:

On top of the Qing Lian Ge is a pheasant nest.

They fly back and forth like the shuttlecock [sic] on a loom.

The most shameless are the ones from Yangzhou. The middlemen pull people's clothes with both hands.<sup>77</sup>

Zuiju's design focuses on its opium den, which is filled with opium smokers, prostitutes and servants, embodying the excitement of the city-life as spectacle with a self-conscious theatricality, with part of the tea-drinking section marginalized at the left end of the picture. The appearance of the stairs shows this section on the upper floor level of the teahouse.

Images like this were common in pages of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. Late Qing multistory entertainment establishments were characteristically cosmopolitan in that they usually combined Chinese wooden architecture with Western elements such as glass windows, balconies, ceiling lamps, clocks and the like. The spectacle was principally embodied in one architectural element— the balcony— that was a standard feature of the upper floor. Although balconies had been associated with entertainment houses in 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou, it was during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that they became bigger in size and more accessible. Built internally and externally, the balcony provided a site of looking and being looked upon, producing a culture of spectacle that was further accentuated with the presence of mirrors. In *Green Lotus Pavilion* the outer balcony is not shown, however,

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<sup>75</sup> Zheng Yimei, *Yihai yishao xubian* (Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1996), p. 359; Laing 2004, p. 74.

<sup>76</sup> The Qianlian ge was already an tourist site during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was pictured in Meihua anzhu, *Shenjiang shengjing tushuo* (1894; reprint, Taipei: Dongfang wenhua shuju, 1972), 2:3a.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Gail Hershat, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 426, n. 99.

a specific practice of seeing is being depicted. The composition is a direct reflection of one particular urban experience in Shanghai— the city was crowded. For most people, living spaces were small and the experience of the crowd just like that of the Qinglian Ge in Zuiju's picture was part of their everyday life. Filled with sensational details (i.e. the appearance of a monk in the tea-drinking section and the flirtation between prostitutes and opium-smokers), Zuiju combines the tourist guide and journalistic illustration elements in this single composition.



Figure 2.16 Zuiju, *Green Lotus Pavilion Teahouse and Opium Den*, 1900, woodblock print, 53.5 x 32 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A37.

In addition, tourist sites outside Shanghai were also portrayed. Tian Zilin 田子琳, a colleague of Wu Youru on the staff of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, had a *nianhua* representation of Suzhou's Tiger Hill in *Scenic View of Tiger Hill Lantern Boats* (*Huqiu dengchuan shengjing tu* 虎丘燈船勝景圖) (figure 2.17), which is a depiction of the



Suzhou custom of celebrating the Lantern Festival on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month, when local people are taking boats decorated with luxurious lanterns, moving leisurely along the Shantang River, in reminiscence of Jiangnan's "pleasure boat (*huafang*)" culture, especially with the appearance of women that evokes imagination of a floating entertainment house. Riding lantern boats at Tiger Hill had been a common entertainment and lifestyle among Suzhou's wealthy people. On the boat, they could drink and gamble while enjoying performances by entertainers.<sup>78</sup> City guide literature and woodblock print together disseminated a standard visual vocabulary, shaping a public aesthetic sphere for an urban readership.



Figure 2.17 Tian Zilin, *Scenic View of Tiger Hill Lantern Boats*, circa 1890s, woodblock print, Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2:97.

<sup>78</sup> Gu Lu [1830] 2008, p. 138.

Novel and play illustrations are another genre taken up by Feiyingge artists. The conjunction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century explosion of middle-brow fiction and printing industry led to the renewal of image production in general and *nianhua* representation in particular. Classic popular novels continued to be popular subjects of *nianhua* representation. *Monkey King Creates Havoc at Peach Banquet* designed by Yinmei, for example, illustrates the popular plot in chapter five of the fantasy novel *The Journey to the West*, attributed to Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (1500- 82).<sup>79</sup> Similarly, *Wu Song Kills His Sister-in-Law* and *Liu Bei Marries Lady Sun of Eastern Wu*, designed by Zuiju, illustrates famous episodes from *Water Margin* (chapter 26) and *Three Kingdoms* (chapters 54-55). More importantly, new urban fiction all found its way into the *nianhua* repertoire. Yinmei, for example, made illustrations for the popular martial romance fiction *Green Peony* ((*Lü mudan* 綠牡丹, 1800).<sup>80</sup> A fiction set in the Tang or Wu Zetian's Zhou Dynasty, *Green Peony* was innovative in that it was an early example of the martial-art novels still popular to this day. The major plotline centered on the romance between Luo Hongxun and Hua Bilian, which was a development from the traditional scholar-beauty genre; however, the male protagonist is not a scholar but a martial artist. The heroine is a good-looking girl with advanced martial skills, and so is not a conventional slender, fragile and sentimental inner chamber lady, although Hua does have bound feet. Their

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<sup>79</sup> Wu Cheng'en, "Disputing the Peach Festival, the Great Sage steals elixir; With revolt in Heaven, many gods would seize the fiend," *The Journey to the West*, translated and edited by Anthony C. Yu (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 160-73.

<sup>80</sup> On *Green Peony* and the rise of martial romance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Margate B. Wan, *Green Peony and the Rise of the Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009). Pheasants were lowest-level prostitutes.

interaction was not through exchange of poetry as in conventional scholar-beauty stories, but instead through martial arts whether in performance or for instant life-saving purpose.

*Hua Bilian Catches Monkey in Siwang Pavilion* (*Hua Bilian Siwang ting zhuohou* 花碧蓮四望亭捉猴) (figure 2.18) portrays the heroine Bilian going up to the roof of Siwang Pavilion in Yangzhou to catch a monkey for Ruan Yiwan, the wicked son of a high official and the master of the monkey.<sup>81</sup> Yinmei's design highlights the acts – Bilian is depicted like a butterfly jumping off her lap to the top of the pavilion in a bent posture. Her target is sitting at the pointed roof not far away. According to the novel, Bilian is incidentally falling off the roof and Luo Hongxun, the scholarly martial hero she loves, is standing under the roof to catch her.

The print as well as the novel not only transformed the classic scholar-beauty mode but also promoted female martial artists in reminiscence of traditional female warriors such as Mu Guiying 穆桂英, a legendary heroine of the Northern Song period and a significant character in the *Generals of the Yang Family* and *Female Generals of the Yang Family*. In these collections of legends, plays and novels, the gallant generals protect the borderland of the Northern Song from the attack by the Khitans of the Liao dynasty in the north. The daughter of a bandit, Mu Guiying is said to have begun her martial arts training from an early age under the guidance of her bandit father Mu Yu. She defeated and captured Yang Zongbao 楊宗保, her husband-to-be and the son of general Yang Yanzhao 楊延昭 (c. 958-1014), and then defeated her father-in-law before she eventually joined the Yang family and their troops. She later takes over her husband's command after his death and plays a crucial role in the battles against the Khitans,

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<sup>81</sup> There was another print of the same subject, but was slightly altered, issued by Xinji 新記 print shop of Shanghai.

especially in breaking the previously unbreakable Heaven's Gate Battle Formation (*Tianmen zhen* 天門陣). Mu Guiying was not simply a female warrior with superb martial skills, but also a loyal servant to the emperor, a key trope in tales of martial heroines as well as martial heroes.

By contrast, female martial artists in *Green Peony* do not have to act as men and are more feminine, as suggested by their tiny lotus feet. *Green Peony* thus mixed qualities of the classic beauty and the masculinity of female warriors, offering a renewed image of the ideal female knights-errant. As Paize Keulemans has noticed, martial arts fiction has been one of the most widely read genres during the last years of the Qing through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> The popularity of the *Green Peony* narrative engendered various forms of representation including the pictorial storytelling in *nianhua*. Exploiting popular narratives, *nianhua* designers such as Yinmei showed their sensitivity toward new and marketable subjects, as well as their ability to do new narrative illustrations for fictional texts in place of the classic “illustrated portraits (*xiuxiang*)” tradition. Even the illustration of plays began to take on the character of journalistic illustration, emphasizing the new.

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<sup>82</sup> On martial arts novels see Paize Keulemans, “Recreating the Storyteller Image: Publishing the Martial-arts Fiction to renew the Public in the Late Qing,” *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 29, no. 2 (April, 2004): 7-37.



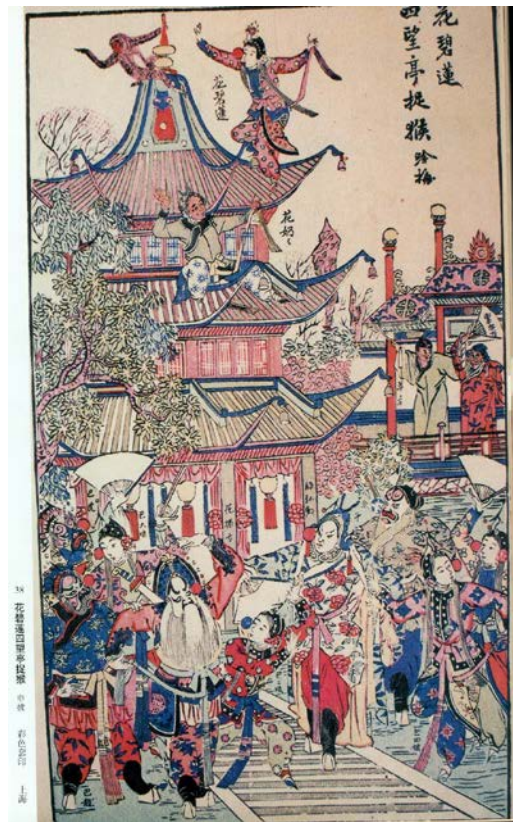


Figure 2.18 Yinmei, *Hua Bilian Catches Monkey in Siwang Pavilion*, circa 1890s, woodblock print. Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuaguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 38.

Wu Youru and his Dianshizhai and Feiyingge colleagues led in Shanghai's woodblock print industry that increasingly surpassed the rest of Jiangnan as the upmost center of print production. With their efforts at incorporating journalistic illustrations and sensational subjects into the *nianhua* repertoire, the traditional genre was transformed and adapted into the cosmopolitan world of Shanghai, where a diversity of images and image-producing systems co-existed in and competed for the market. *Nianhua* was tightly integrated into the networks of Shanghai's print production and pictorial communication.

## Conclusion

The dislocation of Suzhou's *nianhua* industry caused by the mid-century Taiping war reflects and was a result of the transfer of cultural capital and creative energies from the traditional imperial urban center to the new treaty port, Shanghai. There, the meeting of Chinese culture and the outside world created a cosmopolitan environment of hybridity. With the introduction of foreign printing technologies and publishing practice, late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai witnessed the rapid expansion of its printing industry especially its pictorial component. The establishment of China's news media and pictorial press, aided by foreign missionary and entrepreneurial activities, led to the growth of the first generation of China's commercial artists, who, in turn, created a new form of representation that combined journalistic illustration and Chinese traditional picturing practices. Their trans-media experiences helped enrich and innovate the traditional woodblock genre by adding new subjects, with an emphasis on the new, the realistic and the sensational, in accordance with the fad of the popular urban literature. Adapting the *nianhua* genre to the cosmopolitan center of cultural convergence, Shanghai's print artists transformed the Suzhou tradition, redefining the "city" with a new pictorial language of "Shanghai style". Starting by appropriating Chinese popular print artists, Shanghai's modern lithographic printing industry gradually dominated the market by making *nianhua* a means of disseminating the visual vocabulary of modern pictorial press. The ability to adapt led to the development of the traditional woodblock print industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> but also caused its demise when technological and artistic improvement was achieved within the new printing industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Chapter 3 Street Characters: Urban Nobodies or Icon

The relocation of Suzhou *nianhua* business and its rapid development in Shanghai in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the history of the popular print industry in the lower Yangzi area. Shanghai replaced Suzhou as the predominant production center of *nianhua* and other printed matters, and “Gusu prosperity” gave way to “Shanghai experience.” This chapter explores one aspect of that experience, that is, how *nianhua* artists defined the city life in Shanghai, focusing particularly on print representation of the “lower class” city people – peddlers, craftsmen, laborers and coolies, as well as beggars and pickpockets – in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Documenting these “petty traders” of the street and other urban nobodies, *nianhua* prints complete current scholarship on modern Shanghai, offering sketches of previously ignored groups against the backdrop of semi-colonial Shanghai conventionally described through its Westernizing elements.<sup>1</sup> Emplacing those “insignificant” street characters at the center of the urban theatre, late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai *nianhua*, however, departed from traditional representations of cityscapes that emphasized architecture and space in order to illustrate urban prosperity. Refashioning the classic depiction of the underclass that often featured Buddhist undertones, late Qing *nianhua* artists transformed the traditional motif of

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier studies on Shanghai tend to define the city as a “foreign country” separated from the rest of China or as “the other China”, which equalized the city with foreign concessions. See for example Rhoads Murphy, *Shanghai: Key to Modern China* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1953). While the Euro-centric view that defines “Shanghai modern” as extension of Western imperialist history within the “impact-response” paradigm has been criticized, historical interpretation of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century rise of Shanghai continues to be constrained by the “colonial gaze”, over-emphasizing the importance of imports– technologies, ideas and practices, and de-emphasizing the dynamism of native culture and internal changes. In her discussion of intellectual life in late Qing Shanghai, Catherine Yeh remarks “Shanghai was, and still is not, China” in Catherine Vance Yeh, “The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Dec., 1997), p. 420. On commercial printing and publishing in Shanghai, for example, foreign printing technologies, industrial practices and cultural products have been seen as indexes of Shanghai modern. On foreign printing technology and print capitalism see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004); on modern press see Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media 1872-1912* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004).

“beggars and street characters” as “a warning and admonition to the world” into realistic and oftentimes comic/satirical representations of urban life. Late Qing Shanghai appears to have developed an interest in street life and marketplaces, perhaps related to changes in a local society where beggars, peddlers, tramps, street performers and vagabonds of all sorts became increasingly visible.<sup>2</sup> In references to *nianhua*, there was a shift in pictorial perception of urban life— from idealized panoramic cityscape that characterized the Gusu images to anonymous street characters in serialized format— which, I argue, was a response to the demographic change and increasing social mobility in Shanghai. Moreover, the hybrid urban environment featuring fragmentation in space, society and cultural production gave rise to serialized *nianhua* representations of those urban nobodies.

Over the past two decades, English-language scholarship of Chinese cities notably Shanghai has shifted away from debates over civil society in China to histories that reveal various cultural dimensions of urban life. In the main, academic foci have moved beyond the realm of cultural and economic elites to include the lives of ordinary city dwellers, both Chinese and Western.<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Lu Hanchao, Emily Honig, and Yeh Wen-hsin, among others, have given detailed accounts of certain segments of the city’s “petty urbanites” (*xiao shimin*, 小市民), commonly defined as the middle and lower-middle

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<sup>2</sup> The “upper class” Shanghai School painters such as Ren Xun also painted the street types in his 1876 album. Roberta Wue, *Art Worlds: Artists, Images, and Audiences in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> For a study that engages with a common British citizen who worked at the Shanghai Municipal Police in the service of the British Empire in the years of 1919-39, see Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

class city dwellers in Shanghai,<sup>4</sup> during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Shanghai courtesans, in particular, have been the subjects of several studies, although from differing perspectives, by Gail Hershatter, Christian Henriot and Catherine Vance Yeh.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have also turned to certain sections of the urban poor especially rickshaw pullers, factory workers and beggars.<sup>7</sup> Relying on folklore, memoirs, oral traditions, official surveys and ethnographic data, Hanchao Lu's *Beyond the Neon Lights*, in particular, has provided a vividly panoramic view of the city's common people including the lower classes, such as rickshaw pullers, and the "petty traders" who were active in the alleyway communities (*lilong* 里弄)– the night soil collector, food peddlers, the barber, seamstress, repairers (i.e. shoe and umbrella), the "faucet water" vendor (a type of low-class opium business) and

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<sup>4</sup> A blanket term popularly known and used but lacks clear definition, Perry Link defines the *xiao shimin* as the literate and moderately well off residents of Shanghai in Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Similarly, Hanchao Lu defines "xiao shimin" as city or town people of the middle and lower-middle social rank in Hanchao Lu *Beyond the Neon Light: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Wen-hsin Yeh defines them as the readers of Shenghuo magazine in Wen-hsin Yeh 'Progressive Journalism and Shanghai's Petty Urbanites: Zou Taofen and the Shenghuo Weekly, 1926-1945,' in Frederick Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 186-238.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford University Press, 1992); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Light: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (University of California Press, 1999); Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and sexuality in Shanghai: a social history 1849-1949*, translated by Noel Castelino (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> On Shanghai's rickshaw pullers see Lu, *Beyond the Neon Light* 1999, pp. 75-105; on beggars see Hanchao Lu, "Becoming Urban: Mendicancy and Vagrants in Modern Shanghai," *Journal of Social History* 33.1 (1999): 7-36; Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); on workers see Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labour* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

domestic maids<sup>8</sup>— emphasizing the rural-urban continuum and an unchanging lifestyle the rural immigrants brought to Shanghai that was largely impervious to political upheaval and social change.

This chapter, by contrast, intends to locate the experiences of the urban poor— both the working poor and the “ugly poor”— through visual narratives in historical context, treating the poor as both lived experience and pictorial genre. The principal *nianhua* prints used in this chapter are works designed by the Shanghai-based print artist Taoist of Mt. Song (Songshan Daoren 嵩山道人). The artist’s true identity is unknown, except as the designer of a series of prints known as the *Three Hundred and Sixty Professions and Trades* (*Sanbai liushi hang* 三百六十行) created during the years of 1894-95, and several of the Sino-Japanese War prints to be discussed in chapter five (i.e. *Capture, Interrogation and Execution of the Japanese and Russian Spies, General Liu Heads the Black Flag Army Garrison in Taiwan*). At least one source indicates that the *Three Hundred and Sixty Professions and Trades* originally consisted of thirty sets of 12 prints and were initially designed for the Wu Taiyuan 吳太元 *nianhua* shop of Suzhou before its production spread to other Jiangnan cities, notably Yangzhou and Shanghai.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps an anecdotal guess according to the title of the series, no hard evidence is available to prove that number.

To my knowledge, only fourteen prints of this series are extant and none of them has the imprint of a Suzhou shop. One additional print designed by the same artist known as *Marketplace Professions and Trades* (*Shijin geye* 市井各業) consists of a collage of

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<sup>8</sup> Lu 1999, pp. 189-217.

<sup>9</sup> Wang Bomin, *Zhongguo banhua shi*, cited in Wang Jiaju, *Sanbailiushi hang tuji* vol. 1 (Suzhou: Guwuxuan chubanshe, 2002), p. 42.

eight vignettes, each designed in the same style as the *Three Hundred and Sixty Professions and Trades*. These visual records may not represent the diversity of the petty traders and street characters who operated in the city's streets and other public spaces, but they do at least provide fragments of those omnipresent but voiceless historical actors. They and their images were the building blocks of an emerging urban culture in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai.

### 1. The Tradition: Streetscapes and Idealized/ Degraded Nobodies

There was a venerable tradition of picturing the petty traders and street characters in Chinese pictorial arts. Urban life and cityscape had become subjects of interest since the Song dynasty when a renewed urban consciousness emerged as a result of commercialization.<sup>10</sup> Before the Song, Chinese cities were seen as alien places defined by walls and closely associated with administrative institution, tax, corvée and legal procedures. With the rise of urban consciousness and recognition of city's significance in the political and economic landscape of the state, late imperial Chinese artists, particularly court painters, developed a penchant for depicting those urban nobodies as the idealization of order and prosperity, catering to the emperors' tastes by visualizing his political ideas.

Street scenes and the cityscape of Kaifeng are seen in the famous painting *Going up the River during the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖) and its various versions from the 10<sup>th</sup> throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The original painting, attributed to Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (1085-1145), a court painter serving Emperor Huizong (r. 1100-26) during the last years of the Northern Song, was painted shortly

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<sup>10</sup> Chye Kiang Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats: The Development of Medieval Chinese Cities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 167-9.

before the fall of Kaifeng, offering a wealth of information and faithful account of the city life and the cityscape of the Northern Song capital. In the 17 foot-long (the original was perhaps longer) hand scroll, following sections of the countryside and surroundings along the Bian River, the urbanized area appears in the third section of the composition, where shops, houses, business and daily activities, including those of the petty traders and small merchants, occupied much of the surface of the tableau. An apparently unmediated but idealized vision of the northern city Bianliang, the *Qingming* pictures vividly convey the sensations of everyday life in a city during its heyday. Revered as a classic touchstone of idealized peace and order, the *Qingming* pictures were copied and perhaps updated in over 40 versions between the Song and the Qing dynasties.<sup>11</sup>

Court paintings of the Qing dynasty, especially those that document the imperial southern inspection tours of Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong, do show peddlers, shopkeepers, craftsmen and other petty traders along the streets.<sup>12</sup> Xu Yang 徐揚 (active 1750-75), a Suzhou artist serving Qianlong's court, painted the *Burgeoning Life in an Prosperous Time* (*Shengshi zisheng tu* 盛世滋生圖, 1759), a contemporaneous portrait of Suzhou that contains sections depicting the prosperous commercial districts such as the Changmen Street, which is packed with petty traders and two-story shops, along with residential buildings separated by firebreak walls.<sup>13</sup> However, as with the *Qingming*

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<sup>11</sup> For the history of Zhang Zheduan's original painting and its many copies see Roderick Whitfield, "Chang Tse-tuan's Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u" (PhD. dissertation, Princeton University, 1965); Zhao Guangchao, *Biji Qingming shanghe tu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> On Kangxi Empeor's *Nanxun tu* see Maxwell K. Hearn, "The 'Kangxi Southern Inspection Tour': A Narrative Program by Wang Hui," PhD dissertation, (Princeton University, 1990); Maxwell K. Hearn, "Art Creates History: Wang Hui and the Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour," in Wen Fong ed., *Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1777)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp.129-83.

<sup>13</sup> Xu Yang, *Shengshi zisheng tu* (1759) (reprint, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986).



pictures, *Burgeoning Life* as well as those documenting the imperial Southern Inspection Tours were mainly represented from a traditional painterly perspective, and street characters are taken as attachments to landscapes (rural and urban), and more importantly as symbol and abstraction of the humane government under which people were living in peace and harmony.

In her discussion of the Qing revival of the *jiehua* 界畫 or ruled-line tradition, a genre whose subjects are mainly buildings, bridges, boats, carriages, and the like, Anita Chung has argued that the *jiehua*, characterized by grand conception and regal splendor, served to enhance the imperial authority of rulers and, to a segment of the elite, to advertise social status. So the Manchu court promoted *jiehua* as means of defining political, social, or cultural boundaries. Prosperous cities were symbols of imperial power that manifested boundaries between the ruler and the ruled. In Jiangnan cities such as Yangzhou, the genre was appropriated in paintings of gardens marking boundaries between social classes and functioning as commodities of conspicuous consumption.<sup>14</sup>

In Suzhou, the genre was largely appropriated in workshops of commercial arts such as those of the Gusu prints. Targeting the merchant class in the city, the old Gusu print artists made great efforts to emphasize “urban prosperity” that was closely associated with merchant enterprises and their contribution to the city (chapter 1). *Three Hundred and Sixty Professions and Trades* and *Chang Gate*, for example, are streetscapes near the Chang Gate where business and commercial activities concentrated. Although the old Gusu print makers and Yangzhou professional painters alike could not compete with the court painters of the imperial southern tours in terms of the

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<sup>14</sup> See Anita Chung, *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), especially chapter 5 “Moving Gardens: Yangzhou Representations I”.

compositional scale and the stylistic grandeur, all of them took architectural structures as the defining elements of the cityscapes and streetscapes where the business activities and petty traders were an essential part. All their works tended to be ideal abstraction of the political, cultural or economic power.

Whether painted or printed images that represent urban landscapes produced during the late imperial time, all confined figures and their activities within spaces circumscribed by architecture, walls and the like, and indeed, buildings. Landscapes and the larger “structures” were the “protagonists” in these visual narratives and figures were more likely accessories of the grandeur spectacle that highlights prosperity and vitality of urban life, perhaps because traditionally a city was defined in terms of walls and moats as well as its relationship to the cosmos. Figures in these images were romanticized, projecting a moment of hope and imagination rather than presenting an actual moment.

A separate but rare depiction that was more pertinent to the present discussion is Zhou Chen’s 周臣 (circa 1470 - circa 1535) *Beggars and Street Characters* (*Liumang tu* 流氓圖, figure 3.1) of 1516 that portrays the street characters in Ming Suzhou. The figures are depicted in profile, three-quarter view or almost *en face*, in a position facing the opposite figure. There is no background. In making this grotesque painting of those miserable souls in streets and markets, Zhou Chen confesses in the inscription composed by himself that

In the autumn of the eleventh [*bingzi*] year of Chengde [1516], in the seventh month, I was idling under the window, and suddenly there came to my mind all the appearances and manners of the beggars and other street characters whom I often saw in the streets and markets. With brush and ink ready at hand, I put them

into pictures in an impromptu way. It may not be worthy of serious enjoyment, but it certainly can be considered as a warning and admonition to the world.<sup>15</sup>

In his discussion of the painting, James Cahill suggests Zhou was warning viewers, according to Buddhist teachings, against wrongdoings which would bring on the retribution of rebirth into such lives of misery as he had painted.<sup>16</sup> Despite the painter's statement that he saw those figures in the streets and markets, he gave no background to his characters in presentation. Each figure floats in space. In contrast to gentlemanly settings of natural landscapes or rooms decorated with luxurious furnishings for the "upper class" figures, those street people are devoid of any setting even the ground where they are standing, indicating their floating life as vagabonds in physical space and symbolically, their lack of social space. Defining those street characters in their degraded state, *Beggars and Street Characters* departed from the elitist visual discourse of the time that emphasized idealization, but followed the mainstream in terms of its moral tones. A rare and perhaps "strange" creation of the time, it was circulated throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the highest levels of Suzhou society.<sup>17</sup> We do not know if it provided direct inspiration for late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai *nianhua* artists with its mundane subjects, narrative format as well as its realism, but such pictorial language and representational modes were certainly not lacking in traditional Chinese paintings prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We know for certain that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new realism in accordance with the city's cultural climate is seen in *nianhua* prints, addressing issues of fragmentation and social mobility in Shanghai.

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in James Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty 1368-1580* (New York: Weatherhill, 1978), p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> Cahill 1978, p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Marme, *Suzhou: Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 187.



Figure 3.1 Zhou Chen, *Beggars and Street Characters*, details. 1516, album leaves mounted to two handscrolls, ink and light color on paper, 31.9 x 244.5 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art.

## 2. Contextualizing the Petty Traders and Street Characters

Little is known about these textually voiceless, socially marginal and diversified historical actors, as these people themselves were often illiterate, leaving little evidence of how they regarded their lives. They remained obscure in official records of the *baojia* system or regulations of the foreign settlements.<sup>18</sup> One 1939 record from the International Settlement lists some 600 food peddlers with their names and places where they plied their trades, but without any further information on age, origin and type of activities.<sup>19</sup> Most available secondary sources about them were memoirs written by Shanghai residents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose memoirs of the “good old days” concentrated largely

<sup>18</sup> Hanchao Lu notes in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, neither *baojia* system nor civil organizations (i.e. rent negotiator) was able to exert control over neighborhood in the city. See Lu 1999, p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Henriot, “Street Culture, Visual Fragments and Everyday Life: Narrating Peddlers in Shanghai Modern” in Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh eds., *Visualising China 1845-1966: Moving and Still images in Historical Narratives* (Brill, 2012), p. 114.

on peddlers, especially food peddlers of the city during the Republican era.<sup>20</sup> We certainly know that food peddlers were more diverse than those recorded in written documents. Obviously, there were other peddlers along with the food peddlers, neither were peddlers the only group active in the city's streets and markets. Visual documents provided evidence. More than pictorial genre, these street characters were real social groups. To write them back into history, we have to put them in the historical background of their time and space.

Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai's population changed dramatically and immigrants made up more than 75 percent of the total population.<sup>21</sup> After it opened as a treaty port in 1843, the city's development as a commercial and industrial center had begun, attracting a great variety of merchants, traders, craftsmen as well as adventurers and ruffians from all over China. Meanwhile, "from the 1850s on, each new social disturbance in the interior sent tens of thousands of Chinese refugees to Shanghai, seeking protection under the English and French flags."<sup>22</sup> Since the 1870s, increased commercialization and industrialization of Shanghai induced a greater number of immigrants from nearby villages looking for food and shelters in the city. Some of them found jobs in the newly established factories or became shop attendants, waiters/waitresses and domestic servants. Others became street peddlers, public entertainers, healers, fortunetellers, prostitutes, laborers and coolies of all sorts, providing

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<sup>20</sup> Both Hanchao Lu's and Christian Henriot's studies focus on food peddlers, although their sources are different, with Lu relying on memoirs and Henriot on photographs.

