

Notes on Chinese Photography and Advertising in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai

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Although Shanghai's key role in the creation of China's modern visual culture has long been recognized, attention has focused largely on the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, there is little in the visual culture of that period that is not anticipated in the late nineteenth century—provided we always take into account the obvious differences in technology and scale of production. Late nineteenth-century Shanghai may be fruitfully characterized as a laboratory stage, where the future forms of a commercial mass visual culture were first worked out on a relatively small scale through experimentation with new, but as yet limited, technology. Elsewhere I have explored in some detail the interactions between artists and the Shanghai publishing industry during the same period, when photolithography made possible both the first pictorial journalism and the first widespread commercial exploitation of paintings, involving very large numbers of artists.¹ The present article explores in a very preliminary way two other aspects of the late nineteenth-century Shanghai laboratory: the beginnings of its Chinese photography industry and the transformation of Chinese advertising.

Chinese Photographers and Photographs

Although both foreign and Chinese photographers worked in Shanghai from the 1850s onwards, by the 1870s at the latest the foreigners were far outnumbered by their Chinese colleagues.² In contrast to the recent, highly detailed research on photography in Hong Kong during the same period, very little systematic work has yet been done on either foreign or Chinese photographers in late nineteenth-century Shanghai.³ The following brief discussion focuses on *Chinese* photography in the city, leaving aside questions of photographic technique, which I am not competent to discuss.

As pointed out by Huang Shaofen and others in their history of photography in Shanghai, Chinese photographic businesses were among the first to publish advertisements in the city's main Chinese-language newspaper, *Shenbao*, as early as its second issue, in 1872.⁴ A well-known and often-published photo (undated) shows the premises of two of the most famous businesses, Su Sanxing and Gongtai (fig. 1), which were among a number concentrated in the area of San Malu (Hankou Road) and Si Malu (Foochow Road) in the British Concessions.⁵ By the 1880s at the latest there were probably many smaller enterprises as well. According to the Shanghai guidebook *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo* (1884): "Photographic companies in Shanghai number in the dozens."⁶

At least two representations exist showing the photographers at work in their studios. The first, in *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo*, depicts three courtesans having their picture taken in a photographer's studio (fig. 2). The accompanying text mentions Su Sanxing as the leading company of the day. Somewhat later, in the early 1890s, the pictorial magazine *Feiyingge huabao* published a similar representation, of a photographer's studio set up for portraiture, an image subsequently reprinted in *Wu Youru huabao* (1909; fig. 3).⁷ The photographers also worked outside their studios. For example, the most famous pictorial magazine of the day, *Dianshizhai huabao*, founded in 1884, included in one of its issues of that year an image of a photographer taking a photograph in the street.⁸ Other images in the *Dianshizhai huabao* over the following fifteen years showed photographers taking group photographs in gardens and buildings. Surviving photographs prove that Gongtai, for example, was also willing to send its photographers outside Shanghai.⁹

Who constituted the Chinese photographer's public and clientele? Given the small size of the Shanghai foreign population and the presence of foreign photographers working in Shanghai, it seems likely that most Chinese photographers would have tended to work for a Chinese public. However, the leading Chinese photographers (like their foreign colleagues) had mixed clienteles. Surviving albums of photographs brought back from China by Western visitors often include photographs acquired from Chinese companies in Shanghai such as Gongtai, as well as others acquired from foreign photographers.¹⁰ These photographs often have labels printed in English, giving the name and address of the photographer, for example, "Ye-chong. Photographer and Painter on Canvas. No. 24, Foochow and Kiangse Roads, Shanghai."¹¹ (Early Chinese photographers had often started out as painters working in Sino-Western modes of oil painting and watercolor.)¹² Equally relevant, the illustrated magazine *The Far East*, published in Shanghai from 1876 to 1878, used Chinese as well as foreign photographers (see below). And the Shanghai

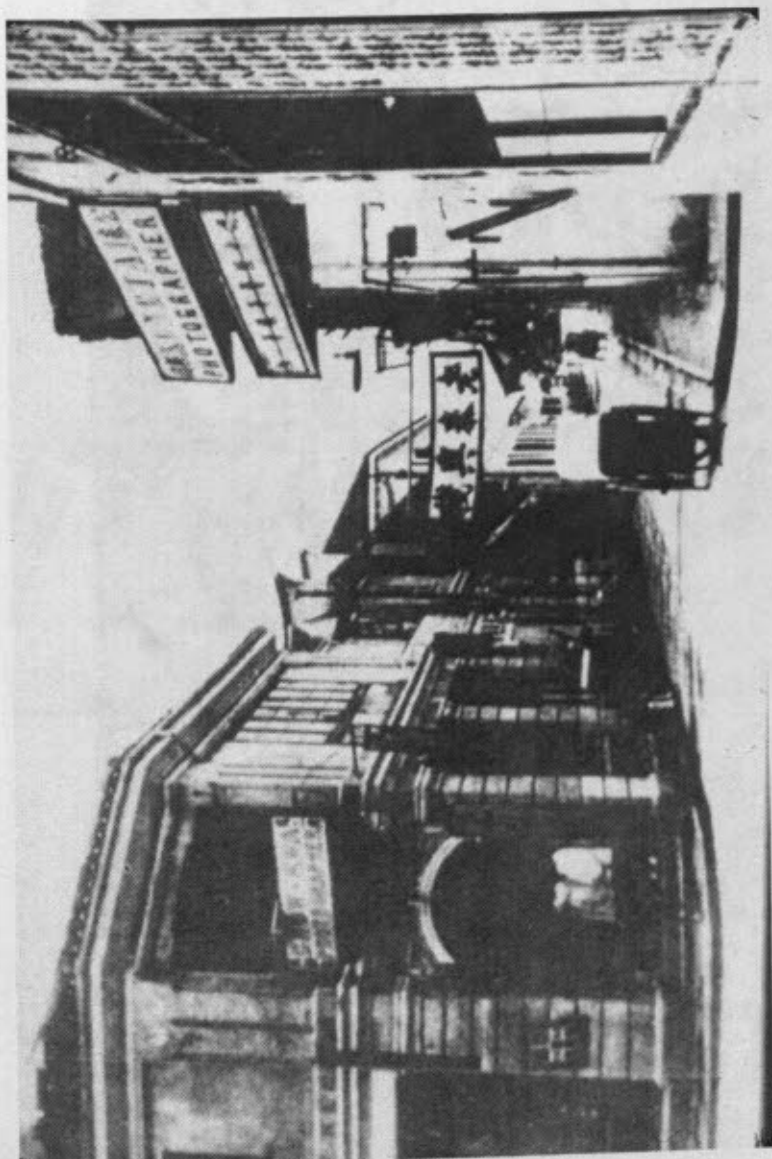


Fig. 1. Unidentified photographer, *Su Sanxing* (Chow-Kwa) and *Gongtai Photography Studios, Shanghai*. After Ma Yuanzeng et al., *Zhongguo sheying shi* [History of Chinese photography] (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 1987), fig. 23.

