COPYRIGHT NOTICE
Ellen Johnston Laing/Selling Happiness

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2004, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

NB: Illustrations have been deleted to decrease file size.
This book traces the careers and fortunes of Shanghai commercial advertising artists who, from the early twentieth century until the Communist takeover in 1949, designed colorful advertisement posters for hanging on the wall as well as black-and-white advertisements for placement in periodicals. As the first substantial investigation of commercial art in China, it adds to the existing studies of Shanghai culture and opens new vistas on twentieth-century Chinese art and visual culture. It discusses not only advertising art but also its production. It constructs extended biographies for the major artists, recounting as far as possible their art training, their daily personal lives, even their adventures in the brothels and occasional brushes with the law. It documents how they made their livelihood as independent artists or in association with an advertising department in a large company, or as a member of a commercial art studio. It tells of their artistic achievements outside the realm of advertising art, in such arenas as Chinese-style painting or photography.

Revealed for the first time are the fruitful relationships between commercial artists and fine artists as well as the important connections between commercial artists and the publishing industry: commercial artists supplied attractive covers for popular-fiction magazines, and popular-fiction authors wrote poetic inscriptions for the calendar posters. By examining commercial art in detail, and especially the distinctive advertisement calendar posters, this book explains how the early twentieth-century Chinese public came to accept Western-style art as normal.

The study focuses on Shanghai.¹ At the close of the Opium Wars of 1840–1842 the terms of the Nanjing Treaty (1842) opened five Chinese cities to Western trade, among them Shanghai. By the 1880s, Shanghai was China’s foremost center of finance, trade, and industry. Westerners from England, the United States, and France staked out settlements on uninhabited or little habited lands surrounding the city in order to provide housing for their nationals. England and the United States eventually combined their
holdings to form the International Settlement, while the French remained in their French Concession. The foreign enclaves became places of refuge for Chinese merchants fleeing from rebels of the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) that swept through southern China. In 1895 the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed at the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War, permitted foreigners to build factories in China’s treaty ports, adding to Shanghai’s burgeoning trade.

In the concessions amenities abounded. Foreigners constructed domiciles in the architectural styles of their homelands and sometimes their Chinese compradores, or commercial representatives, imitated these grand mansions. The foreigners built high-steepled churches and multistoried hotels. By 1930 a skyline of towering commercial buildings, unique in China, dominated the waterfront Bund. The city was run by a Western-style city council, which functioned independently of the Chinese local government, had a fire brigade, a racecourse, and lively nightlife, eventually encompassing cinemas and dance halls as well as traditional theater spaces for storytelling and Chinese opera. There were wide streets and avenues, gaslights, electricity, running water, and public gardens. The city was relatively free in its economic and political practices.

The foreign concessions nearly surrounded the old walled Chinese town with its narrow streets and crowded buildings. In the Chinese town, each street sold particular types of merchandise; Western products in shops attracted both the curious just to gawk and the wealthy to purchase some modern item. By the late nineteenth century, Shanghai Chinese were familiar with Western gadgets such as desk or mantel clocks, hanging oil lamps with glass globes, and other technological advances, soon to include trains, trams, and automobiles. In the first half of the twentieth century, Shanghai was the most Westernized and most modern city in the country.

The printing industry contributed to Shanghai’s rise to commercial prominence. Lithography, introduced into China by missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, by the turn of the century was an accepted mode for mass-producing pictorials, novels, popular magazines, and other inexpensive ephemera. Many presses, originally scattered throughout south China, moved to Shanghai, making it the publishing hub of the country.

In the wake of the Taiping Rebellion, artists also flocked to Shanghai to seek their fortunes. Eventually, they, too, were affected by the commercial atmosphere that pervaded Shanghai. Faced with a decline in traditional patronage systems, which had in the past supported independent artists, and confronted as well by the challenges posed by the advent of photography in China, many artists were forced to go commercial. Calligraphers and artists in Shanghai banded together in support groups, often to set prices for their art on the open market; they later would advertise their price lists in magazines and teach in the art schools that opened after 1905, when the Manchu government abolished the civil service examinations. The rise of the printing industry, with its new genres of popular magazines and other inexpensive literature, was a genuine boon to some artists, opening new avenues for income from artistic endeavor. Many artists made a living from the demands of commerce, providing illustrations for popular magazines and novels or designing attractive book covers, line drawings for ads to be placed in newspapers, and of course, the ubiquitous advertisement calendar poster.
Thus Shanghai, the international and commercial heart of China, had all the prerequisites for a flourishing international, modern commercial art center: a thriving commerce, a solid financial footing, a prosperous printing industry, and a population of artists eager to make a living.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many large and small Western and Chinese companies aggressively and competitively promoted their wares and services. Printed advertising soon became indispensable to commerce.

Advertisement calendar posters were the most important of the many forms of visual advertisement in China. They were introduced from the West and printed in glowing color lithography. These calendars posters, known in China as yu Fen pai, were directed primarily at Chinese, not Western, customers. By the end of Manchu rule, in 1911, there already were many artists in China specializing in designing advertisement calendar posters. It has been estimated that over the next three decades some 700,000 advertisement posters were printed for domestic and overseas Chinese markets. One modern scholar lists the names of fifty-six artists who made advertisement calendar posters.

Sometimes landscapes or, more rarely, floral subjects appeared as the central image of a calendar poster, but the most popular images were of women. Beauties dressed in the flowing garments of ancient times and in settings of elaborate traditional architecture appeared as illustrations to Chinese stories and legends. Their modern sisters were portrayed as fashionable women in contemporary domestic interiors, stylish beauties in gardens (plate 1), or as homemakers with their children. Pictures of the product advertised appeared at the bottom or along the edges of the poster. There might also be printed endorsements, information about where the item might be purchased, and sometimes even poetry. The whole ensemble was often bordered with printed designs simulating the patterned silk mountings of Chinese hanging scrolls and supplied with metal strips along the top and bottom and loops to facilitate hanging. Eventually, “hangers”—pictures alone, without calendars and sometimes without advertising—were also available. Reflecting Shanghai’s international complexion, some calendars were bilingual, with names of companies written in Chinese, or Japanese, or Russian, or English, or French. Lithographed calendar posters and hangers became extremely popular, not only in Shanghai, but throughout China and in Chinese communities outside China as well. Shanghai posters were highly appreciated in Hong Kong, even though that city had its own thriving industry in this art.

Advertisement calendar posters were everywhere; they were given as merchant’s gifts, or sold in bazaar stalls on the streets; they were rewards to customers who purchased specified monetary amounts of products, or were offered to attract magazine subscribers. They decorated the rooms where ordinary people lived and dramatically changed the visual culture of early-twentieth-century Shanghai. Artists and writers have preserved examples of where these calendars were posted and how they were used.

Wu Youru, a Shanghai artist (d. 1893), included a representation of a calendar in a sketch showing the main central room of a modest house. A vertical rectangle (without pictorial image) labeled at the top “yuefenpai” is pasted on the wall just to the left of
the traditional arrangement of a large painting flanked by inscribed couplets. Writing in 1922, Don Patterson observed that “picture calendars find almost universal favor and are often sold, even after the calendars have outlived their period of usefulness.”

A cartoon from 1928 shows how one could have both a picture and a calendar: a hanger depicting a pretty girl advertising Sanyo products is on the wall of a contemporary bedroom; to its left is a thick Western pad calendar. Finally, the distinguished novelist Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang, 1920–1995), acclaimed for her attention to important detail, mentions a calendar poster in a story published in 1943. The plot is set in Hong Kong where the heroine recalls the small but significant things from her life in Shanghai. She remembers the bedroom she shared with her sister, and the calendar poster of a beautiful woman fixed on its wall, noting that her mother penciled on the arm of the beauty the telephone numbers of the tailor, the soy milk vendor, the wife of her mother’s brother, and of her three sisters. The calendar poster had become an inescapable part of Chinese life, for which the Chinese found a variety of uses.

The Chinese advertisement calendar poster was an adaptation of Western advertising practices refashioned for Chinese tastes. Thus the story to be told in this book necessarily begins half a world away, where many of the ideas and practices typical of the design and production of advertisement calendars in China were first introduced and developed.

Pictorial Advertising and Advertisement Calendars in the United States

The long history of advertising in the West is well documented in several authoritative studies. By the eighteenth century a strong capitalist economy had evolved in Western Europe and printed forms of advertising were common in England and the United States. In England, printed pictorial advertisements from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took the forms of handbills, trade cards, and product wrappers, used by businesses, trades, and professions. Some were crude woodcuts, other were sophisticated engravings designed by leading artists and engravers of the times, such as Hogarth.

In the United States, the printed advertisement calendar was inaugurated in the mid-nineteenth century; it would become one of the most popular promotional devices. It is generally acknowledged that it was the Americans who propelled advertising, including the visual kind, to unparalleled new heights in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Printers themselves were among the first to advertise with pictorial calendars. An early advertisement calendar, for the year 1863, was lithographed by Ehrgott, Forbriger & Co. Lith. of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1862 (figure 1.1). The large calendar for 1863 and the first six months of 1864 occupies the central field. It is surrounded with politically charged images: “an elaborate framework of floral and acanthus ornament, surmounted by the figure of Columbia or Liberty. The figure is based on Thomas Crawford’s statue of Freedom on the U. S. Capitol.” Symbols of progress and artifacts of war, arranged to the right and left, are paralleled with a peacetime scene and one of a battlefield en-
closed in oval frames, a feature already in use for seventeenth-century portraits. The name of the printing firm is emblazoned on a plaque festooned with roses and two putti below the calendar. Political themes recur in American and English advertisement calendars over the years. A second early advertisement calendar, for 1867–1868, was published by Jacob Haehnlen of Philadelphia (figure 1.2). A variety of font styles proclaimed the manufacturer’s name and his location, the product name and its virtues. In the center is an impressive six-story building seen from the corner angle to emphasize its scale and solidity, and, by analogy, the scale and solidity of the business. Well-dressed pedestrians and carts drawn by proud horses convey an air of prosperity, further lending to the impression the company wished to project to its customers. Such visual reminders of what the place of business or a factory really looked like were common on invoices, letterheads, and other printed goods associated with a business. In

Introduction
vertical panels on each side of this picture is the full calendar for 1867, and, in a small panel at the bottom, a partial calendar for 1868.