<sup>21</sup> Shanghai's population in 1800 was between one-quarter and one-third million, reaching to 1.3 million by 1910 and to 2.6 million by 1927. See Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), p. 1.

goods or services to meet the everyday needs of the “petit urbanites” and their fellow lower-class professionals. Still others became beggars, tricksters, thieves, robbers and the like, often categorized as the “ugly poor”.

Moving constantly within and beyond the city, the majority of these “petty traders” belonged to the floating population which traversed boundaries of various domains. They (refugees from northern Jiangsu, Anhui and Shandong) might live in the shack settlements in the curves of Suzhou Creek and along the Huangpu River;<sup>23</sup> they plied their trades in the lanes, streets, teahouses, restaurants, opium dens and private households in commercial sections of both foreign concessions and the Chinese Nanshi; some even divided their stay between rural villages and urban Shanghai, coming to work in the city only during slack season.

As in other Chinese commercial centers, Shanghai’s Chinese immigrants were organized through native place ties, which not only facilitated regional recruitment but also helped better the lives of urban sojourners. As a result, the city landscape was divided into “a constellation of ethnic enclaves: entrepreneurs and employees from a particular region of a country lived and worked near one another.”<sup>24</sup> In his classic study

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<sup>23</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labour* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.12. The history of native place associations in Shanghai dates to years prior to the establishment of the treaty port. At least once source points out that at least 26 native place and trade associations in the city before the Opium War. The earliest such associations that appeared in Shanghai was the Guan-Shandong huiguan. The second was the Shangchuan huiguan established in 1715 by ship merchants from Chongming. In 1754, merchants from Huizhou and Ningguo of Anhui province formed the Huining huiguan. Three years later, merchants from Quanzhou and Zhangzhou of Fujian formed the Quanzhang huiguan, followed by Chaozhou huiguan (1783) and Zhening huiguan (1819). Trade unions, based on native place origins, were also built in Shanghai, such as Fresh Meat Union (Xianrou gongsuo, 1771) and Herb Union (Yaoye gongsuo, 1788). During the Qianlong reign (1735-1795), 8 huiguan and gongsuo were established in Shanghai, and 12 were built during the Jiaqing-Daoguang reigns (1796-1850); 14 during the Xianfeng-Tongzhi reigns (1850-1874); 28 during the Guangxu regin (1874-1908); and 7 during the Xuantong reign (1908-1911). For an introduction of the early history of huiguan

of Chinese *huiguan*, Ping-ti Ho argues that increased interregional social and economic integration during the late imperial time gave birth to native place associations in Chinese cities.<sup>25</sup> William Rowe's study of Hankou reveals that native place associations facilitated the guest merchants' participation in local public projects and their formation of a shared urban identity, furthering the development of local society.<sup>26</sup> Echoing Rowe, Bryna Goodman demonstrates native place ties and associations were formative elements in the buildup of modern Shanghai and the construction of national identity, "because of the flexibility, adaptability and utility of native place ideas to forces of economic, social and political change in the city."<sup>27</sup>

Offering support of various kinds for immigrants from the same native places, Shanghai's native place associations built temples and burial grounds; organized religious events; funded hospitals, schools and charitable halls; ran restaurants serving regional cuisines; and sponsored regional opera troupes,<sup>28</sup> thus played an important role in promoting community unity among immigrant groups. Meanwhile, native place associations were deeply involved in local politics, because local officials relied on them to settle disputes.<sup>29</sup> When conflicts with foreigners occurred, native place associations

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and *gongsong* in Shanghai see Shanghai tongshe, *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao xuji* (reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), pp. 143-53; Tang Zhenchang et al., *Shanghai shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1989) p. 102; Goodman 1995, pp. 49-50.

<sup>25</sup> Ping-ti Ho, *Zhongguo huiguan shi lun* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> On Hankou see William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Goodman 1995, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Goodman 1995, pp. 90-118.

<sup>29</sup> Goodman 1995, p. 128.

served as the social base generating anti-foreign nationalism.<sup>30</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, native place associations became increasingly politicized when early revolutionary student groups were organized through native place ties.<sup>31</sup> Commercial economy contributed greatly to the development of Shanghai especially during the early stage of the treaty port era when merchant guilds and trade unions flourished and gradually developed into institutions associated with nationalistic activities.

The quick absorption of a heterogeneous collection of immigrants, however, counterbalanced the influence of native place associations in unifying and serving regional immigrants in Shanghai. The number of refugees, especially Anhui immigrants from north of the Huai River and Jiangsu immigrants from north of the Yangzi River increased dramatically since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and *huiguan* became increasingly unable to provide shelters and food to help most of their poor natives. Many became beggars and vagrants of various kinds roaming the streets of Shanghai. In her study of Shanghai's Subei people (literally, Jiangsu northerners), Emily Honig reveals that Subei refugees escaping flooding and poverty in their home towns came to Shanghai clustering in the lowest paid and lowest esteemed occupations as rickshaw pullers, garbage collectors, dock workers, barbers, bath-house attendants and the like, and congregating in shantytowns at the periphery of Shanghai. In contrast, economic elites in Shanghai were mostly immigrants from Guangzhou and Jiangnan who preferred to hire their fellow natives, continuously enlarging the gap between Subei and non-Subei people in

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<sup>30</sup> One example is the conflict between Ningbo immigrants and the French over the land that was reserved by the Ningbo sojourners for storage of coffins to be shipped back to their hometown. Resistance against French intention to demolish the land was organized by the Simin gongsuo that connects anti-foreign nationalism and native place commitments. Goodman 1995, pp. 163-75.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 193.



Shanghai.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, cultural differences in language, clothing, cuisine and housing patterns distinguished the Subei people from the rest. Gradually, Subei became a synonym for “lower class” in the minds of non-Subei Shanghainese. Native place ties thus contributed to generating discrimination toward certain regional groups.

While ethnic discrimination against the Subei immigrants might have become obvious during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, evidence was not clear for the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At least *nianhua* representation of the “lower class” traders and street professionals in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai showed no such discrimination. None of the “despised” traders and professionals in presentation were captioned as Subei people, who, according to Honig and Lu, overwhelmingly dominated the lowest rung of the occupational hierarchy in Shanghai. Rather, where identity was captioned, one finds Suzhou, Wuxi, Songjiang and Guangzhou, cities of Jiangnan and the south that produced the economic elites and staff of the skilled service sectors for Shanghai’s commercial and industrial world, are also homes of those petty traders. It seems, at least in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when these *nianhua* prints were produced, a stigmatized category of Subei that was associated with poverty, crudeness, ignorance and immorality had not been shaped among the non-Subei Shanghainese. Instead, identity by native places continued to be the convention. A dominating Shanghai identity- Shanghai *ren* (Shanghai people)<sup>33</sup> - was yet to be shaped. If “a dual identity” was adopted, as Hanchao Lu has suggested, the Shanghai *ren* identity, however, seemed secondary to the native place identity prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). On shantytowns and shantytown dwellers see Lu 1999, pp. 116-31.

<sup>33</sup> On Shanghai *ren* identity, see Lu 1999, p.48; Alexander Des Forges, *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), pp. 125-29.

<sup>34</sup> On the “dual identity” see Lu 1999, pp. 48-55.

Historical records about these street professionals and urban poor were rare and scattered in official surveys and newspaper reports. They were largely hidden behind such concepts as “*pingmin* 平民 (ordinary people)”, “*nanmin* 难民 (refugees)” and later “*penghu ren* 棚户人 (shack dwellers)”. Otherwise, they were collectively concealed in demographic statistics and their occupations. The illustrated newspaper *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, for example, had a few reports of refugees settling down in Shanghai. One story of the 1890 illustrates a grandfather and his grandson begging in Shanghai’s streets after fleeing floods in their hometown of Jiangbei (north of the Yangzi River).<sup>35</sup> The other (1896) features a Jiangxi refugee, who, too, came to Shanghai to escape floods in his hometown more than 20 years ago, and set up a small business transporting porcelain from his hometown to Shanghai.<sup>36</sup> Coming as refugees, their fortunes were different. While some eventually got the chance to make profit through small business, many became urban vagrants.

While place identities, statistics, professions and other collective categories might have provided clues to the complex class structure in Shanghai, our understanding of the poor in the city is still sketchy. Issues such as gendered division and age structure of the “lower class” professionals are far from clearly identified. From the visual documents, we find the majority of these petty traders appear to be young adults and the middle-aged, although photographic records of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century show the aged, especially old

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<sup>35</sup> *Dianshizhai huabao*, Wei 91. Historically, flooding occurred in Jiangbei during the years 1888-9. Cited in Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life 1884-1898* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2003), p. 77.

<sup>36</sup> *Dianshizhai huabao*, Zhong 48. Cite in Ye 2003, p. 77.

women, were also commonly seen among street vendors.<sup>37</sup> The only exception recorded in *nianhua* is the child performer (*pao jianghu*, literally “river and lake” runners) cooperating with adults to display balancing skills. In fact, children were also the major force of factory workers in industrial Shanghai. In 1899, out of a total factory workforce of 34, 5000, some 7000 were children.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to entertainment houses, Shanghai’s cotton mills were perhaps the most representative work places where female professionals congregated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to 1949, according to Emily Honig, female cotton mill workers constituted one-third of the total industrial workforce in Shanghai.<sup>39</sup> *Nianhua* representations show that most of these street traders and even the ugly poor were men;<sup>40</sup> however, they also provide examples of women – a female juggler, a blind singer, a fish peddler, a seamstress, and a ferry woman. Documenting female street traders, *nianhua* artists called into attention the gendered labor force experiences among the “lower class” in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai.

Existing surveys of immigrants of Shanghai were largely conducted during the time of the 1920s- 40s, which show that many of the lower classes ended up in the city’s shack settlements (*penghu qu* 棚戶區) in the outskirts along the Huangpu River, forming “another of Shanghai’s distinctive worlds.” Exactly when the shack houses began to be

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<sup>37</sup> For a reproduction of a photograph that depicts an old woman babysits her grandson while running a candy stall is in Lu 1999, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> S.A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> See Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Photographic records of individual peddlers or of large groups of them also show that an overwhelming majority were men. See Henriot 2012, p. 118.

set up is controversial. Hanchao Lu maintains they began to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Honig holds that their appearance in Shanghai was a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena.<sup>41</sup> What is certain is that the city's shack settlements expanded quickly since the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> Refugees from Shandong, Anhui and especially northern Jiangsu, who came to Shanghai to beg or work as coolies, were among the first dwellers of those straw huts commonly made of "scrap matting, straw and boards. Inside, straw spread over bricks served as beds, and old tin cans served as stoves."<sup>43</sup> *Nianhua* representations do not tell where their characters are living. Perhaps, depending on their circumstances, some had to live in the slums, others could be ordinary urban residents, and still others were only passersby of the city.<sup>44</sup> At least in the 1930s, some 600 peddlers lived in the International Settlement where they plied their trade.<sup>45</sup>

Where did their everyday commercial activities take place? The urban structure of Shanghai was packed with "buildings organized into a grid of streets and alleys."<sup>46</sup> The growth of the city and expansion of its system of streets and lanes created more and more different sections of public, private and semi-public/private spaces, which were dotted with peddlers and other street characters. Hanchao Lu identifies the alleyway neighborhoods, where the city's "petty urbanites" lived, as the major spots where the "petty traders" conducted their businesses.

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<sup>41</sup> Lu 1999, p. 118; Honig 1986, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> The second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War produced more shack settlements. By the end of the 1940s, the whole city was enclosed with numerous clusters of shack settlements. On shantytowns see Lu 1999, pp. 118-26.

<sup>43</sup> Honig 1986, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> At least in one survey, peddlers made up 17 percent of the slum population. See Lu 1999, p. 136.

<sup>45</sup> Henriot 2012, p. 114.

<sup>46</sup> Des Forges 2007, p. 56.

In most cases, *nianhua* prints do not specify where the street professionals plied their trades; however, there are exceptions – *Marketplace Professions and Trades* (Figure 3.2) contains two images and one of them shows the place is Ping'an li; the other shows a roaming coppersmith stood at the doorway of a *shuyu*, indicating it is perhaps in or near Fuzhou Road where the famous courtesan houses were located. Photographic records of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century show that in addition to *lilong* entrances, pavements along commercial streets, wharves and markets were also popular places with a higher concentration of those petty traders.<sup>47</sup> Christian Henriot proposes his food peddler subjects were probably “rooted in a particular neighborhood. The radius of their activity around their dwelling places cannot have been very wide.”<sup>48</sup>



Figure 3.2 Songshan Daoren, *Marketplace Professions and Trades*, 1894-95, woodblock print. Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 104.

<sup>47</sup> Henriot 2012, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> Henriot 2012, p. 116.

Who were the clients of these street traders? Lu Hanchao elaborates on this aspect on the basis of oral interviews and bold generalization about *lilong* residents. Most of our *nianhua* records show that the customers of the petty traders are likely ordinary people, including women and men, children and the elders, as well as the poor. However, other customers are also depicted. *Riding the Sedan Chair* (Figure 3.2) features a foreign lady accompanied by her husband. Moreover, one picture (Figure 3.3) portrays a beggar as the client served by a seamstress. Shanghai's "petty traders" and their customers were more complex than one might expect, and the commercial networks of the "lower classes" were perhaps the most extensive that included the "petty urbanites", their fellow petty professionals, as well as the wealthy and the foreign. In sum, those voiceless city nobodies were major characters of the urban stage.



Figure 3.3 Songshan Daoren, *Foreign Woman Rides a Sedan Chair*, 1894, woodblock print, 29.7x27.3 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: ASIA/ 0576.

## **2.1 Peddlers**

Street peddlers were a common and visible category in Chinese cities well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and long after the communist liberation tried to “free” them from hard work. Oftentimes represented as single persons hawking a single good, peddlers were an essential part of Chinese city life, which can be traced to earlier centuries. They were itinerant petty merchants offering foodstuffs, household necessities and luxuries to customers, by day and by night, using their calls and cries, sometimes with the help of musical instruments to attract city dwellers or entice them out of their walled houses.

The “Old Shanghai” in Hanchao Lu’s account was filled with memories of peddlers of various “little eats (*xiaochi* 小吃)”– cooked corn, sugar-coated sour plums, roasted ginkgo nuts, beans of five-fold flavor, stewed plums, sundry turnips, ice cream, watermelons, reed roots, pear syrup candy (*ligao tang* 梨膏糖), fried bean-curd, green olives, porridge, *zongzi* 粽子, *tangtuan* 湯團, won ton soup – as well as the peddlers’ cries. Elaborating on memoirs of two Shanghai residents of the 1930s, Min Tieh and George Wang,<sup>49</sup> Lu romanticizes the peddlers’ world centered on *lilong* neighborhoods. Photographic records of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century also demonstrate the presence of various food peddlers in Shanghai.

Obviously, food peddlers became a popular *representational genre* in both written and pictorial texts. *Nianhua* artists also captured and enriched the images of food peddlers. Familiar image of the candy peddler (Figure 3.4) is also there, but he is not simply peddling candy. He uses tricks to make his trade a gambling game. There is a

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<sup>49</sup> Lu 1999, pp. 198-205 based on Tim Min Tieh’s manuscripts *Street Music of Old Shanghai* (1940) and *More Street Music of Old Shanghai* (1980); and George Zhengwen Wang’s 1991 manuscript *Shanghai Boy*.

candy-picker set at the center of the basket where the candies and perhaps other prizes are displayed. The customer has to flick the picker, letting it spin locate his prizes where the picker stops. Socio-economic variation within the food trade is also suggested by depictions of peddlers of roasted nuts. The chestnut vendor (top middle of figure 3.1), for example, is decently dressed and appears to have a fixed stand, which could be at the entrance of the alleyway community, at the corner of a lane or sidewalk, where he sets up his pot, stove as well as a display table. The ginkgo nut peddler (lower left of figure 3.1), by contrast, wears patched clothing and has to hawk his goods door to door while crying out the following words:

Addiction to opium (*yangyan* 洋煙) makes life so difficult,  
 I have no choice but to hawk ginkgo nuts.  
 Three nuts cost only one copper cash,  
 And can be used as the hand warmer during the coldest winter days.

The peddling of ginkgo nuts in Shanghai's alleyways continued into the Republican period when Ye Shengtao recalled their cries in his writing:

Warm up your hands with hot ginkgos.  
 Tasty, oh tasty and stick-in-your-mouth.  
 One copper cash will buy you three nuts.  
 Three copper cashes will buy you ten nuts.  
 If you want to buy, come and count them out.  
 If you don't want to buy, then get on out! <sup>50</sup>

The content of the *nianhua* record and the oral history is similar, although the difference appears in the narrative tone with the *nianhua* serving both to critique the peddler's addiction to opium, and to show empathy toward his misfortune while drawing a connection between the two.

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<sup>50</sup> Ye Shengtao, *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1987), p. 145.





Figure 3.4 Songshan Daoren, *Candy Peddler*, 1894, woodblock print. After Wang Jiaju, *Sanbai liushi hang tuji* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan chubanshe, 2002), 258.

In addition to peddlers of prepared food, *nianhua* prints also record those who peddle fresh items. We are given the images of an orange vendor (figure 3.5) and a watermelon vendor (figure 3.6). The orange peddler is busy bargaining with his customer and the watermelon peddler is slicing a watermelon to serve his clients. In terms of equipment, the investment is limited to common items: two buckets, a straw or bamboo basket and a shoulder pole for the orange peddler; and a table, one bucket, one tray, and a knife for the watermelon peddler. A third image features a fisherwoman from Suzhou (figure 3.7), who is bargaining with a man, perhaps a cook working for certain restaurant or a fish wholesaler. Her equipment is even simpler with only a basket, while her client a weight measuring device.



Figure 3.5 Songshan Daoren, *Orange Peddler*, 1895, woodblock print. After Wang Jiaju, *Sanbai liushi hang tuji* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan chubanshe, 2002), 259.



Figure 3.6 Songshan Daoren, *Watermelon Peddler*, 1894, woodblock print, 32 x 28 cm. Shanghai Library. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 250.



Figure 3.7 Songshan Daoren, *Fisherwoman*, 1894-95, 23.4x 17.2 cm, woodblock print. Tenri University Library, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 326.

Food was by no means the only thing peddled in the streets of Shanghai, although it occupied a significant place in the nostalgia of old Shanghai as well as in the everyday life of the city residents. Peddlers also sold household items for everyday use. Their goods included basic necessities such as cookware and bowls, daily items such as combs and scissors, as well as household decorations such as flowers, calendars and surely *nianhua*. They also peddled medicine, cloth and other miscellaneous items. A great

variety of commodities were peddled along the lanes to make the life of the city much easier and convenient.

Adding to Lu's list, *nianhua* document peddlers of household items, including fresh flowers and combs. The flower vendor (figure 3.8) holds a basket of flowers on one hand and wears a cross body bucket bag that also contains flowers, and as the caption indicates, *zhulan* and jasmine are his products. In common imagination, fresh flowers were always sold by girls and young women. While this job may have more female occupants, *nianhua* shows this occupation was by no means monopolized by female, men as the figure in presentation also took the job. The comb vendor's (figure 3.9) operation is much more complex. He has a bell to make sounds, and two boxes— one displaying samples, and the other closed and probably containing the product. More importantly, he has a signboard that displays the brand name 'Bu Hengshun', and an advertisement – 'genuine goods at a fair price, no bargaining or haggling.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> It may be speculated that comb vendor is a distributor or retailer of the famous Bu Hengshun comb shop which was established in Biji Lane of Changzhou in 1622 and is believed to be the oldest of its kind. During the Guangxu reign, Changzhou's high quality combs served the court.



Figure 3.8 Songshan Daoren, *Flower Vendor*, 1894, woodblock print. After Wang Jiaju, *Sanbai liushi hang tuji* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan chubanshe, 2002), 257.





Figure 3.9 Songshan Daoren, *Comb Vendor*, 1895, woodblock print, 28 x 32 cm. Shanghai Library. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 250.

## 2.2 Laborers and Artisans

Alongside peddlers, artisans and laborers formed another important class of urban “petty traders”, and provided a great variety of services to cater to the everyday needs of people in the city. Like peddlers, artisans and laborers figured prominently in Shanghai’s

streets where they made their living by their selling their skills and strength. The range of services they provided matched the most common needs of the residents of the city, and were often concerned with repairing household paraphernalia and providing services to comfort body and mind.

Street artisans were divided into two types, those who carried their tools, roaming and crying out for customers along the streets, and those who had a fixed spot or moved occasionally according to a relatively fixed schedule and path. Owing to the nature of his work and equipment the blacksmith, for example, was likely to set up a fixed stand on street corners or in courtyards. |

In one caricature, blacksmith Bi from Wuxi is shown forging iron on the convex anvil with the help of two assistants— one blowing the bellow and the other fixing the anvil. The caption tells of his hardship in listening to the clang of iron and the noise of the working bellow all the day. The coppersmith, by contrast, was more like a peddler. Although some maintained workshops, most street coppersmiths carried their tools and moved from one place to another, specializing in selling and repairing simple utensils for daily use. Like peddlers, they walked with a string of copper coins that could be rattled to attract customers. Songshan Daoren's design focuses on the poor itinerant coppersmith, who is portrayed leaning on his carrying pole and resting his load on the ground with his back to the viewer. He is immersed in the interaction between a woman who stands at the doorway and a man at the corner. The drama is captioned – the coppersmith, we are told, is surprisingly aroused by the beautiful voice of a woman. The vertical board at the doorway indicates the house is the residence of a *shuyu* 書寓 (the highest ranked



courtesan) called Wang Xiaobao 王小寶.<sup>52</sup> The coppersmith, joining the viewers, becomes the witness of the lighthearted flirtation between a courtesan and her pursuer.

*Mujiang* or carpenters and *jujiang* or sawyers numbered among itinerant artisans, although sawyers were probably more stable than carpenters due to the difference in the size of their tools and the nature of the work. With a simple setup, mainly a handsaw and perhaps some small tools that could be placed in a small case, carpenters were able to move around easily, so mostly worked at households or courtyards after being invited. Carpenter Weng, as discussed above, is working in a lady's home, according to the simple indoor arrangement, to repair a night stool, an everyday necessity as well as a standard part of a bride's dowry.<sup>53</sup> According to Klaas Ruitenbeek, "the actual shaping of the various wooden parts and cutting the joints to fit them together is what may be called the carpenter's working proper."<sup>54</sup>

Sawyers' work needed significantly more strength, skills (as indicated in the caption), and good cooperation. It is likely that they resided in fixed places where they could be found when needed. Here Songshan Daoren's design depicts a pair of sawyers, one standing higher on a board and the other sitting on the ground, working together to move a large saw back and forth to cut lumber, probably working with other workers for constructing a house or bridge. Western observers have left us written and pictorial

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<sup>52</sup> A real historical figure, Wang Xiaobao sold herself to a courtesan house in order to pay for her father's burial. See Gail Hershatter 1997, p. 455 note 34. She also had her image published in Huayu xiaozhu zhuren, *Haishang qinglou tuji* (1892), 2:19. For a reproduction of the image see Yeh 2006, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Lu 1999, p. 191.

<sup>54</sup> Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Carpentry and Building in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Fifteenth-Century Carpenter's Manual, Lu Ban Jing* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 64.

records documenting how Chinese sawyers worked. A description details the tools, working procedures and condition of Chinese carpenters and sawyers.

The peculiarity of their tools will be immediately noticed ... the handsaw resembles our bucksaw, except that the blade stands at an angle to the frame, the plane, from its diminutive size, looks like a plaything, and is used, as seen in the hands of one of the figures, the chisels and gouges are few and have very short blades, the rough wooden drill-stock, with a bamboo bow and dart-shaped drills, answers instead of gimblets, a bolt and ring serves to draw nails, as the clumsy looking hatchet does to drive them; the adze, with its wooden head, is a curiosity from the economy of iron evinced in its construction, and, like many other things, the exact opposite to ours, the line for marking boards, &c., is black instead of white. This marking apparatus is a convenient affair; the line is wound on a spool, fastened in a small box, and turned with a wire crank; when drawn out it passes through some cotton containing moistened India ink, which is also used with a slip of bamboo for marking as a pencil, a small weight fastened to the end of the line keeps it from being drawn into the box and serves as a plummet.<sup>55</sup>

Those who lacked a particular skill sold their physical strength to make a living as laborers and coolies, such as rickshaw pullers, sedan-chair carriers, and porters. Back carriers, for example, were said to be able to carry up to 330 pounds on their backs.<sup>56</sup> They were among the most vulnerable to illness or injury that sometimes forced them to live in a situation between free laborers and beggars.<sup>57</sup>

Songshan Daoren has one design depicting the work of two sedan carriers, whose “shoulder carriage” carries a foreign couple, while a hunting dog is following them. The irony is in the contrast between the traditional Chinese transportation and the foreigners

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<sup>55</sup> Enoch Cobb Wines, *A Peep at China in Mr. Dunn's Chinese Collection* (Philadelphia: Ashmead, 1839), pp. 105-6.

<sup>56</sup> Wang Di, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> A corresponding literary figure in such situations was the famous Ah Q created by Lu Xun in Lu Xun, *The True Story of Ah Q*, translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1972). For a recent study on the novel, the character and the author's thoughts in relation to broader historical and intellectual currents, see Paul B. Foster, *Ah Q Archaeology: Lu Xun, Ah Q, Ah Q Progeny and the National Character Discourse in Twentieth Century China* (Lanham, MD : Lexington Books, 2006).

against the backdrop where more and more Chinese took imported transportation such as the horse-drawn carriage.<sup>58</sup>

Another depiction features a ferry woman, the only female laborer in our *nianhua* records, who is talking with a young man, while her husband, a porter, casts a dubious look at them. The caption narrates from the perspective of the women:

My name is Cai Yue'e and (my job is to) wait on standby at the dock to ferry people. I was just offered a big commission, but am afraid my husband, the old porter, will be "drinking vinegar" (be jealous of the young male customer).

It also seems to suggest the marriage between occupations: a ferry woman and a water porter makes a perfect match.

Barbers figure predominantly in the urban space of daily life as the providers of body maintenance service. Barbers have a long and enduring presence in Chinese cities and were generally among the most represented in pictorial records of city life.<sup>59</sup> Before the end of the Qing dynasty these barbers provided an essential service of shaving the forehead and weaving the queues for men in the mandatory Manchu fashion. In addition to head, feet and ears also needed specialized maintenance, although oftentimes, they were done by the same person. Our prints show that in one case the barber also provides ear-cleaning service, in another he provides pedicures. In another print the pedicurist appears as a specialist in feet maintenance. The service was probably vital for the many

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<sup>58</sup> When horse-drawn carriages were first introduced to China, only the wealthy Chinese and some foreigners could afford to ride them. By the 1890s, a much broader section of Shanghai society had access to the experience which was facilitated by the rental companies that had more than two thousand carriages available for rental by 1891. It became an excessive leisure practice frequently represented in Shanghai's fictional works. See Des Forges 2007, p.96. One unique Shanghai street scene of the time was the city's courtesans taking horse-carriages roaming the public spaces. These public parades became news items depicted in Shanghai's leading papers such as the *Dianshizhai huabao*. See Catherine Yeh 2006, pp. 68-74.

<sup>59</sup> According to the then 75 year- old Zhou Shaojie, a Chengdu resident, who was interviewed by Wang Di in 1997, professional barbers only began to appear in the early Qing after the Manchu state ordered Han men to shave their forehead and wear Manchu style pigtailed. Because of that, they were always considered servants of the Manchu government. See Wang 2003, p. 320, note 78.

porters and other people who made their living by walking around. Barbers are often portrayed in the context of humor. In *Ten Funny Scenes* (figure 3.10) a barber provides pedicure service in the street to a man of decent social status, while a barber cleaning a customer's ear (in a teahouse) was viewed as one of the *Ten Really Jolly and Funny Things* (figure 3.11). One of Songshan Daoren's designs features a specialized pedicurist service for women (figure 3.12). The pedicurist, sitting on a stool and wearing glasses, treats the customer's toenail with a stick. The inscription ironically states that the craftsmanship is of little importance, and what matters is the barber's capacity to tolerate the dirt and stench.



Figure 3.10 Anonymous, *Ten Funny Scenes*, accessioned in 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 46.5x33.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A53.





Figure 3.10 detail



Figure 3.11 Anonymous, *Ten Really Jolly and Funny Things*, accessioned in 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 52x 31.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A45.



Figure 3.12 Songshan Daoren, *Pedicurist*, 1894, woodblock print, 32 x 27 cm. Shanghai Library. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 248.