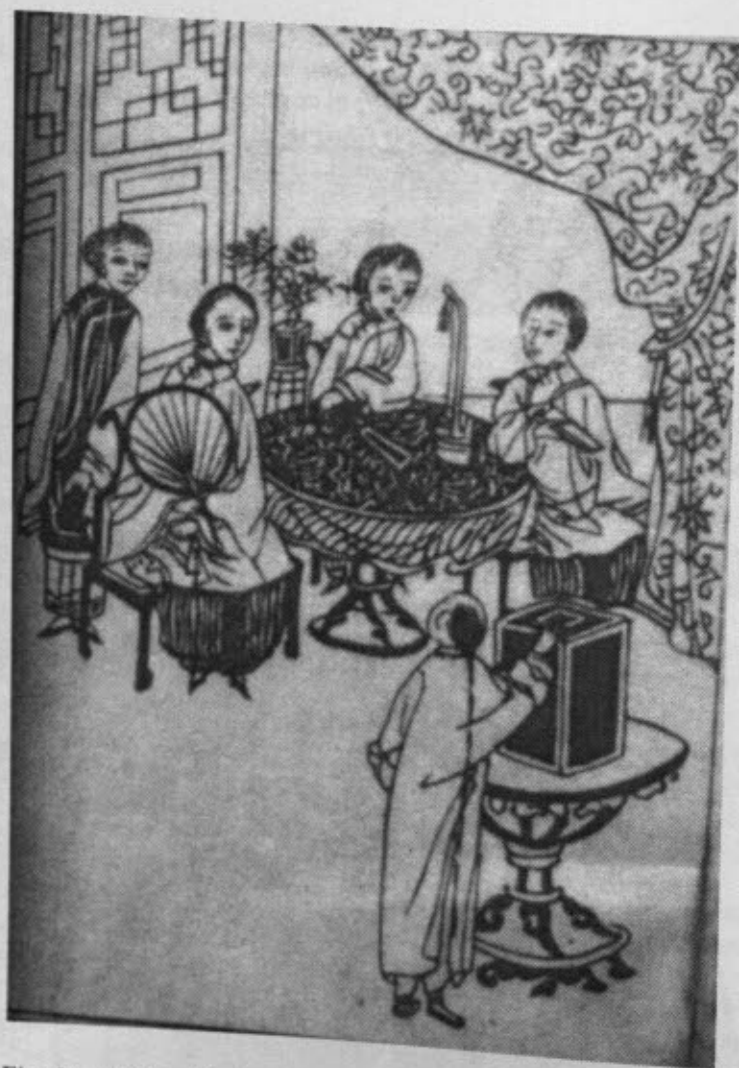


Fig. 2. Unidentified artist, *A Visit to a Photographer's Studio*. After *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo* (1984).



Fig. 3. Wu Youru, *A Visit to a Photographer's Studio*, originally published in the pictorial magazine *Feiyijing huabao* in the early 1890s, later reprinted in *Wu Youru huabao* (1908).

Photographic Enlarging Co. on Foochow Road (Si Malu), a Chinese-owned company founded in 1890 that was the subject of a laudatory article in the English-language newspaper *Shanghai Mercury*, anticipating a mixed clientele, proudly advertised two waiting rooms, one for foreigners and one for Chinese.¹³

While the archive of work by Chinese photographers in Shanghai may eventually prove to be vast, at present we are still at the rudimentary stage of identifying the relevant material. Fortunately, as noted earlier, in some cases the photographer attached a printed label or inscribed the mount, in English or, presumably, in Chinese. One notable example among many is a twelve-part albumen-print panorama of the "Shanghai Bund," formerly in the Lau Collection, which its label says was produced by the Gongtai company in 1881.¹⁴ The works of Chinese photographers in Shanghai that were published between 1876 and 1878 in *The Far East* constitute a second, smaller, but very interesting, body of material.¹⁵ The photographs (original) are often accompanied by explanations, in which the photographer is sometimes identified as Chinese; in the case of one group of photographs, originally commissioned by the Daotai of Anqing in Anhui province, the photographer is identified as Gongtai (fig. 4).¹⁶ However, the vast majority of surviving Shanghai photographs of this early period have no documentation to establish their provenance, and can be attributed to Chinese rather than foreign photographers, and to photographers in Shanghai rather than elsewhere, only on the basis of internal evidence, which, in the case of portraits, includes the sitter's clothes and hairstyle. One group of portraits can be attributed to an as-yet-unidentified Chinese photographer in Shanghai on the basis of a striking similarity to the scene of a photographer's studio represented by Wu Youru in his *Feiyingge huabao* illustration, from the *mise en scène* to the clothes of the two women.¹⁷

Gongtai's 1881 twelve-part panorama of the "Shanghai Bund" demonstrates that, like their foreign colleagues, Chinese photographers produced tourist views for visitors to Shanghai. Another example, less typical, is a series of Sichuan landscapes published in *The Far East* in the late 1870s (fig. 5). The magazine had commissioned an unidentified Chinese photographer to take pictures in Sichuan; however, the editors were disappointed that he returned with landscape views, only a few of which they published.¹⁸ Somewhat different (since it is not really a tourist view) is the view of Anqing by Gongtai, taken for the Daotai of the area.¹⁹ In earlier times the Daotai would have asked a painter to paint a series of views of the area for which he had responsibility; now he could call on a photographer. It is worth noting that both the cityscapes and the landscapes follow closely the style of contemporary foreign photographers working in China.



Fig. 4. Gongtai Photography Studio, The Dao tai of Anqing and His Family. After *The Far East* 5 (1878).