By the 1870s the newly developed techniques of chromolithography allowed for the printing of brilliantly colored images and opened the doors to vigorous advertising in all media. Chromolithography is a method of copying a colored painting or drawing

[6] SELLING HAPPINESS
on paper or metal such as tin. It is not a simple technique. To reproduce a painting, a lithographic artist copies the image and each of its individual colors on separate stones. As long as the registration is accurate, the image can be re-created by printing in successive order, one color after another, on the same sheet of paper until the desired effect is achieved. The craftsman has to know how to divide the image into the proper number of colors, which inks to use, how to register the exact impression for each successive color and how to decide the order in which the colors should be printed. By 1860 stippled dots of color were being used to achieve subtly graded colors. In this technique, color is put on the stone by using ink or crayon, dot by dot, and when several colors are thus applied to stones and then printed together, the dots mix in the viewer's eye to create a blended hue and varying intensities and shades.

Colorful advertisement calendars hit their stride around 1890 and have remained a prominent part of American life. Printers profited from marketing the calendars to businesses, which then had their business names and addresses printed on them. Calendars were offered as premiums to foster sales of products and were advertised in magazines as such. The premium, according to Carl Crow (1883–1945), a former newspaperman who opened an advertising agency in Shanghai, must be an article for which there is a universal demand and that is cheap in price, easily transportable, and not perishable. Calendars fulfilled these requirements exactly and have endured as the most popular of advertising novelties.

Most often, calendar images supplied by printers had little or no connection with the product or service being retailed. They were produced with an abundance of different pictures to appeal to a range of customer interests. The major categories of subjects depicted were religious themes; patriotic and humorous subjects; lovely, glamorous or exoticized women, including Indian maidens; appealing babies; adorable children with or without cute animals; animals themselves, including dogs, cats, lions, horses, and deer; attractive flowers and refreshing scenery; hunting and fishing scenes; views of American landscapes or nostalgic scenes of rural America; idealized home life. Titles of pictures were sometimes printed on the calendar.

Advertisement calendars took a mind-boggling array of different forms. The multiple page calendar or the small pad of twelve sheets attached to a cardboard backing were two favorites. A popular pattern was to cover the space with pictures, such as of flowers or faces of beautiful women, and to scatter the twelve calendars throughout the imagery, as in the Bijou Calendar for 1897 (figure 1.3).

From the 1880s on, printers like the Boston firm of Louis Prang provided stock images that other printers could purchase and then overprint the names and addresses of local businesses. By the 1880s, printers were offering printed images for promotion novelties, including calendars, to the trade through advertisements in professional journals such as Inland Printer. It became increasingly common for advertisers of advertising novelties to include illustrations of their wares. The immense popularity of these stock images for calendars meant that the identical image might be used by more than one business. The Inland Printer full-page advertisement for the Franklin firm promoting “the most artistic designs” and “the largest assortment” of calendar plates for 1898
featured a sample calendar depicting the four seasons; the calendar proper was in two vertical strips placed at the upper left and lower right (figure 1.4).

For the most part, the creators of the images provided by printing houses remain unknown. The organization of the Franklin Engraving and Electrotyping Company in Chicago may be typical of such firms. Aside from its calendar prints, the Franklin business included in its inventory a large number of “cuts” for designs for headings, borders, initials, and other decorative uses. The company had an art department and trained its
own workers. Other engraving houses had in-house art departments whose staff provided images to satisfy the commercial market. Advertising agencies, well established by this time, also had in-house printing departments. Some artists attended night school to improve their skills. In 1916 the art director of a farm journal described his ideal art department. On its staff would be artists proficient at representing animals, two people adept at lettering, one for unusual lettering for broadsides, folder, mailing cards, or posters, the other “capable of rendering copper-plate style, French script for advertisements, brochure titles and catalogue captions.” There were to be decorative designers to pull the creation together into a unified whole. The staff would also boast an art photographer and an airbrush specialist to make finer adjustments. This art director hoped to also have a specialist in automobile illustration, a colorist, and a layout man.

Introduction
Around 1900, special advertisement calendars, designed by known artists and called “art calendars” were advertised in women’s magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Truth*. Usually replicas of the calendar images were included in the advertisement as was a concise description of the calendar, giving the name or names of the artist or artists who created the original artwork. The calendars were not free but could be acquired by submitting some stated evidence of having purchased the advertiser’s product or for a small sum of money that could be sent in the form of cash or postage stamps. Separate plates of the calendar images, without text, could also be obtained for an additional fee. As advertised in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the periodical *Leslie’s Monthly* offered a “beautiful art calendar” for the year 1902 as part of a package that came with a subscription to the magazine. The calendar featured “the most Popular American Actresses and Their Favorite Flower,” especially painted for us by Miss Maud Stumm of New York.” The *Leslie’s Monthly* calendar combined Stumm’s two artistic fortes: flowers and portraits of actresses.

By 1904 each pretty face in the Fairy Soap calendar was surrounded with “a frame effect in imitation of burnt leather, with borders and decorations in L’art Nouveau (The New Art), the latest French treatment in decoration, which is now all the vogue.” Commercial designers had assistance in creating art nouveau designs, for one of the fruits of the art nouveau movement was the stylebook that embodied “principles and concepts developed or advocated by participants in the movement...[and] was often an appeal to designers of commercial products.” Two Hundred Fifty Authentic Art Nouveau Borders in Full Color, reproducing designs executed by Maurice Pillard Verneuil and ten of his art nouveau colleagues, was published in 1904. The goal was to provide “ideas for designing decorative borders, focusing especially on how different figures and lines could be made to interact jubilantly in designs, how boring repeat patterns could be avoided and how the vertical and horizontal of a border design could be merged to form an attractive corner.” Design handbooks are still published today.

As noted above, advertisement calendars sold through magazines sometimes offered calendar pictures without advertising text. It was obviously felt that these were the equivalent of fine art and, appropriately framed, were suitable for home decoration. Stock images for these “hangers” were sometimes offered by the job printers who supplied calendar plates and other printed advertising novelties.

In the aggregate, the most impressive of the advertisement posters and calendars printed in the United States are striking in their resourceful array of images and their flamboyant mixture of decorative text and representational image. Despite the broad range of inventiveness, they share certain pictorial elements. Calendars made for advertising purposes were produced in standard forms of a vertical rectangle with image and calendar pad, or image and scattered months. There were also irregularly shaped calendars. Although most calendars had simple line borders, many others had borders of fancy design or heavy foliage forms framing a representational image. Great imaginative ingenuity often went into the calendar images or overall design; and calendars were found on bookmarks and on trade cards. Sometimes, as noted above, the image had nothing to do with the product. In other instances, the images focused more di-
rectly on the product, providing pictures of the factory that produced the product advertised, or of people using the product, or of pretty women simply holding the product package. Close-up faces of pretty women or bust-length portraits remained standard in calendar and other types of advertising, as the many attractive “Coca-Cola Girls” attest. Text, of course, was important. Advertisements often included slogans and always gave the brand name and usually gave the address of the retailer or manufacturer so people knew where to purchase the item, along with descriptions of the goods, emphasizing their superior qualities and benefits. Different typography styles were often used in one advertisement to print the text messages, and it was not uncommon for the ornate text to encroach into the space of the imagery, integrating text and image; sometimes text unfurled in strips of fluttering banners.

The majority of the calendars had stock images produced by printing houses for retail by other printers, and the designers remained anonymous. Artists practicing as illustrators were often commissioned to create unique images for “art calendars.” Both men and women contributed to these; most, however, regardless of their reputation at the time, have become obscure.

Pictorial Advertising in Traditional China

In contrast to the vast fund of data available about Western pictorial advertising, that of China has never been adequately addressed. Although the Chinese invented printing and were the first to use print technology to reproduce images in multiple, they did not develop and exploit pictorial advertising, because their traditional economic system was not consumer oriented. Evidence of painted or printed pictorial advertisements (that is, the use of a visual motif to advertise a product or service) in traditional China is sparse, scattered, and disparate.

The erratic history of pictorial advertisements in traditional China reveals, for the most part, how different it was from the consistently focused and intentional advertisement practices in the West. Many Chinese pictures construed below as constituting pictorial advertisements simply did not have publicity as their original objective.

Pictorial printed advertisements in China include merchandise wrapping paper, publishers’ logos and portraits, prints depicting entertainments, and finally, toward the end of the nineteenth century, cuts placed in periodicals. So few of these advertisements have survived that, even when assembled, the images do not lend themselves to a comprehensible overview, much less a coherent history of the topic.

Several factors doubtless have contributed to the destruction of actual examples of pictorial advertising. First, the very fragility of the media (ink, perhaps color, on paper) in which these advertisements were created make them difficult to preserve. Paper is a fragile substance that, unless properly cared for, is easily torn and soiled, readily disintegrating in a damp climate. Pictorial advertisement wrapping paper was subjected to wear and tear. Second, in China, scraps of paper that outlived their original purpose were sometimes recycled as layered shoe soles or as stiff armatures for paper figures destined to be burned in funeral ceremonies. Third, since picture advertisements would
in all likelihood be accompanied by text, this put them in the special category of “lettered paper.” An old tradition in China known as “reverence for lettered paper” urged collecting paper on which characters had been written, along with saving and proper disposal of such papers. The practice apparently began in the Song-Yuan period (960–1368) and was originally connected with the worship of Wenchang, God of Literature. In late-nineteenth-century China, there were societies for this purpose. As reported by Justus Doolittle, the goal of such associations was to preserve Chinese characters from “irreverent use.” Each club employed men who patrolled streets and alleys “collecting every scrap of lettered paper which may have fallen to the ground, or which may be found adhering loosely to the walls of houses or shops. Some men gather together refuse lettered paper, old account-books, advertisements, etc., which they sell to the head man or agent of these societies.” Members contributed to the cost of burning the lettered papers, storing the ashes, and finally having them deposited in the local river. It is possible that printed pictorial advertisements were among the papers deliberately collected and burned and their ashes properly drowned or carried out to sea.

The earliest known extant Chinese printed pictorial advertisement has survived only because it was more durable double, its actual copper printing plate, dating to the Song dynasty (960–1260), was discovered in Shandong Province. The image is of a hare pounding a mortar (figure 1.5). The paper was used as a wrapper for acupuncture needles and the text tells customers to seek the shop at the sign of the white rabbit. The text along the top reads: “Acupuncture shop of Master Liu of Jinan”; the text on either side of the picture reads: “You will recognize it by the white rabbit that serves as a sign in front of the door.” Only part of the long text printed below the picture is legible: “We purchase fine-grade metal bars to make excellent needles.” The hare pounding the elixir of immortality is well-known in China and can be traced back to the Later Han dynasty (A.D. 25–A.D. 220) when the rabbit was associated with Xiwangmu, Queen Mother of the West, a deity who conferred longevity and immortality; it is the perfect image to proclaim the therapeutic benefits of acupuncture.

