

Inventing Nanjing Road

Commercial Culture
in Shanghai, 1900-1945

Edited by
Sherman Cochran



East Asia Program
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

Invention, Industry, Art: the Commercialization of Culture in Republican Art Magazines

Carrie Waara

Nanjing Road as a metaphor for Shanghai's commercial culture points to the origins of that culture in the retail businesses of Shanghai. The Shanghai lifestyle has long been described in terms of its restaurants, clothes stores, and entertainments. The invention of this style clearly owes most to the driving force of Shanghai's commercial market, but the fashioning of that consumer culture also owes a fair amount to an extraordinary alliance of artists, publicists, businessmen, and technical experts. In the Republican period, mass market publications, department stores, and radio broadcasts promoted the consumption of luxury commodities through advertisements that glorified the "Shanghai style" (*Haipai*) as refined, dashing, cosmopolitan, and, above all, "modern."¹ The urge to be modern was at the core of Shanghai's identity as a treaty port receiving the latest imports from the industrialized West. Nonetheless, this urge to be modern was compounded by the impulse to shape a modern Chinese identity to face the challenges of the twentieth century. Chinese national interests were more and more threatened through the first decades of the Republic, and nowhere more conspicuously than in Shanghai, where the world powers dominated entire areas of the city. The modernism of

1. In fact, the term *Haipai* originated in the late Qing phrase *haishang huapai* to disparage Shanghai painters and craftsmen for catering to the market, and the term continued in the Republican period to express the negative connotations of the marketplace, equated with frivolity, vulgarity, emptiness and deception. It was partially to counter that condescending view of business that the artists and editors in this study promoted commercial and industrial art. For a discussion of the history and meaning of the term *Haipai*, see Zhang Zhongli, ed., *Jindai Shanghai chengshi yanjiu* (Modern Shanghai Studies) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 1130-1159.

the new Republican-era Shanghai style was not a Western import, but was consciously invented to capitalize on and transform modern Western cultural elements for Chinese purposes. This modernism-as-nationalism was a new element in Shanghai's commercial culture.

The publishing industry in particular pictured itself at the center of the Chinese struggle for a higher position in the hierarchy of nations. Rather than challenge the technological criteria that Western (and Japanese) societies held as standards for international status, some Chinese publishers promoted technical or industrial arts as the primary measure of national progress. A significant group of artists and entrepreneurs engaged in periodical publishing in order to help generate and shape a Chinese-style modernism based on a cult of technology and entrepreneurial commercial nationalism. This modernism came to be conflated in the periodicals with a middle-class consumer culture. It emphasized the spread ("democratization") of a domestic lifestyle replete with all the latest news and fashions, amounting to a kind of nation-building based on comfortable, healthy homes managed by informed and educated women. The consequence for Nanjing Road was a highly gendered consumer culture. Advocating an ideal integration of art with daily life, essays supported all kinds of practical and applied arts like furniture, clothing, housewares, interior and architectural design, and commercial art like advertising, display design, and even wrapping paper and package design, as fields for artists and manufacturers to pursue—fields most visible in the shop windows and department stores on Nanjing Road frequented by the female shoppers described by Carlton Benson. Light manufacturing of such goods was also well suited to the Nanjing Road area, which, as Hanchao Lu points out, housed a variety of commercial/residential mixes in shikumen compounds in the alleyways off the main streets. And Fuzhou Road, one of the main commercial thoroughfares that belonged to the Nanjing Road sphere, was Shanghai's noted booksellers' street, where readers purchased current periodicals, including the art magazines at the center of this study.

Three popular magazines in particular, each edited by prominent artists and backed by powerful political or business interests, exemplify the goals and strategies of Shanghai's new commercial culture: *Zhenxiang huabao* (The true record) was established in the dramatic first year of the Republic by two of the founders of the Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting. The brothers Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng were among the first Chinese artists to be identified with the nationalist movement. Allegedly funded by Sun Yat-sen,² their