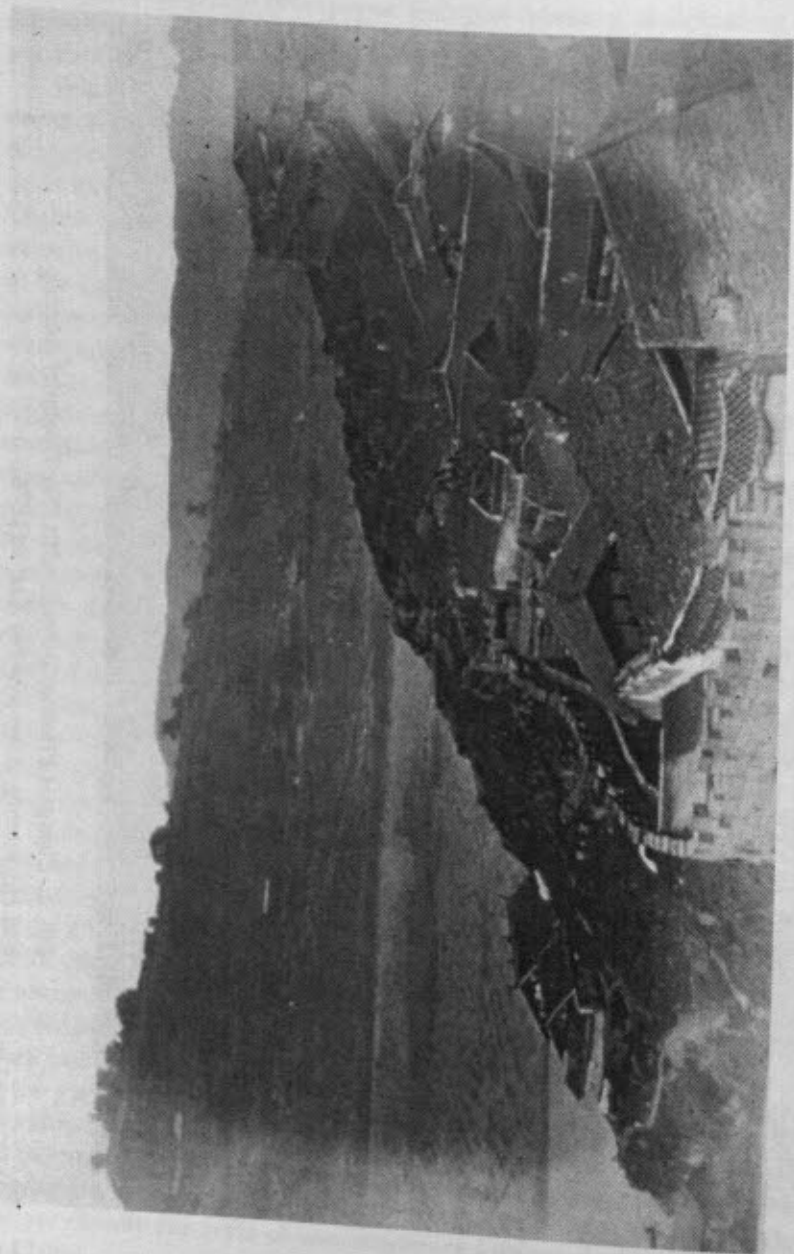


Fig. 5. Unidentified Chinese photographer from Shanghai, *Sichuan Landscape*. After *The Far East* 3 (1877)

Similarly, Chinese photographers followed the lead of their foreign colleagues in taking journalistic photographs to commemorate special occasions, such as the opening of the Shanghai-Wusong railway in 1876. On that occasion, a commemorative photograph was offered for sale to its readers by *Shenbao*.²⁰

There also existed a lucrative market for photographic images of "the Chinese," construed as a series of stereotypes. The market for photographs of this kind, aimed at foreign visitors, was initially dominated by foreign photographers, who used staged scenes. However, in Hong Kong the Chinese photographers, too, supplied such pictures, and there is no reason to think that their Shanghai counterparts would have proceeded differently.²¹ In some case they may have recycled portraits as generic pictures of Chinese people. This seems likely to be the case for at least two photographs by Chinese photographers published in *The Far East*, one titled "Theatrical Group" and the other a "Pekingese Lady."²² But there was also an equivalent demand on the part of the Chinese public for images of foreigners, paralleling the exotic imagery available in the peep shows of the day. In 1890, for example, it was discovered that certain amusement stands offered as prizes "lucky bags," in which portraits of individuals in the foreign community were to be found. Presumably the photographers who had taken the portraits had later supplied copies to the amusement-stand owners as generic images of foreigners.²³

There is little doubt that the portrait was the major specialty of Chinese photographers in Shanghai. One of the most revealing texts on photographic portraits is to be found in an 1884 guide to the world of Shanghai prostitution, *Haishang yeyou beilan*:²⁴

The Westerners have created the art of photography, with which one can use chemical fluids to make a complete portrait of a person on a rectangular piece of paper. It is lifelike and perfectly resemblant. Wherever there are prostitutes, they fight to have their portrait taken, hanging it on the wall or making a present of it to clients. Recently [photography] has spread to distant provinces and is available everywhere. As for the few most famous courtesans, they always keep the original glass plate at the [photographer's] shop, in order to have photographs printed as necessary to sell to people. They can truly profit from it indefinitely.

Although the text is brief, it nonetheless reveals several entirely different uses of individual photographic portraits. One is a private use: when the prostitute hung her own picture on the wall she was doing the same thing that many other private individuals did in this period, although they

might have rather placed the photograph on a table (cabinet portrait). The practice of hanging portraits on the wall is well documented in *Feiyingge huabao*, and framed portraits of this kind still exist today in their original frames (fig. 6).²⁵ The second use of the portrait image was professional, as a *carte de visite* given to clients.²⁶ Actors, too, used portraits professionally as *cartes de visite*. According to *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo*: "There is not a beauty of the willows and alleys, nor an actor of the 'pear garden' who does not have small photographs printed for the pleasure of giving them away."²⁷ A third use of the photographic portrait was as an entertainment commodity. The courtesan used the negative to have multiple copies printed for sale to others. In this way portraits of courtesans (and actors) circulated publicly. An 1876 poem comments on courtesans' photographs: "Clients pursuing spring pleasures compete to buy them / Hoping to use the pictures to guide them in their search for a beautiful girl."²⁸ Needless to say, group portraits were also popular. The *Shenjiang mingsheng tushuo* illustration of a photographer at work (fig. 2) shows a group of three courtesans, and certain *Dianshizhai huabao* illustrations show photographers taking pictures of much larger groups. At least one group portrait in the same journal is clearly based directly on a photograph (fig. 7). A number of unidentified group portraits, in both studio and outside settings, some of which may be the work of Shanghai photographers, exist today in Western collections.

Finally, a few speculative remarks may be made on the stylistic features of portrait photographs by Chinese photographers in Shanghai, although these features are probably shared with the work of Chinese photographers more generally in this period.²⁹ One may be struck, for example, by the photographers' need to create an environment for the sitter. Most commonly, simple groups of objects (a table, a vase of flowers, a book, and so on) function as metonymic signs to evoke a domestic interior. Striking, too, is the importance of Western or Westernizing elements, whether in the furniture or in the painted, illusionistic backdrops, with their suggestions of a Western architectural setting. The portrait then does not simply record; it creates an imaginative displacement that is not so easily found in portraits by foreign photographers. Formally, certain images are striking for their rhythmic treatment of solid and void, light and dark. One notices also the care with which the photographer leaves the objects clearly isolated, which contributes further to the graphic effect. Moreover, the photographer has his subjects pose so that their bodies, or rather their silhouettes, are aligned with the surface of the image. All of these elements are reminiscent of Chinese painting, and at the same time are alien to the approaches of foreign photographers working in China. Finally, when it was necessary to express a domestic hierarchy, the