A significant number of wrapping-paper images survive from the late-nineteenth–early twentieth-century printing establishments in Tainan, Taiwan. Made for drugstores, stationers, and incense shops, they also relied heavily on auspicious motifs. The Xie-dechuntang stationer’s shop logo was a vase holding a ruyi scepter, orchids, and lingzhi fungus. The character for “vase” is read “ping,” sharing the same sound as the character for “peace”; the ruyi is emblematic of the expression “as you wish”; the fungus is a sign of longevity; and orchids mean “concord,” from an expression in Yijing (Book of changes) that says: “When two people are in concord, their sharpness is broken. Words of concord are fragrant as orchids.”

Publishers and printers were particularly wont to create pictorial advertisements. In books, a printer’s colophon or trademark was normally found on the back of the title page or at the end of the table of contents. Colophons were boxed squares containing such information as the date and place of publication, the printer’s name, and occasionally a note on the process of production and an advertisement of the printer. Three Yuan dynasty (fourteenth century) printers incorporated into their colophons an ab-
breviated message as an ornamental design, such as a hanging bell or an antique tripod of the type known as a jue, or a ding. The jue vessel, a deep cup supported by three pointed legs, is associated with official office; the ding tripod represents the three senior dignitaries supporting the emperor and is included among the sets of precious good luck symbols; the bell is a verbal rebus, as the pronunciation of the character for “bell” (zhong) is a homophone for “to hit the mark” or “to obtain a degree.” These emblems are not only auspicious, but are especially appropriate for the scholarly, literati products they advertise. They brought the customer’s attention to the supposed superior quality of the printer’s products and perhaps also alluded to benefits to be gained from reading his publications. The visual images are easy to remember, and they remind the reader of where to go to acquire his next text or reference book.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many inexpensive single-sheet woodcut prints bear the name of the printing shop along one margin or in small characters following the title of the depiction, thus constituting an advertisement. The renowned Qi Jianlong shop in Yangliuqing, near Tianjin, went even further and employed what can only be interpreted as an abstract logo consisting of an outer circle of four arcs enclosing a solid circle, both crossed by a vertical and a horizontal line. This mark was not automatically included on all prints issued by this shop but appears on a disparate range of representations. Some prints bearing this logo are superb in de-
sign, cutting, coloring, and printing; others are less accomplished, so it is impossible to
determine what criteria determined the use of this emblem.

Publishers often printed text advertisements in their publications, and even included portraits of themselves as part of the advertisement. The earliest known of these advertising portraits is dated 1492. In it the publisher sits cross-legged on a terrace in front of a landscape screen; he appears to be seated on a cushion or some other sort of support, reading a small book, and is attended by two youths. Yu Xiangdou (ca. 1560–ca. 1637), a Fujian printer, went to extraordinary lengths to remind customers of his books and to impress them with his supposed scholarly status. Yu came from a long line of printers and publishers; he failed the civil service examinations and went into the family business. He claimed he hired noteworthy scholars, winners in the civil-service examinations, to assist in the compilation and annotation of a number of titles ranging from Confucian classics through philosophical and religious works of several schools to collections of famous literary writings. He listed the titles he produced “for the benefit of scholars in their private studies.”

Three renderings of his portrait appear in at least six of his publications. The simplest depicts him as a gentleman-scholar, seated in front of a screen in a hall, his desk spread with books, brushes, and ink stone; a servant approaches with tea, while another sweeps the courtyard. Yu’s name and those of his publishing firms are prominently placed along the top frame of the screen and over the gate. Above the portrait, the caption proclaims Yu as the publisher, and text along the sides gives the title of the book and its table of contents, followed on the left by the statement: “In addition, it includes poems, lyrics, songs, rhapsodies, and fictional works of various authors which are too many to list. Examination candidates in the country: whoever buys this book will know this (claim is true) when he opens the cover.” In a final hint, the title of the book Yu is reading in his portrait is the very book he is promoting.

Other portraits of Yu as an affluent scholar are more elaborate. One version, published in his encyclopedia Wanyong zhengzong (The correct source for myriad practical uses), pictures him sitting in front of a landscape screen, surrounded by attending servants and grand household and garden accouterments announcing a wealthy man (figure 1.6). A placard above the courtyard gate names it Chonghuamen, the location of many printing establishments. Two of Yu’s many names, including one he used for his print shop, are inscribed above the picture frame.

Doubtless Yu wanted to be seen as one of the scholarly class, and his publishing firms as catering to the literati. His portrait in his publications made his name memorable, and thus his portraits served, in an impromptu fashion, to promote his publishing empire. Timothy Brook correctly assesses the advertising value of Yu’s portrait:

The pose is of scholarly endeavor, . . . We are not looking merely at vanity, but at the social aspiration to look like gentry, and as well the commercial motive to present the [encyclopedia] as the reading matter of a man of culture. . . . [The sur-
roundings] assure the purchaser that when he buys a book published by [Yu], he is getting an emanation from the world of the gentry.  

Paper, ink sticks, and ink cakes, especially when ornamented with characters, scenes, and designs, are among the desk objects eagerly collected by Chinese scholars. Printed inventories picturing decorated letter papers, ink sticks, and ink cakes, perhaps used as merchandising ploys, began appearing in the seventeenth century. Although this advertising gambit remains to be fully explored, it is believed that at least one illustrated catalogue of ink sticks, the  

Mopu, was intended as a commercial strategy, and the possibility exists that a printed selection of letter-paper designs also served this purpose.  
The illustrated ink-stick register featured designs sometimes based on existing pictures,
sometimes commissioned by the manufacturer, that had been cut by craftsmen into
the wooden molds into which the liquid solution would be poured and allowed to so-
olidify. Catalogues of these designs were compiled and printed “both as record of the
images used and also as practical means of advertising the decorative products to an
élite market of scholars and connoisseurs.”

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chinese entertainment world
was a major source of images for the colorful popular prints. When the theater is
named in these prints, they can be considered advertisements. A rare print from the late
Qing period depicts a Suzhou wineshop, the Qingchunlou, the Celebrating Spring Hall.
The shop name is inscribed on a board directly above the door. Customers are seen ar-
riving and leaving; they stop at the front desk, where two men smoke and reckon ac-
counts. Upstairs, customers seated at square tables chat and refresh themselves while
enjoying a performance. Because the name of this wineshop is prominently visible in
the print, it served simultaneously as a souvenir and an advertisement. A print depict-
ing a ballad-singing teahouse in Shanghai, the Xiao Guanghan (Small Far-reaching Cold) also falls into the souvenir/advertisement category (figure 1.7). The name of the teahouse, referring to the palace on the moon (Guanghangong), the residence of the moon goddess, Chang E, is on a placard above the performance area. Wooden boards on the side columns announce that Zhu Wenlan and Wu Beiqing have been especially invited from Suzhou to perform here and lists the four stories of their program.48

More earthy diversions were acrobatics and juggling; entertainments current as early as the late Han period. Representations of them are found in Han tomb reliefs and on Song dynasty ceramic pillows.49 Such exhibitions were still popular in the 1920s and 1930s. In one such spectacle in Beijing, they

put up a small enclosure, rather like a circus, with a high pole in the centre and a narrow track where the “horse-girls” appear. The show consists of alternate turns by riders and acrobats. Most of the performers are little girls dressed in red silk . . . One girl . . . balances a large earthenware jar and whirls it rapidly with her toes.50

Woodblock prints from Shandong Province depict girls from the famous Wang family troupe executing dangerous acrobatic and juggling feats on horseback.51 According to Bo Songnian, these prints were designed by Yang Zhonghai (1875–1937), who worked for the Gongtai Huadian (Gongtai Picture Shop), whose name is on the prints.52 Because each girl’s name is inscribed next to her, the prints became more than mere souvenirs of a popular local amusement, and their value as advertisements cannot be overlooked.

These entertainment prints were neither advertisements ordered nor endorsed by the particular teahouse or acrobatic troupe, but were produced by the print shop for sale as commercial ventures. The initial concrete financial profit from their sale went directly into the print shop coffers. True, the entertainers might benefit from an increased audience and thereby perhaps an augmented income, but this is an intangible gain difficult to link to the prints themselves.

The introduction of lithography, and especially photolithography, into China in the late nineteenth century, and the publication of photolithographed pictorials, significantly enlarged the range of visual imagery, including pictorial advertisements, available to the common person. The primary geographical locus for photolithographic pictorials was Shanghai. During the 1870s the missionary-run Gezhi huibian (Chinese scientific and industrial magazine) carried picture advertisements, but apparently none has survived.53 It was also in Shanghai, in 1872, that the English merchant Ernest Major used lithography and photolithography to print the first new-fashioned newspaper published in China, Shenbao. Lithography was also the medium for the pictorial Dianshizhai huabao, published every ten days between 1884 and 1898 by the book branch of Shenbao.54 In addition to the Shenbao and Dianshizhai publishing houses, Major and his brother, Frederick, owned the Shenchang Shuhuashi (Shenchang Painting and Calligraphy Shop), as well as a number of other enterprises in China.55 From the very beginning, Dianshizhai huabao carried pictorial advertisements. Like Western newspaper and journal advertis-
ing in the 1880s and 1890s, each page contains pictorial advertisements for different products, along with text matter. One *Dianshizhai huabao* page from 1884 advertises a fan shop at the top (figure 1.8). Inside are eager customers, busy clerks behind the counters, among the stacks of boxes, and hanging displays of paintings. Lower down on the page are ads for two books published by Dianshizhai and Shenchang. The opium pipe and opium container do not advertise this drug, but rather a special medicinal paste to help people overcome the noxious habit. The Guangzhou firm offering this paste had branches in Shanghai, Jinling, and Suzhou. The box of ginseng pills (for

**Figure 1.8.** Advertisement page, *Dianshizhai huabao* 4 (1884, fifth month, middle ten days), advertisement section, collection jia, 2a.
“male strengthening” and “female soothing”) advertises a product from a Guangzhou concern with a branch in Shanghai. A firefighting water pump made in Seneca Falls, New York, is “newly arrived” and for sale by the Shanghai firm of Quanheng Import Goods Shop (Quanheng Yangguanghuo Hao) on Third Avenue.