Fortune-tellers were the most important figures who took care of the souls of people by giving advice about the future. From Qing literati writings such as *Hard Gourd Collection* (*Jian hu ji* 堅瓠集) by Chu Renhuo 褚人獲 (1635-?), we are told that there were various petty fortune-tellers making their living by fortune-telling without reading people's faces, and who were usually blind, moving around in the streets of Jiangsu.<sup>60</sup> One type of fortune-teller beat an iron plate; others plucked string instruments;

<sup>60</sup> Chu Renhuo, *Hu jian ji*, juan 3, "Wuzhong yiren" (郡昔有人双目皆瞽。以推命为生。旁无相者。日走苏城之内。外。不失尺寸。街坊巷陌。无不知之。) Cited in Gao Yongjian, *Qigai* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1998), p. 115.

still others kept a sparrow as the aid of telling fortunes.<sup>61</sup> Songshan Daoren portrays the “plucking-string fortune-teller” from Songjiang (figure 3.13), traveling with his three-stringed *xianzi* 弦子, from one place to another. Walking with a stick, he is stopped by a woman and a boy. It turns out that the little boy is stopping the fortune-teller for his older sister, who wants to know when she should get married. The frequent lack of real knowledge (i.e. the unity of Nature and humanity, the doctrines of yin and yang and five elements etc.) earned fortune-tellers a dubious reputation, little better than that of tricksters. Songshan Daoren seems to suggest that women and children were easy targets for these non-professional fortune-tellers, although the *nianhua* designer also shows sympathy for their hard and floating life.

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<sup>61</sup> Hu Puan, “Jiangsu, Nanjing caifeng ji,” *Zhongguo fengsu* (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2007), p.111.



Figure 3.13 Songshan Daoren, *Fortune-teller*, 1894-95, woodblock print, 31x 27 cm. Shanghai library. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 248.

### 2.3 The Vagabond

In his discussion of the rural economy of the Lower Yangzi region, David Faure points out that *yumin* or the floating population was a perpetual phenomenon in 19<sup>th</sup> century China, and the category refers to people who did not have a steady position or belong to the city. Unlike peddlers and artisans who sold goods and services to make a living, urban vagabonds, notably beggars, pickpockets and quack doctors were badly reputed and normally categorized as the “ugly poor”. Beggars were especially



controversial here because they were constantly moving but were also part of the urban population. Faure distinguishes beggars from *youmin* because Qing administration put beggars under the *baojia* system, while Hanchao Lu places beggars within the realm of *youmin*, though a special group of the *youmin*.<sup>62</sup> However, they were also regular actors in the urban stage, and therefore major characters in the *nianhua* narrative of street life.

Beggars made up a significant proportion of the urban poor in late Qing and early Republican Shanghai. Mostly considered vagabonds who begged on street, according to Hanchao Lu, many Chinese beggars had family ties in rural villages, sometimes provided performance and services for alms, and as a group they took mendicancy as a profession that was an urban calling in contrast to their rural background.<sup>63</sup> Displayed in *nianhua*, they were subjects of humorous communication hidden in literary pun and social satire. In *Ten Really Jolly and Funny Things*, the beggar is ridiculed when having his worn-out clothes patched up. The seamstress has to mend his trousers without having them taken off, as these are probably his only pair. The caption describes the occurrence as extremely (*qiong* 窮) funny, a pun on the word *qiong*, which also means poor. The incongruities also come from the fact that ragged clothing was their identifying marker, but the beggar now seeks to have it mended – he is both a beggar and a consumer. He has to pay for the services he gets from the female tailor, though the money and food he obtains generally comes as alms from other people.

The irony was also in the contrast between beggars and new professions. The importation of Western technology and entertainment brought in new occupations. The

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<sup>62</sup> See David Faure, "The Rural Economy of Kiangsu Province, 1870-1911," *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong* 9, 2 (1978), pp. 365-471; Hanchao Lu, *Street Criers: A Cultural History of Chinese Beggars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> Lu 2005, p. 13.

arrival of foreign optical devices produced a new type of entertainment, the peep show, known in Chinese as *xiyang jing* 西洋鏡, literally “mirror of the Western ocean,” as well as the new occupation, the peep show vendor. Songshan Daoren’s illustration of a peep show booth (figure 3.14), where a child, accompanied by a woman, is standing on a wooden bench and looking through a small opening on one end of a boxlike enclosure that contains one or more magnifying lenses. The lenses give the illusion of depth and action of the images, usually of landscapes or figures, projected on the surface of a platform behind the closure. Meanwhile, a beggar, supported by a bamboo pole, wearing ragged clothing, approaches the woman and presents his begging bowl. The addition of the beggar in this scene seems unnecessary and the designer did not give any word to him in the caption, which only explains the amusement of the new optical entertainment. Pictorial intersection of the urban poor and the novel leisure activities, however, seems to suggest the coexistence of both the vice and the modern.

Pickpocketing was one of the recurrent crimes illustrated in late Qing Shanghai *nianhua*. Pickpockets are typically depicted as clownish petty thieves, in contrast to the would-be victim who usually appears as carelessly immersed in other matters vis-à-vis a cautious and sneaky thief. In *Street Barber* (figure 3.15), at a barber’s booth, a pickpocket reaches his hand out to the customer’s cap that is hung on the erect pole while sneaking a glance at the customer and the barber. The irony is that the customer indulges in the delight of ear cleaning offered by the barber while the thief is cautiously moving closer to his goal.



Figure 3.14 Songshan Daoren, *Peepshow Booth*, 1894, woodblock print, 32 x 26 cm. Shanghai library. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 250.



Figure 3.15 Songshan daoren, *Street Barber*, 1894-95, woodblock print, 24.9 x 19.1 cm, Tenri Library, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 327.

A similar scenario plays out in the transaction between a fisherwoman and a retail trader in the above-mentioned *Fisherwoman* (figure 3.7). The pickpocket stands behind the woman, reaching toward her basket while the woman is immersed in bargaining with the male retailer about the weight of the fish in the hope of getting a better deal. Both pictures depict a common scene in the street markets, and could be read as a warning

against petty thieves, who also appear in abstract form such as being captioned in the signboard inside a teahouse and opium den that reminds the customers to be cautious about their belongings (i.e. in *Green Lotus Pavilion Teahouse and Opium Den of Shanghai*).

## **2.4 Street Theatre**

We already know that with the rise of Shanghai, the city developed a dramatically prosperous market for theatre. There was only one theatre, the Kun opera playhouse Sanyayuan, (founded in 1842) in Shanghai before the Taiping Rebellion.<sup>64</sup> The war forced more than 100 Kun opera performers (and far more patrons) to Shanghai, and by the 1870s, there were more than thirty theatres in the foreign settlements.<sup>65</sup> From that time, continuing throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai saw the rise and fall of over a hundred theatres.<sup>66</sup> Both theatres and performance genres increased rapidly. Regional and local operas performed in dialects and local traditions gathered in Shanghai. By 1885 Shanghai had attracted most of the mature genres of Jiangnan as well as those of other regions, such as Hui opera, Beijing opera, Guangdong opera, Tanhuang opera (Jiangsu), the Mao'er theatre, the village flower drum and the like.<sup>67</sup> The city gathered a great variety of theatres, becoming the center of performing culture by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>64</sup> He Ma and Zheng Yimei, *Shanghai jiu hua* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1956), pp. 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> Huang Maocai, "You Hu cuoji (1898)", reprinted in Shanghai tongshe ed., *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao* (Taipei: Zhongguo chubanshe, 1984), p. 559.

<sup>66</sup> Xue Liyong, *Xianhua Shanghai* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> A list of regional genres in Shanghai can be found in Zhongguo xiquzhi bianweihui, *Zhongguo xiquzhi: Jiangsu juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1992), pp. 157-65, pp. 124-28.

The spirit of urban recreation, however, was not limited to professional theatres. Streets provided one of the best public stages for popular entertainers. Unlike professional theatres that attracted customers seeking certain performances, street performers were able to turn any passerby into their audience, and people did not necessarily have to pay for viewing. William Rowe has identified a great variety of popular entertainers, performing in open-air marketplaces or in wine shops and teahouses of early modern Hankou, including street singers, female impersonators, actors, verse-chanters, storytellers, public lecturers, and clap musicians.<sup>68</sup> Similar types of urban recreation could be found in other cities, including Shanghai.

Like Hankou, Shanghai had its street singers. Listening to blind singers' performance was characterized as one of the *Ten Really Jolly and Funny Things*. Here we have a female blind singer, who is invited to perform in a private household or perhaps inside a commercial place like a teahouse or restaurant, according to the interior setting. She is playing *erhu* 二胡, a two-stringed spike fiddle while singing. A blind man beside her is clapping out the rhythm as accompaniment. A male spectator, perhaps the master of the house or a consumer of the commercial house, stands before them with one of his hands putting up, indicating his immersion in the performance.

Street entertainers depicted in *nianhua* are mostly acrobats and magicians. Acrobatic performance in one of Songshan Daoren's designs (figure 3.16) depicts a team of acrobats including a woman and a child who are performing on a table, along with a male musician. The female acrobat displays the balance skill, lying on a table with her feet stretching up to hold the child who is standing on his head. The musician is

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<sup>68</sup> William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 22.

somewhat clownishly depicted beating a gong, and nearby can be seen sword, trident, nunchakus and an erect ladder. A male spectator of apparently good social standing throws money toward the acrobats. The caption alludes to the Jin dynasty's Tao Kan 陶侃, once governor of Guangzhou, who had moved bricks outside the house in the morning and inside the house in the evening, meaning to temper oneself—that is to say—the acrobats had to train hard in order to profit from their performance. In Suzhou, acrobatic performance had been closely associated with New Year celebration as recorded in the miscellaneous writing by Gu Lu, and tightrope walking had been a common motif in the old Gusu prints. Contemporary commercial artist Wu Youru also designed a *nianhua* titled *Acrobatic Performance at the Yu Garden*, in which the tightrope walkers, martial artists, somersaults, musicians and crowds of spectators were depicted at the center.





Figure 3.16 Songshan Daoren, *Acrobats*, 1895, Woodblock print, 32 x 28 cm. Shanghai Library. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 249.

In addition to the commonly seen acrobatic performances such as tightrope walking and Kung-fu demonstrations, Songshan Daoren also recorded a magician (figure 3.17). He has a pole in his mouth; toward the other end of the pole there are three prongs above which a miniature stool-like device is situated. The bowl is tied to a stick or string that has the other end attached to the little stool. As the caption indicates, the performer is able to let the bowl rotate by itself. The performance is so fascinating that a certain old man Wang and a “Cantonese woman” with (stereotypically?) large or natural feet, are captivated by the performance with no intention to leave.





Figure 3.17 Songshan Daoren, *Magician*, 1894-95, woodblock print, Shanghai Library.  
After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000): 2: 111.

Opera performers and acrobats who performed in public spaces took the street as their stage. Peddlers and artisans, too, contributed sounds, calls and “noises” to the street markets. Some of those itinerant “merchants” actually sang a song or musical phrase, with or without a musical instrument. These sounds and performances transformed Shanghai streets into a lively stage, where daily performance of the street people, as well as periodic formal performances of religious and political significance, notably the

recitation of morality books and perhaps the preaching of “Sacred Edict” (*shengyu* 聖諭),<sup>69</sup> took place, blurring the boundaries of everyday life and performance.

It is not clear exactly when the tradition of peddling through sounds and calls started in China. Meng Yuanlao 夢元老 (fl. 1110-1160) of the Song dynasty made the earliest reference to peddling in his *Record of a Dream of Splendor in Eastern Capital* (*Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄, 12<sup>th</sup> century). Current scholarly literature has approached the subjects of peddlers and their calls from the folklorist perspective, maintaining that the nature and use of instruments had pre-modern sources, and that the calls of the city were parts of the folk culture.<sup>70</sup>

Basically, there were three types of peddling, depending on how they made their sounds. The first type relied only on the peddlers’ voice, another type used only musical instrument, and still another used both voice and instrument, although there did exist a “silent” group, such as the above-mentioned candy peddler (Figure 3.4) who claims (in the caption) that he does not have to say a word for “peddling” as the customers would come automatically, playing the moving candy-picker which is set in the middle of basket, where candies are placed. A male customer is flicking the picker, which would spin and

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<sup>69</sup> The growth of recitation of morality books around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is associated with the influence of professional *baojuan* performances and recitation of the Sacred Edict promoted by the Imperial government. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, publishers in larger urban areas published several types of morality books for recitation, and notably some of them were printed in lithography by Shanghai publishers. According to Christopher Reed, Dianshizhai studio’s first publication was *Shenyu xiangjie* (*Sacred Edict Explained in Detail*). See You Zi’an, “Cong xuanjiang shengyu dao shuo shanshu: jindai xuanjiang fangshi zhi chuancheng,” *Wenhua yichan*, no.2 (2008): 49-58; Reed 2004, p. 110; Philip Clart, *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China, 1800-2012* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 166.

<sup>70</sup> Qu Yanbin, *Zhongguo zhaohuang yu zhaolai shisheng* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2000). Peddlers are particularly prominent in books about “old Beijing”, just a few examples, Bai Tiezheng, *Lao Beijing de gugudian’er* (Taipei: Huilong chubanshe, 1977); Fu Gongyue, *Beijing jiu ying* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1989); Zhengyangmen guanli chu, *Jiujing shi zhao* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1996).

the customer could get the prize located where the picker stops. A photograph of perhaps the 20<sup>th</sup> century records the same trade run by an old woman with a child, probably her grandson, in a Shanghai street.<sup>71</sup>

*Nianhua* artists not only depicted the way peddlers made their calls, but also recorded some of their cries. A means of advertising, those calls and songs were believed to have a harmonious link with the goods on sale.<sup>72</sup> In his discussion of Chinese martial arts novels, Paize Keulemans argues that sound played a key role in late 19<sup>th</sup> century martial arts novels. By incorporating and sometimes inventing the storytellers' sounds, these novels turned the silent printed texts into a lively simulacrum of festival atmosphere, contributing to the construction of communal identity based on a shared reading experiences that evokes imagination of oral performances, thus the making of modern reading subject.<sup>73</sup>

By the same token, *nianhua* prints that include or imitate the cries of the peddlers transformed the voiceless visual materials, as well as the act of viewing into the communal sharing of the street theatre. The chestnut peddler sang, "Chestnuts are roasted with sugar, they taste sweet and savory. A portion costs only 14 *wen*; be cautious, eyebrows will fall (*tuo meimao* 脱眉毛) after eating." Here the "*tuo meimao*" was a local expression to describe the deliciousness of food, as well as a humorous communication between the peddler and his customers. Use of local dialects also shows *nianhua* of the type helped define the readership sharing the same language. As with any commercial

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<sup>71</sup> For a reproduction of the photograph see Lu 1999, p. 216.

<sup>72</sup> Bai 1997, p. 79.

<sup>73</sup> Paize Keulemans, *Sound Rising from the Paper: Nineteenth-century Martial Arts Fiction and the Chinese Acoustic Imagination* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

practice, peddlers' advertising calls were not mere description of actual goods. They used pleasant and exaggerated words to promote their goods – the chestnut peddlers' song suggests that his chestnuts are so delicious that the eaters would lose their eyebrows. Others added rhymes to their calls, as Samuel Victor Constant observed in 1937, "some call out their wares in a musical voice or song calculated to please the hearer."<sup>74</sup> Unlike Keulemans' subjects of fiction, *nianhua* prints of the street theatre enlivened the lived everyday experiences of the urban community.

Together, the "petty traders" including peddlers, artisans and laborers, and professional street performers took the street as the stage to display their arts, crafts and goods. Even the "ugly poor," the pickpockets for example, were "performing" their tricks on the street stage for the city people and *nianhua* viewers.

### 3. Visual Fragments and Urban Icon

Political and social disturbances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pushed state power to margins when local elites began to assume social and military control over society.<sup>75</sup> The emergence of treaty ports and colonialism further divided the urban structure and administrative power in cities, which ceased to be a symbol of imperial political power. In Shanghai, foreign settlements and the Chinese administration cooperated and competed, dividing the administrative structure. The establishment of foreign settlements and the related infrastructures and technologies further divided and transformed urban

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<sup>74</sup> Samuel Victor Constant, *Calls, Sounds and Merchandise of the Peking Street Peddlers* (Peking: The Camel Bell, 1937), p. v.

<sup>75</sup> A classic study of the decline of the state power and the rise of the local elite see Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

space. The carryover of regional cultures with immigrants from various places throughout the country contributed to the fragmentation of local society and cultural production.

Cultural production in and about the city provides narrative structures that featured and promoted the sense of fragmentation and ephemerality as defining characteristics of experiencing the city. The popularity of the *zhuzhi ci* 竹枝詞 (bamboo-twig poems)<sup>76</sup> mostly published in newspapers such as *Shenbao*, and guidebooks about Shanghai since the 1870s testifies to the formation of a new reading/viewing habit of skimming and a mind habit of fragmented imagination. As Alexander Des Forges has shown, turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century Shanghai fiction did as much as newspapers and guidebooks to explain the city in a straightforward fashion through narrative aesthetics of “simultaneity, interruption, mediation and excess.”<sup>77</sup> The narrative aesthetics forced the readers to “skim only the surface of” and “give only hurried and cursory glance at” the city and its cultural representations.

With the advent of photography, Chinese streetscapes and street characters became privileged “objects” of Western observers, and with the help of the new printing and publishing technologies, photographic images of individual “petty traders” were widespread in the marketplace through newspapers and magazines. In his discussion of photographic representation of peddlers in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, Christian Henriot remarks that peddlers as a *photographic genre* posed “various forms of gaze on Chinese society: aesthetics, exoticism, ethnography and voyeurism” and contributed to the

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<sup>76</sup> A rich collection of the *zhuzhi ci* about Shanghai is in Gu Bingquan, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhi ci* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Des Forges 2007, p. 8.

formation of “the association of poverty and China.”<sup>78</sup> From the perspective of the Western photographers, this may be the case. For the Chinese artists (as well as Chinese photographers), who also produced images of street characters and the urban poor, this argument seems less effective. Chinese mastery of photography and more importantly photographic code, however, did contribute to a renewal of their visual vocabulary.

In fact, Chinese artists of Guangzhou made serial paintings portraying petty traders and street life of the southern port for export trade during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Examples included the pith paper (*tongcao* 通草) watercolor paintings that comprised a whole genre of depictions of street traders.<sup>79</sup> An artist known as Puqua created a set of 100 gouaches and another named Tingqua painted a series of 360 ink drawings as export art during the time 1830-70, all devoted to everyday urban activities and street people including merchants, street vendors, butchers, craftsmen, candle makers, arrow smith, shoemakers, laborers, painters, tailors, carpenters, salt smugglers and the like.<sup>80</sup> Although Guangzhou artists targeted a Western audience, they definitely were not casting a “colonial gaze” on his fellow urban dwellers.

There is no simple answer to the question of whether the Westerners’ “projection of China images” forced the Guangzhou artists to make such images, or whether these images gave the Westerners the impression of “what China looks like.” The export art quickly declined with the rise of Shanghai, and many export painting workshops of

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<sup>78</sup> Henriot 2012, pp. 101-2.

<sup>79</sup> On Chinese export watercolors see Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984); Chen Cunjie, *Shijiu shiji Zhongguo waixiao tongcao shuicaihua yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>80</sup> The two sets have been published together in Huang Shijian ed., *Shijiu shiji zhongguo shijing fengqing: sanbai liushi hang* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999). Then there is the so-called pith paper *tongcao* painting from Guangdong, also depicting the trades, street figures and plants, which were also targeting European market since as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Guangzhou were reorganized into photographic studios. It is unknown whether Guangzhou's export paintings had any impact on Shanghai's *nianhua* artists. Probably no, or at least very little, as they targeted the European audience and moreover, Shanghai only began to produce *nianhua* representations of the theme at the exact time when it lost its favor among Guangzhou's export artists and their foreign clients. Rather, I propose, it was the local demographic change, which was too dramatic to be ignored, that led the *nianhua* artists to appropriate the motif but adapted it to address their current concerns.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai print artists updated the classic motif of street characters, transforming the urban nobodies to the status of major actors of the street theatre. Different from their literati and Guangzhou export artist precedents, Shanghai *nianhua* artists disseminated the images of the street characters among the ordinary urban viewers, along with the circulation of photographs and journalistic illustrations of them, promoting the street characters to the status of urban icon.

So the urban landscape in the Gusu print *Three Hundred and Sixty Hang* became reformulated, the resultant work was Songshan Daoren's series *Three Hundred and Sixty Professions and Trades* and *Marketplace Professions and Trades*, with each print or miniature devoting to a particular "trade". The reference to each protagonist as "so and so" (sometimes with their origins) in *Marketplace Professions and Trades* appears to tell the viewer the figures are realistically depicted and that they are real and could be the vendor one just met on the street or frequented every day. A shift in visual vocabulary from that of the idealized urban prosperity, in which the peddlers, vendors, laborers, artisans and the like are only symbols and abstraction to that of urban everyday realism where each trade has its cosmos, and indeed is Shanghai in miniature, produced and was

produced by the urban environment and its aesthetic forms that structure its cultural production.

## **Conclusion**

Relocated to post-Taiping Shanghai, *nianhua* artists continued their city-making practices but started to define a different city. Visual perceptions of the “city” were accordingly shifted, addressing issues pertinent particularly to late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai. Drawing on traditional Chinese genre paintings of streetscapes and cityscapes and Western photographic codes, Shanghai *nianhua* artists like Songshan Daoren transformed the image of the “city” defined in Gusu prints, by centralizing the previously idealized street characters, symbolic of order and prosperity, into realistic urban figures of the immigrant society. *Nianhua* representations of street vendors and urban poor helped define and disseminate an urban aesthetic – featuring hybridity, fragmentation and everyday realism – that promoted the historically, socially and visually prominent, though voiceless, urban nobodies to the status of urban icon.



## Chapter 4 Inauspicious Women: The Grotesque, New Viragos and Modern Female Professionals

Although print artists of 18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou had already developed an interest in personalizing urban settings as Gusu images, late 19<sup>th</sup> century prints of Shanghai were marked by a new realism with more sensitivity toward changes that were appearing in the immediate urban environment. As the previous chapter has revealed, *nianhua* played an important role in defining the urban experience in Shanghai, representing the demographic and structural changes of the city through depictions of ordinary urban characters. Among others, the transformation of women's lives had been the main concern of many, including the woodblock print artists, who exploited the subject of the female image, transforming her from the auspicious symbol and ideal beauty to the realistic, the corporeal and the unruly.

This transformation, I propose, was a response to contemporary debates on the “woman question”, so contributed to the broader cultural feminization and sexualisation of cosmopolitan Shanghai. I do not intend to deny the continued production of “auspicious beauties” such as those designed by Mengjiao (Zhou Muqiao) and his colleagues (chapter 2), but propose that there was a growing market for *nianhua* representations of “inauspicious women”, which, I contend, was a result of the commercial economy and the changing cultural image and social role of women in Shanghai. Meanwhile, the changing visual vocabulary of the female image signified the modern transformation of the *nianhua* genre itself – secularization. It was the interaction between *nianhua* and the urban environment that defined a unique gendered viewing experience in turn-of-the-twentieth- century Shanghai.

Past scholarship on late Qing Shanghai women has mainly focused on two social categories of the female gender: the educated “new women” and the glamorous urban courtesans,

as sites for the construction of modernity and nationalism. The “new woman”, in particular, was central to contemporary elitist discourses, both male and female, in turn-of-the-twentieth century China, following upon the late imperial traditional “talented women” ideal.<sup>1</sup> According to Joan Judge, refashioned discourses of virtue, talent and heroism played a key role in defining modern Chinese womanhood during the last years of the Qing (1898-1911) especially among the first generation of Chinese feminists. In contrast to values of the “talented women”, a new set of social ideals emerged for the modern women. For women’s education, for example, the traditional idea of talented women’s literacy was refashioned as a means of not simply promoting cultural capital of the family but more importantly the value of public goodness. The location of education was shifted from the inner chamber to the classroom; the motherly duty was refashioned from giving birth to sons to carry on the marital family’s lineage to that of raising the national citizenry.<sup>2</sup>

Concentrating on urban reform-minded women, Nanxiu Qian’s study reveals that 1890s Chinese female reformers drew on the *xianyuan* 賢媛 or “worthy ladies” tradition of the Wei-Jin period (220-420), establishing the first Chinese girls’ school *Nü xuetaang* and Women’s Study Society (*Nü xuehui*), and advocating women’s self-improvement through the first Chinese women’s journal *Chinese Girl’s Progress* (*Nü xuebao* July 24– October 29, 1898).<sup>3</sup> In so doing, they managed to define a new set of principles of womanhood that problematized the masculine

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<sup>1</sup> In the Ming and Qing time, “talented women” became a real and visible social and literary category through their poetry and literary anthologies. Maintaining a complex relationship with the dominant discourses of Confucianism, they tended to empower themselves through the adoption of the male voice. For a recent discussion of the “talented women” culture in the late 18<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> century Jiangnan, see Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Nanxiu Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms,” *Modern China*, vol. 29, No. 4, (2003): 399-454.

approach to China's cultural and social reforms, prioritizing women's liberation over national strengthening. Those active, erudite and poetic women reformers sought to fulfill women's cultural ambitions of gaining equal educational and political rights for the purpose of establishing an ideal social order.<sup>4</sup> The feminine approach to the improvement of women's social role provided an alternative solution to the broader issue of China's accommodation of Western ideas and technologies, and determining the proper place of women as educated and informed contributor to a wider society. Judge's and Qian's accounts alike demonstrate that principles of modern womanhood were not mere imitation of Western (or Japanese) models, rather, their vigour came from an internal reaction against and appropriation of the traditional ways in which elite Chinese women were defined in textually ideal and socially practical terms.

One of the most prominent conceptual ruptures of the "new woman" was its close connection with the changing concept of the body. Articulated originally in the form of the emancipation of women's feet, the female body became a site of constructing modern citizenry, bringing women's labour outside the family into industrial factories.<sup>5</sup> Along with bodies came the change of clothing, as Antonia Finnane has demonstrated. Chinese women's (as well as men's) clothing changed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the changes were revolved around fabric and color rather than cut and fit, which Finnane has attributed to rapid urbanisation

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<sup>4</sup> Nanxiu Qian, *Politics, Poetics, and Gender in late Qing China: Xue Shaohui and the Era of Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 1–68.

and its promotion of consumption and production in connection with colonial-capitalist commerce and industrialization.<sup>6</sup>

A second group of women attaining a high profile in the gendered landscape of late Qing Shanghai were courtesans. In his socio-historical studies of Shanghai prostitution, Christian Henriot reveals that during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the increasing commercialisation of the local economy together with the emergence of the middle-class urbanites caused a general decline of the role and status of high-class courtesans who had been the symbol of a cultural tradition of the Chinese elites, contributing to the formation of a full-fledged sex market of popular prostitution in Shanghai. Sexualisation and commercialisation began with the opening of Shanghai to foreign trade and was completed after World War I. Drawing on guides to prostitution, memoirs written by elites and archives of the French Concession's Sanitary Police, Henriot discusses in detail the institutions and organizations of prostitution in Shanghai, the historical background of the courtesans' move, since the 1850s, from Nanshi (the walled Chinese city) to the foreign settlements where they were joined by immigrant courtesans from other Jiangnan cities who were escaping the Taiping Rebellion, as well as the ages and regional backgrounds of them.<sup>7</sup>

Gail Hershatter's study covers roughly the same period from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but from a feminist perspective. By piecing together the biographies of several top courtesans in Shanghai, Hershatter makes it clear her aim is to let the "elusive subaltern voice"

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<sup>6</sup> Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Christian Henriot, "From a Throne of Glory to a Sea of Ignominy: Shanghai Prostitution Revisited (1849-1949)," *Modern China* (April, 1996): 132-61; Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History 1849-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

of her female subject be heard, thus making a great contribution to our understanding of the lived experiences of those women. In her “imagined reconstruction” of the lives of courtesans in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, Hershatter describes in detail the female agency – their complex relations to the madam and the customer, their choice of love interest and of exit from the courtesan house. In other aspects, she approaches her subject from the perspective of power and control as part of the broader project of China’s nation-state building.<sup>8</sup>

Building on Henriot’s and Hershatter’s studies, Catherine Yeh treats the urban courtesans as proactive participants in an emerging entertainment industry that prospered in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai.<sup>9</sup> With a focus on entertainment culture especially Shanghai’s print entertainment, Yeh describes in detail the interaction among the city’s courtesans, the new urban intellectual-journalists, and the civic environment of the foreign settlements that celebrated “the absence of a hegemonic power structure” in Shanghai.<sup>10</sup> Citing published texts, Yeh describes Shanghai as the “playground” for its public women and her literati pursuers to play games with print and performance. They invoked the *Dream of the Red Chamber* by naming themselves Daiyu and Baoyu, while the tabloids described their world as the Dagan Yuan. The development of print culture in the city had been held decisive in changing the narrative structures of cultural production generating a new genre of courtesan fiction.<sup>11</sup> The courtesan

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<sup>8</sup> Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Yeh 2006, p. 347.