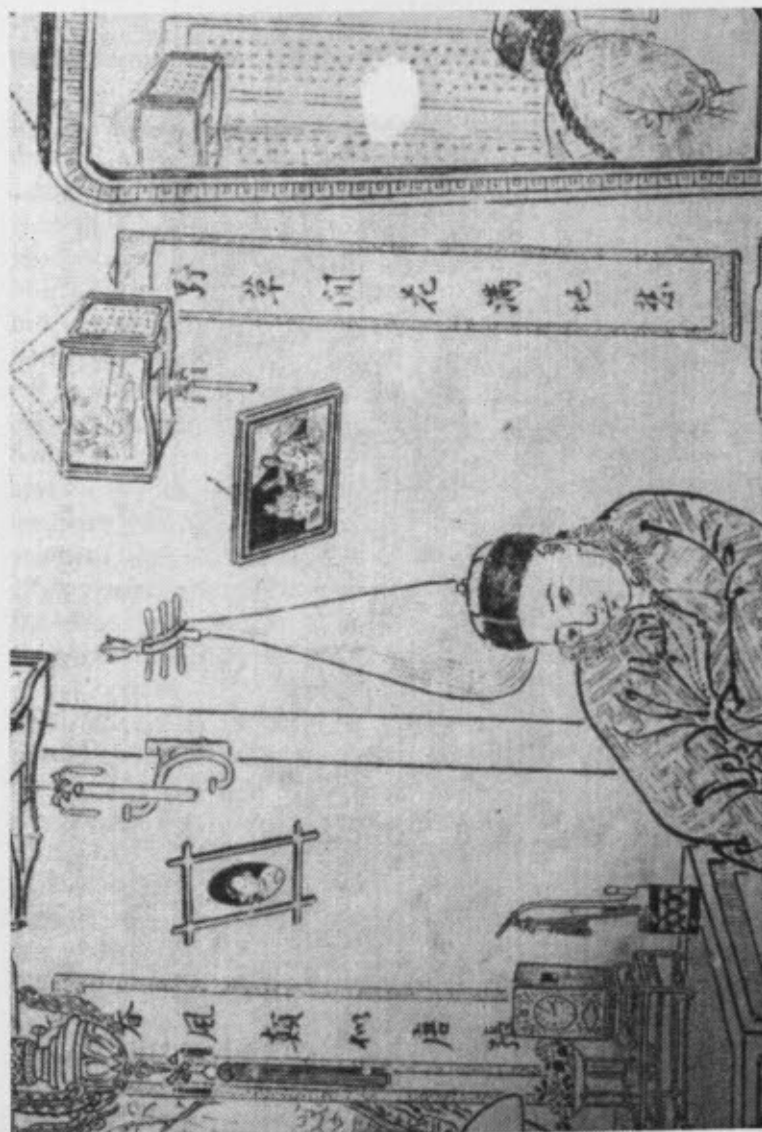


Fig. 6. Detail of the wall of a courtesan's bedroom, from an illustration by Wu Youru originally published in *Feijingge huabao* in the early 1890s, later reprinted in the *Fengsu zhi* section of *Wu Youru huabao* (1909).



Fig. 7. Jin Gui, *Chrysanthemum-Picking in the Xu Garden*. After *Dianshi Zhai huabao* 15.3 (1890): 12b-13a.

portraiture might take his inspiration from the formal, hieratic aesthetic of ancestor portraits. This is the case, for example, for Gongtai's portrait of the Daotai of Anqing and his family (fig. 4).³⁰

Advertising: Writing in the Street and Images on the Page

In China, as elsewhere, advertising is so fundamental to modern urban life that the origins of the twentieth century forms so familiar to us constitute a historical question of some importance. In a long-term perspective, there is no doubt that the history of advertising can be traced back hundreds of years to include, for example, the very early shop signs or publications of ink-cake designs such as the *Chengshi moyuan* around 1600. However, modern advertising also has a more recent genesis that is derived essentially from the nineteenth century, from cities where Chinese and foreigners formed a hybrid commercial culture. Cities particularly important include Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, although the importance of overseas "Chinatowns" in the United States, especially in San Francisco and New York, should not be underestimated. Here I deal in a very preliminary way with two aspects of late nineteenth-century-Shanghai advertising that are relevant in different ways to the larger question of the city's visual culture. The first of these is the role of written advertising in the visual environment of the street, while the second is the use of visual elements in advertisements on the printed page.³¹

A certain W. MacFarlane, in his *Sketches in the Foreign Settlement and Native City of Shanghai* (1881, reprinted from *Shanghai Mercury*) describes narrow streets near the New North Gate in the Chinese City as having "the sky almost obscured from view by the wooden and canvas signboards and ornamental tablets stretching from one side of the street to the other." Although few if any photographs of these streets in the Chinese City survive today, the many photographs of the commercial streets of the Concessions demonstrate that MacFarlane's description would have held almost as true for them (fig. 8). As in Guangzhou and Hong Kong during the same period, Shanghai's commercial streets were saturated with written characters, and nine times out of ten the writing was an advertisement. Obviously, written advertising in the street was by no means new in the nineteenth century. It is vividly recorded from the Northern Song dynasty onwards, in paintings of street scenes such as the many versions of the *Qingming shanghe tu* theme, or the court depictions of Kangxi and Qianlong's southern inspection tours. However, comparison of more modern images of Shanghai with these earlier representations quickly reveals that in the late nineteenth century writing saturated the streets to an

unprecedented degree. In the most crowded streets, so little advertising space was available on the shopfronts that merchants projected their advertising outwards into the no-man's-land spanning the street, until, as MacFarlane describes it, "the sky [was] almost obscured from view."

In such streets, the basic advertising form was the shop sign, carved in wood or embroidered on canvas. Some shops used visual signs for their products. For example, tailors suspended a garment, watchmakers had signs painted to look like clockfaces, cobblers used a boot design, and paper and fan shops used the silhouette of a fan. On the whole, however, Shanghai businesses, perhaps continuing a Jiangnan regional tradition, placed their trust in the written word, whereas Beijing businesses, for example, continued to make heavy use of visual shop signs into the 1930s. Written shop signs had numerous potential locations. They could be set into the shop front itself, or be suspended just in front of it; they could project out into the street, a practice that followed the use of English-language signs by Chinese businesses; and they could be suspended across the width of the street. Written signs were visual as well as textual: great attention was paid to the style and script of calligraphy, and culture- or leisure-oriented businesses often invited reputed calligraphers to supply the initial designs for carved wooden signs. In addition to signs made of wood or cloth, there were also painted signs (calligraphic, not pictorial) used by businesses that were housed in buildings with whitewashed walls (fig. 9). Their written characters were several feet high and could be seen from a great distance, so consequently they were not restricted to most commercial areas, with their narrow streets.