A consistent, coherent history of pictorial advertising in pre-1900 China is difficult to retrieve today. The best that can be recovered at this point is the occasional use of pictorial advertisements from the Song dynasty on. Purchases might be wrapped with paper decorated with the shop’s pictorial logo, to serve as a reminder for a repeat visit and to broadcast further the shop’s commodities. Auspicious motifs are conspicuous in the logos of Tainan businesses as well as in the publishing industry, where bookish types would recall the status of particular publishers by their pictorial logos or even their portraits. The names of the print shops that appear on many popular prints, and the use of at least one abstract design logo by one shop, were direct, deliberate advertisements. People who haunted the entertainment quarters might buy an inexpensive depiction of the wine shop they had just visited, or hoped to visit, or a certain ballad-singer establishment they favored. Even souvenirs of street entertainers could be acquired, taken home, and discussed with others. The inclusion in the pictures of the names of the tea- and wineshops and of the performers themselves publicized their location and attractions, and the performers’ skills. Even at this time, the theater was a source of pictorial imagery, although later on, it would be the star performers whose pictures sold commodities, or who endorsed products. Despite the indeterminate scope of pictorial advertising in traditional China, some visual elements can be identified as continuing to inform advertising pictures in twentieth-century China.

Saturation advertising, as known in the West, did not begin to affect China until the late nineteenth century when small pictures of products began to appear in the periodical press. Like the theater prints that included the name of the stage, the depictions found in the pictorial Dianshizhai huabao of the facades of fan shops brought familiar establishments to popular attention. Other pictorial cuts of newfangled firefighting equipment in Dianshizhai huabao transmitted a different set of images, one based on modern science and Western technology. In other words, advertising itself had now become a commercial enterprise, albeit still in its infancy.

The pictorial advertisements in Dianshizhai huabao mark for several reasons a dramatic change from the occasional Chinese advertisement pictures of the past. First, they are the earliest extant examples of reliance in China on the Western advertisement practice of placing images of numerous diverse products on a single page. Second, these images were ancillary to the purpose of the publication, i.e., a news pictorial. Third, presumably, aside from the in-house advertisements, someone paid to have these advertisement pictures published in this format. Some pictures were drawn by Chinese draftsmen, but the accurate rendering of the water pump suggests either it was supplied by the Western manufacturer or a picture of it was faithfully copied by a Dianshizhai staff member. Soon pharmaceutical, tobacco, and other companies would dominate the advertising business, most visibly in their colored advertisement calendar posters. The stage thus was set for grander accomplishments stemming from an amalgamation

Introduction
of Chinese and Western ideas about the best ways to advertise commodities in China. But the images and compositional arrangements of the traditional Chinese calendars were not to be the model for the new yuefenpai.

Traditional Chinese Calendars

A major component of traditional Chinese woodblock print production was the calendar, which in almanac form goes back to the ninth century. The overview of traditional Chinese calendars presented herein demonstrates that the Chinese had a long tradition of printing pictorial calendars using distinctly Chinese motifs and for specific purposes.

In traditional China the passage of years was indicated by a set phrasing giving first the name of the emperor’s reign followed by the number of the year of that reign, sometimes reinforced by two characters from the cyclical characters, the so-called branches and stems.

Months and days of the year were marked by much more complicated systems. The Chinese used both the lunar calendar (agricultural calendar, nongli) and the solar calendar. The lunar calendar, based on the cyclical waxing and waning of the moon, divided the year into months either twenty-nine or thirty days in length. The former were known as "little or short months" (xiaoyue); the latter as "large or long months" (dayue). The first day of the month always falls on the day of the new moon; the fifteenth day of the month always falls on the day of the full moon. To keep the lunar calendar in approximate coordination with the seasonal cycle, an extra, intercalary month is inserted at selected times. In the lunar calendar the first month is called the “standard month” (zhengyue), and the remaining months are designated by numbers from two to twelve. In printed calendars, each lunar month is indicated as short or long.

The solar calendar divides the year into twenty-four spans (jie) either fifteen or sixteen days in length; the length of the spans are recalculated each year, and the sixteenth day reassigned, to coordinate with the seasonal cycle. The first day of each span, or “node,” was given a special name, the whole sequence divided into odd (jie) and even (qi) numbers, so that the system is known as “the twenty-four solar spans and ethers” (ershisi jieqi). Each node has a name based on meteorological phenomena or agricultural circumstances. The first node is designated “the beginning of spring,” followed by the period of “rain and water,” and so on throughout the solar year to its concluding spans, “the inception of winter,” the “light snow,” the “heavy snow,” the “winter solstice,” the “lesser cold,” and the “greater cold.”

Calendars in traditional China existed in three forms. The first two, the state calendar and the almanac, appeared as books, and both have received scholarly attention. The third type of calendar is the illustrated single-sheet calendar, which, although data about them abounds, have never been formally investigated.

The official, government-issued, state calendar covered with imperial yellow silk had various titles. It was printed in different versions for the emperor, for the nobles, and for the civil and military officials, while a fourth was for purchase by the general public. For ordinary people, there was the almanac, based on the official calendar and also
in book form but given an auspicious red cover. The almanac provided useful information to assist in making decisions relating to daily life. Almanacs included charts of the auspicious and inauspicious days of the months, listing lucky and unlucky days for travel or sewing clothes, for weddings or funerals, for initiating a building project or starting on a journey. Almanacs had comments about the progress of a pregnancy, or health advice, along with charms against evil spirits. The almanac covered dream interpretation, physiognomy, and geomancy. A common motif in the almanac book, one never found in the state calendar book, is the spring ox and his herd boy, Mangshen, wherein the weather for the coming year was forecast through a code. If Mangshen wears shoes, there will be plenty of rain; if he wears one shoe, the year will be dry; if he wears a hat, the year will be sunny; if his hat is worn on his back, it will be cool.

The third traditional Chinese calendar is the single-sheet, or one-page, pictorial calendar. Single-sheet pictorial calendars fall into three categories. One is associated with the image of the stove god (zaojun) posted anew each year, at New Year’s time, after being sent off to make his annual report to heaven via ritual burning. His report determines the family’s fortune during the coming year. These calendars normally are vertical in orientation and measure anywhere from 22 × 18 cm to 45 × 28 cm. The other two pictorial calendars are “Welcoming Joy” pictures (yingxi tu) and “Spring Ox” pictures (chunniu tu), related to the spring ox, those that depict events associated with the spring-plowing ceremony. Welcoming Joy pictures are small, measuring 23.6 × 34 cm. The spring-ox and spring-plowing pictures are horizontal in orientation and range from 31 × 45 cm to 35 × 46 cm. Welcoming Joy pictures and the spring-ox and spring-plowing calendars all share pictorial images, the solar-lunar calendar, and charts of lucky and unlucky days, as well as other useful information for the conduct of daily life.

Pictorial single-sheet calendars were mainstays of the traditional print business, and a wide assortment were produced. The blocks for any given calendar image could be used year after year because it was possible to change the characters giving the year date and the calendar proper by carving new characters into removable plugs and inserting these into the notches.

The earliest illustrated calendar found is technically part of an almanac dated to 877. It was discovered at the Buddhist cave shrines at Dunhuang on the edge of the Gobi desert by Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and is now in the British Library. In a scroll fragment about four feet in length, information is printed in narrow horizontal strips, with “minute drawings and diagrams.” The section just left of the center is a chart of the days of the year along with sketches of the twelve animals of the duodenary cycle: rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog, and boar. Of these, as noted by Lionel Giles, only the rat, the serpent, and the monkey are marked with the character meaning “lucky.” A second early calendar, unfortunately incomplete, was also brought back to England by Aurel Stein and is now also in the British Library. It can be dated to the year 978 and, as described by Giles, is a group of finely executed drawings representing the Year-star God (the planet Jupiter) seated in the middle and surrounded by figures of the twelve “great spir-
its” and the four Lokapalas, guardians of the four quarters of space. Each of the former is wearing as a head-dress one of the twelve animals of the duodenary cycle and eight of them carry ceremonial tables in their hands.62

These illustrated calendars are very primitive in comparison to the sophisticated single-sheet examples from later centuries in China, but they do confirm the antiquity and importance of the duodenary animals in the popular calendar, a feature common in illustrated calendars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The stove god has a long history as a deity worthy of worship. Images of this god might have been in use in the Tang dynasty (618–906); they certainly were a vital part of New Year’s ceremonies in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1126).63 It is not known when a calendar was combined with an image of the stove god. The images of the stove god printed with calendars surviving from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries observe a rigid, conventional composition arrangement (figure 1.9).64 The stove god may be alone or accompanied by his wife and is surrounded by other figures. The god of the market and the boy who ushers in wealth are popular secondary figures. A large cartouche at the top margin is labeled with characters giving the dynasty name, the reign name, the year number, and the cyclical characters. Below them is the calendar proper in which the upper register lists the long and short months of the lunar calendar; the lower register contains coordinates for the twenty-four spans of the solar calendar. There may be sets of phrases along sides or bottom that give prognostication information about the year as based on the directional positions of the stars or planets of various deities, which changed every year. The calendar cartouche is frequently framed by a pair of dragons. A “basin of wealth” containing shining jewels or coins or silver ingots, or sometimes a money tree, is usually depicted at the stove god’s feet.

Stove-god prints, perhaps because they were used in important New Year’s rites, remained fixed in compositional arrangement with the calendar, regardless of whether it was directly in the center or split into the two parts invariably located above the sacred image.