<sup>11</sup> One typical example was the popularity of installment fiction serialized in newspapers; see Alexander Des Forges, *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007). For the narrative innovation of late Qing courtesan novels see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

image represented by Shanghai writers was “rooted in the complex response of literati novelists to their social position in Shanghai foreign settlements and their troubled identity in the city.”<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the courtesan image was widespread through illustrated texts such as city guides, pictorials, photographs and postcards. Compared to the image of her late Ming counterpart, as Yeh has pointed out, the image of the late Qing Shanghai courtesan underwent dramatic change from secluded to public, exclusive to popular, becoming symbols of the urban glamour and commercial might by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Images of the courtesan riding in carriages between engagements, and in teahouses, entertainment houses and temples were reproduced and widely circulated in and beyond Shanghai through illustrated publications such as *Scenic Views along Shen River*, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, *Feiyingge Pictorial* and *A Hundred Beauties of Shanghai* that were filled with illustrations of the urbane courtesans and stories of their lives and loves. Unlike her traditional image as the passive muse of the literati lover (as in the ideal scholar-beauty mode), the late Qing courtesan was represented on her own terms as a proactive trader in the prostitution business and self-conscious manipulator of Western material culture.

Aside from the images of the glamorous courtesans, the “new women” as well as the traditional “auspicious beauties”, Shanghai *nianhua* artists contributed to the print markets with their depictions of a different category of women, the immoral and the deviant.<sup>14</sup> Woodblock

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<sup>12</sup> Catherine Vance Yeh, “Creating the Urban Beauty: The Shanghai Courtesan in Late Qing Illustrations,” in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith Zeitlin and Lydia Liu (Cambridge: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2003), p. 398.

<sup>13</sup> Yeh 2003, p. 397.

<sup>14</sup> “Radical” sheet prints were produced in northern print center Yangliuqing near Beijing. *Patriotic Woman* (*nüzi aiguo*), *Women’s Self-Strengthening* (*nüzi ziqiang*), *Female Students* and *Women in Military Training at Girls’ School* (*nü xuetao yanwu*), “women militia” prints in particular were extreme examples of the new women.

illustrations including *nianhua* had long been used to represent exemplary and virtuous women, both real and fictional, as well as technical illustration of womanly works such as the classic illustration of “women weaving (and men farming)”.<sup>15</sup> By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, female images in *nianhua* were dramatically transformed with the addition of the ordinary and more importantly the immoral types, which, I argue, was a response to the broader process of commercialisation and sexualisation of Shanghai.

This chapter explores these deviant women represented in *nianhua* and argues that by transforming the “auspicious women” into the inauspicious ones including the vulgarized goddess, the eroticized mother, the adulteress, and the murderess, *nianhua* artists actively participated in the contemporary redefinition of womanhood through the creation of what Mikhail Bakhtin has described as the “grotesque body”, degrading the ideal, the spiritual and the noble to the material, the decadent and the vulgar, which, in turn, became the power base toward renewal and regeneration.<sup>16</sup>

For Shanghai’s *nianhua* community, images of the new viragos and professional women (workers in industrial factories and entertainment/ service sector) became the power base of possibilities. While the elitist discourses defined women as the embodiment of ideal social order, proposing to return to either the (renewed) Confucian ideal to safeguard women’s role as the guardian of family morality or to create new Western-oriented ideal of educated and informed

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Although the girls’ school, the Women’s Study Society, and women’s journal were all established in Shanghai, such extremely politicized female images were not produced in the city. Tanya McIntyre, “Images of Women in Popular Prints of the Early Modern Period,” in Antonia Fiannane and Anne McLaren eds., *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture* (Monash: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 59-80.

<sup>15</sup> There is a separate genre of erotic paintings and illustrations and sex manuals, in which, women as well as men are sexualized. On the Ming erotic color prints see Robert Hans van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1941], trans. Hélène Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

contributor to society, late Qing popular *nianhua* artists subverted the elitist ideational construct, celebrating the degradation and demoralization of women. Centralizing the image of the disruptive and lascivious woman in the pictorial reservoir, *nianhua* artists joined their literary contemporaries producing texts featuring the new, the strange and the exotic. Meanwhile, that grotesque realism replaced auspicious idealization marked the pictorial and narrative shift of *nianhua* from Confucian didacticism to cosmopolitan entertainment, thus creating possibilities for innovation, a practice with a connotation of modernity.

### 1. The Auspicious Beauty

There is a venerable tradition of representing female figures in Chinese pictorial arts. Indebted to the tradition of the illustrated biographies of *lienü* 列女 or exemplary women, the images of female figures developed as an independent genre of *shinü* 仕女 or beautiful women (i.e. palace ladies and noble women) by the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and continued throughout the late imperial time.<sup>17</sup> As an ideational construct by masculine hands within the patriarchal system, images of women were traditionally made to visualize the ideal womanhood and femininity- apart from beautiful and elegantly attractive, she must be the embodiment of the virtues and behaviours expected of her social role in Confucian society. Reduced to worthy acts or stereotypes of ideal womanhood in accordance with Confucian gender ideology, the beauty was objectified and her rendition standardized, with the positioning of her in generic settings- the inner chamber, the garden, and the nature (landscape)- a “dreamscape”, to use Catherine Yeh’s

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<sup>17</sup> *Biographies of Exemplary Women (Lienü zhuan)*, compiled by the Confucian scholar Liu Xiang (77-6 B.C.), provided the major literary source for illustrations of exemplary women as an idealization of the heroic filial and virtuous acts. Like Confucian works, illustrations of exemplary women were to teach and encourage virtue and check evil.



phrase.<sup>18</sup> The female figure in illustrations, apart from her function to satisfy the desire of male viewers, is thus a symbol of spiritual purity and cultural refinement, an embodiment of the ideal womanly way (*fudao* 婦道) and female virtue (*fude* 婦德), and a visualization of female learning (*nüxue* 女學).

Whereas the female image occupied a symbolic space that was embedded in the life ways of Chinese elites, the Chinese state also appropriated her as instructional tool for illustrating idealized womanly behavior, particularly womanly work (*nügong* 女工), the labor that was expected to be performed by women from all social classes, which was a symbol of female virtue and her social function of contributing to the well-being of the family and the state.<sup>19</sup> Womanhood in imperial China had been defined by the production of textiles, thus the use of woodblock illustrations depicting “women weaving” (along with “men plowing”) represented by the classic *Illustration of Farming and Weaving* (*Gengzhi tu* 耕織圖), which had its early appearance during the Song dynasty and was reissued during the Qing dynasty.

### **1.1 Guanyin as Embodiment of Ultra-Femininity**

Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Mercy and Compassion (in Sanskrit, Avalokiteshvara), was particularly popular among Jiangnan women in late imperial times, and the cult of Guanyin in the region can be traced to the Song dynasty. In his *Record of the Pure and Fine* (*Qing jia lu* 清嘉錄), Gu Lu 顧祿 (19<sup>th</sup> century) has a description of the Guanyin cult in Suzhou.

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<sup>18</sup> Yeh 2003, p. 401.

<sup>19</sup> On womanly work, see Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 173-205.

The 19<sup>th</sup> day (of the second lunar month) is Guanyin's birthday, (on which,) ladies would gather at temples burning incense. Some would offer lamp oil for the Eternal Fire in order to be blessed with good health; others would pray for male children and promise the male children are to be converted to Guanyin in order to be blessed with longevity. Monks and nuns are making the Guanyin fair, in which rituals are solemnly performed, and fragrant flowers are offered. Women have to keep vegetarian fast since the first day until the current day—this is called *Guanyin su* 觀音素. This has to be re-practiced during the same days in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> month.<sup>20</sup>

Originally a male Buddhist deity, Guanyin acquired the female identity in the Song dynasty, and gradually her female features “superseded” the image of the Buddha.<sup>21</sup> A particularly popular image of Guanyin was the White-Robed Guanyin. Often rendered seated or standing alone, sometimes accompanied by “golden boy (Shancai 善才) and jade girl (Longnü 龍女, daughter of the Dragon King)” or a sparrow, Guanyin typically appears wearing a white robe and shawl covering her crowned head, with her left hand holding an ambrosia vase and the right hand a willow-branch wand (figure 4.1).

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<sup>20</sup> Gu Lu, *Qing jia lu* (1830) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), pp. 72-3.

<sup>21</sup> On the transformation of Guanyin in China, see Chun-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: the Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).



Figure 4.1 Anonymous, *Guanyin*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, Shanghai library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 126.

The cult of Guanyin and the popularization of her feminine identity were closely associated with the cult of Miaoshan 妙善.<sup>22</sup> The Miaoshan legend is about a young princess, who refused to marry a person of wealth and power. On defying her father's wish, Miaoshan was sent to labour in Baique Temple. When she retreated into a life of Buddhist meditation, her angry father had her killed. During her sojourn in the underworld, Miaoshan saved suffering souls

<sup>22</sup> Wilt Idema attributes Guanyin's gendered transformation to Miaoshan, proposing that Buddhism used Guanyin to replace local goddesses, see Wilt L. Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 8.

there. Later she returned to earth and assumed the guise of recluse in Mt. Xiangshan 香山. Hearing about her father's mortal illness, she then offered her eyes and arms to make magic medicine to eventually cure him. After showing her father the true path, she then miraculously revealed her real identity as Guanyin and achieved nirvana.<sup>23</sup> Miaoshan epitomizes the extreme form of filial piety through her self-mutilation. Refusing to marry, she avoided the pollution of wifehood, but also violated filial piety and the rites of propriety, so had to sojourn in hell for redemption.<sup>24</sup> In the form of Guanyin Who Brings Children, she embodies the ideal of motherhood with qualities of compassion, mercy and nurturance. Guanyin thus contains connotations of ultra-femininity.

Along with her traditional iconographic image of the White-Robed Guanyin, *nianhua* artists visualized the construction of gender identities of the sacred symbol.

## **1.2 Industrious and Respectable Mothers: Nursing and Weaving**

Traditional illustrations of mortal women, like Confucian classics, had been designed for the edification of the viewers, and female figures were intended to represent ideals of womanhood and femininity.<sup>25</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> century art historian Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (c.1020- after 1075) summarized how the beauty should be rendered— her image should be endowed with

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<sup>23</sup> On the history of the legend and its transformation, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For other versions, see Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), pp. 78-87; Henri Dore, *Researches on Superstition in China*, trans. M. Kennelly, 13 vols. (Shanghai: T'usewai, 1914-33), 6:134-96; Variant versions of the legend were distributed in the published form of religious tracts meritorious books (*shanshu*) and precious volumes (*baojuan*). A discussion of the legend recorded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century text *Xiangshan baojuan* is in Idema, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> On danger and power of female pollution see Emily Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in Arthur Wolf ed., *Studies in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 269-90.

<sup>25</sup> In illustrated biographies of exemplary women, apart from the inscription identifying each virtuous act, they could be any women— daughter, wife, mother, or widow.

loveliness and feminine charm, and her figure and face must have the look of severe correctness to reveal an antique purity of soul so that their stately and dignified beauty would inspire the onlooker to look up to them in reverence.<sup>26</sup> The woman in Chinese pictorial arts according to Guo, and demonstrated by many others in practice, should be portrayed as beautiful and charming, but submissive, amiable and good-natured in accordance with her prescribed role in Confucian patriarchal society. Confucian didacticism encouraged the use of illustrations in education. To teach the proper womanly principles, illustrations were used to display her proper work and obligations within the family.

One of the most important responsibilities for a woman in traditional China was to be a mother raising children, who, in a typical representation, could be observed playing beside their industrious mother, sometimes accompanied by maids. The iconography of diligent mother and playful children (oftentimes boys) had long been a standard of *nianhua* representations. The Gusu print *Mother and Children* (figure 4.2), for example, depicts a mother standing in a courtyard, looking at her three boys who are just playing beside her. With an enriched composition, *Children Playing on a Boat* (figure 4.3) is rendered in a highly mannered style with atmospheric setting evoking traditional tropes of secluded refinement, tranquility and order within the inner chamber. It shows a woman in a garden, looking casually at the boys playing. The composition of the window and architecture, the landscape of pond, boat, bird, trees, and flowers accentuates the liveliness and energy of the beauty, and the mother-son interaction signifies the importance of motherhood in supporting the prosperous and happy family. *Mencius's Mother Cutting Down the Loom* (figure 4.4), based on the illustrated biographies of exemplary women tradition, illustrates the tale about Mencius' mother who cut the cloth she is

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander C. Soper, *Kuo Jo-hsu's Experiences in Painting* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951), p. 18.

weaving in front of Mencius after hearing that Mencius was truant from school, teaching him the lesson that one cannot stop halfway. The print shows two women looking down at a boy who is kneeling in front of them. Giving the women smiling faces and genteel manner instead of gestures of anger, the artist softens the personality of the mother while the boy does not appear depressed or low-spirited after his scolding. Rather, a sense of peace and harmony dominates the atmosphere. The print artists appropriated the literary trope but reduced the conflict to its minimum, showing a respectable, kind and loving mother and her lovely son. Her image was further enhanced with the reference to the second major responsibility of a woman in the family, weaving, which defined the social, economic and moral role of the female gender in traditional China.



Figure 4.2 Anonymous, *Mother and Children*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 57.7 x 81.5 cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 77.



Figure 4.3 Anonymous, *Children Playing on a Boat*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 97.9x 53.9 cm. Ōshajō Bijutsu Hōmotsukan, Japan. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 97.





Figure 4.4 Anonymous, *Mencius's Mother Cutting Down the Loom*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 105.6x 59.2 cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 224.

Illustrations of “women weaving” had been produced since as early as the Song dynasty, and were reissued with imperial endorsement in the Qing. The intent of the weaving prints is clearly stated in the *Sacred Edict*:



Our sacred ancestor, the benevolent emperor filled with loving concern for you his subjects, and a volume engraved, (called) “Planting and Weaving (illustrated by) Woodcuts,” in which he sketched in detail the joys and sorrows of farmers and weavers. This beyond all question, was to urge you to devote your energies to that which is fundamental. Will you not all reflect, and in deed and in truth attach importance to husbandry?<sup>27</sup>

Thus the commercial production of *nianhua* prints illustrating the theme of “women weaving” (along with “men farming”) has been considered as a result of the Qing government’s agricultural propaganda.<sup>28</sup> The mid-Qing Gusu print *Picking Mulberry Leaves and Weaving* (figure 4.5) depicts two women; one is picking mulberry leaves and the other weaving, along with a child playing. This image also accorded with the role of Suzhou as one of the major silk production centers in Jiangnan (along with Hangzhou and Nanjing), where mulberry cultivating, silkworm raising and silk weaving were important activities of the peasant family production economy.<sup>29</sup> Aside from its economic function, womanly work such as weaving, embroidering, cleaning, preparing food and family ceremonies were held decisive in keeping order and harmony within the inner chamber. Unlike the technical illustrations of womanly work issued by the state or those *nianhua* representations of the same subject produced in the North, the Gusu image adapted the conventional theme into its auspicious “beauty-children” motif.

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<sup>27</sup> F.W. Baller ed. and trans., *The Sacred Edict: with a translation of the colloquial rendering, notes and vocabulary* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1892), p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art and History in Rural North China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Philip C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 46-7.



Figure 4.5 Anonymous, *Picking Mulberry Leaves and Weaving*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 103.3x 54.3 cm. Ōshajō Bijutsu Hōmotsukan, Japan. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011): 230.

## 2. Grotesque Women

The Guanyin cult retained its popularity in late Qing Suzhou and Shanghai, which was evidenced by the circulation of prints like *Before Enlightenment in Mt. Xiangshan* (*Daxiangshan chengdao qian* 大香山成道前) (figure 4.6) and *Guanyin Touring Hell* (*Guanyin you difu* 觀音遊地府) (figure 4.7) that serialized the Miaoshan tale. However, the incorporation of the Miaoshan narrative, previously popularized through oral tradition or religious tracts, into the *nianhua*

iconography of Guanyin reflects a trend toward narrational representation of the sacred symbol, which had been built upon Buddhist portrait tradition and constituted a separate genre as the iconic or votive figures usually for burning in ritual.<sup>30</sup> Although narratives derived from fiction, drama and myth had been popular subjects in *nianhua* representations; sacred icons such as Guanyin had been exclusively represented in portrait format to signify their nobility and sacredness. Illustrating tales of her pre-nirvana and mortal incarnation suggests a shift in secularization of sacred icons and the *nianhua* media.

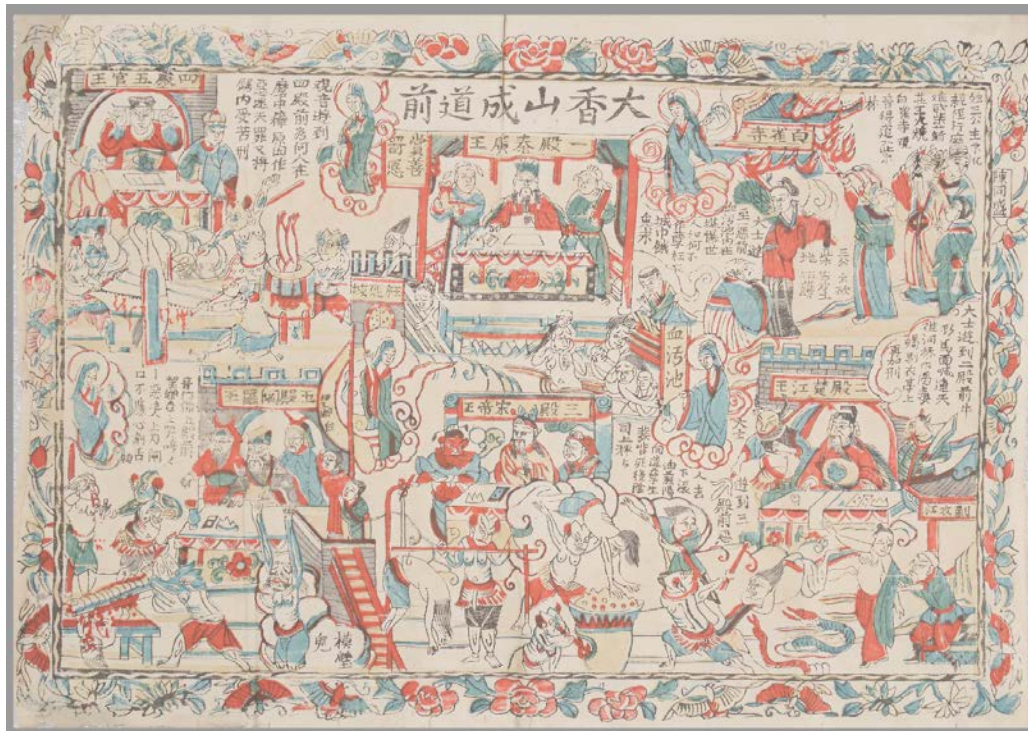


Figure 4.6 Anonymous, *Before Enlightenment in Mt. Xiangshan*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 46.5x 33.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A06.

<sup>30</sup> For a classic study of iconic *nianhua* and Chinese folk religion, see Clarence B. Day, *Chinese Peasant Cults: Being a Study of Chinese Paper Gods* (1940, reprint, Taipei: Ch'eng Wen, 1969).



Figure 4.7 Anonymous, *Guanyin Touring Hell*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 46 x 33.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A05.

## **2.1 Secularized Guanyin: The Miaoshan Story**

*Guanyin Touring Hell* and *Before Enlightenment in Mt. Xiangshan* describe Miaoshan's tour in the underworld. Of the numerous Chinese popular fantasies about divine justice, the most familiar one was expressed in the imagination of *difu* or the hell. An eclectic concept that combines Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs about the afterlife and rebirth, *difu* is a place where all souls reside, and also a penal world where the wrongdoers are to be punished according to the crimes they committed during life with different punishments and tortures through ten courts, each ruled by a judge, or a karma king. The idea of the bureaucratized *difu* dates back to as early as the Tang dynasty and was popularized through the circulation of



moralistic tracts, religious booklets, and hell tales. One of the most commonly referenced sources is the *Precious Record of Jade Calendar* (*Yuli baoshao* 玉歷寶鈔), an illustrative tract on the organization and regulation of *difu* that was widely published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which, according to Jonathan Spence's study, had influenced Hong Xiuquan in shaping his earlier ideas about hell and was later banned by him in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of *difu* played a key role in Chinese popular religion, and has long been considered to have a similar layout as that of the earthly realm, complete with houses, furniture, bureaucracy and of course souls passing through the "streets". In the prints, all the Yan kings, who are responsible for recording good and evil deeds of the living, and administering justice in the underworld, appear in male forms as magistrates, wearing the traditional Chinese official garb (perhaps Ming style). Each is portrayed sitting behind a table on which there is usually a brush and a book, and sometimes an ink stone. Each king is accompanied by two assistants, possibly a *xiancheng* 縣丞 and a *zhubu* 主簿, who are aiding him in the execution of various punishments, most of which are punitive. Only in the second court, standing beside King Chu Jiang are the fearsome guardians Ox-head and Horse-face, who are said to be the escorts of the newly dead to the underworld.

Indeed, the cult of *difu* reflected a search for legal justice administered by the divine as a result of the doubt about the increasingly corrupt legal system for the living, and finally a quest for a better next life through a place where the law is less corrupt to uphold the hierarchy and stability. A growing body of research on the relationship between Chinese religious and legal

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<sup>31</sup> George W. Clarke trans., "Yu-li or Precious Records," *Journal of the China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28.2(1898), pp. 233-400. Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 24-59. On the influence of Yuli on Hong see Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1996), pp. 38-41.

culture has revealed the influence of retribution on popular ideology of justice and the intervention of the divine in the practice of judicial judgments.<sup>32</sup> Looking for divine help in solving village disputes has long been an integral part of community life in traditional China, and the rituals were usually performed within local temples where deities of the underworld were enshrined, and where moral, cultural and political powers were displayed and executed. Even late imperial officials made offerings to judicial deities and sometimes moved trials to temples.<sup>33</sup> A mediator who is able to cross the boundaries of the underworld and the earthly, Miaoshan is simultaneously a witness of the underworld justice and a symbol of the divine justice herself.

*Before Enlightenment in Mt. Xiangshan* is a visual sequence of Miaoshan's tour in the first five courts of the *difu* and *Guanyin Touring Hell*, her journey through the last five courts. In *Before Enlightenment* a viewer could read from the top right where the princess was doing chores at the Baique Temple to the upper middle of the first court led by King Qin Guang 秦廣王 and then move abruptly to the lower right of the second court under King Chu Jiang 楚江王. Moving left to the lower middle, the viewer's vision will follow Miaoshan's journey to the third court under King Song Di 宋帝王. And then diagonally moving to the upper left, the viewer would reach the fourth court ruled by King Wu Guan 五官王, and the fifth under King Yan Luo 閻羅王 just below the forth court, locating at the lower left. Continuing the numeric order of the courts of *Before Enlightenment*, in *Touring Hell*, a viewer could start his/her visual journey from the lower right where the sixth court led by King Bian Cheng 卞城王 is located. Supposedly

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<sup>32</sup> Paul R. Katz, "Indictment Rituals and the Judicial Continuum in Late Imperial China," in *Writing and Law in Late Imperial China: Crime, Conflict, and Judgment* ed. by Robert E. Hegel, Katherine Carlitz (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 161-86; Paul R. Katz, *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Katz 2007, pp. 161-2.

moving the vision anticlockwise, a viewer, following Miaoshan, will tour the remaining four courts under King Tai Shan 泰山王, King Du Shi 都市王, King Ping Deng 平等王 and King Zhuan Lun 轉輪王 respectively.

The multifaceted image of Miaoshan serves as graphic punctuation in the visual sequence, while simultaneously indicating the changing identities/ incarnations of Guanyin. At the beginning of the story (top left corner of *Before Enlightenment*), Miaoshan is depicted as a common woman in a red up garment and a black skirt carrying a stack of firewood. Traveling to *difu*, she has been portrayed as a nun wearing a blue/green garment and a *guanjin* 冠巾 cap, holding a *fuchen* 拂尘. As with the concept of *difu*, the image of the nun-spirit Miaoshan is likely a combination of both Buddhist and Taoist elements. She has been represented as wearing a halo and riding clouds, indicating her divine nature and distinguishing her from the other demonized spirits and the underworld bureaucrats. At the end, she reveals her real body as the Thousand-Armed Guanyin sitting on the lotus flower before her family. Narrating the Miaoshan story that mixed mortal and divine beings, prints like *Guanyin Touring Hell* and *Before Enlightenment in Mt. Xiangshan* reflected a visual revolution in *nianhua* industry toward secularization of the iconic Guanyin.

## **2.2 Sexualized Guanyin: Luoyang Bridge**

*Zhuangyuan Cai Builds Luoyang Bridge* (*Cai Zhuangyuan qizao Luoyang qiao* 蔡狀元起造洛陽橋) (figure 4.8) marks an even more dramatic change in *nianhua* representations of Guanyin. This print and another titled *Xia Dehai Visiting Crystal Palace in a Dream* (*Xia Dehai mengyou shuijing gong* 夏德海夢遊水晶宮) (figure 4.9) illustrate a Guanyin legend, according to which, the filial Song scholar Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012-67) began the construction of a bridge

over the Luoyang River of Quanzhou after his mother survived a distress caused by water demons on the river. However, the construction was delayed by the lack of money. Moved by Cai's filial deed, Guanyin transformed herself into a beautiful woman riding a lotus boat under the unfinished bridge, promising to marry anyone who could strike her with an ingot. Soon, the boat was filled with ingots, which were then handed over to Cai to finish the construction.<sup>34</sup> The print shows a gentlewoman sitting quietly on the boat. With a fan at her left hand, Guanyin elegantly bows her head in a tamed and obedient manner. At first appearance, she is depicted as a classic beauty, though not secluded within family garden or the inner chamber. However, unlike Miaoshan, she promised marriage and sex. Aiming to help people reach goodness, she used sexual desire as skillful means and a teaching device.



Figure 4.8 Anonymous, *Zhuangyuan Cai Builds Luoyang Bridge*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 55.5 x 31.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A09.

<sup>34</sup> The same tale was also exploited by *nianhua* artists of Yangliuqing. A summary of the tale is in Li Zhiqiang and Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo Yangliuqing muban nianhua ji* (Tianjin: Yangliuqing huashe, 1992), p. 86.





Figure 4.9 Anonymous, *Xia Dehai Visiting Crystal Palace in a Dream*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print. 55.5 x 31.5 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4837 A08.

The seductive features of Guanyin are further enhanced when read together with the pairing print *Xia Dehai Visiting Crystal Palace in a Dream*, with the depiction of an actress and the mixed-gender performance. It depicts the other plotline of the Luoyang Bridge tale. The legend has it that just before the construction, Cai Xiang sent a yamen runner named Xia Dehai to the Dragon Palace to ask for approval by the Dragon King. Xia got drunk at the beach and woke with a letter from the Dragon King.<sup>35</sup> The print artist imaginatively illustrated Xia Dehai's visit to the Dragon Palace, where he sees a "flower-drum play" or *huagu xi* 花鼓戲. Besides a clown actor and a group of musicians, an actress stands on her left leg, holding a fan in her right hand and a handkerchief in the left. Compared to the male partner's stiff stance, the actress

<sup>35</sup> Li and Wang 1992, p. 200.

appears more lively and energetic, so was central at the theatre and to the audience presented in and of this print.

A female performer, evidenced by her tiny lotus feet, in the place of a male impersonator made this performance unique in a time when both female performers and the mixed-sex performances were rare. The foreign settlements of Shanghai were the only venue for the growth of female performers and the mixed male and female performances. Elsewhere these performances were considered 'obscene' and banned by government and conservative moralists.<sup>36</sup> Anxiety over female exposure and gender mixing was heightened by an actual and imagined connection between female performers and prostitution. The famous courtesan Lin Daiyu, for example, was an enthusiastic opera singer and regularly performed at the Zhang Garden with the Maoer troupe (*Maoer xi* 貓兒戲), which, with its all-female cast, was a Shanghai landmark.<sup>37</sup>

Putting the *Luoyang Bridge* and *Xia Dehai* pair together, one may find that the physically and emotionally evocative female performer at the Dragon Palace contrastingly echoes the submissive and quiet gentlewoman-Guanyin. Both are holding a fan at each end, fanning up an atmosphere of ambiguity and delicacy. Is Guanyin somewhat alike the female performer, who usually evokes erotic imagination as its purported connection with prostitution? Even a Goddess became seductive when she was in her mortal incarnation as a public woman, even though her use of "sex" was theoretically and religiously justifiable as a teaching device to guide people toward kindness and goodness.

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<sup>36</sup> On the rise of female performers in late Qing and early Republican Shanghai see Luo Suwen, "Gender on Stage: Actresses in an Actors' World 1895-1930," in Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson eds., *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), pp.75-95.

<sup>37</sup> Yeh 2006, p. 62, p. 70.