The carved wooden shop sign was expensive, decorative, and made to last; the embroidered banner, though less solid, was also meant to last; and the more-strictly-functional painted shop sign, although it might fade, could be refreshed. Contrasting with these long-term advertisements were the various forms of ephemeral advertising on paper. Announcements of upcoming performances by various performers were hung outside teahouses and theaters. Certain buildings also had the names of courtesans or prostitutes living there posted outside. Least glamorous of all, and a practice still common in Shanghai today, were slips of paper—with information on the availability of products, services, or theatrical performances—pasted strategically onto those walls where they would be seen by the greatest number of people (fig. 10). These fragile and ephemeral posters inspired the authorities, or the owners of the wall, to ban the pasting of posters with the ubiquitous formula, "Posters will be torn down" (*zhaotie ji zhi*)—itself in poster form. So humble a form of advertising as the *zhaotie* might seem too insignificant to mention, but as one of the precursors of modern advertising posters the *zhaotie* is very important. Thus the

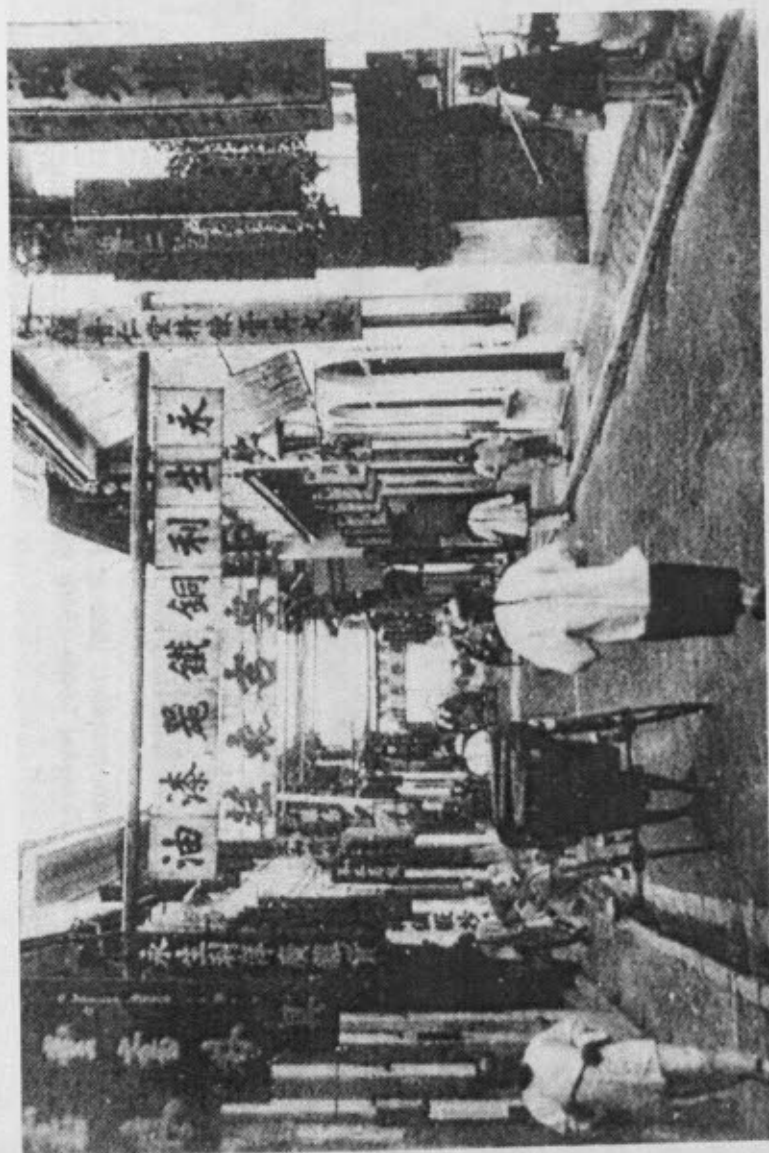


Fig. 8. Unidentified photographer, *View of Honan Road*, late Qing. After Tang Zhenchang, ed., *Jindai Shanghai fanhua lu* [Splendor of modern Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), fig. 28.

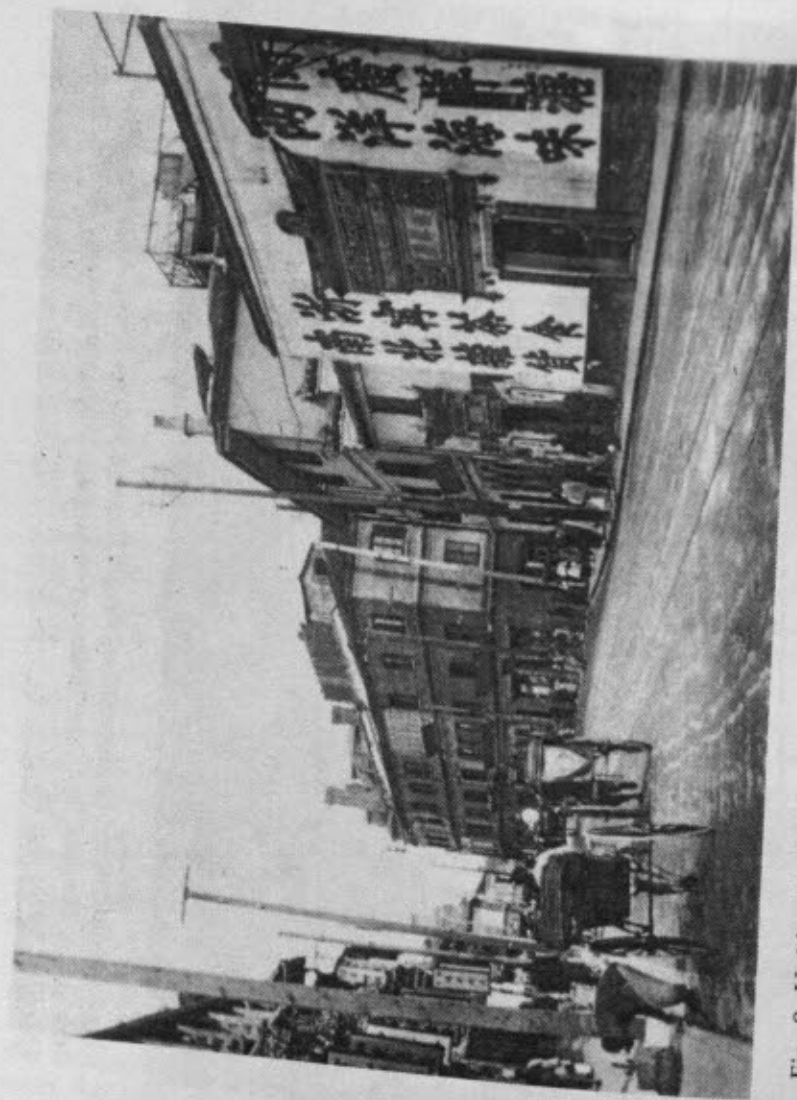


Fig. 9. Unidentified photographer, *View of Paoqiu Chang*, late Qing. After Deng Ming, ed., *Survey of Shanghai 1840s-1940s* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1996), 60.