Two early, identical single-sheet Welcoming Joy calendars were printed at the famous Taohuawu area in Suzhou. One, presently in the Tenri Library in Nara, Japan, is dated to 1766 (figure 1.10); the present location of the second, dated to 1772, is unknown.65 A third example is known only from having been incorporated into a New Year’s still-life arrangement printed in Suzhou in 1745; unfortunately, for artistic effect, the calendar is draped (à la Salvador Dalí’s limp watch) over a book, leaving only text parts of it visible.66

This Welcoming Joy calendar combines almanac data with calendar information. The whole sheet is divided by lines into rectilinear units, not unlike an almanac page. At the top a row of discs encloses characters for the date and the title Welcoming Joy Picture. At the bottom of each end of this strip, two small sections contain abbreviated agricultural prognostications for the coming year based on standard entries in the almanac: on the left, the “Earth Mother Classic,” and on the right, “Liu’s Biscuit Poem.” They frame the calendar proper. In the upper left corner is the octagonal divination
compass used for selecting auspicious dates for marriages. The octagonal diagram on the right gives the locations of the god of joy, who determines lucky days. The large central panel is packed with images of money. The military god of wealth on the left is accompanied by two boys, the Harmony Brothers (Hehe). One holds a box (he), the other boy holds a lotus (he); the civilian god of wealth on the right is accompanied by the smooth-faced god of the marketplace and the bearded foreigner, with whom trading brings wealth.\textsuperscript{67} The civilian god of wealth sits under a money tree whose branches sprout clusters of coins. Overhead, a dragon sprouts coins, ingots, and coral branches into a basin of wealth that already holds rhinoceros horns and gleaming gems. A tiger crouches below. In ancient lore, the green dragon is associated with the east, the white

\textit{Introduction}
tiger with the west; perhaps these correlations still pertain here to convey an idea of a great expanse of geography. In the upper right corner is a label reading “gold mountain”; its counterpart, the “silver mountain,” is at the left margin. The secondary panels to the right and left of the central image provide data relating to days when it is inappropriate to sew clothing or light a fire, and, on the left, inauspicious days in general. Below are given the varying positions of, on the right, Jupiter, the planet that controls time and human fate and whose “residence” changes each year; and on the left, Venus. By the early nineteenth century, this style of Welcoming Joy calendars was out of vogue.

Beating the Spring Ox, a ceremony of great antiquity, was performed on the day of the solar calendar that marked the “beginning of spring.” In the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), local officials moved in procession beyond a city’s east gate, where a clay ox awaited them. Someone costumed as the spirit of spring, Mangshen the herd boy—or sometimes the officials themselves—would beat the ox until it fell to pieces and its inwards, usually the five grains, scattered on the ground. This beating symbolized urging the ox to work to ensure a fruitful harvest. There were regional variations in the performance of this ritual, including that observed by Lewis Hodous in Fujian Province in the late nineteenth century. Hodous reported:

The procession was headed by a band of musicians. There were the tablets with the titles and offices of the magistrates. There were one or more umbrellas with
ten thousand names given to a popular official when he leaves his post. All official decorations were exhibited on this occasion which was made as magnificent as possible. Behind the open sedan chairs of the officials followed a long line of attendants each carrying a bouquet of artificial flowers belonging to the spring season.69

Spring Ox calendars were extremely fluid in their iconography and composition. They share with Welcoming Joy calendars, however, the basic arrangement of important elements: the calendar is at top center, and panels or diagrams with secondary data are in upper right and upper left corners. The main motif is supposed to be the spring ox and the herd boy, but often they are so small in comparison with other images on the sheet that it is difficult to determine differences in the boy’s attire, making it doubtful that this device was really useful for forecasting the weather. Beyond these basic affiliations with the other calendar forms, Spring Ox calendars vary widely in their imagery.

An early Spring Ox calendar, dated 1843, was printed in Suzhou and is now in the School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London (figure 1.11).70 A riverbank is lined with mock-European towers and pergolas mixed with Chinese curved eaves. Maintaining the standard arrangement, the all-important calendar is positioned at top center, and secondary panels of data are incorporated into the architectural decoration at the upper right and upper left corners. Two processions of heavily laden wagons, one drawn by an ox and one by a mule, meet in the center of a bridge spanning the river. The title of this calendar is Western Countries Bring in Riches, Spring Ox Picture (Yangguo jinbao chunniu tu). The reference to foreign commerce proclaims that international trade brings wealth to China and suggests connections with the wealth advocated in Welcoming Joy calendars. In eighteenth-century Suzhou, woodblock prints were heavily influenced by Western engravings, copying both the trappings of Western perspective drawing as well as Western cityscapes. This print is a rare survival of that time. Unfortunately, the Suzhou print industry—its shops, its woodblocks, and its inventory—was destroyed in the blazes attendant on the siege and capture of the city by the Taiping forces in 1861. When the print business revived, European influence had vanished. The new Spring Ox calendars had different backgrounds and subsidiary images garnered purely from Chinese culture.

The new Spring Ox calendars tended to crowd available spaces with images so that sometimes the ox and his herder are lost in the medley. Nevertheless, these calendars adhere to a standard compositional formula, with the characters giving the year date in circles along the top margin. The calendar proper and its attendant panels of secondary information about the god of joy and inauspicious days are placed along the top of the page. The new Spring Ox calendars often merged motifs from plebeian culture. The “Spring Ox and Tea Pickers” calendar is an example. Here the minute ox and herder are at the very bottom center of the print. On the central axis, the ox supports a huge disc surrounded by representations of zodiac animals and at the top of the print are the civil god of wealth and his attendants. Figures of women hold flower lanterns. Every space is filled with the written text of so-called tea-picking ditties. There are twelve songs, one for each month. The lyrics of one risqué verse are: “When pomegranates turn red
in May, Ruilan met Jiang Shilong while picking tea; wedded in an inn one night, in the morning apart like east and west.”

The whole is based on a local performance called the “Tea Picking Lantern Dance,” popular in Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces. According to Wang Kefen, the show developed from local folk songs and dances, and judging from the fact that a decree forbade its performance, it must have been exceedingly common. The most popular version was “Tea Picking in Twelve Months,” in some locations performed by twelve young men dressed as women carrying flower baskets illuminated by lanterns covered in crimson silk. They formed a large ring, circling around, singing and dancing. This calendar is a new and clumsy rendition of an old pictorial cycle that had been printed two centuries earlier, not as a calendar, but in a much more accomplished and elegant guise.

Other Spring Ox calendars include sets of four large characters spelling out auspicious sayings, like “fortune and longevity come in pairs” (fushou shuangquan) with the interiors of the strokes of written characters crammed with motifs. Here, as usual, the calendar and the supplementary information occupy the center and corners of the upper margin. The ox and his attendant are located at the center along the lower margin of the picture. Auspicious motifs such as the gods of wealth, longevity, and high official position, the Hehe brothers, basins of jewels, and bats (the word for which, “fu,” is a homophone for happiness, “fu”) fill up the sheet. Representations of the flower spirits for the twelve months was yet another way to enliven Spring Ox calendars.
They are modeled on the people who carried bouquets and marched in the processions in certain celebrations of the Beating the Spring Ox ceremony, as described above.

A calendar dated 1907 from Yangliuqing, in Tianjin, and now in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, contains an image of the spring ox, but the subject actually is the first plowing of the spring. The ox and his herder along with an elephant and his attendant appear in front of a magistrate whose responsibility it is to represent the emperor in presiding over the spring plowing ceremony. The elephant (xiang) is part of the expression “myriad things take on a new aspect” (wanxiang gengxin), the phrase on a banner held by the elephant’s keeper. Other motifs include a god of wealth holding a cornucopia of jewels and a branch of coral. The calendar itself is, as required, placed in the center top of the page.

Printers in Shanghai were especially ingenious in creating different calendar subjects, all the while retaining the traditional organization of placing the calendars along the center top of the page. By 1898 Western commercial firms had established a secure footing in China. As business boomed, commerce and banking began to be conducted according to the Western calendar. The local publishing industry supplied new calendars that stressed new types of practical information, such as indicating correspondences between the Chinese calendar and the Western calendar’s Sundays, and providing tide tables. The former data was important because Western firms did not conduct business on Sundays; the latter was important to shipping in Shanghai. These calendars were for neither the peasant nor the official, but the merchant. They generally measure approximately 54 × 31 cm.

Several new calendars are related to the Beating the Spring Ox subject. One, published by the Gu Mingji shop in Shanghai, is titled The Prefect Beating the Spring (Ox). In the center, the prefect undertakes the ritual plowing of the new year; on the right, local officials stand in fine gowns; on the left are peasants in simple smocks and trousers. In the background is a shrine to the god of grain. The calendar consists of the Chinese solar and lunar schemes, along with a section labeled “libai qi” (Sunday chart) giving the coordinates for the Christian day of worship, and is divided into two parts, one placed in each corner. Another Shanghai calendar is labeled Ox Picture, but no ox is visible in it. Instead, four gods of wealth are ranged to either side of the most important god of wealth, Guan Yu, attended by his son, Guan Ping, and his sword bearer, Zhou Cang. To the right and left are the crenellated walls of the gold treasury and silver treasury; inside are shining ingots. A basin of jewels is at the center bottom of the scene. The two parts of the calendar are in the upper right and left corners. A final example, printed at the Wenyizhai shop in Shanghai, is titled Meeting in the Peach (Garden) (figure 1.12). The peach garden, belonging to the Queen Mother of the West, was the abode of the immortals. The calendar depicts the “Eight Immortals,” grouped four on a side, around a shrine identified as a Dragon Gate that houses a huge tripod full of glowing ingots, coral, and gems; Zhong Kui, the demon-queller, dances atop it to keep away thieves and evil. Two carp leap from waves below the shrine, and a dragon slithers from its lower eaves. These creatures carry out the theme of a carp transforming into a dragon, a

Introduction
metaphor for success in the civil service examinations. The Eight Immortals are usu-
ally associated with longevity, but they also connote commercial success. Four cranes
of longevity complete the auspicious imagery. The solar-lunar and Sunday calendars, 
along with tide tables, occupy the upper corners of the page.

Traditional single-sheet pictorial calendars in China were printed in many forms and 
with a wide range of motifs germane to Chinese life. Unlike calendars in the West, which 
competed in different shapes and unusual arrangements of the calendar proper, the 
Chinese traditional calendars all adhered to a single compositional organization. The 
major image in the center of the format might be of the stove god (perhaps with his 
wife), or of gods of wealth “welcoming joy,” or of New Year’s ceremonies like Beating 
the Ox, or folk themes like tea-pickers’ songs. Nevertheless, the calendar proper, along 
with attached practical information or guides to lucky or unlucky days, is invariably lo-
cated at the top margin of the print.

The traditional calendar is congested with secondary, auspicious motifs, in which 
those for wealth predominate. In the mid-1850s a new, different type of calendar, known 
as yufenpai, had appeared in Hong Kong. By 1898, on the cusp of an explosion of in-
ternational trade centered in Shanghai, the traditional Shanghai calendar makers must 
have been aware of this new calendar. Despite concessions to modern commerce, the 
traditional Chinese calendar never incorporated advertisement of commodities or 
services.

Indeed, the extremely limited and incoherent use of pictorial advertising in tradi-
tional China could not provide a secure foundation on which to construct a modern 
promotional program assimilating the advertisement calendar. The traditional pictorial 
calendar, itself, would lend some features to the new advertisement calendar. But the
passive age-old calendar images with their static hopes for good luck and wealth could not compete in the new advertising arena with its new urban iconography of persuasion requiring action to acquire happiness or wealth.