### **2.3 Demoralized Mothers**

At a time when the goddess was tainted, the ethic of motherhood became open to redefinition. *Reclining Beauty Nurses a Child* (figure 4.10) appropriated the mother-children motif but transformed it with the combination of sensual overtones. The scene takes place in an exquisitely decorated room, where there are two women and two children. One woman is perhaps a mother or wet-nurse, who is nursing a son in a semi-reclining position in the bed. The other woman, perhaps a maid, is observing at the bedside. Conventional subjects of a beauty-fertility theme are all there; the mother, the children, and even the symbolic pomegranates which as a visual pun meant to stand for more sons. What differentiated this print from traditional mother-children motif was the openly sexual overtone that overshadowed qualities of motherhood. The attractive mother in the print has her coat open to show her breast, her left leg crosses over the top of the right knee, exposing her tiny bound feet (which was highly erotic in Chinese culture). Looking down at the baby in her right arm, she raises the left arm open and the left hand behind her head, intensifying her provocative pose. In his study of prostitution in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai, Christian Henriot notes that it was not unusual for courtesans to have children, nor was it unusual for them to be pictured together with their children as found in the pages of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. Written sources of the time, however, are practically silent on the issue of courtesans' pregnancy and raising children, which was only occasionally touched on in novels about prostitution.<sup>38</sup> Stressing the corporeal sexuality of the mother suggests something other than a mother-child relationship. The mother could be a courtesan.

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<sup>38</sup> Henriot 2001, p. 55.



Figure 4.10 Anonymous, *Reclining Beauty Nurses a Child*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, Shanghai library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jiangxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000):2:115.

Commenting on the demoralization of the mother, *Retribution for Killing One's Own Son* (figure 4.11) illustrates a popular play of the 1890s, which because of its obscene and violent content was frequently banned by the Qing government.<sup>39</sup> In brief summary, the story is about a widowed mother, who has an illicit sexual relationship with a monk. After her son accidentally discovers her illicit relationship with her paramour, she kills him, and then slices and conceals his body in an oil jar. Both the mother and the monk are executed at the end of the story.<sup>40</sup> Although many episodes of the story such as “illicit sex” and the intervention of justice people were common in the then popular court-case novels, the episode of the extremely cruel mother

<sup>39</sup> The earliest printed version of the narrative is published in 1897 by the Jingwen tang. For a reproduction see “Shazi bao,” in *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng*, vol.74 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> *Xikao daquan* (1915-25, reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1990), pp. 239-40.



murdering her own son was not common, along with the narrative's deliberate depiction of blood and honour of killing. The submissive, good-natured and respectable mother-beauty image was completely subordinated to that of a cruel and immoral mother-murderess. Aside from the criminalization of the mother as murderess, the narrative contains references to one of the most important issues regarding moral degeneration, namely adultery. The mother-killing-son case was rare, but the wife-murdering-husband cases permeated both legal and popular culture of the Qing.



Figure 4.11 Anonymous, *Retribution for Killing One's Own Son*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print. Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000), 2: 78.

## **2.4 Wives: Adulteress-Murderesses**

While goddesses and mothers could come across as sexually and morally deviant, wives were also dangerous in the same environment. The problem of adultery had long been an issue of central importance to the legal codes of China, not to mention the society's sense of its own virtue (or lack thereof). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this problem had migrated to the news media where it continued to grab headlines. *Shenbao*, for example, carried one suggestive story under the headline "Discussing the new case of persons caught in the act of adultery." This case involved a woman from Songjiang 松江 who created a scandal by engaging in a brazen "adulterous" affair after the death of her husband. The offending widow was eventually arrested, but the scandal was compounded when she was released with a 50-yuan fine, which neighbours and in-laws considered shockingly light.<sup>41</sup>

Qing official ideology of female virtues was constructed on the state-sponsored cult of chastity, a practice that began to grow during the Song dynasty and continued throughout the late imperial time, culminating in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> It was particularly promoted during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by honouring more widows, partly as a response to the demographic changes caused by the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), and partly in response to what it perceived as the moral deterioration in society.<sup>43</sup> Despite the state promotion of female chastity, the penalties for "consensual illicit sex" were mild in the Qing, with 100 blows of heavy

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<sup>41</sup> *Shenbao*, February 18, 1873.

<sup>42</sup> A classic analysis of female virtue and the state is in Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and State in China," *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 111-52.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46.1 (1987): 51.

bamboo and one month cangue (since 1725).<sup>44</sup> M.J Meijer in *Murder and Adultery in Late Imperial China* contends that wide dissatisfaction toward the punishment resulted in the social custom of resorting to private justice.<sup>45</sup>

Woodblock print artists illustrated their treatment of adultery. *A Law Suit* (figure 4.12), organized into a serialized narrative through the use of multiple frames, beginning by claiming to tell the complete story of a law suit filed against ‘woman Liu’ for the crime of illicit sex. The story begins on the upper-right of the print starts from the top right “File a law suit (*gaozhuang* 告狀): family members submitted the written complaint. Erniang 二娘 (the concubine) gave a detailed explanation of the doubtful points about the case;” to the top middle “Beating the Drum (*jigu* 擊鼓): Mr. Tong was beating the drum (at the entrance of local yamen) in person and immediately held the court trial;” to the bottom right “Interrogation (*shenwen* 審問): Mr. Tong was sitting at court with the plaintiff and defendant kneeling separately before him;” then to the top left “Offering” in which the concubine is making offering before the adulterer Wang Wen who is on his way to execution, to bottom right “execution of the four Orchids” and bottom middle “Parading through the street (*youjie* 遊街): Mrs. Liu is paraded through the street on the wooden donkey and was ordered to cry out the adultery-murder case.”

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<sup>44</sup> Before 1725, the punishment for consensual illicit sex was different, with 80 blows of heavy bamboo, if the woman was single, and 90 blows of heavy bamboo if the women was married. Matthew Harvey Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 25; Appendix A.2: 325.

<sup>45</sup> M.J. Meijer, *Murder and Adultery in Late Imperial China: A Study of Law and Morality* (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1991).



Figure 4.12 Anonymous, *A Law Suit*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 54.5 x32 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalogue No: Asia 0574/ B15.

The story was based on a popular *tanci* 弹词 (literarily “plucking rhyme,” a popular form of ballad or lyric poem of the Jiangnan region) literature the *Japanese Cloak* (*Wopao zhuan* 倭袍传). Preserved only in relatively late editions, the *Japanese Cloak* made its early appearance sometime in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The story is set in the Zhengde reign (r. 1506-1521) and contains two plotlines. The first plotline is a military romance centred on the Tang family. The second story regarding an adulterous affair was far more popular and was reworked into various independent genres for storytelling, operas, folk songs, and *baojuan* 寶卷 scripture.<sup>46</sup> In

<sup>46</sup> The *Wopao baojun* with two volumes were published by the Xiyin shuju 惜陰書局 in Shanghai, publication date unknown. According to Hu Shiyong 胡士瑩 (1901-79), the same publisher published *Wopao baojuan* and *Guobaolu baojuan* separately. See *Tanci baojuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), pp. 42, 55. It was also reworked into a novel *Xiu Gebao quanzhuan* 繡戈袍全傳 with 42 chapters that are divided into eight juan. The Suzhou storyteller Wang Shiquan 王石泉 had been quite noted for telling the story of adultery, and he was recognized as one of the Four Masters of tanci. See Xu Ke 徐珂, *Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔 (Beijing: Zhonghu shuju, 1984), vol. 10, p. 4943.



summary, the story is about Diao Nanlou's 刁南樓 wife Liu Su'e 劉素娥 who has an illicit sexual relationship with Wang Wen 王文, which is accidentally discovered by Diao's concubine, Mrs. Wang. Mrs. Liu thus plans to murder Wang with poison but mistakenly kills her husband. Diao's half-brother Mao Long 毛龍 has just passed the imperial exam and is appointed the Imperial Inspector. After receiving Wang's petition, Mao Long carefully investigated the case and sentenced the adulterous to death.<sup>47</sup>

The extreme punishment for the crime of adultery-murder is reflected also in a second related print titled *Retribution for Illicit Sex* (*Jian yin guobao tu* 姦淫果報圖) (figure 4.13), credited to Chen Tongsheng of Suzhou, which omits the details of the case, illustrating only the final punishment. The adulteress-murderess Liu is riding a wooden donkey,<sup>48</sup> followed by her maids the four Orchards (Huilan 惠蘭, Xialan 夏蘭, Chunlan 春蘭 and Yulan 玉蘭), who help to facilitate and conceal the "illicit sex" between their mistress and her paramour. The placard carried at the head of the parade identifies Wang Wen as an adulterer (*jianfu* 姦夫), and makes it clear all are to receive the supreme punishment for their tawdry affair.

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<sup>47</sup> Various editions of the same narrative made appearance in the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with only slight difference, for example, in names. A printed version titled *Xiu goupao quanzhuan* was passed off as a work by Yuan Mei, in which the doctor Wang Tinggui replaced Wang Wen, and Mao Long was renamed as Mao Tianhai etc. The novel only states at the end that Wang and Liu are sentenced to death without the plot of Liu Su'e riding the wooden donkey to death.

<sup>48</sup> *Qi mulü* (Riding a wooden donkey) is a fictive punishment out of literary creation that was reputedly designed by Di Renjie (630-700), a highly celebrated official of Tang and especially Wu Zetian's Zhou dynasty, to punish the adulteress-murderess. The punishment was not new for Qing readers, as in the Ming masterwork *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*), attributed to Shi Nai'an, the wooden donkey was used to punish Wang Po 王婆, the matchmaker who bridged the adulterous affair between Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 and Ximen Qing 西門慶. If not killed by Wu Song, Pan Jinlian probably would have to be riding the wooden donkey on her way to execution.



Figure 4.13 Anonymous, *Retribution for Illicit Sex*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 55x 31.5cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog No: 70 / 4561 A56.

Exploiting the narrative, woodblock print artists expressed their concerns that were current to their own time and space. As Paize Keulemans demonstrates, stories like *The Cases of Judge Peng* and *The Cases of Judge Liu* were becoming popular in the late Qing as themes of regeneration.<sup>49</sup> Judge Mao and the Wang-Liu adultery-murder case should also be seen as a moral commentary on the perceived moral and judicial leniency in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when both the state and the public were concerned about both the actual adultery-homicide cases as well as the fabrication of such cases to damage the reputation of one's competitor/enemies or to cover up for merciless murder, an example of the latter was the famous late Qing court case Yang Naiwu 楊乃武 and Little Cabbage (*Yang Naiwu yu Xiaobaicai an* 楊乃武與小白菜案) of 1873-77. Little Cabbage and her suspicious paramour, the scholar Yang Naiwu were convicted

<sup>49</sup> Paize Keulemans, "Recreating the Storyteller Image: Publishing Martial-Arts Fiction to Renew the Public in the Late Qing," *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2004): 7-37.

of murdering Little Cabbage's husband in 1874, and later were found to have been falsely accused at a retrial in the capital in 1877.<sup>50</sup> During the case, the alleged adulteress-murderess Little Cabbage was spotlighted firstly as the all-powerful temptress and later the victim of official misconduct or sexual advances of the powerful. The involvement of the news media further complicated the issue and popularized the case; as a result, it was not only recorded in Qing court documents but also in newspapers and diaries as well as appropriated by writers of historical romance and performance literature.

In her discussion of the case, Madeline Yue Dong maps out the complicated relationships in the communication of the case between different levels of society.<sup>51</sup> She argues that "people involved in the case were not simply, or even primarily, guided by the legal system; rather, people participated in varied channels of communication to form their own opinions...in which each channel expresses and suppresses the interests of particular communities."<sup>52</sup> While on the Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage case, popular literature saw Little Cabbage as the victim of the sexual advances of the son of local magistrate who seduced Little Cabbage and then contrived a false accusation to cover up his murder of her husband or that of the misconduct of injustice by the local officials.

By contrast, on the Liu-Wang affair of the *Japanese Cloak*, the *nianhua* community gave the adulteress-murderesses the most serious punishment of riding a wooden donkey toward execution. In informing the public, *nianhua* prints had also provided one possible channel of

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<sup>50</sup> On legal process of the case, see William Alford, "Of Arsenic and Old Laws: Looking Anew at Criminal Justice in Late Imperial China," *California Law Review* 72.6 (December, 1984): 1180-256.

<sup>51</sup> Madeline Yue Dong, "Communities and Communication: A Study of the Case of Yang Naiwu, 1873-1877," *Late Imperial China*, Volume 16, Number 1, (June 1995): 79-119.

<sup>52</sup> Dong 1995, p. 82.

communication. With sympathy or hatred, women, whether victims or criminals were central to define justice and morality in a time of increasing injustice and moral degeneration. As a matter of fact, Qing judicial records categorized a great number of the female criminals as the “shrew” (*pofu* 潑婦, *hanfu* 悍婦 and *yinfu* 淫婦) and an adulteress’s homicidal betrayal of the wifely principles was characterized as a reflection of a wife’s shrewishness.<sup>53</sup>

### 3. Regeneration: Shrews, Factory Workers and Secluded Courtesans

Reversing the ideal Confucian female images in forms of exemplary women, industrious wives and respectable mothers, *nianhua* artists imaginatively created the grotesque women as a reaction against the contemporary definitions of womanhood among various communities. Celebrating the changing lives and social status of women, *nianhua* artists comically communicated their idea regarding the renewal of Chinese women. From the images of domineering wives, female professionals in factories and the service sectors of Shanghai, they appeared to point out that the developing commercial economy and colonial-capitalist industries in the city created the types of women who were open to change and innovation.

#### 3.1 The New Shrew

A familiar social category in the Qing, the shrew was a commonplace in late imperial fiction. Yenna Wu has documented the popularity of fictional shrews in 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese literature by writers such as Li Yu 李漁 (1610-80) and Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715). Categorizing the Chinese shrew into the childless, the jealous and the violent, Wu argues that the appeal of the shrew in 17<sup>th</sup> century literature was primarily in the comic inversion of normative

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<sup>53</sup> On judicial construction of the shrew see Janet Theiss, “Explaining the Shrew: Narratives of Spousal Violence and the Critique of Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Criminal Cases,” in Robert E. Hegel and Katherine Carlitz, eds., *Writing and Law in Late Imperial China: Crime, Conflict, and Judgment* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 44-63.

marital roles between the sexes.<sup>54</sup> In her study of Pu Songling and his strange tales, Judith Zeitlin points out that, although the shrew appears to be an indicator of the opposition and reversal of the conventional husband – wife relationship between sexes, the taming of the shrew in literature was often a purely women’s affair.<sup>55</sup> Whether antagonism and conflict between sexes or within a single sex, the virago in late imperial literature was usually described as a jealous wife and her violent acts usually result from her jealousy about her husband’s love for other women.

In reference to late Qing Shanghai, the stereotype of the shrewish wife – henpecked husband had lost little of its appeal by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, stories about the shrew became noteworthy as news. The frequent reports and editorials about the shrew gave the impression Shanghai wives were domineering and Shanghai men were henpecked, a discrimination that continues its popularity even today when Shanghai men are characterized as the “little men (*xiao nanren* 小男人).” In 1883, *Shenbao* treated the issue simultaneously with humor and gravity, as in this “Record of henpecked drollery”:

The henpecked phenomenon is very much in vogue.... Yesterday, I encountered a crowd when I crossed Pingwang Street. The reason was that Ah Rong’s wife was scolding him. In general, a man fears his wife because he clings to her beauty. But, we found that Ah Rong’s wife was already middle-aged and not attractive. Moreover, the cause of the incident was that Ah Rong admonished his wife to stop smoking. This enraged her and she abused him. Ah Rong was afraid and ran away while bystanders ridiculed him for being henpecked. Ah Rong’s wife was originally a girl living in the suburbs of Shanghai, but she wasn’t satisfied with poverty and fell into the demimonde. At middle age her beauty declined, so she got married.... Although the matter of fearing one’s wife continues from ancient times, it is still a cowardly behaviour.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> On literary creation of the shrew see Yenna Wu, “The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, 2 (1998): 363-82; Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of The Strange: Pu Songling and The Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 128.

Lively as such accounts could be, more vivid representations of the shrewish wife were created through the *nianhua* industry. *Good Wife, Bad Wife* makes the point that not all husbands were suffering at the hands of their spouses. The right-hand frame displays a gentleman enjoying the comforts of home while the text explains: “when he enters the door in bad temper, his wife serves him tea”; but in sharp contrast the second scenario in the left-hand frame shows a man chased out of his house. The text explains that he “doesn’t drink, whore or gamble, but still (his wife) beats him with laundry paddles and chases him up a tree.” The contradiction seems to suggest the virago sometimes treats her husband with respect and the submissive wife could also become a shrew at certain time, that is, the flexibility of the marital relations. Rather than the black-white stereotypical construction in literary works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, late 19<sup>th</sup> representations were characterized with a sense of realism.

In similar fashion but without the contrast between submissive and domineering wife, the *New Version of the Ten Most Henpecked of the Qing Dynasty World* (*Xinchu Qingchao shijie shi paqi* 新出清朝世界十怕妻, circa 1890s) (figure 4.14), issued by Lao Wenyi Zhai 老文藝齋 print shop, illustrates ten scenarios, each devoting to a situation faced by a henpecked husband:

The first husband, his surname is Gao. He is good at pleasing his wife. He can do housework, and when he has free time, he massages his wife’s thigh.

The second husband, his surname is Den. His wife and children are bad-tempered. He is (often asked to) put a bowl on his head and crawl under the bench (as punishment).

The third husband, his surname is Tan. Opium, wine, prostitutes and gambling, in none of these does he dare to indulge. Every time friends come to invite him out, when he returns home, he is forced to kneel by the bed.

The fourth husband, his surname is Feng. His wife is really domineering. He is asked to wash her foot bandages and tidy up the night stool.

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<sup>56</sup> *Shenbao*, July 27, 1873.

The fifth husband, his surname is Liu. He has six concubines who fight each other and he cannot make peace. (He is) abused by day and eats bitterness at night.

The sixth husband, his surname is Xu. He likes to chase pheasants [streetwalkers]. His wife is angered and kicks his ass.

The seventh husband, his surname is Shi. Because he does not know how to give birth to a son, his wife makes him take off his pants very night so that she could beat him thirty strokes.

The eighth husband, his surname is He. All his life he has lived in fear of his wife, every night he kneels on the chamber pot with the urinal on his head.

The ninth husband, his surname is Cao. He wants to take a concubine, but dares not to tell her wife directly, so does everything to ingratiate himself with his wife [in order to persuade her].

The tenth husband, his surname is Bei. He becomes rich because he is afraid of his wife. Every day he kneels before his wife and the *yuanbao* 元寶 [gold or silver ingots] just keep rolling in.

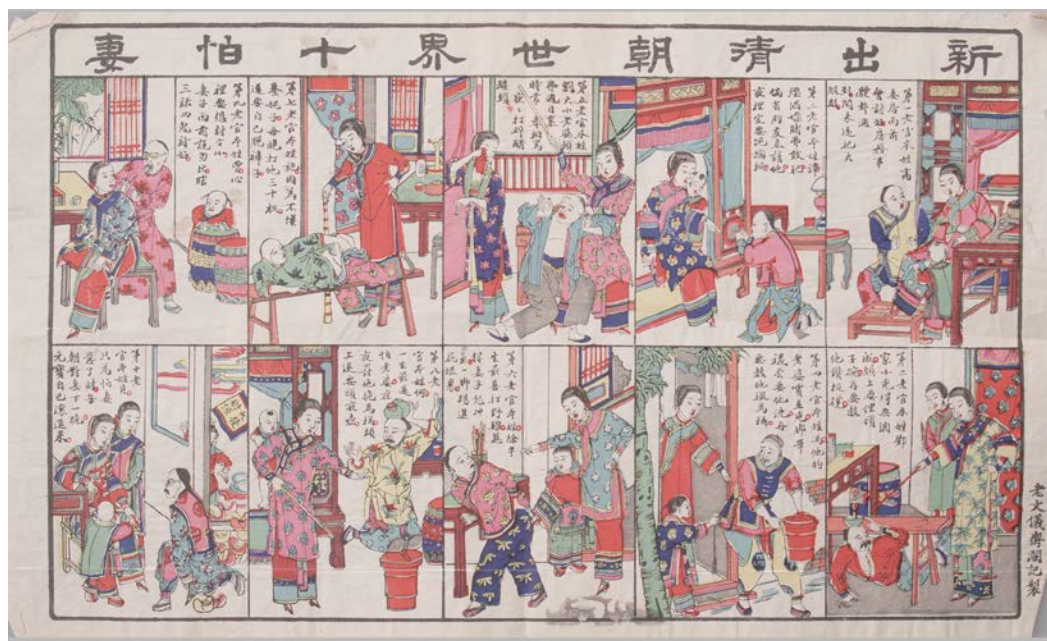


Figure 4.14 Anonymous, *New Version of the Ten Most Henpecked of the Qing Dynasty World*, accessioned 1901-04, likely reprint of circa 1890s, woodblock print, 54 x 31 cm. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalogue No. Asia 0574/B23.

Although the henpecked husband seems grim, all is not lost as the final frame of the print concedes. Unlike the 17<sup>th</sup> century fictional shrews, who are mostly stereotyped as jealous wives, the late Qing shrews seemed to be fierce by nature in most cases, although jealous wives are also depicted in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> stories. In the 4<sup>th</sup> story, with six concubines, jealousies and quarrels are everywhere. In the 5<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Xu likes chasing streetwalkers so was beaten. It is a bit ambiguous in the 9<sup>th</sup> story of the Cao family whether the wife is a jealous woman, as there is no direct depiction of the wife in the text. Only the husband's action that in order to have a concubine, he makes every effort to fawn on his wife, such as massaging her back, suggests that his wife is the dominant one and probably a jealous wife as well. Dominant wives in other stories are different from their Ming literary predecessors.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> story, the husband is credited with the responsibility for not being able to give birth to a son, which angers his wife and she beats him every night. For the rest of the stories, the shrew emphasis is on the henpecking, with the husband massaging his wife's legs, lifting a bowl on his head and kneeling on a footboard, washing foot binding bandage and holding night stool. Surprisingly, a certain Mr. Bei becomes rich because of his henpecking. Like in traditional literary representations, the shrew and her henpecked husband are sources of humor and satire. Celebrating the reversed marital relationship, late Qing *nianhua* representations made visible more aspects of shrewishness, aside from jealousy, without giving any resolution, or rather showing any intention to tame these domineering wives.

The inventive revitalization of the old literary type by the *nianhua* artists probably suggests the increasing appearance of the shrew and the henpecked marital type in actual life. Permeated with a sense of realism, they do not necessarily depict reality. Perhaps, exaggeration was applied to stimulate the comic effect. With humour and satire, prints like *New Version of the*



*Ten Most Henpecked of the Qing Dynasty World* expressed contemporary concern about the changing gender roles. Unlike traditional historical or fictional shrews, who were extreme forms of Confucian wives as guardians of the moral order within the inner chamber, her jealousy or shrewishness in general espouses an extreme form of wifehood, that is, fidelity to her husband. Moreover, when Pu Songling wrote about the shrew, he placed her alongside stories of fox spirits, ghosts and other peculiarities, making her status clear through the context. The shrew and other strange examples of impropriety are embedded in a series of bizarre or taboo incidents and circumstances. This suggests, rather than a daily fact of life, the shrew was considered to be highly unusual. The association of the shrew with other “strange” subjects suggests the depth of concern that people, particularly men, felt toward the prospect of women acting in defiance of the gender norms prescribed for them in Confucianism. In his discussion of late Qing press appropriation of the strange as a continuously evolving cultural construct, Rania Huntington argues that the strange in modern periodicals such as *Shenbao* and *Dianshizhai Pictorial* “offers a means of coping with change by combining older knowledge of the weird with new information.”<sup>57</sup>

By the same token, the shrew in late Qing *nianhua* was also a medium of communication in which the shrew provided a means of coping with changes in gender roles and martial relations. With the “new” replacing the “strange”, however, the shrew was redefined. Removing her from bizarre contexts, she could be a daily fact, a daily amusement or a new “strange.” What is that new strange? We may never be able to fully understand how the authors and viewers of the time might have seen the theme. However, considering the same market contains a great

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<sup>57</sup> Rania Huntington, “The Weird in the Newspaper,” in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honour of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith T. Zeitlin, Lydia He Liu and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 380.

diversity of representations of women, such as the images of female factory workers and courtesans, one may wonder if she was associated with these professional women. Was the change in relations between sexes associated with changes in her economic status?

### **3.2 Female Factory Workers: Redefining Motherhood and Wifehood**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cottage weaving industry in Jiangnan was rapidly losing ground to the mechanized textile industry firstly established in Shanghai. The silk factory in particular attracted a great number of both local women and those from nearby villages. Emily Honig notes that by 1894 there were approximately 5000 workers (male and female) in the silk-filatures of Shanghai.<sup>58</sup> According to one estimate, between 1895 and 1919, there were more than fifty-seven strikes in which women were the main participants.<sup>59</sup> Factory work occupied their time that was previously contributing to weaving, sewing, spinning and the like within the household. Although the wages were lower for women and girls, with time, they could accumulate a certain amount and even become better off to buy themselves and their family ready-made goods such as shoes and socks. This led to their further abandoning of traditional womanly work. Moreover, with spare money, they could afford to visit teahouses, restaurants, theatres, and opium dens, places they were conventionally not allowed to go. These were illustrated in pages of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. The Confucian ideal of “women weaving” at home thus gave way to the new images of factory women.

*Getting off Work from the Silk Factory* (circa 1900s) (figure 4.15) depicts the scene in which female workers are just getting off from the Hualun Silk Factory and several men and

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<sup>58</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills 1919-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> S.A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 55.

women are kidnapping a female worker and forcefully putting her into a curtained sedan chair. Prints like this one were common in illustrations of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* as sensuous news items. Positioning the factory woman as the victim of kidnapping, *nianhua* artists dramatized and made commentary on her as a factory worker and public person. The presence of the Sikh police in red turban standing at the doorway and looking indifferently at the occurrence suggests the particular cosmopolitan setting, in which women as factory workers seemed in conflict with their status as wives. It corresponds to the historical fact that with more women going to work at modern factories, traditional womanly works and wifely virtues were to be redefined. With the contrast between the public kidnapping and the indifference of the Sikh Police, the print artists actually made fun of the situation, critiquing the man and those who liked to reposition women into seclusion, symbolized by the curtained sedan chair.



Figure 4.15 Anonymous, *Getting off Work from the Silk Factory*, late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print. Shanghai History Museum. After Zhang Wei and Yan Jieqiong, *Dushi fengqing: Shanghai xiaojiaochang nianhua* (Taipei: Xinrui wenchuang, 2014), 103.

### **3.3 Repositioning Courtesans: Secluded Beauties or Professionals?**

The comic redefinition of gender roles was further promoted through a conscious repositioning of courtesans. The common image of the late Qing Shanghai courtesan as the feminine master of modernity and dominator of public space, an image that had been spread through the news media. *Green Lotus Pavilion and Opium Den of Shanghai* (1900, figure 2.16)<sup>60</sup> illustrates the more realistic aspects of the courtesans' lifestyle and working conditions, presenting them as waitresses and entertainers in one of Shanghai's most famous teahouses the Green Lotus Pavilion, which was located on Fuzhou Road. It sold tea on the upper floor and provided variety shows on the lower floor. The *nianhua* depicts its opium den on the upper floor. It was a popular spot among intellectuals and businessmen who frequented for refreshments, meeting friends as well as discussing business. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was already noted as a tourist destination, being pictured in city guides and featured in bamboo-twig poems.<sup>61</sup> The crowded scene in the print suggests the popularity of the teahouse. Here courtesans were more than pleasure facilitators and entertainment providers but are proactive traders similar to her image in mainstream press. *Nianhua* artists also joined the journalists and news illustrators catering to an audience in exploring issues of modernity and changing gender roles.

*Ten Famous Courtesans of Shanghai* (1900, figure 2.11),<sup>62</sup> by contrast, suppressed the imagery, repositioning the courtesans to their traditional role as secluded beauties. It shows a group of famous courtesans including Shen Erguan, Xiao Yuanyuan, Hua Wenjuan, Lu Lanfen

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<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 2, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> Ellen Laing notes the Green Lotus Pavilion was also the place where calendar poster customers frequented in every November for the calendar trade. They came to drink tea and to view the coming year's supply of new calendar pictures. See Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 74.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 2, p. 100.

(d. 1900), Zhuang Xiufeng, Wu Xinbao, Hua (Shiquan?), Zhu Ruchun and Jin Xiaobao (b. 1878), as they enjoy cultured activities in a garden reminiscent of Shanghai's famed Yu Garden in the old Chinese city.<sup>63</sup> Zhu Ruchun and Wu Xinbao are seen producing music and song, which were known as a forte of the courtesan, while Lu Lanfen is seen engaged in embroidery. Miss Hua, finally, is engaged in reading, a pursuit that marks her as educated.

Being both professional women offering entertainment in public space and secluded beauties engaging with cultured activities, courtesans became a powerful image that was open to possibilities, thus regeneration and renewal. Suppressing the "new women" image created by the reform-minded elites and "courtesan-as-victim" or as "moral-contaminator" image defined by the conservative moralists, *nianhua* artists of Shanghai celebrated her publicity and seclusion at the same time. Taking contrasts and contradictions as the norm of life might be one innovative answer to problems raised during this tumultuous time.