bookstore-publishing house in Shanghai produced in *Zhenxiang huabao* a new form of publication in China, the photographic art pictorial, which set the pattern for the art magazines that followed it. In particular, it hailed its own use of advanced printing technology and claimed a guiding role for itself as a promoter of industry and technology in China. *Liang you tuhua zazhi* (The young companion pictorial magazine), published from 1926 to 1941 by Wu Liande, a nationalistic entrepreneur with broad overseas connections, was one of Shanghai's most popular and successful pictorial magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. It frequently joined its coverage of the native goods movement with enthusiastic promotion of small-scale industrial and commercial arts. Moreover, its signature portraits of glamorous "covergirls" call to mind the statement by Cao Juren: "*Haipai* is like a modern girl."³ *Meishu shenghuo* (Arts and life) was published in 1934-1937 by a leading Shanghai print industry entrepreneur and edited by a virtual Who's Who in Chinese art for this period.⁴ This prestigious periodical clearly targets women consumers in its "art and life" messages promoting commercial art and consumer industries, but each of these Shanghai art magazines couches its consumer agenda in nationalistic terms and addresses potential producers as well as consumers.

The joint participation in these publications of the cultural elite of the art world and the modern Shanghai business bourgeoisie was a conscious effort to promote the new culture of the city as a model for all of China. They attempted to reconstruct Chinese national identity through an urban focus on the industrialization (*gongyihua*) of art to meet the needs of society, the practical needs of consumers as well as the commercial needs of industry. They promoted new ways for retailers and manufacturers to join forces with artists for economic growth and national development. As a result, the Shanghai search for a new national culture became inextricably linked to the commodities of domestic life.

Gongyi Meishu: Industrial Arts and Artistic Industry

The magazine editors recognized that the modern movement penetrates most widely in the forms of everyday life, and the decorative, applied, or industrial arts comprise the field of art that most embodies the modernist movement. The *Meishu shenghuo* editors stressed consistently that the *gongyi meishu*

2. Wang Bomin, ed., *Zhongguo meishu tongshi* (A General History of Chinese Art) in Vol. 10 of *Jinxiandai meishu* (Modern and Contemporary Art) (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988), 113.

3. Quoted in Zhang Zhongli, *Jindai Shanghai chengshi yanjiu*, 1137.

4. Founder and publisher Jin Youcheng has an entry in Qi Zaiyu, ed., *Shanghai shiren zhi* (Biographies of Notable Shanghai Men) (Shanghai: Zhanwang chubanshe, 1947).

movement⁵ represents a significant link between fine art and socioeconomic life. The decorative industrial arts were seen as the artists' bridge between the "masses" and "beauty."⁶ This movement in China had a double impetus: not only was it a logical extension of the "art for life" movement to promote the practical and applied arts for national glory, it also promoted national economic rejuvenation through consumer culture. Many artists encouraged the development of items for sale and for export.⁷ *Meishu shenghuo* especially emphasized the productive possibilities of art for life's sake.⁸ Such

5. In Chinese, *gongyi* can refer both to technical arts like printing or textile manufacture and to decorative art and design, as well as to craftsmanship and technique. The *Zhongwen da cidian* (Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Language) translates *gongyi meishu* as "industrial art," and describes it as the production of objects of everyday use that are subject to aesthetic criteria. In other words, *gongyi meishu* refers to various kinds of goods meeting the needs of practical life and on which artistic skill or ornamentation is applied. Examples are lacquerware, woodwork, pottery, textiles, and metalwork. *Zhuangshi meishu* is another term used for "decorative arts," but *gongyi meishu* also came to indicate machine production of consumer goods, as well as to refer to industrial design and tool and machine use (common Western associations with the term industrial art). In this work, *gongyi* and *gongyi meishu* will usually refer to the "applied arts" or "decorative arts," except where handicrafts are specifically indicated, as in *Meishu shenghuo*'s promotion of hand-crafted commodities. To distinguish clearly, however, it is important to note that the *gongyi meishu* movement in Republican China had several sources, a major one being the contemporaneous European modern design movement dating approximately from 1890 through the 1930s. Its sources, in turn, lay with the English arts and crafts movement, the nineteenth-century revival of handicraft art championed by the socialist William Morris and emphasizing "art for use" in society, and with the European Romantic tradition in the arts, including interests in folk arts, "Oriental" trends, and nationalistic revivals. Chinese artists also relied on Japanese sources on modern European industrial and handicraft arts.