Advertisement Calendars in China

The new *yuefenpai* would become the dominant calendar printed in China during the twentieth century. Once the colorful *yuefenpai* were firmly established, they became major factors in effective advertising and were tremendously popular. The accepted format was a vertical rectangle with a large central area for the main image and the remainder of the surface subdivided into smaller rectilinear compartments for additional pictures or text (plate 1). The calendar appeared along the sides or at the bottom. This strictly rectilinear format was never seriously contested, unlike in the West, where there was a seemingly unlimited and irrepressible demand for novelty in format and in placement of the calendar itself. In China the advertisement calendar poster depicted mainly beautiful women rendered in close approximation of Western realistic representational style, significantly different from traditional calendar themes and pictorial techniques.

Once the business community in China began to advertise using the new pictorial calendars and new images, there was no stopping the flow of attractive pictures. They were not only offered through shops as premiums or given outright as gifts but also trickled down to street vendors, who sold them for pennies at stalls, so that they reached the lowest levels of society. The status of the calendars, however, was ambiguous; they were not wholeheartedly welcomed by all. Despite their acknowledged popularity among plebeian urbanites, the advertisement calendar posters elicited mixed feelings from others. Some Westerners expressed qualms about their effectiveness and their cost. Some Chinese voiced concerns about their constant depiction of attractive women in what was perceived as a low level of artistic competence. Because so many posters offered pictures of realistically rendered beautiful women at a minimal price, “fine art” purists denigrated their value and were convinced that such vulgar artistic expressions endangered the artistic sensibilities of society.

The Status of Advertisement Calendar Posters in Shanghai Commerce and Art

The advertisement calendar poster in China, just as in the United States, was an important part of large promotional campaigns aimed at bringing products to potential purchasers’ attention. Such drives encompassed newspaper and journal advertisement, with or without pictures, plus other forms of advertising, perhaps more immediately attractive and certainly more likely to permeate all levels of society. The latter included outdoor posters affixed to walls, handbills, window displays, and items of everyday use, such as bookmarks as well as rugs bearing company logos and placed in the bottoms of rickshaws. Small cards printed with pictures of animals, legendary heros, or myriad other subjects (popularly known as “cigarette cards”) provided stiffeners for soft cig-
arette packs, and people were encouraged to collect these. Customers were lured through coupons, promotional gifts, prizes, and premiums, such as “paper parasols, paper fans, cigarette boxes, towels, handkerchiefs, phonographs and bicycles.” Eventually, advertising spread to billboards, radio, and film.

The importance of advertisement calendar posters or of hangers to Western and Chinese businesses as an effective means of reaching even the lowest levels of society, however, cannot be overestimated. In China medium-sized calendars, measuring $22 \times 13.2$ cm were included in the large cases of cartons of fifty packs of cigarettes. According to Wang Shucun, these had pictures of modern beauties or of Chinese scenes such as *Boating on West Lake*, or *Picking Tea*; each picture also had a representation of the cigarette package and a calendar on the reverse side. More impressive were the calendars printed on paper the size of a sheet of newspaper.

The gift calendar continued an established Chinese custom. In the late nineteenth century, the Reverend Justus Doolittle, an astute observer of Chinese life, describing festivals and customs of the twelfth month, recorded that shopkeepers made presents to their preferred customers who patronized them throughout the year. The presents, according to Doolittle, were of little value and “were understood as not only an expression of thanks for their past patronage, but also as the indication of a wish that it may be continued.” Among gifts mentioned by Doolittle are such things as bundles of wood from a carpenter and kitchen knives from a restaurateur.

While some foreign merchants were immediately successful in their printed calendars, others, sometimes even Chinese traders themselves, encountered troubles in their choice of images or design of logos. The business community’s confidence in the usefulness of advertisement calendars fluctuated over the decades; sometimes they were highly praised and recommended, and at other times were said to be costly and ineffective. Successes, false starts, and difficulties characterized the production of advertisement imagery and of advertisement calendar posters.

Initially British American Tobacco (BAT), notorious for its massive advertising campaigns that blanketed China in the early twentieth century, relied on its staff of Westerners to formulate advertisements for its tobacco products and followed solely Western standards. Their cigarette cards bore illustrations to German fairy tales, and their posters pictured American landscapes and American heroes like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and even American women, or buxom women with décolleté necklines, or the figure of Atlas to advertise Atlas cigarettes. A cigarette card included in a packet of Pin Head smokes from American Tobacco Company features two pictures of scantily dressed Western women, both of whom clasp their hands behind their heads in suggestive poses (figure 1.13). When it was brought to the company’s attention that the Chinese could not relate to such images, Chinese artists were hired to design new pictures that would appeal to their countrymen.

By 1900 calendar posters were hawked in the streets, although the imagery was still heavily foreign in content. The sketch of one such street vendor shows him seated on a box below his posted wares, three rolls of additional stock at his knee (figure 1.14). On the wall behind him, the four posters picture a warship, a factory, a mountain, and
assorted flags of different nations. Two potential customers timidly approach. The text at the top, presumably the peddler’s street cry like those of the ambulating dealers of popular woodblock prints described in chapter 2, reads:

Colored calendar posters, painted really beautifully. At ten cents foreign money, they are inexpensive. Please, sir, buy one and take it home. Take it home, hang it in your room. Each month [you can] easily note the Sundays. Sundays are rest days, no need to go out [to work]. At home, your wife will indeed be delighted.

The remarkable popularity of the calendar poster and its role as a status emblem is embodied in a humorous story carried in this same Shanghai pictorial. A certain Zhou Liangrong so thirsted for a calendar poster, he wrote a letter in a “foreign script,” added the seal of the Dunqinglong firm, and took the letter to a foreign firm that sold alkali in order to “extort” a calendar from them. The people at the alkali firm, however, sent someone to Dunqinglong, where it was discovered that they had no knowledge of this letter. The attempted ruse was reported to the local police, who arrested Zhou and wanted to question him at the station. Zhou, however, started off in a rickshaw, where, mentally stressed, he produced a knife and slashed his throat until blood flowed freely. The judge gave a great deal of attention to this matter and being indulgent of Zhou’s injuries, decided to destroy the incriminating evidence. Zhou was released without punishment.

The picture in figure 1.14 confirms the observations made in 1917 by James Hutchison, who worked in China as a BAT advertising and sales representative for more than two decades (from 1911 to 1933). He published a valuable account of his travels through-

---

**Figure 1.13.** Pin Head cigarette card issued by the American Tobacco Company, early twentieth century. After Chen Chaonan and Feng Yiyu, *Lao guanggao* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998), 52.
out China directing a team of workers pasting single-sheet posters on walls (not calendar posters, but simply posters), showing “a large open packet of cigarettes with brand name and caption,” and distributing leaflets and packets of cigarettes. Hutchison was aware of the power of the calendar poster and left incisive testimony to its importance. Writing in March–July 1917, he says:

The check on the calendar’s value as an advertising piece was the price at which it sold on the market. Within ten days after distribution had started, picture hawkers

---

**FIGURE 1.14.** Street vendor selling advertisement posters, 1909.

all over China displayed them with their other wares on the main shopping streets. If the price rose to eleven or twelve cents each, the calendar was a success.86

In 1919 Julean Arnold, the commercial attaché, warned American businessmen to be sensitive to Chinese tastes, to select illustrations and colors in keeping with Chinese customs, and to avoid those that would fall afoul of Chinese superstitions. Arnold recommended hiring someone familiar with Chinese culture to design and execute illustrations and trademarks.87 Trademarks were a thorn for marketers, for unless carefully designed, they could be easily counterfeited by unscrupulous Chinese manufacturers and draw revenue away from the original product sales. Counterfeiting was not limited to stealing from foreigners; Chinese firms were also victims of unscrupulous activity. In 1934 smokers of The Rat cigarettes were warned in advertisements to “beware of counterfeit trademarks.” The success of My Dear (Meili) cigarettes engendered direct copycats including the Meilee brand; eventually, My Dear brand “spawned at least 160 variants.”88

Chinese firms were better prepared to supply appropriate material for their calendars, but even they erred on occasion. The Chinese tobacco company marketing Yellow River cigarettes produced a calendar for 1924 that bore the slogan “jiazi xinnian, Huang He mingyan,” (1924 is a new year, Yellow River is a famous cigarette). Because of the many homophones in the Chinese language, people from Shandong Province, which often suffered from floods, read the slogan as “1924 is a new year, the Yellow River is famous for flooding.” Ultimately, Yellow River cigarettes were construed as “unlucky,” and the brand floundered.89

American companies doing business in China were advised by Julean Arnold that the “use of calendars is one of the most favored forms of advertising in China, as the calendar is a most important thing in the life of every Chinese. He regulates his life by the sun, moon, and stars, and never enters upon an important negotiation or journey without a careful consideration of omens and signs.”90 Arnold’s statement about Chinese reliance on calendars mistakes calendar posters for the traditional Chinese calendar or for the Chinese almanac, both of which provide data about lucky and unlucky days for a variety of activities. The calendar poster, or yuefenpai, never included such information, although its advertising copy conveyed useful information of another dimension, about products and their benefits. Arnold might not be the best informant, but he did speak from a position of authority, and these comments of Arnold’s echo those by Hutchison a few years earlier:

Most advertisers issue a calendar, and some who never advertise in any other way put out the most elaborate designs. They are highly treasured by the recipients, and a regular trade in them is maintained. When the calendars are issued there is a general rush for them by merchants, clerks, and coolies, who turn them over to the dealers for a consideration; but as a rule there is only a halfhearted attempt on the part of business houses to get these calendars into proper hands, as the best an advertiser can wish for is that his advertisement will be bought and paid for. In the Chinese cities one sees displays of dealers in calendars on walls and in alleys

Introduction
where the dealers do a good business at profitable prices. . . . As in all advertising to the Chinese, the greatest care should be taken in design and wording, though this branch of advertising effort has received the least attention from the western concerns.  

In 1926 Carl Crow wrote the chapter “Advertising and Merchandising” for the new edition of Arnold’s handbook for businessmen in China. As one of the first foreigners to recognize the potential for an advertising agency in China, Crow was eminently qualified as a spokesman for advertising in China. His agency promoted newspaper and billboard advertisement; his clientele were mostly American companies doing business in China. An outspoken advocate of pictorial advertising, Crow repeatedly admonished merchants to use images in their advertising. In his 1937 best seller on doing business in China, he gave tips to pictorial advertisers, urging that the rendition of cigarette packets should always exactly replicate the real packet down to the most minute detail, not be a sketchy approximation of it, and that it should always be depicted open so as to display the full contents of ten cigarettes, confirming that the packet does indeed hold this number of cigarettes, and to show the bright yellow color of the tobacco. Crow recommends using red and gold lettering, which “the Chinese find so attractive.”  