## Conclusion

Whether as symbols of moral degeneration or new ideals of social stability, new professional and public women were central to people's imagination about a new social order. *Nianhua* artists did not pretend to be able to provide resolutions to the problem of changing gender roles; rather the contradictions and contrasts in their construction of the female images suggests their simple intention to emphasize that change as an essential part of the cosmopolitan experience, and made it clear that it was complicated, contradictory and sometimes incomprehensive. Subverting the elitist and state discourses that demoralized women as the root

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<sup>63</sup> Zhu Ruchun was an elite *changshan*, and noted activist for courtesans' rights, organizing a courtesan association in 1912, see Henriot 2001, p.64. Jin Xiaobao was known as a "good girl," who stood for virtue, see Hershatter 1997, pp. 152-3.

causes of moral degeneration or China's weakness, *nianhua* artists pushed the demoralization of women to its extreme through the construction of a series of grotesque women.

Celebrating the presence of the deviant and the unruly, woodblock prints joined the press informing the public of changing social status of women and its association with modern life. Meanwhile, with the deconstruction of sacred symbols and classic auspicious beauties, woodblock prints renewed their pictorial reservoir, a change no less significant than the gender issue it presented. The older knowledge about social norms and sexual morality, law and justice, spirituality and materiality was emphasized and renewed with a new means of consumption through *nianhua*. Picturing narratives that were frequently banned by the imperial state and the moralists, *nianhua* also became a site of resistance, capable of expressing contemporary concerns through a renovation of old subjects. In the process, both female images and the *nianhua* industry were transformed from tools of Confucian didacticism to means of entertainment, from projecting auspicious future to capturing the fragmented moment of sensuality and "reality".

## Chapter 5 Auspicious War: Picturing Victory at Times of Defeat

In May 1884 the first issue of the lithographic *Dianshizhai Pictorial* 點石齋畫報 broke the news of the Sino-French War in Vietnam, and in the months to follow the first four volumes of the journal would include a total of twenty-six illustrations depicting China's conflicts with France.<sup>1</sup> This has been recognized as a critical period in the development of the Chinese media, and is arguably the moment in which Chinese “current affairs” gained a visual dimension.<sup>2</sup> However, in the first issue of the paper, Ernst Major (1841-1908), the British entrepreneur and owner of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and its parent newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, reported that he was only convinced of the local demand for illustrated news after seeing the so-called “victory pictures (*zhanjie zhitu* 战捷之图)” on the streets of Shanghai.<sup>3</sup> Chinese *nianhua* artists, in other words, had begun to depict contemporary political and military events before the emergence of a commercial pictorial press, and they would continue to circulate their works long after the commercial press began to dominate the market. This chapter concerns these “victory pictures”,

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<sup>1</sup> Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life 1884–1898* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Centre for Chinese Studies, 2003), p. 26. It started with Wu Youru's “Fierce Attack at Bac Ninh (*Ligong Beining* 力攻北宁),” *Dianshizhai huabao*, jia 1, no. 3, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> For studies on *Dianshizhai huabao* and its role in the development of Chinese illustrated journals, see Yu Yueting, “Woguo huabao de shizu-Dianshizhai huabao chutan 我国画报的始祖一点石斋画报初探,” *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 10, (May 1981), pp.149-81; Rudolf G. Wagner, “Jinru quanqiu xiangxiang tujing: Shanghai de Dianshizhai huabao 进入全球想像的图景：上海的点石斋画报 (Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper Dianshizhai huabao)” in *Zhongguo xueshu* 8 (April, 2001), pp.1-96; and for study of urban life represented in *Dianshizhai huabao* see Ye Xiaoqing 2003.

<sup>3</sup> 近以法越構衅，中朝决意用兵，敌愆之忱，薄海同具。其好事者绘为战捷之图，市井购观，恣为谈助，于以知风气使然，不仅新闻，即画报亦从此可类推矣。爱倩精于绘事者，择新奇可喜之事，幕而为图，月出三次，次凡八帧，俾乐观新闻者有以考证其事。而茗余酒后，展卷玩赏，亦足以增色舞眉飞之乐。Recently, France and Annam are in conflicts. China has decided to send troops. Hatred toward [the French] enemy is intense, and shared by [people] at home and abroad. Someone painted victory pictures that are sold in the marketplace and provide topics of public discussion. I thus know that there is a growing public interest in news and by analogy in illustrated newspaper. Therefore, [I] invited painters, making illustrations for the new, the strange and the heartening things and events. [The paper] will be published three times a month, and each issue contains eight illustrations, so that those who are interested in news can check and investigate. (The pictures) can be enjoyed while drinking tea and wine that will add joy and pleasure. See Zunwenge zhuren 尊文阁主人 (Ernst Major), “Dianshizhai huabao yuanqi,” *Dianshizhai huabao* 1 (5 May, 1884).

focusing on how *nianhua* artists gave visual expression to contemporary wars and how they and their audience may have understood domestic and international conflicts. In so doing, I inquire into the origins of mass media in China, the relationship between traditional woodblock print and lithography, and the popular anxiety about foreign crises, as well as the growing fascination with military modernization and the development of nationalism.

Central to the imagery of the “victory pictures” were China’s foreign wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most significant encounters with foreign powers occurring in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were represented in *nianhua*, including the Sino-British conflicts during the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60), the Sino-French War (1884-85), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), and the Eight-Nation Alliance invasion at the end of the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900). The defining element in these prints is that in spite of having been technically defeated in each of these conflicts, China is routinely portrayed as the victor. In doing so, *nianhua* provided something that the commercial press could not – they could define China’s foreign wars in terms of what they “should have been” , rather than what they were.

This “victory narrative”, moreover, is what defines these images as *nianhua*. As Bo Songnian observes, traditional *nianhua* are defined not by the circumstances of their production or circulation, but by the message they are supposed to convey. That message is auspiciousness. Issued during the New Year and other festival seasons, *nianhua* were traditionally understood as graphic “prayers” that might bring happiness and drive off malevolence.<sup>4</sup> By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the religious icon Guanyin became secularized (chapter 4), the *nianhua* genre itself began a process of modern transformation, with the incorporation of “inauspicious” figures,

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<sup>4</sup> Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhua shi* (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1986), pp. 1-5.



who, however, did not turn *nianhua* into the ill-omened objects. Rather, *nianhua* was updated with a new spirit of realism and amusement.

When the *nianhua* artists turned to warfare, “victory” was adopted as the theme, one that is both auspicious and amusing, albeit with a political subtext. What is more, “victories” are credited to individuals of the Han ethnicity, and not the Manchu court that bore responsibility for the more widespread defeats. This parallels the historical trend of rising Han nationalism and the regionalization of military power in the late Qing.<sup>5</sup> As Benedict Anderson observes, print media was a driving force in creating particular “print-language” that offered the possibility of creating a “form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for modern nation state,” and “print-language is what invents nationalism.”<sup>6</sup> In studying *nianhua*, it is possible to see an alternate version of “popular nationalism” that was neither wholly “traditional” nor defined by modern commercial press driven by “print capitalism”.<sup>7</sup>

Conventional *nianhua* representations of battle scenes and military events were derived from fiction, drama and fictionalized history. Depictions of “actual” warfare, meaning battles fought in recent history, had been a tradition of the imperial court. The Qianlong court, in particular, was known for having engaged Chinese and European artists to illustrate the emperor’s “Ten Great Campaigns (*Shiquan wugong* 十全武功)”, and disseminating both painted and printed versions of those illustrations to members of the political and cultural elites. As gifts

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<sup>5</sup> On the devolution of state power into the hands of local elites and the militarization of local society see Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1769–1864* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2006), p. 48, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> For the development of print capitalism in China see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

from the emperor, those images would not normally have found their way into the studios of *nianhua* artists, although it may be argued that 19th century *nianhua* artists did begin to adopt the general concept of war illustration, and that they began to incorporate the visual conventions and pictorial vocabulary of official war illustrations into graphic storytelling narratives. With the flourishing market for illustrated news, *nianhua* artists also innovatively adapted the new *huabao* style techniques into their expressive mode. As a result, *nianhua* became a hybrid graphic print genre fusing elements of imperial battle paintings, modern pictorial journalism, and the graphic storytelling traditions of woodblock illustrations.

In the following discussion, I will first explore the official commemorative art of war, focusing particularly on military images produced during the Qianlong reign, demonstrating how imperial war illustrations provided compositional strategies and representational techniques for late 19<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* artists. Then, I will examine woodblock illustrations of war subjects derived from fictional and dramatic works, which provided the particular form for the depiction of figures as well as the narrative approaches. I argue that late 19<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* representations of current warfare drew on the two types while elaborating on the new journalistic illustration techniques to create the “victory pictures” category, addressing pertinent issues concerning militarization and anti-foreign nationalism at a dramatic time of China’s meeting with the outside world.

### **1. Imperial War Pictures**

War, while marginalized in literati discourse, was a central concern of the state throughout imperial China, and so constituted a long-standing though seldom noted tradition of visual commemoration. Examples of court military paintings can be found in many periods of

Chinese history, including the Han, Tang, Song and Ming dynasties,<sup>8</sup> although the art genre reached its peak of development in the Qing dynasty through the patronage of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-96). The Manchus, after emerging from obscurity during the late Ming, occupied China in 1644 and then rapidly expanded their hegemony across east and central Asia. In addition to its cultural continuation of the Han civil service, central to their success was the military prowess of the Manchu state. Built on the state enterprise established by Emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng, Emperor Qianlong eventually expanded the borders of Qing Empire far beyond those established by any previous dynasty. Self-styled as the “Old Man of Ten Complete Victories (*shiquan laoren* 十全老人),” Qianlong considered his military exploits to be one of the central accomplishments of his long reign.<sup>9</sup>

To “document” these accomplishments, while also promoting martial ideals and military superiority of the Manchus, Qianlong launched a grand program of war commemoration in which court painters were summoned to produce a whole genre of war images that would include illustrations of battles, conquests, ceremonies and portraits of meritorious generals and soldiers. These images, along with other propagandistic arts and texts as well as military trophies, were displayed in the Purple Light Pavilion (*Ziguang ge* 紫光閣) at the center of the Forbidden City, a

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<sup>8</sup> The court tradition contained mainly two documentary forms- portraits of meritorious military officers (*gongchen tu*) and illustrations of military events (*zhantu*) - the second form was believed to have emerged in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Two pre-Qing examples of the second documentary form have survived, illustrating two of the battles fought between the Ming army and the Japanese bandits (*wokou*) in the Korean peninsula and the southeast coast of China during the Jiajing (1522-1566) and Wanli (1573-1620) reigns. For a general discussion of the history of court military painting see Hongxing Zhang, “Wu Youru's 'The Victory over the Taiping': Painting and Censorship in 1886 China,” PhD dissertation, (University of London, 1999), pp. 40-7.

<sup>9</sup> Qianlong's ten military victories included the two wars against Zunghars, Muslim and the pacification of Xinjiang (1755-59), two wars to suppress the Jinchuan rebels in Sichuan (1747-49, 1771-76), war to suppress the Lin Shuangwen Uprising in Taiwan (1787-88), and four expeditions abroad with one in Burma (1765-70), one in Annam (1788-89) and twice in Nepal (1790-92). Lu Zhengming, “Qianlong di ‘shiquan wugong’ chutan,” in *Zhongguo junshi shi lunwen ji* (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1989), pp. 239-58; Zhuang Jifa, *Qing Gaozong shiquan wugong yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987); Joanna Waley-Cohen, “Commemorating War in Eighteenth-Century China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 4 (1996): pp. 869-899.

place of military significance where the emperor also received victorious commanders and met the envoys of tributary states.<sup>10</sup>

Being aware of the power of visual images, Qianlong commissioned a total of five sets of commemorative illustrations as a means of promoting war and militarism. The first set of sixteen paintings documenting the campaigns in Eastern Turkestan (1755-59) was especially well-known for the involvement of four missionary artists: Italian Jesuit Lang Shining 郎世寧 (1688-1766, Giuseppe Castiglione), French Jesuit Wang Zhicheng 王致誠 (1702-68, Jean Denis Attiret), Bohemian Jesuit Ai Qimeng 艾啟蒙 (1708-80, Ignatius Sichelbart) and Italian Augustinian missionary An Deyi 安德義 (d.1781, Jean-Damascène Sallusti). Moreover, small-scale copies of those paintings were sent to Paris, under the commission of the emperor, to be engraved into copperplates, printed and subsequently shipped back to China. They were displayed in imperial memorial halls and the palace, and bestowed on deserving officials as a marker of imperial favor.<sup>11</sup> All following sets were painted and engraved in Beijing by Chinese artists and artisans under the instruction of Jesuit artists.<sup>12</sup>

Built on the visual commemoration tradition of the previous dynasties, the Qianlong series was also informed by Western arts. The emperor may have been aware of European paintings and prints through the missionaries at court. Military historian Joanna Waley-Cohen speculates that Qianlong was impressed by European battle paintings such as those executed by the German artist Rugendas (1666-1742), and was perhaps aware of the war paintings displayed

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<sup>10</sup> An introduction of the Ziguang ge is in Waley-Cohen, p. 893.

<sup>11</sup> Qianlong granted those prints to officials cultural elites such as the Fan family of the famous Tianyi ge Library of Ningbo on various occasions and. See Zhuang 1987, pp. 527-8;

<sup>12</sup> They included sixteen illustrations for the suppression of Great and Lesser Jinchuan rebels, twelve for the campaign in Taiwan, six for the war against Vietnam, and eight for the war in Nepal.

at Versailles of France and at El Escorial of Spain, and was thus encouraged to involve Jesuit artists in his own war-illustration enterprise.<sup>13</sup> As for why Qianlong chose to have the war prints produced in France, Waley-Cohen suggests, it is because no one in China recalled the techniques of copper engravings. France, meanwhile, was home to the best European artists in that craft, and more importantly, the emperor may have wished to broadcast his military power and triumphs beyond China.<sup>14</sup> Qianlong's war paintings and prints were one among a wide range of commemorative means that the emperor employed to "document" his great military victories of territorial expansion and suppression of unruliness. They served to glorify the Manchu rule and exert ideological control over the memory and historiography of war in China. Whether in painted or printed form, war illustrations of eighteenth-century China remained an episode in the history of imperial visual commemoration, and are telling documents of the Manchu state's self-exaltation.

Elaborating on this emerging style of Sino-European painting, Chinese artists began to incorporate Western visual vocabularies into the expressive mode of Chinese lines. European arts had been introduced to China in the late Ming era.<sup>15</sup> Synthetic styles continued to develop in the Qing dynasty and at the Manchu court were Kangxi's academicians such as Jiao Bingzhen 焦

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<sup>13</sup> Waley-Cohen 1996, p. 892.

<sup>14</sup> Waley-Cohen 1996, p. 892.

<sup>15</sup> Art historians Michael Sullivan and James Cahill have convincingly argued for the importance of Western influence on the artistic innovations in works of seventeenth century Chinese artists. For a classic introduction to the artistic exchange between China and the West, see Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art: From the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1973). Cahill points out that European pictures became accessible to Chinese artists through prints and European influence was especially visible in the works of painters active in or near Nanjing where one of the Jesuit missions located. A new interest in the physical world, a wealth of descriptive details, a stronger sense of spatial penetration, and novel perspectives are innovative elements in the works of such artists as Chang Hung and Wu Pin. See James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

秉貞 (fl.1689-1726) were active.<sup>16</sup> In Qianlong's court, the hybrid style was best developed to create a novel representational form that incorporated realism, modeling with chiaroscuro and linear perspective into Chinese modes of visual expression. As a result, physical forms such as facial features were individually emphasized, space was more three-dimensional, light and shadow was applied, accuracy and animation became distinctive features in works styled in the Sino-European manner.

One of the most effective uses of the synthetic style was in narrative paintings of contemporary events, exemplified by the war illustrations. In 1755, Qianlong sent troops to Xinjiang, where the internal conflicts among the Zunghars provided the emperor opportunity to take decisive actions in Eastern Turkistan. By 1759, Qianlong had defeated the Zunghars and subdued the Muslim tribes farther south, thereby consolidating power over the vast territory later called Xinjiang. Toward the end of his reign, Qianlong would count the conquest of Xinjiang among his greatest military achievements, and the battles were depicted in sixteen *Victory Pictures of the Conquest of the Zunghars and Muslim Tribes* (*Pingding Zhungaer huibu desheng tu* 平定準噶爾回部得勝圖, 1765-75).

*Victory Pictures of the Conquest of the Zunghars and Muslim Tribes* represents the highly developed Sino-European style in Qing court arts. The series begins with the surrender of ethnic Ili people in 1755 and ended with three scenes of military rituals to celebrate the

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<sup>16</sup> Jiao Bingzhen worked in the imperial Bureau of Astronomy, where he learned linear perspective drawing from European astronomers. He was good at figure and architecture painting. Through his student Leng Mei, Jiao's influence extended to the Qianlong court. Jiao's best known work was his 1769 edition of the *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* (*Illustrations of Farming and Weaving*), which would become one of the most widely reproduced imperial publications during the Qing dynasty. For Jiao's biography see Hu Jing, *Guochao yuanyhua lu* 國朝院畫錄 juan 1, *Hushi shuhua kao sanzong* 胡氏書畫考三種, *Xuxiu siku quanshu* vol. 1082, 1a-b. For general discussion of his art see Yang Boda, *Qingdai yuanyhua* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1993), pp. 59-64.

victories.<sup>17</sup> *Great Victory at Qurman* (*Huerman dajie* 呼爾滿大捷)<sup>18</sup> (figures 5.1, 5.2) represents the Battle of Qurman that occurred on February 3, 1759, when six hundred soldiers under Generals Fude 富德 and Machang 瑪璘 relieved General Zhaohui 兆惠, whose troop was besieged by over five thousand Muslims near the city of Yarkand.<sup>19</sup> The panoramic battle scene features dramatic landscape of undulating mountains within which troops are scattered, advancing and fighting amid hillside, peaks and valleys, while focusing primarily on the details and actions of figures. The tone of the natural landscape setting is essentially Chinese, especially apparent in the painted version where mountains are depicted with shading that emphasizes their dimensionality. The three prominent trees in the foreground near the bottom portion are poised symbolically and echo the rhythm of the actions: the left one stands along with the reserve forces of the Qing, the middle leans forward and symbolizes the advancing Qing troops, and the right near the Muslim troops rears back. The most prominent European picturesque device employed is the illusion of space that is created by using lines that recede toward a vanishing point in the upper third of the picture.

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<sup>17</sup> The series of paintings are reproduced in Gugong bowuyuan, *Qingdai gongting huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), pp. 209-16; Nie Chongzheng, *Qingdai gongting huihua* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1996), pp. 183-91. The suit of sixteen copper prints are reproduced in Nie Chongzheng, "Qingchao gongting tong banhua: Qianlong pingding zhunbu huibu zhantu," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, no.4 (1989), pp. 55-65; Chen Shou-yi, "Les Conquêtes de l'Empereur de la Chine," *Honolulu Academy of Arts Annual Bulletin* (1940), pp. 3-19. The whereabouts of the sixteen war paintings are unknown except that a fragment of the right section of the *Battle of Qurman* is kept in Ethnological Museum of Hamburg and a fragment of the left section of the painting was auctioned on 8. October 2013 at Sotheby's HK, lot 3073 (<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.3073.html/2013/fine-chinese-ceramics-and-works-of-art-hk0477>).

<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in note 17, only fragments of the painting are seen in public collection and art market today. A reproduction of the copper print version is in Chen Shou-yi 1940, figure 8, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> On the battle see James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1559-1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 31-2.



Figure 5.1, *Great Victory at Qurman*, 1760. Fragment of a painting mounted as a scroll, ink and color on silk. 130x 120 cm. After Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Printed Images in China 8<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (<http://metmuseum.org/exhibitions/view?exhibitionId=%7Bd341c7da-c89f-43e7-9ced-fcdca982f4cd%7D&oid=77031>)



Figure 5.2 Augustin de Saint-Aubin (French, 1730-1807), after Giovanni Damasceno Salusti (Italian, 1727-1781), *Great Victory at Qurman* (*La Grande Victoire de Qurman*), 1770, copperplate engraving on European paper, 58x92.9 cm. After Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Printed Images in China 8<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (<http://metmuseum.org/exhibitions/view?exhibitionId=%7Bd341c7da-c89f-43e7-9ced-fcdca982f4cd%7D&oid=77031>)



Figures are depicted in portrait manner with accuracy and animation. General Machang, for example, is depicted pulling back his bowstring just beside his dead horse in the middle of the lower portion of the picture. The image is similar to the official portrait of him, although not a duplicate. Machang was among the 100 meritorious officers (of the East Turkistan Campaign) whose portraits would be commissioned in 1760. The scene that appears in the battle painting represents the incident that was recorded in an inscription composed by Qianlong praising the heroic actions of Machang in a painted handscroll *Machang Lays Low the Enemy Ranks* (瑪瑞斫陣圖) (figure 5.3) by Lang Shining. Machang led the advancing troops and managed to penetrate enemy lines. Falling from his dying horse Machang continued to advance and fight by foot until he was rescued by the relief army. Soldiers are scattered among the natural landscape settings – at the forefront are mounted officers and soldiers equipped with bows, reserve forces are packed in rows standing shoulder to shoulder with bayonets. They are accompanied by cannon carried by a line of camels. The battle line winds along the ground toward distant mountains. Despite the straightforward application of European techniques, it was the unique combination of Chinese and European styles that characterized the imperial battle scenes.



Figure 5.3 Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione, 1688–1766), *Machang Lays Low the Enemy Ranks*, 1759, ink and colors on paper, 38.4 x 285.9 cm, 故-畫-001098-00000 National Palace Museum, Taipei. After <http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh96/newvision/large/c02.htm>



Figure 5.3 detail.

The impact of the unique hybrid style of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was perhaps limited to the imperial art circle and quickly declined after the death of Qianlong. The following Jiaqing 嘉庆 Emperor (r. 1769-1820) ordered three sets of similar images and Daoguang 道光 (r. 1821-50) Emperor commissioned only one.<sup>20</sup> The final imperial war illustrations were not commissioned until 1885 when the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) ordered a set to commemorate the Sino-French War (1883-85).<sup>21</sup>

The point, however, is that Chinese military paintings and graphic prints were long established as a site of hybridity. In the context of deeper European economic penetration into

<sup>20</sup> After Qianlong, Emperor Jiaqing commissioned four, sixteen and thirty-two, respectively, war illustrations for the campaigns against the ethnic Miao people in Hunan (*Pingding miaojiang zhantu*), the Miao in Guizhou (*Pingding zhong miao zhantu*), and the Li people in Yunnan (*Weixi pingli tu*) between 1798 and 1803. In 1828, Emperor Daoguang commissioned ten war illustrations of *Pingding huijiang zhantu* to commemorate the campaign in East Turkestan, along with forty-four portraits of meritorious generals and soldiers. See Hongxing Zhang 1999, pp. 46-7.

<sup>21</sup> Cixi commissioned four sets of illustrations to commemorate the suppression of Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), the Nian Rebellion (1851-68), the Muslim Rebellion (1856-74), as well as the Sino-French War (1884-85). The first and the most well-known set is the set known as *Illustration of Suppressing the Rebels from Guangdong and Guangxi* (*Pingding yuefei tu* 平定粤匪图) that was ordered to commemorate the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion. It took six years for the completion of the project and the resulting works include 67 paintings of battle scenes as well as a great number of officer portraits to be displayed in the palace memorial hall. See Zhang Hongxing, "Studies in Late Qing Dynasty Battle Paintings," *Artibus Asiae*, 60/2 (2000): 265-96.

China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coastal cities such as Guangzhou became homes to professional painters and craftsmen who engaged in the “China trade” by producing works that were informed by Western techniques. Soon Shanghai surpassed southern ports becoming the synthesizer and innovator of Sino-European arts, and it was here that China’s *nianhua* artists began to apply that synthesis to their depiction of modern wars of imperialism, repackaging them as graphic storytelling and celebrations of auspicious victory.

## 2. Pictorial Storytelling: *Nianhua* Illustration of Fictional Wars

Despite the political reputation and visual power of the imperial war illustrations, 19<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* artists did not and could not simply copy imperial military paintings. Rather, their experience of making illustrations for fiction and drama informed their representation of actual wars. During the Qing dynasty, mass production of novels and the rise of popular operas coincided with the mass production of *nianhua* representations. The relationship between theatre and *nianhua* in particular has attracted much scholarly attention. Wang Shucun coined the term *xichu* 戲出 to refer to those theatre-based *nianhua* and argued that the theatrical *nianhua* were drawn from live performances.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Russian Sinologist the late Boris Riftin (Li Fuqing 李福清 1932-2012) has identified two types of theatre-related *nianhua*: the “theatre *nianhua* (*xiju nianhua* 戲劇年畫)” and the “story *nianhua* (*gushi nianhua* 故事年畫).” The difference is that the “theatre *nianhua*” represented the story as seen on stage while the “story *nianhua*” was set in a landscape.<sup>23</sup> Among the great variety of plays and novels, the *Three Kingdoms* stories

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<sup>22</sup> Wang’s argument is based on his study of the theatrical *nianhua* produced in Yangliuqing 杨柳青 (Dai Lianzeng 戴廉增) near Tianjin. See Wang Shucun, *Xichu nianhua* (Taipei: Hansheng, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Li Fuqing [Boris Riftin], *Guangong chuanshuo yu sanguo yanyi* (Taipei: Hanzhong, 1997), p. 133.

were one of the most represented materials both on stage and in *nianhua* representations,<sup>24</sup> and were best known in the novel version *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (1330-1400).

Through a careful analysis of a series of *nianhua* illustrations of the famous episode “Battle of Changban Slope” (*Changban po* 長阪坡) from the *Three Kingdoms* (chapter 41),<sup>25</sup> Riftin found that many of the *nianhua* representations place the sequence in landscape settings, but retain theatrical elements such as the black and white face of Zhang Fei.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, many *nianhua* versions contain the imagery of a dragon circumscribed by a magic cloud rising from above Adou 阿斗, indicating that the child would become the ruler of the Kingdom of Shu – an element not recorded in the novel, but present in operatic versions of the story.<sup>27</sup>

Storytelling literature was another source of inspiration. One later example is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou print depicting the famous episodes of Wu Song from *Water Margin*. *Water Margin* is best known in its form as the Ming dynasty novel authored by Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (1296-1372). The novel, however, does not tell the complete story, and omits certain episodes that survive in the storytelling version of present day Yangzhou. Riftin thus suggests that the *nianhua* version of the Wu Song stories must have been made under the influence of local

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<sup>24</sup> Li Fuqing [Boris Riftin] has identified some 337 *nianhua* depicting the Three Kingdoms stories, while Tao Junqi's catalogues of Beijing Opera pieces include some 155 out of 1300 plays rendered episodes from the Three Kingdoms. See James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art and History in Rural North China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> The story features Zhao Yun who saves Liu Bei's son Liu Shan (Adou) from Cao Cao, with the help of Zhang Fei who prevents Cao Cao's forces from crossing the bridge with his yell.

<sup>26</sup> Li Fuqing, “‘Sanguo yanyi’ nianhua yu Guan Yu banhua,” *Sekai Kara mita Chugoku minkan hangga*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Nihon Mingaikan, 1998), pp. 17-26.

<sup>27</sup> Li Fuqing 1998, p. 19.

storytellers of Suzhou.<sup>28</sup> A rare Suzhou *nianhua* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, offers visual evidence of how this transmission between storyteller and artist might have taken place. *An Lushan Rebellion* (*An Shi zhi luan tu* 安史之亂圖) (figure 5.4), issued by Zhengmao hao 正茂号 of Suzhou, depicts a storyteller playing a *qin* while telling the stories of An Lushan Rebellion (755-63) at the right corner, and includes fragments of the storytelling literature scattered about the frame, suggesting the crucial role storytellers had played in providing narrative sources for popular print artists. *Nianhua*, therefore, appear to have bridged the gap between narratives performed on stage and those in print.



Figure 5.4 Anonymous, *An Lushan Rebellion*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 34.9x 54.5 cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 149.

<sup>28</sup> Li Fuqing [Boris Riftin], “2004 nian xueshu fangwen jianbao ji fuji,” *Chugoku hanga kenkyu*, 5.2 (2007), pp. 163-72.



While stage practice played a crucial role in *nianhua* renditions, they were far from literal translations of theatrical scenes. Rather, *nianhua* artists were free to pick up subjects and motifs that they thought were appealing to the audience in telling stories. In the Changban Slope narrative *Saving the Master at Dangyang* (*Dangyang jiuzhu* 当阳救主) (figure 5.5), probably from early 19th century Suzhou, a group of unarmed civilians including women, children, and elders appear in the upper left, where they balance Cao Cao and his forces on the upper right. Riftin suggests sometimes *nianhua* artists added contents that may not be relevant to current narrative in order to make fuller and enriched scenes. *Nianhua*, therefore, should not be regarded merely as illustrations of fiction, theatre or storytelling, but as an independent form that drew on a diverse media and reconfigured them as graphic storytelling.