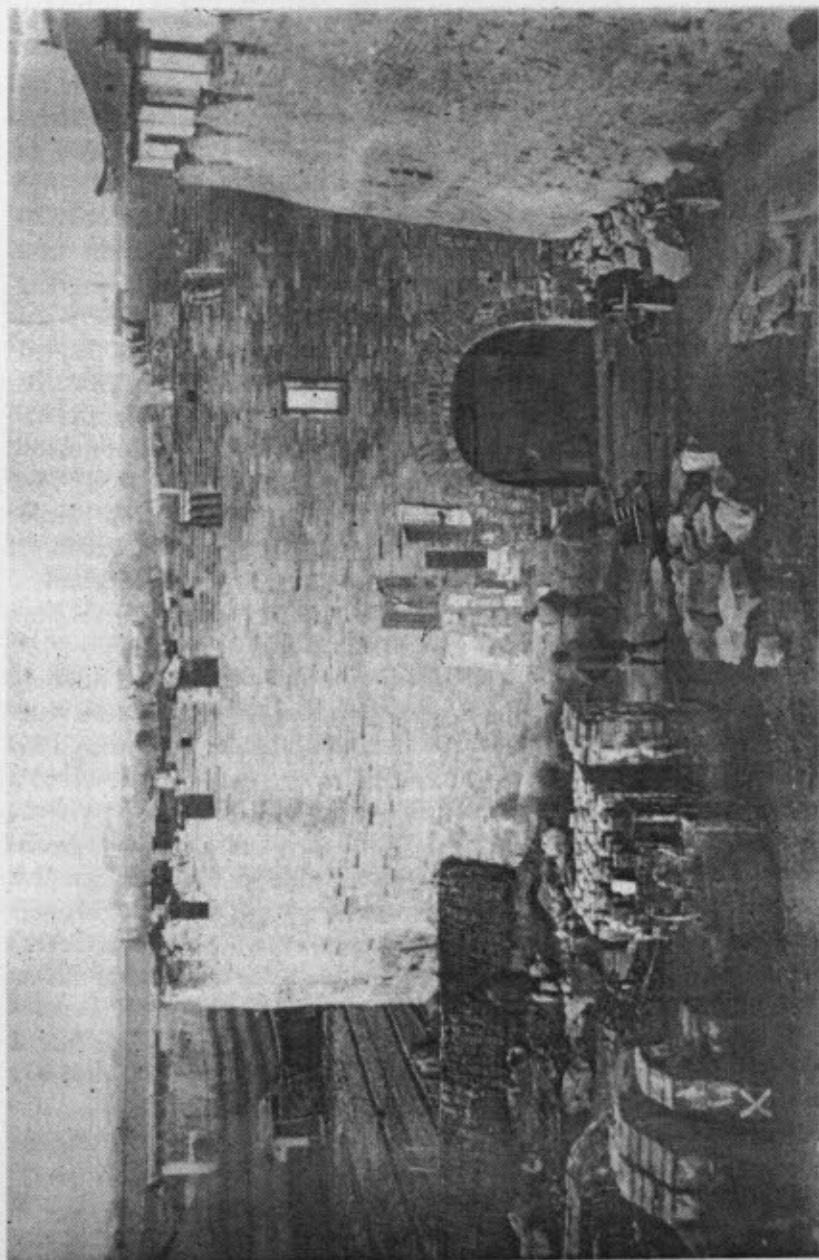


Fig. 10. Unidentified photographer, *West Gate of the Chinese City, Shanghai*. After *The Far East* 2 (1877).

streets were saturated by advertising on several levels: the orgy of advertising in commercial areas, the large-scale painted sign meant to be seen from a distance, and the humble poster that insinuated itself onto walls all over the city.

A particularly significant aspect of street advertising is the role of calligraphy and calligraphers. The calligraphers signed their work, and their signatures were then carved into the wooden shop signs along with the texts. This has proved to be a remarkably resilient practice, enjoying a renaissance in Shanghai and Beijing in the 1990s. Since shop fronts often incorporated many signboards, a single shop could have contributions from several different calligraphers. An example is the fan shop Xihongtang, whose appearance is faithfully recorded in a pictorial advertisement that appeared repeatedly in *Dianshizhai huabao* during the late 1880s. The advertisement shows that the shop had six different calligraphic signboards, five of which were signed. I have been able to identify only two of the five calligraphers. Both were officials, whose contributions were presumably meant to give an upmarket tone to the shop. Tao Fangqi (1845–1884), 1876 *jinshi*, was a native of Shaoxing who had a reputation as both a painter and a calligrapher, until his premature death at the age of 40. Xu Fu (zi Songge), a native of Shanghai (Jiading) born in 1836, was the top-ranked candidate in the 1862 *jinshi* examination and later served in several high official positions. He, too, was both a painter and a calligrapher.³²

A signed shop sign, it should be noted, must have advertised not only the shop but in some cases the calligrapher; a viewer might have wondered whether the displayed calligraphies could be obtained through the fan shop. In any event, by helping calligraphers to become known to a broad and largely anonymous public, as was also accomplished by some of the decorated letter papers sold by the same shops, shop signs indirectly contributed to the creation of a commercial public space for calligraphy. How far back in time can this phenomenon be traced? Did calligraphers sign shop signs in the eighteenth century? I am not aware of evidence that they did; on the other hand, they certainly signed titleboards and *duilian* couplets for buildings in semipublic spaces such as gardens. For one garden in eighteenth century Yangzhou, the East Garden built by the Shanxi merchant He Junzhao in 1744, for example, Li Dou in the *Yangzhou huafang lu* records that by 1746 a thousand calligraphers had written *duilian* couplets and title-board inscriptions for the various buildings of the garden, although not all of these would have been used. Li Dou's account names more than 140 calligraphers.³³ If the garden is in some sense typical of eighteenth-century Yangzhou, and the commercial street typical of late nineteenth-century Shanghai, then it may be legitimate to speak of the creation of a more democratically public space for calligraphy in Shanghai.

This process can be seen elsewhere, for example, in the expanded use of both paintings and calligraphies as decoration in restaurants, teahouses, and other easily accessible leisure spaces; and in the new phenomenon of cheap photolithographic reproductions of paintings and calligraphies (a role played earlier by copies and fakes).³⁴

Print advertising for a Chinese public in late nineteenth-century Shanghai was predominantly textual.³⁵ However, from a very early date a certain proportion of advertisements incorporated visual images, and in some cases they were primarily visual. Although there are missionary publications that could be discussed as well, I particularly want to focus here on the newspaper *Shenbao* and the magazine *Dianshizhai huabao*. I discuss these two publications separately, because they used visual elements in advertising differently.