6. Zhe An, "Zhuangshi meishu zhi xin gujia" (A new appraisal of the decorative arts) serialized installment begun in *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934). Here Zhe An develops a theory of the relationship between the decorative arts and "national" (*minzu*) spirit: Great spirit is expressed in decorative art, evident in such examples as the arts of Greece, Rome, and Paris. Each people wants to express its greatness and glory by building great cities and incomparably beautiful government buildings. Public gardens and handcrafted architecture lead to city and national pride, just as the Champs Élysées nourishes French patriotism. When art and beauty are valued and widely available, a people's spirit will be strong and refined.

7. For example, Gao Jianfu, the esteemed cofounder of *Zhenxiang huabao*, promoted decorated porcelain as a potential export industry and as an art form. See Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 68.

8. See Liu Lin, "Tichang gongyi meishu yu tichang guohuo" (Promote industrial art and promote national goods) in *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934); Liu Suijiu, "Wei gongyi meishu yan" (Speaking for the applied arts), *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934); Lang Shu, "Shangye meishu" (Commercial art), *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934); Zhang Derong, "Gongyi meishu yu rensheng zhi guanxi" (The relationship between the applied arts and human life), *Meishu*

encouragement worked to overcome the anti-business bias inherent in the so-called "amateur ideal" that selling one's artwork devalued it. "A New Appraisal of Decorative Art" set forth the *Meishu shenghuo* argument against the amateur ideal:

From the previous art scene emerged a superiority theme that declared that in order to preserve the respectability of art, artists must be forbidden from engaging in the applied arts. . . . It also claimed . . . artists are just not in the same category [as artisans and that] artwork is not sold for money; whatever is sold is not art. [It also claimed] artwork is not useful; whatever is useful is not art. . . . Yet, in fact, people who condemn the selling of art, . . . who despise applied arts for having no artistic value, . . . will buy pretty patterned fabric and fashionable furniture, and say, . . . "How beautiful this is to look at!" This self-contradictory talk is something we often hear.⁹

Moreover, failure to acknowledge the caliber and the role of artisans and painter-craftsmen in creating great monuments to art like churches and palaces reveals not only a lack of expertise on the part of so-called artists, but an inflated sense of their own worth that is embedded in pre-Republican notions of class and social prestige.

While most people cannot recognize the value of decorative art and the greatness of the "artisan," they fall head over heels for the empty name of "artist." In fact, most . . . artists . . . do not reach the artisans' level of skill. . . . Thus Roger Marx, in his *Le Rapide* magazine article "Salons and the Decorative Arts," says, "We would rather have fewer ordinary painters and a few more useful painter-craftsmen."

There is another group of people who, in order to prop up their stinking airs of being "artists," determine never to do decorative art for fear their status will fall to that of "painter-craftsmen." This is all abnormal thinking that comes out of a people whose . . . art ideology is unhealthy. We must know that the work of the painter-craftsman is of the same artistic value as the artist's. We absolutely cannot ignore them or slight them on account of social status.¹⁰

shenghuo 1 (April 1934); and Tang Jun, "Tashang shiyong yishu di daoshang" (Step onto the road of practical arts), *Yi feng* 2:3 (March 1933): 22-23.

9. Zhe An, "Zhuangshi meishu zhi xin gujia."

10. Zhe An, "Zhuangshi meishu zhi xin gujia."

Meishu shenghuo emphasized the appeal of modern, up-to-date applied arts technology, which supported national development and growth. With more and more advanced techniques available to artists in China, it would be unprogressive to reject such work as unartistic. "If we now want to enter the 'city' of modern civilization, we must purge the empty talk on art and energetically apply ourselves to the decorative arts," one writer urged.¹¹

Industrial art was promoted in *Zhenxiang huabao* and *Liang you* as a way to compete with foreign manufactures in China. In an essay titled "The Relationship between Industrial Arts and Human Life," Zhang Derong remarks that the makers of Chinese decorative arts failed to adapt to the changing requirements of human life. Chinese goods could not compete economically with machine-made foreign products, resulting in the contemporary situation of Chinese economic decline. Zhang bemoans the comparatively backward, even regressive nature of Chinese handicraft arts, and urges art's modernization (*xiandaihua*) and enlivening (*shenghuohua*) through the "industrialization" (*gongyihua*) of art. Zhang saves specific blame for the Chinese art world's negligence in this area. Art academies' failure to institute specialized courses in the applied arts deprive their students of the skills to "meet the needs of society"—including the practical needs of both middle- and working-class consumers as well as the commercial needs of industrial society.¹²