Figure 5.5 Anonymous, *Saving the Master at Dangyang*, circa early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 56.2 x 106.8 cm, woodblock print, Ōshajō bijutsu hōmotsukan, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 296.

One of the most popular subjects of *nianhua* storytelling is the drama of fictional war. Traditional *nianhua* representation of fictional battles typically featured mounted warriors in

operatic costumes and equipped with classic weapons such as spears, swords and shields. Sometimes supernatural intervention is involved and illustrated to intensify the drama of conflicts. The image either depicts a confusion of combatants or single close combat. Unlike performing arts that have only the stage property (the simplest scene contains only a couple chairs and a table) and simple props such as the whip that indicates the act of horse riding, *nianhua* narratives usually appear in natural landscapes with real horses, while giving concrete shapes to supernatural beings that were lacking or represented in symbolic forms on stage.

*Twenty-eight Stars at Kunyang* (figure 5.6), from the Wang Junfu 王君甫 shop active in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou, belongs to the type of fuller composition. The print depicts the Battle of Kunyang during the Eastern Han dynasty, in which Liu Xiu 劉秀 (AD 25 - AD 57) regained the throne with the aid of twenty-eight warriors. The narrative was recorded in the novel *Romance of the Eastern Han Dynasty* (*Dong Han tongsu yanyi* 東漢通俗演藝), a remaking of historical accounts and legendary sources of the Eastern Han period.<sup>29</sup> *Nianhua* artists chose to depict a group-fighting scene while foregrounding key figures Zhi Junzhang 志君章 and Qu Wuba 瞿武霸. Riding a lion, Qu confronts Zhi on horseback at the center of the image. Crowds of mounted-warriors occupy the remaining space. Neither official histories nor popular literature recorded Zhi and Qu. We do not know who they are and how they got into *nianhua* narratives of the Eastern Han stories. They may have been fabricated by the artists, although it is more likely that they were derived from an oral tradition in which Zhi and Qu appear as protagonists.

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<sup>29</sup> Xie Zhao 謝詔 (*jinshi*, 1574) was the editor of *Donghan tongsu yanyi*. The best-known edition was published, along with Zhen Wei's *Xi Han yanyi*, in the *Jianxiao ge piping Dong Xi Han tongsu yanyi* 劍嘯閣批評東西漢通俗演義, with a preface by Yuan Hongdao, which states that the edition was based on an earlier publication of 1612 by the Daye tang of the Zhou family in Nanjing.



Figure 5.6 Anonymous, *Twenty-eight Stars at Kunyang*, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 37.7 x58.8 cm. Ōshajō Bijutsu Hōmotsukan, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 290.

*Li Wenzhong Sweeping the North* (*Li Wenzhong Sao bei* 李文忠掃北, figure 5.7), from Hongtai 洪泰 print shop active in the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> century Suzhou, represents the second type and depicts close combat between two mounted warriors. The story may have originated with the Ming novel *Biographies of Heroes* (*Yinglie zhuan* 英烈傳) or plays and stories about the conflicts between the last Mongol ruler Shundi 順帝 (r. 1333-1370) and the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368-98). The print depicts a battle taking place on a bridge between the Ming general Li Wenzhong (1339-84) and the Northern Yuan commander Bai Yuanta 白元它 (i.e. Bo Yantu 伯顏圖). Wearing operatic costume, Bo Yantu turns back from his horse to accept the challenge from Li Wenzhong at the foot of the bridge. A divine animal appears above the sea in the upper right of the picture and the inscription explains that the creature built the Golden



Bridge over the Northern Sea and thus allowed the Yuan remnants to escape the Ming. From textual sources of the late Yuan legends, we know that it is a Taoist magician who recalls the divine creature to help the Yuan forces in order to avoid a slaughter, and reveals to Li Wenzhong that it was not heaven's will to wipe out the Yuan forces at the present moment despite having run out of good fortune.<sup>30</sup> The *nianhua* artist accentuates the narrative by focusing on a single battle in order to tell a more complex tale of heroism, divine intervention and dynastic change.



Figure 5.7 Anonymous, *Li Wenzhong Sweeping the North*, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 32.5x 50cm. Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Riben cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 156.

Panoramic representation is another feature developed by *nianhua* artists to tell war stories. Early *nianhua* works such as *Twenty-eight Stars at Kunyang* and *Li Wenzhong Sweeping the North* generally focus on portrait-like illustration of figures and close combat while

<sup>30</sup> Liu Xiusheng 李修生 ed., *Guben xiqu jumù tiyao* 古本戲曲劇目提要 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), pp. 623-4.

minimizing the setting. The 19<sup>th</sup> century *Saving the Master at Dangyang* adopts a panoramic perspective with a rich landscape that frames the fighting, although retaining the focus on figures and combating as well as the operatic gesture and costume maintained. Similarly, *Three Attacks at the Zhu Family Village* (figure 5.8) by Tang Weishun 湯維順, based on an episode of the *Water Margin*, provides a panoramic view of the battle between the Liangshan outlaws led by Song Jiang and the Zhu Family forces. Despite the continuing popularity of close-up scenes, *nianhua* artists had begun to adopt the wide-angle perspective.



Figure 5.8 Anonymous, *Three Attacks at the Zhu Family Village*, 18<sup>th</sup>- early 19<sup>th</sup> century, woodblock print, 94.8 x 53cm. Ōshajō Bijutsu Hōmotsukan, Japan. After Feng Jicai ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Taohuawu juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 314.

At the same time, the mode of serial narration was under development. Multi-scene *nianhua* prints became increasingly common during the Qing dynasty, although *nianhua* narratives tend not to present scenes in the order that is consistent with the appearance of episodes in novels. Rather, as Riftin suggests, the artists were likely to choose one moment from the whole chain of events that constitute one episode and to design a vignette from which the

viewer could see the whole picture.<sup>31</sup> Serial narration in *nianhua* paralleled the flourishing of vernacular *zhanghui xiaoshuo* or multi-chaptered novels and the associated storytelling practice since the late Ming onward.<sup>32</sup> The popular aesthetic sensibility toward multi-episode narratives provided the literary and visual templates for *nianhua* artists to “report”, as well as for the *nianhua* readers, the “mental space” through which to appreciate the “news” during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Taiping Rebellion (1850-64): Graphic Storytelling of Recent Events

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Taiping Rebellion is indisputably an event of far-reaching and transformative significance in the history of the Qing dynasty. The story of the Taiping Rebellion is usually read as a biography of a visionary and the movement he inspired. Hong Xiuquan (1814-64), a failed candidate of the imperial Civil Service Examination from Guangdong, claimed (in 1843) that he was the second son of Heaven and brother of Jesus Christ from a vision he received in a wondrous dream (in 1837). Subsequently, he developed a religious system and gathered converts from his hometown that formed the bases of his revolutionary movement challenging the existing system of the dynasty. In January 1851, Hong announced himself the Heavenly King of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The Taiping army fought its way northward out of Guangxi, advancing downward to the lower Yangzi. There they occupied Nanjing in 1853, made it their capital and renamed it Heavenly Capital (Tianjing).

For more than a decade, the Taiping forces fought against the Qing imperial army consisted of Green Standard Army, Eight Banners Army, local militias, and the Ever Victorious

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<sup>31</sup>Li Fuqing [Boris Riftin] 2007, p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> The *zhanghui* novels, usually written in vernacular language and for long narrative stories, began to develop quickly since the late Yuan and early Ming, reaching its maturity from the mid-Ming throughout the Qing.

Army over a territory that covered the heart of the Qing Empire, causing great damage to regions along the Yangzi River. Scholars seeking to explain the rise of Shanghai in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century often allude to the contribution of the refugees and migrants from the prosperous Jiangnan region, with reference directly or implicitly to the devastation caused by the Taiping war that impelled them to move.

The China field has long been preoccupied with the ideological questions and the erasure of public memory about the ruination and brutality of the war through official commemoration. Local gazetteers of the restoration period, for example, focused on recording and establishing images of martyrs and their righteous acts of resistance against the rebels.

*Nianhua* representation of the war provides visual clues about how popular narrative created imaginary victories, helping to shape public memory of the war. Using techniques of graphic storytelling, *nianhua* artists repackaged contemporary war events as a fictional narrative, while appropriating the pictorial rhetoric of official visual commemoration.

In the depiction of battles fought during the Taiping Rebellion, *nianhua* artists show a particular interest in representing city walls and gates. Many of the battles are represented as occurring outside the city gates especially of Nanjing, the capital of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. City walls and gates had their practical function in protecting the interior and governing passage from one space to another, but they were also a symbolic linkage between the mundane world and the cosmos.<sup>33</sup> By the late imperial time, it was common knowledge that gates of important cities were topped with watchtowers as with fortified walls on the frontiers.

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<sup>33</sup> A good discussion of the cosmic schemes of the city gates of Suzhou is in Xu Yinong, *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp. 50-3.

As Joseph Needham noted, Chinese city-walls are never complete without their watchtowers and gate-towers, usually single structures of two or three stories.<sup>34</sup>

Nanjing's city walls, built by Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (r.1368-98), adopted a winding design that followed the local landscape. Fundamental to its complex topography was its strategic proximity to Yangzi River and the presence of hills and lakes that form natural barriers. Originally, the Ming state built thirteen gates through Nanjing's city walls. The historical significance of Nanjing's city walls and gates coincided with its political significance during the Taiping Rebellion.

All of these factors are crucial elements in *nianhua* representation of the battles fought between the Taiping rebels and the Qing armies. Although the Imperial force was a mixture of the Banner Army and various local and regional militia, Zeng Guofan's Xiang Army, in particular, played a crucial role in fighting and suppressing the Taiping rebels. The increasing importance of the Han generals and armies is visible in the *nianhua* narratives that depict mostly the Han Chinese as the victorious fighters.

A series of *nianhua* titled *Victory at Nanjing* (*Nanjing desheng tu* 南京得勝圖) (figure 5.9), now preserved in the SOAS library, depict battles fought at the city gates, such as the Fengyi Gate, Tongxi Gate, and Huyang Gate of Nanjing.<sup>35</sup> *Fengyi Gate*, for example, represents the imagined battle scene in a realistic topographical landscape with significant landmarks such

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China. Vol. 4, Physics and Physical Technology. Part 3, Civil Engineering and Nautics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> The list of *nianhua* in SOAS library can be found in Michel D'Ortona, "Preliminary list of Chinese Woodblock Prints in the SOAS Library," (2011). (<http://digital.soas.ac.uk/content/LO/AA/00/00/12/00001/PDF.pdf>)

as the Fengyi Gate, the Swallow Rock (in the middle of the upper portion), and the Guanyin Gate (the northernmost gate of the city, upper left of the picture).<sup>36</sup> The inscription states that,

The Taiping rebels were fleeing like rats into Nanjing. An urgent message had been received reporting that the mandarins and imperial ambassadors had witnessed how the good spirits had devised an ingenious plan to scare the bad spirits with flaming reeds tied to the tails of oxen. The imperial army was deployed to break into the city. The Taiping rebels were killed and the traitors exterminated. Peace was completely restored and the reign of ten thousand years was once again pure. The Taiping rebels were entirely eradicated. The people were touched by the imperial favors and kindness bestowed on them.

In addition to city wall and gate, the print incorporates another popular motif in situating the military camp at the upper right corner. The higher position of the camp relative to the city wall of Nanjing symbolically indicates the military superiority and the virtuous cause of the Qing army. The use of ox formation at the forefront of the Qing army shows the imaginative creation of the print artists who had a gift of using storytelling techniques to fuse the realistic and the imaginary.

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<sup>36</sup> A reproduction of the print is in Christer von der Burg ed., *The Art of Contemporary Chinese Woodcuts* (London: Muban Foundation, 2003), Figure 29, p. 30.





Figure 5.9 Anonymous, *Victory at Nanjing*, circa 1850s-60s, woodblock print, 45.8 x 31 cm. SOAS, University of London. After SOAS Digital Library <http://digital.soas.ac.uk/LOAA003943/00001>

In the same vein, *Picture of Eliminating Taiping Rebels* (*Jiaomie yuefei tu* 剿滅粵匪圖) (figure 5.10), depicts a battle scene outside the city gates of Zhenjiang and Yangzhou. While the natural landscape is somewhat realistically represented – the strategic position of Zhenjiang at the crossing of the Grand Canal and the Yangzi River skirted by ranges of hills, as well as the picturesque island of Jiaoshan – the fighting is exaggerated and romanticized. The inscription tells how the Taiping rebels are running for their lives and escaping in the direction of the Jinshan Temple, west of Zhenjiang. The officials hear about the rebels who burn everything down in the temple, so immediately set up an army that moves forth to the cities and suburbs. The army consisting of all possible recruits fight with extraordinary skill. While the rebels flee they are killed by the swords of the army. The print shows how they drive away and resist the

enemy as they hold their heads and skulk away in shame towards Yangzhou. A note on the left of the print explains that the captured Taiping rebels were ordered to be flayed alive.

The image was reproduced in *The Illustrated London News* (hereafter abbreviated as *ILN*) of January 7, 1854.<sup>37</sup> *ILN* suggests that the image was a military dispatch sent to the court to announce the recapture of Zhenjiang (Chin-kiang) from the Taiping rebels. It gives a detailed description of the print:

The coloring is chiefly a dull red, a few parts, together with the writing, being black.” “The resurgents may generally be distinguished by having merely coarse wrappers around their heads, instead of a sort of helmets, or by wearing long hair. The mandarins, along with their attendant, are in upper right hand corner of the picture, admiring the prowess of their troops. The dress and the general appearance of Chinese soldiers are given with great accuracy.<sup>38</sup>

The text further indicates that “the event portrayed in this (print) is sheer invention: the town (Zhenjiang) having been found by the English authorities to be still quietly in the possession of the insurgents long after the date of the asserted re-capture.”<sup>39</sup> It may further be noted that while physical features of the figures are realistically depicted, much of their fighting was based on theatrical poses.

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<sup>37</sup> “Chinese Military Despatch,” *The Illustrated London News*, 7 January 1854, Volume 15 (Leighton, 1854), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> “Chinese Military Despatch,” *The Illustrated London News*, 7 January 1854, Volume 15 (Leighton, 1854), p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 5.10 Anonymous, *Picture of Eliminating Taiping Rebels*, circa 1850s-60s, woodblock print, 45.8x 31 cm. SOAS, University of London. After SOAS Digital Library <http://digital.soas.ac.uk/LOAA000016/00001>

What is most interesting, perhaps, is the fact that while the battles actually occurred in Zhenjiang, the result of the battle was quite the opposite, with the Qing going down to defeat and the Taiping going on to rule south-central China for the next ten years. They are, in other words, “victory prints”, in spite of the fact that victory had not been achieved. It appears to build in part on the long tradition of representing all wars against rebels as virtuous, regardless of the reality. Current war events are remade to fit the graphic storytelling mode while incorporating accurate description of figures and landscapes to lend credibility to the narrative.

#### 4. Sino-French War (1884-85): Making Heroes, Anticipating Wartime “News”

*Nianhua* representation of contemporary warfare began to undergo a dramatic change during the time of the Sino-French War (1884-85) when foreigners entered the *nianhua* scene,

and battles begin to reflect “current affairs” with more realistic elements. The depiction of Chinese and foreign adversaries is no less fanciful, although the “victories” were largely fabricated. Where images of the Taiping Rebellion had derived largely from traditional visual and narrative techniques, with the Sino-French War the artists begin to portray European armies, weaponry, uniforms, figures and racial characteristics with an unprecedented sense of ‘reality’, meaning that they are not consciously represented as fiction.

#### **4.1 Sino-British Conflicts of 1850s: Guangzhou and the Victory Pictures**

*Nianhua* depicting contemporary wars were not produced in large scale before the 1880s. However, popular print artists had begun to depict China’s foreign wars from as early as the 1850s. At least two *nianhua*, issued in Guangzhou (Canton) where the battles took place, illustrated military conflicts between Qing and British armies of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. One such example is *Authentic Picture of Defeating the Foreign Ghosts* (*Da bai guizi zhentu* 大敗鬼子真圖), depicting the battle at Fatshan (Foshan 佛山) Creek in 1857. Although the original print does not appear to have survived, a copy was redrafted and published in the *ILN* on January 23, 1858.<sup>40</sup> Historically, the battle was fought between British Royal Navy and Chinese pirates on the Pearl River on June 1, 1857, and concluded with a decisive British victory. The *nianhua* artist, however, chose to represent the opposite scenario in which a small Chinese junk confronts two gigantic British warships, which are depicted as oversize Chinese war junks. The Chinese braves on the Chinese junk fire gunpowder at the British ships while villagers on the bank take up swords, spears and shields to defeat the British soldiers armed with rifles.

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<sup>40</sup> The print is reproduced in Wang Shucun, *Nianhua shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 188. Wang dates it to the 1840s, which seems incorrect. The other contemporary print is *Firing Cannon at Elliot* issued around 1839, and depicts the Qing armies led by Lin Zexu fighting with the British forces under Charles Elliot. A brief description of the imagery is in the same book, p. 120.

Although they were far from ‘realistic’, prints like *Authentic Picture of Defeating the Foreign Ghosts* marked the first step Chinese woodblock artists had taken in incorporating current wars into *nianhua* imagery. However, Chinese imagery of war continued to be based on the tradition of ‘moral combat’ as reflected in the attached text that explains why modern British armies are defeated– “The rebellious barbarians are hateful, [because they have been] causing havoc in local village life.” The “morally inferior” foreigners are doomed to failure and the symbolic red rain indicates the anger of Heaven. The print reveals a particular Chinese perception of war; the unjust cause finds little support from Heaven so is foredoomed to fail, in spite of all evidence to the contrary.

James Polachek has observed the similar practice of making “victory myth” among the literati community of Guangzhou (Canton) during the first Opium War (1839-42). According to Polachek, the relatively intense literati involvement in local politics in Guangzhou helped to create the myth of local elites mobilizing ordinary people to fight against the foreign invaders, thus demonstrating the necessity and legitimacy of local literati who took over the role of military leadership in place of officers appointed by the Manchu court.<sup>41</sup> While the increasing power of local elites could be found in many regions from the Taiping war onward, the production of “victory prints” during the Sino-British conflicts of the 1850s demonstrates that military myth-making was also on the rise amongst ordinary people, indicating an increasing public interest in politics of local and even national significance.

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<sup>41</sup> James M. Polachek, “The Myth of Victory in Kwangtung,” *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 137-75.

## **4.2 Sino-French War: News Illustrators or Myth-Makers**

Starting from the mid-1870s, the modern press, especially *Shenbao* (launched in 1872), disseminated news about foreign encroachment on Chinese territory.<sup>42</sup> Stories concerning the 1874 Japanese expedition to Taiwan and the Sino-Russian dispute over Ili during 1879-81 helped to intensify the sense of foreign crises among the Chinese, and newspaper rhetoric began to familiarize the Chinese public with discourses of nationalism such as people's "love of the county" and government's "love of the people."<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, since the 1860s, the Qing state had committed considerable resources toward modernizing Chinese armies, including the establishment of arsenals and shipyards, importing Western military technologies as well as sending military students abroad. The Sino-French War of 1884-85 provided a dramatic opportunity to test that new firepower. In hindsight it is clear that the Chinese military was still inferior to the French, but *nianhua* representation of the war continued the tradition of constructing imaginary victories, as well as images of heroes, such as Liu Yongfu 劉永福 (1837-1917) and his Black Flag Army (*Heiqi jun* 黑旗軍).

The valorization of a former bandit was the key theme of the visual narratives of the Sino-French War. Once a Taiping rebel, Liu Yongfu was forced to take refuge in Vietnam, and it was there he recruited his famous Black Flag Army. After winning several victories over local military forces, Liu and his men finally secured their position in Vietnam. Liu had begun to engage the French in Vietnam since as early as the 1870s, and won several victories including

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<sup>42</sup> On *Shenbao* see Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Tsai Weipin, *Reading Shenbao: Nationalism, Consumerism and Individuality in China 1919-37* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> For a general discussion of late 19<sup>th</sup> century political and cultural changes in urban society see Mary Backus Rankin, "Alarming Crises/Enticing Possibilities: Political and Cultural Changes in Late Nineteenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 29, no.1 supplement (June, 2008): pp. 46-63.

the defeat of the first French adventure in Tonkin, which resulted in the death of French lieutenant Francis Garnier (1839-73) on December 21, 1873,<sup>44</sup> and the Battle of Paper Bridge on May 19, 1883, during which the French commander Henri Riviere (1827-83) was killed.<sup>45</sup> Liu and his black flags had now made their name for defeating French ambition in Tonkin by taking scalps of two French officers, which provided sources for patriotic propaganda with the progress of war.

When word of these conflicts, and especially the ‘victories’, reached Guangzhou in 1884 popular artists began to render their impressions in print. On April 19, 1884 the commercial publisher *Shubao* 述報, founded on the previous day, claimed to be in correspondence with a so-called ‘special artist’ by the name of the Hermit of Pinshi (*Pinshi shanren* 品石山人). Hermit of Pinshi, it was written, had followed General Liu into battle and was expected to send battle pictures, a photo of General Liu and a translated version of a French map of Annam. The photo and map were to be reproduced and sold at a cost of one yuan each, and provided free of charge to the newspaper subscribers.<sup>46</sup> The paper’s engagement of the Hermit of Pinshi would appear to be the first instance of a Chinese commercial publisher provides “coverage” of a contemporary war depicted by a correspondent, although the idea seems quickly caught on.

In late April 1884, a print on Liu’s defense of Bac Ninh titled *Picture of General Liu Defending Bac Ninh* (*Liu tidu zhenshou Beining tu* 劉提督鎮守北寧圖) (figure 5.11), by the

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion on Francis Garnier and his adventures in Tonkin see Ella S. Laffey, “French Adventurers and Chinese Bandits in Tonkin: The. Gamier Affair in its Local Context,” *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, vol. 6, no.1 (1975), pp. 8-51.

<sup>45</sup> On background information of Sino-French War see John King Fairbank, Denis Crispin Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911*, pt. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 ), pp. 251-69; Bruce A. Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 82-93.

<sup>46</sup> “Benguan gaobai,” *Shubao*, April 19, 1884.

Hermit of Meizhou (Meizhou yinshi 梅州隱士), was reproduced in *ILN* with the following comment:

A Chinese Special Artist, who was with the retreating garrison, has made a series of rather curious drawings, which have been engraved and published in China, as a sort of Chinese Illustrated News, and a copy of which, sold at Shanghai, was recently bought and sent to us by an obliging correspondent.<sup>47</sup>

As with the Hermit of Pinshi, the identity of the Hermit of Meizhou is unknown, except that he presumably came from the city of Meizhou in eastern Guangdong. The other important message from the comment of *ILN*, however, is that the print was circulated in both the southern port and Shanghai, suggesting a wider circulation of such images and perhaps a Guangzhou-Shanghai connection.



Figure 5.11 Meizhou Yinshi, *Picture of General Liu Defending Bac Ninh*, 1884, woodblock print. After Feng Jicai, *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Eluosi cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 430-1.

<sup>47</sup> “The French War in Tonquin: The Battle of Bacninh,” *Illustrated London News*, May 17, 1884.

In addition to the image reproduced in *ILN*, Hermit of Meizhou also painted a series of “victory pictures” regarding the battles at Bac Ninh, such as *Great Victory at Bac Ninh* (*Beining dajie* 北寧大捷) (figure 5.12, up), *Complete Picture of Recovering Bac Ninh* (*Kefu Beining quantu* 克復北寧全圖) (figure 5.12, bottom) and *Recapturing Bac Ninh at Night* (*Yeke Beining* 夜克北寧). It was probably these same “victory pictures” that caught the attention of *Shenbao*. The editors noted at the beginning of 1884 “pictures depicting Chinese defeat of the French were widely circulated among the Guangzhou people.... The information is that Black Flags are victorious and the French are frequently defeated.”<sup>48</sup> Another editorial published in *Shenbao* reveals how those “victory pictures” were made:

The victorious “news” had reached Hong Kong, where local people also believed in the victory (Battle of Sontay). As a matter of fact, a special artist had painted the picture before the battle began, in which, the Black Flags are depicted chasing the French army who are fleeing in disorder.... The delineation is so realistic that the viewers are pleased in seeing such illustration.<sup>49</sup>

The comment in *Shenbao* suggests that at least some of those “victory pictures” were made before the battles started, and obviously by local artists who anticipated the outcome rather than “war correspondents” following General Liu onto the battlefield. We can only speculate as to the rationale – there may have been competition in the marketplace to get the story out first, regardless of its veracity, or there may have been an intention to mobilize the public emotion toward the French before the battle began. Most likely the artist was catering to a public that had a certain aesthetic sensibility that expected the unvirtuous to be defeated, much as was the case

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<sup>48</sup> “On the fall of Sontay,” *Shenbao*, January 4, 1884.

<sup>49</sup> “On War Illustration,” *Shenbao*, January 2, 1884.



in the theatrical *nianhua* prints that were probably circulating alongside war prints in the New Year markets of 1884.



Figure 5.12 Meizhou Yinshi, *Great Victory at Bac Ninh* (up), 34 x 57 cm and *Complete Picture of Recovering Bac Ninh* (bottom), 33x60cm, 1884. Russia. After Feng Jicai ed. *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Eluosi cangpin juan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 432.

The “victory pictures” especially those by Hermit of Meizhou also illustrate the development of the technique of panorama. The artist uses fine line painting to develop grand landscapes with distinct military events unfolding amidst undulating mountains and forts.

Although we cannot draw a direct connection between these images and any earlier form of



military commemoration, the composition strategy is similar in many ways to the court military paintings of the Qianlong era. Central to Hermit of Meizhou's rendition of battle scenes was the fortified wall that may have invoked the city gates of Taiping era "victory pictures" and the barrier mountains that suggested the frontiers of imperial China in Qianlong's war illustrations.

What distinguishes the "victory pictures" depicting battles of the Sino-French War from previous war illustrations is a relatively objective knowledge of the French military institution, the sense of racial difference and the use of clothing to demarcate the French and Chinese military. The Chinese uniform is the traditional *haoyi* consisting of a wide jacket with circular plaques at front and back and black characters denoting the soldier's unit. Jackets are worn over the civilian long gown and loose trousers are tucked into black cloth boots. Paired aprons are worn, along with a rattan helmet or a turban. Archers, musketeers, cavalry, and artillerymen on the battlefield are led by soldiers carrying rattan shields and dressed in a long sleeve jacket with yellow and black stripes, matching leggings and boots, and a cloth helmet. Chinese officers wear the standard conical mandarin hat with tassels.<sup>50</sup>

The French are depicted wearing the European uniform of high-buttoned coats and tight trousers. Ethnic features are emphasized. The French are depicted with Caucasian features such as the high noses. French mounted officers are equipped with swords and infantry with rifles and bayonets. Apart from their shields, Chinese soldiers are depicted with the same rifles, bayonets, spears and cannons and so appear, from the Chinese perspective, equally well armed but better dressed than their French adversaries (barbarians). From the perspective of the Self-

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<sup>50</sup> Valery Garrett, *Chinese Dress: From the Qing Dynasty to the Present* (New York: Charles E Tuttle Co, 2008:), p.29; Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 72.

Strengthening Movement, the Qing forces have adopted Western practicality while preserving their Chinese essence (*ti-yong*).

Most of the prints concerning the Sino-French War depict land battles, although one rare print *Victory from Fuzhou* (*Fuzhou jiebao* 福州捷報) depicts the naval battle at Fuzhou fought in August 1884.<sup>51</sup> Late in November of the same year the print was reproduced in *ILN*, which contrasts “what really happened in the battle” with the Chinese *nianhua* representation of it:

It had been generally supposed, from the accounts which have reached Europe that the gun-boats of the French naval squadron in the Min River bombarded the Foo-chow (Fuzhou) Arsenal and the adjacent forts, driving out their garrison with little difficulty, and sinking all the Chinese junks. But a Chinese special artist, in the sheet from which we have copied this engraving, represents a very different scene, the valiant defenders of the place pouring forth a terrible cannonade and fusillade, sending a French vessel to the bottom, while multitudes of the enemy are drowned or shot, the fire of the batteries and troops on shore being assisted by that of a Chinese force afloat on the river. In the aerial region above, the Chinese Governor condemns prisoners to death.<sup>52</sup>

The Chinese side is clearly outnumbered in personnel and is superior in military conducts, with the backing of Jinpai fort (Kimpai) and Changmen batteries (white fort). The French have a modern warship in contrast to the traditional Chinese junk; still, the Chinese have the upper hand as the French ship is in sinking.

Victory pictures of the Sino-French War show the power of visual images in defining war and shaping public opinions about it. Pictures were made in advance to anticipate rather than report the war results. Artistically, Sino-French War *nianhua* prints drew on the court war

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<sup>51</sup> Historically, the battle was fought in Mawei harbor to the southeast of Fuzhou, during which the French squadron under Admiral Amédée Courbet almost destroyed the Fujian fleet, which led to the blockade of the Nanyang fleet on the Yangzi River that cut the flow of tribute grain up the Grand Canal to Beijing.