At its founding in 1872 *Shenbao* made a very small amount of space available for visual elements. During the 1870s the few visual advertisements that were included tended to be for foreign products. They reused advertising images from Western publications. In the course of the 1880s, the number of visual advertisements increased, and came to include Chinese examples alongside Western ones (fig. 11). Although there are exceptions, such as one repeatedly placed advertisement for a lithographic printing press, in general the visual elements are small, and tend to be signs rather than fully fledged pictures that illustrate either the product or the trademark. For illustrations of products, a simple diagrammatic drawing—for example, of a feather fan, or books—was often considered sufficient. The more numerous advertisements illustrating trademarks are sometimes pictorial, for example, a Japanese decorative design for Japanese soap, a pretty woman's face for cosmetics, or the Daoist immortal Li Tieguai for medicines. Others, however, are written shopmarks. This is particularly the case for lottery enterprises, of which there were large numbers, many of them concentrated in Qipan Jie (Chessboard Street), in the area outside the north gate of the Chinese City.

In line with its orientation to images, the *Dianshizhai huabao* (founded 1884) always constructed its advertising pages around images. Pages usually incorporate several different advertisements, but in rare cases a single one takes a full page. Because they were largely omitted from the two reprint editions of 1911 and 1983, which scholars tend to use for convenience, these advertisements are not as well known today as they should be. Although not very numerous and often repetitive, they are nonetheless historically important as some of the earliest Chinese experiments in pictorial advertising. Some are closely related to the *Shenbao*-type advertisements: they incorporate an image of a product or a trademark; the products include water pumps, medicines, matches, waterpipes, and books.



Fig. 11. Two pages from Shenbao, May 5, 1887.

Others depict consumers using the product or service: readers in need of books, artists in need of an outlet for their work, and the sick in need of medicine. These images of the consumer, although again few in number, are highly significant: they may be the first images ever to make the consumer alone a pictorial theme. Among the advertisements of this kind is one for a medicine sold by the Cantonese pharmaceutical company Liang Kaiti Tang, located on Qipan Jie, which had long been an active advertiser in *Shenbao*. As Sherman Cochran has shown, pharmaceutical companies were among the most active and innovative advertisers in the early twentieth century, but the case of Liang Kaiti Tang shows that they had understood the possibilities of media advertising from the beginning.³⁶

A third type of advertisement is centered on the depiction of a shop, in which can be seen shop signs, products, sales staff, and consumers. Several of the shops represented, including the Dianshizhai head office, and the branch office at Paoqiu Chang (the crossroads of Nanjing and Honan Roads), were owned by the magazine's publisher, Ernest Major. The Shenchang Shuhuashe bookshop on San Malu (Hankou Road), for example, was the main outlet for Dianshizhai publications, including periodical publications, books, and art reproductions; it also served as an informal office for Major's other business concerns. And when Shenchang Shuhuashe opened a branch office on Good Fortune Street (Jixiang Jie) in the French Concession, the new building got a full-page advertisement. The Suzhou branch of Tongwen Shuju was established only after this lithographic publishing house was acquired by Ernest Major. Outside the borders of Major's commercial empire, Fuying Shuju on Qipan Jie was the Shanghai branch of a Tokyo publishing house specializing in copperplate printing; while Jiongying Ge and Jiangzou Shulin on Si Malu (Foochow Road) were bookshops selling all kinds of old and new books. Finally, the Xihongtang at Paoqiu Chang and the Jiuhua Tang just to the south of Paoqiu Chang on Er Malu (Kiukiang Road), were two of the leading fan shops specializing in the sale of paintings, fan, and decorative letter papers. These various cultural shops consistently refer to their clientele using the terms *shishang* or *shenshang*, acknowledging the mixed scholarly/mercantile character of their customer base.

Finally, although I have been emphasizing visual elements in print advertising, writing also plays an important role and reveals certain parallels and contrasts between advertising on the printed page and in the street. Unlike *Shenbao*, *Dianshizhai huabao* did not use movable type, so calligraphy, with its range of script-types and styles, plays a large role in the advertisements. The use of standardized styles is especially noteworthy, since it anticipates the twentieth-century exploitation of calligraphic typography in advertising. Among the standardized styles that are used,

perhaps the most important is a form of standard script derived from the mid-nineteenth-century innovations of calligraphers such as Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884), who made a special study of Northern Dynasties stone-carved inscriptions. This style more than any other defines the calligraphy of commercial culture in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. Such standardized styles in print advertising certainly contrast with the individualized shop signs written and signed by specific calligraphers, but they are continuous on the other hand with the similarly standardized styles that were used for the bulk of the anonymous signs incorporated into shopfronts as well as for large-scale painted signs on whitewashed walls. When such Chinese writing practices receive any art historical attention it is usually under the category of calligraphy, of which they are seen as debased forms. It may be more useful, however, to reserve the term *calligraphy* for writing that makes a claim to self-expression, and to recognize standardized writing styles as belonging to a separate history of *public writing* that from the beginning shadows that of calligraphy.³⁷ Within this long history, late nineteenth-century Shanghai and related cities are important. There advertising emerged as the primary motor of the modern development of public writing, a trend that would continue in mainland China until the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949.

Photography and advertising are two examples of how late nineteenth-century Shanghai functioned as an experimental laboratory for commercial mass culture in China. My discussion of advertising has brought into play two very different advertising *sites*: the street and the printed page. One of the advantages of discussing them together is that they reveal contrasting mechanisms for how advertising was transformed into its fully modern form. In the case of the street, preexisting practices are expanded and intensified to the point where the quantitative change becomes qualitative: more advertising eventually transforms its very significance. Although the same mechanism can be seen in the use of standardized styles of writing in print advertising, visual elements make the printed page the site of experimentation; as in photography, distinctively new practices emerge, stimulated by imported technologies. The more general conclusion one can draw for China's visual culture, then, is that when a fully fledged modernity crystallized in the late nineteenth century, it was as the result of the confluence of two different historical processes, one more obviously internal to China, with roots in early-modern history, and the other more obviously global and contemporary. Of course one must always bear in mind that closer analysis would quickly erode this as a hard and fast distinction.