In his 1926 contribution to Arnold’s handbook, however, Carl Crow dismissed the cost-effectiveness of calendar posters in a terse paragraph:  

Calendars are widely used for advertising purposes, and some of the calendars distributed at Chinese New Year are real works of art. The calendars are in great demand, as some of them are readily salable at as much as 50 or 60 cents each; but considering the high cost of calendars, it is doubtful that their distribution is ever justified by the advertising results obtained.  

Part 2 of the very same handbook in which Crow maligns the calendar poster contains vital information about the location and population of important cities; about agriculture, manufacturing, and industrial development; minerals and mining; and other worthwhile facts for twenty-three consular districts. All reports were submitted by the local consul or trade commissioner and all contain data about the local situation regarding advertising and merchandising. The accounts vary in the quality and quantity of the intelligence they record. Most attention focuses on newspaper, poster, and billboard advertising and their costs. Only three areas report on the success of advertisement calendars. Consul Leroy Webber, writing about Xiamen, says, “The best means of advertising in this district are probably the poster, and the free distribution of such attractive specialties as mirrors, fans, calendars and similar articles.” Advertisement calendars were also recommended for businesses in Changsha, where along with “caps, and fans [they] offer ample opportunity to the firm or agency for bringing its wares to the attention of the local public.” The summary of the advertising situation in Kalgan bluntly states, “The only advertising mediums employed in the district, and perhaps the only advertising forms that could be effectively used, are billboards, posters, pictures and calendars. The use of these is widespread.”
In contrast to Crow’s disparaging remarks about the calendar poster and the data from various areas of China that suggest the decline of the advertisement calendar poster, other evidence verifies that posters remained a significant part of advertising in China. In Arnold’s commercial handbook, an entry by trade commissioner George C. Howard, “Import Trade of China,” is a lengthy account of the various types of paper imported into China in 1923, from newsprint to book paper to banknote paper to blotting paper and another twenty or so types. In regard to a category of special papers, including art, enamel, and coated papers, Howard says:

A very large business is done in these classes of paper, used principally in halftone and calendar work. Deliveries must be made in China before June, in order that the Chinese lithographers may have ample time to turn out the great volume of calendars for the Chinese New Year period. The calendar business is one of the largest single items in the trade. Principal supplies are from America, England, Italy, Scandinavia, Japan and Germany.

In 1921 the Cincinnati-based Ault and Wiborg China Company located on Canton Road in Shanghai, with branches in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Hankou, Tianjin, and Manila, advertised in a Shanghai newspaper that they manufactured printing and lithographic inks, dry colors, and aniline dyes, and dealt in printing and lithographic machinery, and in papers of all kinds.

Howard’s observation about the volume of calendars printed speaks for the Chinese as well as the foreign merchant, and there is no doubt that both continued to advertise their products through the attractive medium of color calendars. Westerners were quick to appreciate special calendars. Varied mercantile calendars for the year 1925, for example, were lauded in the Shanghai English-language press. Asiatic Petroleum distributed a calendar to its Chinese customers with “An attractive scene from West Lake showing a temple and the old Thunder Peak Pagoda at Hangchou . . . reproduced in colors.” The Chinese calendar from Callender’s Cable and Construction Company had an allegorical reproduction representing the power of thunder and lightning harnessed to the beneficial use of mankind by the “Goddess of Lighting.” The principal figure is a Chinese goddess holding in her left hand the character representing “electricity” and in her right a mirror reflecting electricity into a Chinese city. Outside the Chinese city is a modern electric lighting station with lines of communication carrying electricity into the city.

Indeed, in the 1930s, advertisement calendars and hangers were still wildly popular, and picture hawkers were still selling them at street stalls, as seen in a photograph published in 1936 (figure 1.15). A comparison of the 1936 vending scene with that from twenty-five years earlier (figure 1.14) reveals the tremendous change that has taken place in the general acceptance of the poster. The modest array of four posters with a variety of pictorial themes is replaced by pictures almost exclusively of women and children literally papering the display wall. Men eagerly gaze at the lovely ladies and step forward to make a selection.

Introduction
In 1937 Carl Crow was again writing about the posters, now not for their supposed ineffectiveness as advertising, but for their value to the Chinese as inexpensive interior decoration, observing that “Chinese buy these hangers as works of art and use them to decorate their homes, and see nothing especially objectionable in the fact that they may advertise a cigarette or a brand of cod liver oil. In Shanghai, and every other large city, there are dealers whose sole stock consists of these advertising calendars and hangers.”

Sometimes, calendars were printed on the reverse of these hangers. Chinese also recognized the value of the advertisement calendar. In 1928 the Chinese government, as part of a nationalistic endeavor to regain a hold on the country’s economy by promoting consumption of domestically produced goods, mounted an exhibition in Shanghai of such commodities. Ma Chonggan wrote an essay criticizing Chinese companies for their lack of good advertisement; the tract was published in the catalogue issued in conjunction with this exhibition. Ma insisted that manufacturers erroneously preferred to focus on written text, whereas, in his view, visual imagery was much more effective because only the literate could read the advertising copy and busy people were often too preoccupied to do that. He opined: “If [ads] have good quality illustrations, then they will catch people’s eye. Take a look at the ignorant public; when they see illustrated calendar posters none of them can put them down, and all are eager to find out the meaning of the illustration.”

---

Carl Crow was not the only person to belittle advertisement calendar posters. A number of Chinese artists and others active in the cultural realm also disapproved of them, but for radically different reasons. According to Mayching Kao, when some Chinese artists came in contact with real Western art, they were dismayed to discover “how successful the calendars had been in conditioning the public taste. After studying the masterpieces of Western art in art schools or abroad, the artists were unanimous in their condemnation of the vulgar and degenerate taste of the calendar painters and their superficial grafting of Western techniques.”

Writing in the radical journal Xin qingnian (New youth) in 1918, Lü Cheng took a dim view of the future of calendar posters. Lü believed that the recent trend for learning Western art and aesthetics had only superficially resulted in advertisement pictures of beautiful women being regarded as art, and the creators of these pictures considering themselves artists. He noted that there were artists talented at producing these pictures in Shanghai, but complained that faces did not differentiate male from female, limbs were out of proportion, and there was little evidence of any familiarity with human anatomy. He felt the emphasis was on fleshly suggestiveness and that this was “really lamentable. All beauty of art is lost and meaningful thoughts that great works of art show is replaced by vulgarity.” Lü Cheng’s was just one of several cries raised against what were perceived as negative values expressed in advertisement calendar pictures. Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), the founder of Xin qingnian and one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, responded to Lü’s article, agreeing that pictures of women so popular in Shanghai were immature and outrageous.

In 1920 Lu Xun (1881–1936), the famous short-story writer and outspoken critic of traditional Chinese culture, as well as an advocate of revitalizing Chinese art, reportedly held up in a public lecture a poster of a lovely woman and decried it in no uncertain terms as an example of decadent art, hardly conducive to the development of revolutionary art in China:

Today . . . calendar posters are popular with ordinary people in Chinese society. The women in calendar posters are sick. Not only are calendar painters unskilled but the subjects of their paintings are disgusting and depraved. China has lots of women who are healthy and strong, but calendar painters only draw sickly ladies so weak they could be knocked down by a gust of wind. This kind of sickness does not come from society. It comes from the painters.

Writing in 1928, Yu Jianhua (1895–1979), a landscapist in the Chinese style, had no sympathy for any form of Western art in China. In an essay on contemporary art, he included a section on Western art wherein, in scathing language, he castigated Western-style painting as practiced in China. Yu maintained that twenty years earlier, no one had seen a real Western oil painting, but opportunist men purchased postcards and prints of oil paintings and, on the basis of this, set up studios to teach Western painting. They acquired a few terms about Western painting and began to condemn Chinese painting. Yu classified Western art in China in five categories:
1. The true Western painting school, of which he claimed there was none in China, for only paintings by native Western artists are “real Western paintings” and Chinese artists, no matter how much they try, cannot rid themselves of a Chinese flavor in taste, composition, technique, or ideas. Even those artists who studied abroad, once they returned to China, reverted to Chinese style and some even began to paint in Chinese traditional medium.

2. The “gilded” Western painting school, referring to students who studied Western art abroad simply to enhance their social status and to enjoy Western food, movies, cafés, and Western women; they might have acquired rudiments of Western color or brushwork; and some even got jobs in art institutions when they returned to China.

3. The “fake” Western painting school, followed by artists whose capabilities were low, but who were good at establishing themselves. Some simply copied from prints; others painted in outrageous fashions. When they realized their art did not resemble Western painting, they termed it self-expression, life expression, developing independent character, or a unique style. Some, imitating neo-impressionism, expressionism, and futurism, considered themselves Cezannes, van Goghs, and Gauguins, even though they lacked fundamental art training.

4. The advertisement calendar posters.

5. Color-and-carbon portraits. In Yu's eyes, only the color-and-carbon portraits ranked lower than advertisement calendar pictures. Of these two schools, he contended: “At the beginning, these two types of art were very popular for several years, but today they have declined like a spent arrow.” Commenting further: “Advertising calendar art and color-and-carbon portraiture seemed to become a profession; they were considered art in the past and dominated the Chinese art world for several years. Today, they have all disappeared from the artistic realm to become part of the commercial world.”