<sup>52</sup> “Chinese pictorial version of the conflict at Foo-chow: repulse of the French gun-boats,” *Illustrated London News*, November 11, 1884.

illustrations in their basic structuring strategy, while maintaining the narrative conventions of traditional graphic storytelling in terms of emphasizing heroic images and deeds against the unruly. The involvement of commercial artists such as Wu Youru in imperial war commemoration after the Sino-French War demonstrates the capacity of commercial print artists in war illustrations, and the cultural exchange between court and popular arts, thanks to the commercial economy that made war and war arts accessible to a larger audience. However, realism became an increasingly crucial element. The realistic depiction of the French army demonstrates the influence of the *huabao* style images – i.e they were beginning to develop a “journalistic” perspective. The traditional narrative code continued in their emphasis of heroism, but it became inseparable from the patriotic messages that defined a market for wartime stories. In moving toward “journalism” and commercial printing, the *nianhua* producers, again, became disseminators of the new literary and visual discourses of the emerging mass media, while maintaining its myth-making practice and transforming it into a means of producing nationalistic messages.

### **5. Sino-Japanese War (1894-95): Recycling and Innovation**

By the time Sino-Japanese War came its conclusion in 1895, Chinese war pictures were being mass-produced. The years since the Sino-French War had enabled Chinese print artists to gain more experience in the use of lithography, yet the market was still occupied by woodblock artists who were obliged to change their graphic style in order to compete. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out, it appears that one of the most effective ways to “scoop” one’s competitors was to recycle old Sino-French war prints, which not only provided a production advantage, but ensured that war images were rendered in patterns that were already familiar to the public. The victory myth continued, but it was also represented by innovative formats with

new subjects being introduced and lengthy texts composed in journalistic style forming an integral part of the war pictures. *Huabao* style imagery looms larger.

### **5.1 Recycling Sino-French War Images**

Despite having suffered frequent defeats in foreign wars, in 1894 the Chinese court and many Western observers were optimistic that Chinese military power was still superior to that of Japan, in spite of the fact that much of the naval budget had been appropriated for repairing and constructing imperial palaces and retreats.<sup>53</sup> Sir Robert Hart (1835-1911), Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, in his letter to James Duncan Campell (August 5, 1894) wrote that “if the war lasts long enough we must win: Chinese grit, physique and numbers will beat Japanese dash, drill and leadership – the Japs are at their best now, but we’ll improve every day!”<sup>54</sup> Such confidence and optimism was shared and disseminated by the modern press. *Shenbao* published several editorials arguing that a war with Japan could not be avoided and that China should take the opportunity to assert authority and sovereignty over its tributary state, Korea.<sup>55</sup> Victories of the Sino-French War were recalled. *Xinwenbao*, established in 1893, for example, published an editorial on September 27, 1894, reminding the readers that victorious battles fought against the French should be remembered. To convince the readers about China’s military strength, the editorial further emphasizes that China’s naval forces had been largely

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<sup>53</sup> John King Fairbank, Katherine Forst Bruner et. Eds., *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), vol. ii, p. 991; Ji Pingzi, *Cong yapian zhanzheng dao jiaiwu zhanzheng* (Taipei: Yunlong Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 541-45.

<sup>54</sup> John King Fairbank 1975, pp. 980-1.

<sup>55</sup> See for example “Lun Zhongguo wei chaoxian shi bukebu yu riben yi zhan,” *Shenbao*, July 21, 1894; “Chou zhan yi,” *Shenbao*, July 27, 1894.

improved, and that this fact had been recognized by Western observers of a military review sponsored by Viceroy Li Hongzhang in Tianjin.<sup>56</sup>

It was in this air of optimism that victory pictures of the Sino-French War were recycled. Hermit of Meizhou had gained some fame for his depictions of the Sino-French War, so it is unsurprising that ten years later his images were recycled to cover the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War. *Recapturing Bac Ninh at Night* (figure 5.13) was republished as the *Battle of Pyongyang at Night* (figure 5.14), and *Victory of Fuzhou* was recycled as *Picture of General Ye Advancing by Water and Land* (figure 5.15). There is no obvious forerunner for *Victory Picture of Naval Battle at Korea* (*Chaoxian shuizhan desheng tu* 朝鮮水戰得勝圖) (figure 5.16), and so it is possible that the print was produced especially for the war, although elements of the print may well have been adapted from earlier prints of the Sino-French War, such as the *Battle of Fuzhou*. Considering that both naval engagements were categorical failures, it seems that the practice of claiming victory had also been carried over and recycled.



Figure 5.13 Meizhou yinshi, *Recapturing Bac Ninh at Night*, 1884, woodblock print, 61.9x 36 cm. National Museum of Taiwan History.

<sup>56</sup> “Xu zhong wo bingzhi butong lun,” *Xinwenbao*, September 27, 1894.





Figure 5.14 Anonymous, *Battle of Pyongyang at Night*, 1894, woodblock print, 63.5 x 36.8cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4 \(30\) B20102-53.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4 (30) B20102-53.jpg).



Figure 5.15 Anonymous, *Picture of General Ye Advancing by Water and Land*, 1894, woodblock print, 64.2 x 36.8cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4 \(27\) B20102-50.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4 (27) B20102-50.jpg)



Figure 5.16 Meizhou yinshi, *Victory Picture of Naval Battle at Korea*, 1894, woodblock print, 64.1x 36.6cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(25\)\\_B20102-48.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(25)_B20102-48.jpg)

In addition to the recycling of battle scenes and artists, war heroes were also recycled. The Sino-French War hero Liu Yongfu, who was not involved in major battles of Sino-Japanese War except the defense of Taiwan in 1895 to resist Japanese occupation of the island, was visually recalled to fight the Japanese. In *Commanders Song and Liu Recovering Jiuliancheng* (*Song Liu er shuai kefu Jiuliancheng* 宋劉二帥克復九連城), by Wu wenyi zhai of Shanghai (figure 5.17), Liu and his Black Flags together with General Song and his men fight against the Japanese in the battle at Jiuliancheng. Mounted combat between Liu and Japanese commander Ōtori Keisuke is represented in the middle of the lower portion of the picture with a text “General Liu challenges Ōtori Keisuke with a pike.” However, the historical battle was fought between the Chinese forces under General Song Qing 宋慶 (1820-1902) and the Japanese imperial army under General Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922) on the border between Korea and



Manchuria on October 24, 1894. Neither Liu nor Ōtori Keisuke (1833-1911) was involved, although Keisuke might be more familiar to the Chinese for his career as a diplomat to China and more importantly his instrumental role in opening the Sino-Japanese War. In 1893, Keisuke was appointed Minister to Korea so was involved in the internal political fights in Korea and the subsequent negotiations leading to the Sino-Japanese war but he retreated from diplomatic stage shortly after the war broke out.<sup>57</sup> In the first instance “recycling” was simply a matter of copying old prints and introducing only new titles and slight changes, such as replacing French flags with Japanese ones. Recycling the image of Liu Yongfu at the critical moment when the war was coming to the Chinese territory seems to suggest that China’s defeats in Korea came as a shock to the Chinese public, who now turned to the Sino-French War hero for help.



Figure 5.17 Anonymous, *Commanders Song and Liu Recovering Jiuliancheng*, 1894, woodblock print, 62.5 x 36.7cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(39\)\\_B20102-62.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(39)_B20102-62.jpg)

<sup>57</sup> On Otori Keisuke, see Hilary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea: 1868-1910* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960). On Battle of Jiuliancheng see Elleman 2001, pp. 104-5.



What is most interesting behind the practice of recycling is the imagery of the Japanese. Representing them as “foreigners (i.e. the French),” the *nianhua* artists transmitted the image of a militarily Westernized Japan, although they might be not able to distinguish the difference between the French and the German on which Japan built their modern military machine. Flath argues that this “confusion over the identities of Japanese” “reflects a popular perception that the Sino-Japanese War was a war against all foreigners.”<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the recycling of Sino-French war images, I argue, suggests that China had certain knowledge of Japanese military reform and perhaps, to some degree, its transformative power, so turned to Liu Yongfu, the veteran hero of Sino-French war, “inviting” Liu to “fight” and “defeat” the Westernized Japanese.

## **5.2 Innovation:**

Journalistic rhetoric and lithographic styles began to be incorporated into victory pictures of the Sino-Japanese War. Lengthy text usually placed on the top of the image, occasionally inserted into marginal empty space, was written in the new literary style that specifies time, place and actions commonly seen in journalistic commentaries. *Battle at Pyongyang on a Moonlit Night* (*Yueye dazhan Gaoli Pingrang cheng* 月夜大战高丽平壤城) (figure 5.18), for example, representing the Battle of Pyongyang on 15 September 1894, contains the following text:

On the night of the sixteenth day of the eighth month, the Japanese troops marched from three directions to stage a sudden attack. Our troops were subsequently divided into three groups to confront. Both parties had losses, however, the Japanese lost much more.

Similarly, in *Commanders Song and Liu Recovering Jiuliancheng*, the text states:

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<sup>58</sup> Flath 2004, p. 107.

From Tianjin a telegram arrived saying that the Japanese rebels attacked Jiuliangcheng. Generals Song and Liu pretended to retreat, placing landmines and gunpowder fifty miles away [from the town] that blasted the Japanese to death. Japanese casualties were 20,000.

Comparing *Commanders Song and Liu Recovering Jiuliancheng* with a Dianshizhai illustration *Irresistible Force* (*Pozhu shicheng* 破竹勢成) by Jin Gui, Judith Frohlich notices texts of both pictures contain the same wording “from Tianjin a telegram arrived saying...”<sup>59</sup> Details such as the time, the death toll, war tactics as well as telegraphed message were elements characteristic of newspaper literature that was to emphasize the “accuracy” of the report. By adopting newspaper rhetoric, *nianhua* became a channel of disseminating the news culture, contributing to the formation of a standard readership.



Figure 5.18 Anonymous, *Battle at Pyongyang on a Moonlit Night*, 1894, woodblock print, 62.4 x 36.6 cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(40\)\\_B20102-63.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(40)_B20102-63.jpg)

<sup>59</sup> Judith Frohlich, “Pictures of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895,” *War in History*, vol. 21, 2 (2014): pp. 225-6.

In response to the emerging illustrated news industry in China, *nianhua* artists also imitated the *huabao* style imagery, especially in rendering modern military technologies. *Destroying the Japanese Warship (Jihui wojian 击毁倭艦)* (figure 5.19), painted by Master of the Hall of Anticipating the Pacification of the East (Wang pingdong guan zhuren 望平东馆主人), depicts the scene in which Chinese cruiser *Jiyuan* opens fire on the Japanese fleet. The way that the waves are drawn, and more importantly the accurate rendition of the modern vessels, shows the influence of journalistic illustrations such as those of illustrated news items in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (i.e. *Western Ship Saving People*).

The historical event in question is perhaps the Battle of Fengdao, the first naval battle of the Sino-Japanese war that occurred on 25 July 1894 offshore of Asan, where Japanese cruisers *Naniwa*, *Yoshino* and *Akitsushima* staged a sudden attack on two Chinese ships, the cruiser *Jiyuan* under the command of General Fang Boqian (1853-1894) and the accompanying gunboat *Guangyi*. In the course of the battle, two more Chinese ships were involved – the transport ship *Kowshing*, a British merchant vessel chartered by the Qing government to ferry troops and military supplies to reinforce Asan, and the escorting gunboat *Caojiang* (Tsao-kiang). The battle ended with a complete Japanese victory. *Jiyuan* escaped at the expense of *Guangyi* and took great damage. *Caojiang* was captured and used as a patrol boat for the Japanese during the remainder of the war, and the transport *Kaoshing* was sunk with a great loss of life. The artist, however, describes the scene as follows: “the Chinese army under Viceroy Li meet a Japanese vessel on their way to Korea at the sea. General Fang subsequently opens fire, and severely damages the Japanese ship, which has to lift a dragon flag for surrender. Suddenly, three Japanese ships come to rescue the damaged one.”



Figure 5.19 Wang pingdong guan zhuren, *Destroying the Japanese Warship*, 1894, woodblock print, 54.3 x 28.2cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(18\)\\_B20102-41.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(18)_B20102-41.jpg)

New war subjects were also introduced. More victory pictures depicting naval battles began to appear. In addition to *Destroying the Japanese Warship*, there were *Victory of Water Battle at Yalu River* (*Yalu jiang shuai shui jiebao* 鴨綠江帥水捷報) (figure 5.20), and *Victory Picture of Battle at Weihaiwei* (*Weiahiwei dazhan desheng tu* 威海衛大戰得勝圖) (figure 5.21). Perhaps, the modern periodical press provided pictorial templates for the depiction of modern warships. A public fascination with modern military technology coexisted with the anxiety over foreign crises.





Figure 5.20 Anonymous, *Victory of Water Battle at Yalu River*, 1894, woodblock print, 64.1 x 36.8 cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(29\)\\_B20102-52.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(29)_B20102-52.jpg).



Figure 5.21 Anonymous, *Victory Picture of Battle at Weihaiwei*, 1894, woodblock print, 63.5 x 36.7cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(26\)\\_B20102-49.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(26)_B20102-49.jpg).

In addition to naval battles, scenes such as treating captives and negotiating treaties were depicted in print. The treatment of captives of war was not new in Chinese illustrative history, but in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century *nianhua* artists re-appropriated and adapted the subject and pictorial convention. *Arresting, Investigating and Beheading Japanese Captives* (*Zhuona wosui shengwen zhengfa* 捉拿倭遂審問正法) (figure 5.22) depicts how Chinese treated the Japanese captives. Here the *nianhua* artists once again appropriated the imperial war illustration tradition especially with regard to the circular composition; however, brutal execution replaces the mood of peaceful surrender as represented in the imperial victory pictures. Generals Ye (Zhichao) and Nie (Shicheng) sit at the center of their camp flanked by their retinues. Behind them are two rows of foot soldiers. The Japanese captives are portrayed in the foreground at the bottom of the picture. Some are on their knees, some are chained and pulled along by the Chinese, and one in the middle is cruelly beheaded. The imitation is very superficial and somewhat distorted. The Chinese soldiers in the middle ground are depicted as disproportionately large in contrast to the Japanese in the foreground who are reduced to miniatures. Brutal killing replaced the conventional rhetoric of peaceful surrender of the “barbarians” suggests the growing “hatred” toward the “foreign” enemies and popular concerns about the militarization of China, but without Westernization.



Figure 5.22 Anonymous, *Arresting, Investigating and Beheading Japanese Captives*, 1894, woodblock print, 63.2 x 36.9. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4\\_\(28\)\\_B20102-51.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.4/16126.d.4_(28)_B20102-51.jpg)

Pictures of treaty negotiations marked a dramatic departure from previous war illustrations. No such content appears in illustrations of fictional wars, while official war pictures rendered only the surrender scenes that expressed the values of the tributary system. Treaty negotiation was defined by the Western system of international law and based on the premise of the equality of states, despite the different application of the law in Western imperialist and non-Western colonial countries.<sup>60</sup> Its appearance in Chinese illustrated papers, as Frohlich has noted, indicated the change in Chinese views regarding the changing interstate relations between China and Japan.<sup>61</sup> *Nianhua* representation, however, showed an ambiguous attitude.

<sup>60</sup> Frohlich 2014, p. 240.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



Peace negotiation was already illustrated in *nianhua* during the Sino-French War. The only extant Suzhou/Shanghai print representing Sino-French war was *The French Are Begging for Peace* (*Faren qiuhé* 法人求和, figure 2.4)<sup>62</sup>, designed by Wu Youru, perhaps the most well-known news illustrators of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai. It depicts a fictional negotiation scene in an interior setting, where Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) and Zuo Zongtang (1812-1885) representing the Qing government receive the request for a peaceful truce from French General Courbet (Guba孤拔), who is accompanied by German maritime customs adviser Detring (De Cuilin德璀琳) and the British ambassador Parkes (Ba 巴).

This print was probably made before Wu officially became the chief illustrator for *Dianshizhai Illustrated News*, for which he would make a different picture illustrating the peace negotiation of June 9, 1885.<sup>63</sup> Historically, China and France had a peace negotiation in July 1883 in Shanghai between Li Hongzhang and Arthur Tricou, French minister to Japan, but the meeting failed to arrive at any satisfactory agreement.<sup>64</sup> Wu's *nianhua* illustration must have referred to that negotiation though the figures involved in the actual negotiations were different from those in the print. *The French Are Begging for Peace* is pure fiction. All the Western powers are bowing to the two Chinese officials sitting at the center, backed up by a dragon, emerging from the clouds on heaven and blowing fire to break the smokes and clouds, a highly symbolic image indicating the military power of China. Peace "negotiation" was a French "surrender."

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 2, p. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Wu Youru, "Heyi huaya," *Dianshizhai huabao*, no. 43 (Ding 5), mid-June 1885.

<sup>64</sup> Zeng Jizeng, Chinese diplomat to Paris played a crucial role in convincing Li Hongzhang that France had no intention to launch a full-scale war over China. See Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 76-87.



By the time of the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese had gotten a better understanding of the concept of peace negotiations and in fact, it became part of both official and popular rhetoric. More images were produced to render the process leading to peace treaty ceremony. *Welcome Viceroy Li* (*Ying ya Li fuxiang* 迎迓李傅相) (figure 5.23) starts with Li Hongzhang's arrival at the Japanese port where he is received by the vice Prime Minister of Japan along with a group of Western ambassadors. The inscription explains that the war has lasted for one year, which has interrupted foreign trades, so the Western countries push for a peace negotiation between China and Japan. The tone was less arrogant compared with that of *The French Are Begging for Peace*.



Figure 5.23 Anonymous, *Welcome Viceroy Li*, 1894-95, woodblock print, 62.0 x 35.9 cm. British Library. After [http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.2/16126.d.2\\_\(10\)\\_B20102-76.jpg](http://jacar.go.jp/jacarbl-fsjwar-j/gallery/images/zoom/16126.d.2/16126.d.2_(10)_B20102-76.jpg).

*Welcome Viceroy Li* is marked as the first picture (*qiantu* 前圖), which means at least one more picture (*houtu*) or perhaps a series of pictures were produced for events leading to the negotiation and peace treaty. *Foreign Envoys Meeting Up with Viceroy Li for Peace Negotiation*

(*Geguo qinchai huitong Li fuxiang yihe tu* 各國欽差會同李傅相議和圖) (figure 5.24), printed by Wu Wenyi zhai 吳文藝齋 of Shanghai, is perhaps the other picture of the same series and depicts the conclusion of the Treaty of Maguan (Shimonoseki). The Chinese official and the Japanese are ritually on par, showing the changing Chinese ideas about peace negotiation and treaty.



Figure 5.24 Anonymous, *Foreign Envoys Meeting Up with Viceroy Li for Peace Negotiation*, 1894-5, woodblock print, Shanghai Library. After Shanghai tushuguan, *Qingmo nianhua huicui: Shanghai tushuguan guancang jingxuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2000): 2:90.

Interestingly, beside this ideologically “realistic” representation of negotiation, the appearance of Xiaoshan 小山 (Koyama Toyotarō 1869–1947) in both *Welcome Viceroy Li* and *Foreign Envoys Meeting Up with Viceroy Li for Peace Negotiation* shows the popular interest in anti-heroes and the drama of violence. Drawing on journalistic lithography, *nianhua* artists still maintained the vernacular subjects such as the fort and camp. As with fortified city walls in land

battles, fortified ports were crucial in naval battles. For the Chinese, these ports equipped with batteries seemed to be the most effective defense against the Western warships. While the concept of peace negotiation began to be increasingly familiar to the Chinese, *nianhua* representation of the negotiations was still dependent with the drama of heroic figures. Modern military technology and conduct continued to be informed by Sino-French War prints. All of these attributes suggest the limited capacity for popular culture to keep up with the “news.”

## Conclusion

The late 19<sup>th</sup> “victory pictures” discussed above constitute the main evidence for the intimate and complex relationship between traditional woodblock print and the emerging mass media culture in China. They demonstrate how graphic prints defined and redefined wars. The production of the “victory pictures” was driven by the commercial economy that commodified war and war images. Drawing on various visual conventions from official commemorative arts and historical illustrations of novels and plays to industrially produced news illustrations, as well as narrative and literary techniques of graphic storytelling and the new journalism, *nianhua* artists brought real warfare into their repository thus public viewing/ discussion, spurring a mass market for contemporary war events. By expanding the visual territory to include battle fields beyond the immediate urban environment, these “victory pictures” represented dramatic departure from *nianhua* tradition of city-making, which was now giving way to the practice of state-making.

*Nianhua* did not represent the actual situation or progress of the war, but rather what the war should be. Behind the imagery of a victorious China facing modern military powers was the paradoxical Chinese attitude toward the foreign. On the one hand, starting from port cities, especially treaty-port Shanghai, a popular fascination about Western technologies was developing, and that fascination was beginning to spread all over China. On the other hand, an

increasing level of public awareness about foreign crises was forming, thanks to the development of newspapers, pictorial press and those *nianhua* “victory pictures”. The incongruity surfaced in *nianhua* depictions of military technologies and the conduct of modern military powers, as well as in optimistic portrayals of Chinese military self-sufficiency. These “victory pictures” thus contributed to the anti-foreignism and to a more generalized sentiment of anti-Manchuism (i.e. Unable to defeat the invaders, the Manchus were proven to be incapable and illegitimate rulers.), and therefore bear a share of the responsibility for the eventual collapse of the Qing dynasty.

The cultural hybridity of the “victory pictures,” less a result of conscious effort than of unsystematic adaptation to new ideas and new things without radically rejecting the old cultural formats, also attested to the appeal of the new and the strange, the characterizing flavor of the urban life in Shanghai that was advertised by the lithographs in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, the flourishing industry of fantasy novels and short stories that brought readers to the previously unimaginable worlds of Western submarines and Chinese ghosts, as well as the glamorous lifestyle of the Shanghai courtesans that broke up traditional gender norms. Innovation came not from the radical departure from the traditional or the copying of the Western but from ongoing modification and reinterpretation of Chinese cultural conventions. Shanghai *nianhua* provided readers with novel amusements of fusing fiction and news, fantasy and realism, the foreign and Chinese, and eventually the religious and the secular. *Nianhua* artists, literati radicals and the Shanghai courtesans certainly lived differently just as “victory pictures” were different from war illustrations in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, but they were similar in starting to adjust to what might be called Chinese modernity.

## Conclusion

The dissertation has traced the continuities and ruptures of Chinese popular woodblock printmaking industry in the Suzhou-Shanghai region during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Taking *nianhua* as both *representatives* and *representations* of history, I have demonstrated how *nianhua* traversed the early modern – modern transition, giving visual and material form to processes, events and communal attachments. I have argued that the changing regional historical conditions, and more importantly place-making practices and openness toward new pictorial techniques laid the foundation for the industry’s renewal and transformation as it moved from Suzhou to post-Taiping Shanghai. In Shanghai, *nianhua* producers actively and innovatively adapted to the treaty-port environment by addressing issues closely related to changes in local society. Shanghai replaced Suzhou as the locus of *nianhua*, and the focus shifted from city views and architectural designs to contemporary people and current events. With the intensification of foreign crises from the 1870s onward, China’s foreign wars became major subjects of *nianhua* representations, and the visual reach of the *nianhua* genre expanded from the immediate urban environment to the state. Therefore, *nianhua* was transformed from a medium of city-making to that of nation-making.

Current scholarly literature defines *nianhua* as a static peasant tradition rigidly adhering to an established code of symbols and motifs. In their classic study of the iconographies of Chinese *nianhua*, Bo Songnian and David Johnson contend that “once a god’s iconography had been fixed, some devotees rejected any but the smallest changes in it, much as village women balked at changes in funeral rituals.”<sup>1</sup> The workshop production process is also characterized as

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<sup>1</sup> Bo Songnian and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.17.

lack of innovation – “when block carvers did have to make a new design” write Bo and Johnson, “they frequently relied on pattern books, which by definition preserved older styles.”<sup>2</sup> This study of Suzhou-Shanghai *nianhua*, by contrast, has demonstrated the industry’s urban and cosmopolitan character, as well as its creativity and flexibility. Central to the vitality and continuity of the *nianhua* industry in this region was its engagement in place-making and capacity to absorb new visual knowledge. Focusing on *nianhua* definition of places, my dissertation also critiques existing conceptualizations of the vast body of visual materials now covered under the umbrella term *nianhua*. Both the objects and their representations were more complicated than auspicious signs and religious icons could signify.

Scholarship on *nianhua* has been constrained by the availability of relevant materials. Extant collections of *nianhua* mainly date to the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the folklore movements that began to account for these works are generally seen as being in the same trajectory with Communist propaganda art and visual culture of the 1930s to 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Connecting the late 19<sup>th</sup> century prints with their 18<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, my study sheds new light into China’s early modern-modern conditions by revealing the dynamism of Chinese woodblock printmaking industry, which had been actively engaged in making images of the “city” and involved in a globalized visual culture by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Combining traditional *jiehua* (ruled-line) tradition with Western pictorial techniques and representational modes,

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<sup>2</sup> Bo and Johnson 1992, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> See especially David Holm, “Art and Ideology during the Yanan Period, 1937-1945” (PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 1979); Chang-tai Hung, “Two Images of Socialism: Woodcuts in Chinese Communist Politics,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 59, No.1 (1997): 34-60; Chang-tai Hung, “Repainting China: New Year Prints (Nianhua) and Peasant Resistance in the Early Years of the People's Republic,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2000): 770-810; James A. Flath, “ ‘It's a Wonderful Life’: ‘Nianhua’ and ‘Yuefenpai’ at the Dawn of the People's Republic,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2004): 123-59; James A. Flath, *The Cult of Happiness: Nianhua, Art, and History in Rural North China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), Chapter 6 “The Politics of the Popular.”



especially linear perspective and chiaroscuro, in representations of urban sites, Suzhou print artists transformed conventional rustic imagery of Suzhou into architectural designs symbolic of urban prosperity. Those cityscape prints catered to the merchant residents of the city, giving material form to their civic pride and love of their hometown as well as a general cult of wealth in a city ruled by commercial and mercantile spirit.

Relocating to Shanghai during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *nianhua* innovatively adapted to the new urban environment, where it became increasingly occupied with the city's people and sensational imagination of urban life, addressing contemporary concerns, specifically the demographic change with regard to a growing floating population and the urban poor, and the changing social status of women. The visual tone was accordingly transformed from auspicious projection and idealization of life (i.e. wishes for wealth and fertility) to everyday realism and mundane entertainment featuring the quotidian, the dramatized and even the grotesque. That, in turn, reflected the shifting definition of the "city", and the modern transformation of *nianhua* itself.

More dramatic transformation of *nianhua* in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai came from its expansion of visual territoriality from the "city" to the "nation", with its representation of frontier areas and battlefields. Almost all of China's conflicts with Western imperialist powers were represented in *nianhua*. Depicting China as the implied victor – contrary to reality – *nianhua* became a site of nation-making. Civic pride in High Qing Suzhou and sensational imagination of cosmopolitan Shanghai gave way to a nationalist sentiment of anti-foreignism and interest in militarization.

In so doing, my study also provides an alternate view of the "Shanghai modern". Previous scholarship has emphasized the importance of Western mechanical printing

technologies and their print commodities, while leaving Chinese woodblock printing and prints at the fringe of modern Chinese print culture. In fact, although its existence can be traced to an earlier date, the woodblock *nianhua* industry began to flourish in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not only in Shanghai, but also in other *nianhua* production centers across China, precisely at the time when foreign printing technologies and products began to flood the Chinese market, especially Shanghai.

This study proposes that imported mechanical printing technologies, especially lithography, were instrumental in creating China's modern print culture centered on journalism, advertising and entertainment. The pictorial component, in particular, was centralized. Images played a key role in defining the printing and publishing landscape of the city. That, in turn, promoted *nianhua* as an important part of Shanghai's complex system of image-making and pictorial communication. Given that Chinese cultural tradition had long regarded the woodcut as a main conduit of visibility, and because of the lack of colored lithographic printing techniques in China, woodblock printmaking retained a place in the graphic print markets into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to the commodity economy and the cosmopolitan environment of Shanghai, a great variety of styles and pictorial techniques, both Chinese and Western, contemporary and past, became available to *nianhua* artists. Their acquisition of a globalized visual knowledge was facilitated, and that further promoted the ongoing modification and reinterpretation of conventional *nianhua* practices and representations to better serve a readership exposed to a diversity of images and communication conduits in an increasingly globalized context.

The convergence of the expanded mass media and pictorial production system in Shanghai helped transform the traditional woodblock printmaking arts through the networks and artworks of trans-media commercial artists such as Wu Youru and Zhou Muqiao, who were able



to combine the traditional fine line brush methods with foreign drawing techniques to create a hybrid form of representations in proximity to illustrations in the pages of Western magazines. With *nianhua*'s incorporation of journalistic illustration techniques and styles, the genre became a disseminator of a visual knowledge, giving rise to the modern Chinese pictorial press and visual culture. In that way, *nianhua* helped shape visual literacy.

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