Notes

- 1 "Painters and Publishing" (intro., n. 11).
- 2 For a daguerrotype by Lai Chong dated 1853, see Christie's London 1994/10/19, "The Lau Collection of 19th Century Chinese and Japanese Photographs," lot no. 1. On the photographer Luo Yuanyou, active in Shanghai during the late 1850s and early 1860s (?), see Huang Shaofen et al., *Shanghai sheying shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1992), 2-3.
- 3 See *Picturing Hong Kong: Photography 1855-1910* (New York: Asia Society and George Braziller, 1997), catalogue of an exhibition curated by Roberta Wue. Two of the catalogue essays, by Roberta Wue and Edwin K. Lai, include important discussions of Chinese photographers in Hong Kong. The only studies on photography in late nineteenth-century Shanghai of which I am aware are Hu Zhichuang and Ma Yunhong, eds., *Zhongguo sheying shi, 1840-1937* (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 1987); Huang, *Shanghai sheying shi*, 1-18; and Hongxing Zhang, "From Slender Eyes to Round: A Study of Ren Yi's Portraiture in the Context of Contemporary Photography" (unpublished manuscript).
- 4 Huang, *Shanghai sheying shi*, 4-6.
- 5 Ibid. Note the following company names: Su Sanxing [Sanxing], Yichang, Huaxing, Gongtai, Baoji (founded 1888), and Lizhu. Zhang, "Slender Eyes," adds the company name Hengxin, and the name of the photographer Lian Shitai. To this list can be added the names of Yeh-chong, the Shanghai Photographic Enlarging Co. and, perhaps, Ah-fong (a branch of the Hong Kong company of the same name?), whose premises can be seen in a later photograph, from 1906. See *L'Illustration*, September 1, 1906.
- 6 Xiazhuan picture no. 35, accompanying commentary.
- 7 Wu Youru huabao, "Haishang baiyan tu" [One hundred Shanghai beauties], 16.
- 8 *Jia* 5/37.
- 9 *The Far East* 5 (1878): facing pp. 82 and 94.
- 10 Christie's London 1994/10/19, "The Lau Collection of 19th Century Chinese and Japanese Photographs," lot nos. 19, 22, 34.
- 11 Ibid., lot no. 22.
- 12 Both Roberta Wue and Edwin Lai make this point for Chinese photographers in Hong Kong in their essays in *Picturing Hong Kong*. Wue writes: "The earliest Chinese commercial photographers were almost certainly Cantonese first active in Hong Kong. They learned their trade in a variety of ways, the majority probably already being skilled artisans working in the field of export painting" (34). Lai (55) notes that "many early Chinese photographers were originally painters from Hong Kong." For the implications of this historical connection, see Wue's discussion on pp. 39-40.
- 13 *Shanghai Mercury*, October 2, 1890. I am grateful to Roberta Wue for this information.
- 14 Christie's London 1994/10/19, "Lau Collection," lot no. 34.
- 15 Vol. 2, facing p. 4, ("Theatrical Group"); vol. 3, facing pp. 52, 56, 60, 86 (views of the upper Yangtze), and 128 ("Pekingese Lady"); vol. 5, facing pp. 82 (portrait of the Daotai of Anqing and his family) and 94 (view of Anqing).

16 Ibid., vol. 5, facing pp. 82 and 94.

17 Wu Youru huabao, "The Hundred Beauties of Shanghai," no. 16. The Paris-based scholar Dr. Régine Thiriez identified as a group the portrait photographs, now in a North American collection, through similarities in the studio accoutrements. I thank Dr. Thiriez for showing me her documentation of late nineteenth-century Chinese photographs in Western collections, and for introducing me to *The Far East*.

18 *The Far East* 3 (1877): facing pp. 52, 56, 60, and 86. For the editor's comments, see p. 69.

19 *The Far East* 5 (1878): facing p. 94.

20 *The Far East* for the month of August 1876 notes that two Western photographers established in Shanghai, Saunders and Fisler, took photographs before the departure of the first train.

21 Commenting on a photograph of musicians, ca. 1870s–80s, from Hong Kong's Pun Lun photography studio, Roberta Wue writes, "Chinese genre images were an important stock-in-trade for photographers, and the clichéd, even stereotyped nature of such images did not prevent Chinese photographers from also producing them for sale" (*Picturing Hong Kong*, 118).

22 Vol. 2, facing p. 4; and vol. 3, facing p. 128.

23 *North China Herald* (March 28, 1890), 363.

24 Vol. 3, p. 10a.

25 Wu Youru huabao, "haishang baiyan tu," 14; "Fengsu zhi tushuo," xia 9, 14.

26 For a possible example, perhaps slightly later in date, see Tang Zhenhua ed., *Jindai Shanghai fanhua lu*, 98.

27 Xiazhuan, picture no. 35, accompanying commentary.

28 Li Mou'an, "One Hundred Poems on Different Aspects of Shanghai" [*Shenjiang zayong bai shou*], cited in Huang, *Shanghai sheying shi*, 6.

29 See Wue's discussion in *Picturing Hong Kong*, 38–39.

30 See also a portrait by an unidentified Chinese photographer of an actor with his concubine and another actor, published in *The Far East* 2, p. 4.

31 Other forms of advertising which deserve further study include packaging, the photographic *carte de visite*, and the decorative images given away by newspapers, magazines, and businesses.

32 The other calligraphers are: Liu ?fu, zi or hao Yabing; Wu Dayan; and Miao Siyong, whose sign, dated 1880, was already several years old when this advertisement was drawn—perhaps all the signs date from that year.

33 Vol. 13.

34 See Hay, "Painters and Publishing."

35 For a detailed study of late nineteenth-century Chinese-language newspaper advertising (principally *Shanghai xinbao* and *Shenbao*), see the earlier part of Barbara Mittler's as-yet-unpublished paper titled "'Stay Home and Shop the World'—The Cosmopolitan Nature(s) of Newspaper Advertising in Shanghai (1860s–1910s)," prepared for the conference "The Formation of a Multiethnic Urban Culture: The Shanghai Concessions 1850–1910," Heidelberg, 1998.

36 "Marketing Medicine."

37 For a study of public writing in an early-modern and political context, see Jonathan Hay, "The Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces: Calligraphy and Public

Writing," forthcoming in a collection of essays on body and face in Chinese visual culture, edited by Wu Hung and Katherine Tsiang Mino.

Artwork, Commodity, Death Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials

Wu Hung

In "The Body Inscribed with Death," I argue that pictorial representations of the female body in the early twentieth century functioned as a site for negotiating modernity. "Why does the body exist as a commodity in the first place?" I wonder and then asked the question: "What does modernity mean?" What I was asking was that pictorial representations of the female body in the early twentieth century functioned as a site for negotiating modernity. "Why does the body exist as a commodity in the first place?" I wonder and then asked the question: "What does modernity mean?" What I was asking was that pictorial representations of the female body in the early twentieth century functioned as a site for negotiating modernity.

My argument regarding the nature of the pictorial body in the early twentieth century is that it functioned as a site for negotiating modernity. "Why does the body exist as a commodity in the first place?" I wonder and then asked the question: "What does modernity mean?" What I was asking was that pictorial representations of the female body in the early twentieth century functioned as a site for negotiating modernity. "Why does the body exist as a commodity in the first place?" I wonder and then asked the question: "What does modernity mean?" What I was asking was that pictorial representations of the female body in the early twentieth century functioned as a site for negotiating modernity.