In 1936 Liang Desuo—photographer, self-trained in Western art, and member of the editorial board of the popular magazine Liangyou (Young companion)—surveyed modern art in China. He lamented the decline in the level of artistic taste and placed much of the blame for this on yuufenpai. Liang included a segment on art and the publishing world, briefly reviewing the evolution of pictorials, illustrated books and textbooks, and “hanging materials,” including pictures such as Ten Views of West Lake, Sunday School pictures, classroom scientific charts, and commercial advertisements. Liang admitted that among landscape yuufenpai, the seasonal scenes by Hu Boxiang were praise-worthy and gave pleasure to “the elegant as well as the unrefined.” Liang maintained that yuufenpai subjects were mostly of the “pretty women” variety and that the majority of advertisement pictures were hackneyed. Moreover, he continued, because these pictures were readily available and their content simplistic, they became special items for decoration in ordinary people's houses. As a consequence, the sale of reproductions of ancient and recent traditional-style paintings had decreased.
A more appreciative voice was that of Zheng Yimei (1895–1992), a well-known participant in the Shanghai entertainment, romance literature, and art world of the first half of the twentieth century. In his 1944 appraisal of the art scene of the last thirty years, he emphasized the commodification of art, the necessity for artists to retail their paintings and to provide price lists, or of calligraphers to sell their art by writing book titles for publishers. To Zheng were another means for artists to earn a living, and he remarks on a few artists, giving snippets of biographical information about them or brief characterizations of their artistic styles. Zheng was a good friend of at least two major calendar artists, and his reminiscences of early-twentieth-century Shanghai popular culture published in the late 1980s and early 1990s are important sources of significant information about artists and their world. For, indeed, regardless of the negative opinions of Lü Cheng, Chen Duxiu, Yu Jianhua, Lu Xun, and Liang Desuo, production of advertisement calendar posters and hangers continued unabated through the late 1930s.

Advertisement Art and Artists

In China the first artists employed in preparing these commercial advertisements emerged from the ranks of a vigorous print world that prospered by producing prints for mass consumption. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Shanghai print industry encompassed one domestic print technique, the woodblock print, and two imported techniques, lithography and photography. Each of these had its own traditions, conventions, and requirements in design and production, some of which were transferred into the advertising picture. The late stages of this continuum and the evolving print technology, including lithography and photography in China, are the subjects of chapter 2. Many procedures commonly practiced in the production of these traditional prints, from the structured workshop fabrication methods to the accepted habit of one shop reprinting an image originally issued by a different shop, but with a new title, would carry over into the making of advertisement calendars. Other calendar artists’ initial artistic training was closely linked to Chinese portrait photography.

Pictorial calendars not only continued to be produced as advertisements for consumer goods and services but also became commodities in themselves. Chapter 3 describes how calendar posters were produced and marketed in China, confirming links between both traditional practices (such as workshop procedures) and modern ideas imported from the West (such as advertising a calendar in the news media). This chapter also elucidates the role of the painting school for young male orphans at the Jesuit center, Xujiahui, and of Commercial Press in training budding artists in Western painting techniques. Advertisements and calendar posters were produced through several channels. British American Tobacco, one of the largest and most powerful Western-owned multinational corporations in China, had its own advertising department and its own production procedures. Independent advertising agencies, some run by Westerners, some by Chinese, also contributed to pictorial advertisements.
The transformation of the Chinese advertisement calendar from its uneasy, experimental beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century into full-fledged confident maturity in the 1920s and 1930s was actually the achievement of the artists themselves. It is the artists with their differing artistic styles and different personalities who brought the calendar posters to life. Through their artistic capacities they visualized effective and captivating images, and through their technical skills, they rendered these images into perceptible form. Consequently, the remaining chapters of this book focus on the major commercial artists who designed *yuefenpai*. Their lives, their artistic styles, and their contributions to the development of advertisement calendar art are presented roughly in chronological sequence, placing both artistic and thematic changes in advertisement calendars and the artists themselves into their proper historical context.

Chapter 4 begins with early history of the advertisement calendar poster in Asia as it first appears in Hong Kong, in 1854, and moves to the two earliest extant chromolithographed calendars (for the years 1888–1889 and 1889–1890), made for English companies with branches in China. One of these calendars was prepared by Zhang Zhiming for Thomas Barlow and Brother, which had offices in Manchester, England, and in Shanghai. The calendar is decorated with a multitude of small motifs derived from Indian, English, and Chinese contexts. Zhang is the earliest-known Chinese calendar artist, and his calendar contrasts strongly with other late-nineteenth-century Chinese black-and-white lithographed advertisement calendars issued by newspapers and lottery offices, as well as with colored woodblock calendars that were made, not as advertisements, but for sale as commercial guides for merchants. The chapter concludes with an analysis of yet another type of calendar poster, the colored woodblock prints with current political events as pictorial subject matter.

Zhou Muqiao (1868–1923) is the first calendar artist about whom sufficient data exists to assemble an adequate biography and to evaluate his artistic accomplishments. He is the subject of chapter 5. Zhou is notable for creating a new image for the advertising posters: large-scale figures of Chinese women. His posters were prepared using traditional Chinese painting techniques; he fell on hard times late in life when he was unable to master a new painting technique perfected by Zheng Mantuo (1888–1961), who came to the foreground of calendar poster production around 1915. Zheng and his collaborator Xu Yongqing are the focus of chapter 6. The special technique perfected by Zheng was known as rub-and-paint; it involved rubbing carbon into paper and then overlaying it with light watercolor pigments. Zheng Mantuo became famous not only for promoting this special technique but also for painting pictures of nudes or seminudes (not all necessarily for calendars) that were often offered as subscription premiums by romance-literature magazines. Very early in his career, Zheng collaborated with the older artist Gao Jianfu (1879–1951) in making pictures of pretty women and later, since Zheng was unskilled in landscape depiction, with Xu Yongqing (1880–1953), a former student at the Jesuit orphanage school, who provided backgrounds for Zheng’s pictures of women. Xu himself did a number of attractive advertisement posters depicting famous sites and Buddhist temples in China. As an independent commer-
cial artist, Zheng Mantuo produced of necessity a vast number of calendar posters, some of which were embellished with poems by his friends from the romance-literature world. To keep ahead of his competitors in the depiction of modern women for posters, Zheng kept up perforce with the latest feminine fashions, and his art (and that of his colleagues) contains an invaluable record of changing feminine fashions in early-twentieth-century China, many of which are hybrids of Chinese and Western haute couture.

Of all the major advertisement poster artists, only Xie Zhiguang (1900–1976) also produced black-and-white advertisements for placement in newspapers; he was a recognized Chinese-style painter. He was extremely prolific, producing advertisement calendar posters, black-and-white ads for newspapers, covers for romance-literature magazines and for the well-known pictorial Liangyou. He was a student of Zhou Muqiao and of the prestigious artist Zhang Yuguang (1885–1968), from whom Xie received training in painting backdrops for photographic studios and theaters. Xie may have at one time been on the staff of the advertising agency owned by Carl Crow. In his mature career Xie worked primarily for two large Chinese-owned tobacco companies, the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company (Nanyang Xiongdi Yancao Gongsi) and the Huacheng Tobacco Company (Huacheng Yan Gongsi). Chapter 7 reviews Xie’s life and works, covering the variety of advertising art he produced, including at least one nude.

The commercial artists associated with British American Tobacco produced an array of different posters—some quite lavish and all innovative—under the workshop system in effect there. Four of these artists are presented and their art discussed in chapter 8. Liang Dingming (1898–1959), whose posters were prepared using oil painting techniques, featured rich colors and golden highlights reminiscent of the work of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Liang would later become a semiofficial painter for the Nationalist Party. Hu Boxiang’s (1896–1989) interest in photography helped define and inform the landscapes and the beautiful women he depicted for BAT advertisements. Ni Gengye (dates unknown), during his stint at BAT, moved the portrayal of beautiful women from quiet, static, aloof, and distant young girls to provocative women who smile and gesture at the viewer with an invitational allure. Zhang Guangyu’s (1900–1965) amazing flair for design was nurtured at BAT as he devised, using the latest in art deco motifs and artistic approaches, wondrously inventive and intricate borders for the pictures by Hu and Ni.

Contrasting with the advertisement department at the Western-run British American Tobacco Company is the Chinese-run Zhiying Studio, presented in chapter 9. This commercial art studio was founded by Hang Zhiying (1900–1947), who initially closely followed the style of Zheng Mantuo but eventually broke away from it. The Zhiying Studio depended heavily on the artistry of two men who stayed with the firm throughout its life: Jin Xuechen (1904–1997) and Li Mubai (1913–1991). Hang Zhiying took a paternalistic attitude toward his staff artists, sending Li Mubai to study at the White Goose Painting Institute in Shanghai. The products of the Zhiying Studio vary tremendously in quality, probably because it served as a training ground for some artists, and perhaps also depending on how much the customer was willing to pay. Images seen in advertisement posters prepared by the Zhiying Studio are sometimes copies of photo-
graphs of famous movie stars or entertainers, a practice not limited to the Zhiying Studio. New themes for beautiful women were introduced in the 1930s, especially seminudes, women surrounded with their children, and women engaged in athletic activities.

The florescence of advertisement calendar posters and other pictorial advertising during the 1920s was possible because of Shanghai’s commercial prosperity during this decade of relative peace. Pictorial advertisements continued to thrive during the 1930s despite political crises both nationally and locally, when Shanghai’s own physical and psychological structures were repeatedly interrupted. During this era, advertisement calendar artists produced posters with nationalistic themes, such as the patriotism of the famous woman warrior Hua Mulan. In 1937, fighting between the Chinese and Japanese broke out in north China, and in Shanghai, in response to this new Japanese threat, there were clashes with the Japanese military. Fighting took place on the ground and eventually also in the air as bombs from both the Chinese and Japanese air forces fell on the city, resulting in much civilian loss and extensive property damage. After three months of heavy combat, the Chinese failed to drive the Japanese from Shanghai. The widespread destruction wrought during this struggle was devastating. Trade was effectively strangled; most local industries were unable to function; shipping was limited and restrictions were placed on restoration of business, trade, and residence as well as on transportation within the city. Shanghai was effectively cut off from the rest of the country.

For the next eight years, the flight of Western companies from Shanghai also eliminated a source of income for advertising artists. Some temporarily retired from their profession; others, because of nationalistic feelings, refused to work for the Japanese. A few artists continued to create advertisements for Chinese companies but at a much-reduced level. Production of advertisement posters for private companies ceased with the Chinese Communist takeover of China in 1949.

Chapter 10 outlines what happened to the calendar poster artists who lived and worked in Shanghai after the Communist takeover in 1949. At first they and the style they employed were difficult to fit into the new art scheme dictated by Communist and socialist ideological goals and purposes. During the 1950s, artists struggled to meet these new demands in the propaganda posters and in what were now termed yufenpai nianhua (calendar new-year pictures) that they were required to create. Eventually, Li Mubai and Jin Xuechen, no longer under the supervision of the Zhiying Studio, blossomed as masters of this new mode. Xie Zhiguang developed his traditional ink-and-brush painting to a remarkable degree; his Chinese paintings are now widely sought after. In the early 1990s, though, new more-tolerant views of the past were accompanied by a swell of nostalgia and there began a renewed interest in the old advertisement posters. The posters intrigued people who saw them, and many began to avidly collect and publicize them.