On the pages of *Liang you*, *Meishu shenghuo* and *Zhenxiang huabao*, these promoters of the industrial arts constantly sought new ways for education and commerce to join forces for economic growth and national development. Some were inspired by the ways that commercial artists succeeded in joining their talents to modern industry and business. Perhaps with an eye to encouraging employment on Nanjing Road for art school graduates, both *Meishu shenghuo* and *Liang you* were especially drawn to reproduce the works exhibited by students in the graphic design department at the Shanghai Academy of Art, one of the few modern commercial art programs in the country. *Liang you* featured a vivid selection of the students' designs in a special section on the applied arts titled in English "Decorative and Ad Drawings." The designs included advertisements for Ford cars, a newspaper, and for the state lottery (the last illustrated by an airplane and a new car). The short text that

accompanied the display stated, "The development of commerce depends on art. Various aspects, like design composition and color, are able to catch the viewer's attention . . . and prove effective in soliciting customers. It is a pity our Chinese art world has paid so little attention to this."¹³ As Sherman Cochran notes earlier in this volume, Chinese entrepreneurs and artists alike had initially ignored the American advertising techniques of the British-American Tobacco Company in Shanghai. But when the BAT brought advanced printing technology to Shanghai and began to win over Chinese customers, advertising started to develop there.

By the 1930s, commercial art was vigorously promoted by some in the Shanghai art world. One *Meishu shenghuo* author noted that advertising had become more and more important in the recent era of commercial competition. As more businessmen invested in advertising, advertising itself had become more competitive, he asserted, noting that typeface had become a major way to attract consumers' attention. A second article on commercial art declared that although the term was fairly new, the phenomenon of commercial art had existed for a long time, and was now influenced by the most advanced art techniques and forms. The development of the field worldwide was attributed to the stimulus of capitalist competition. The author's use of examples from advertising campaigns in Paris underscored the global competitiveness of Shanghai's commercial art scene.¹⁴

Showcasing the two Chinese arts academies that had already instituted design curricula, one issue of *Meishu shenghuo* reproduced examples of graphic art from the West Lake National Art Academy in Hangzhou and from the Shanghai Academy of Art. All of the pieces exhibited decidedly Art Deco influences, in the sans-serif-like typography on a set of advertisement designs, and in the curvilinear yet flattened female forms dominating the three other designs. Presumably these student works represented the cutting edge of the movement to combine avant-garde and decorative arts in China.¹⁵ According to Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, imported American and European Art Deco designs of the nineteen-twenties attracted Chinese middle-class consumers,

11. Liu Suijiu, "Wei gongyi meishu yan."

12. Zhang Derong, "Gongyi meishu yu rensheng zhi guanxi" (The relationship between the applied arts and human life) *Meishu shenghuo* 1 (April 1934). From the opposite position, Sanyi Printing Company pledged as its mission the "aestheticization of the industrial arts" (*gongyi meishuhua*). Both agenda ultimately lead to the same goal, the union of art and industry.

13. "Shiyong meishu zhanlan" (Exhibition of applied arts) *Liang you* (February 1937).

14. Zhang (or Zhou?) Yifan, untitled article on advertising and typeface; Yifan, "Chuchuang chenlie" (Window displays); and Liu Guantong, "Meishu ziti" (Artistic typeface) in *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934).

15. Two of the works, from a West Lake Academy exhibition, are anonymous. The Shanghai Academy of Art works are attributed to Lin Yu and Xu Mingying, relatively unknown artists.

who saw them as representations of modern life.¹⁶ The so-called Shanghai Style of graphic art not only incorporated Western elements of Art Deco (such as its crisp lines, geometric forms, and flattening of pictorial space, borrowing from Cubism—which has roots in both African and Asian art) but also incorporated patterns and motifs found in traditional Chinese decorative arts. The accompanying illustrations show how the Shanghai Style often combined Chinese and Western Art Deco forms.

Invention and Technology

It is clear by now that the Shanghai art magazines of the Republican era participated in a much wider cause. *Gongyi meishu* (industrial or decorative arts) was art and more. Alongside the magazines' endorsement of consumer culture and economic development was a fascination with the power of machine technology and advanced processes. Some editors may have appreciated that the prosperous economy of pre-1800 China had depended on a highly developed handicraft industry. The capacity of Chinese industry to "catch up" to Western levels depended to a certain extent on its handicraft economy. For instance, ingenuity and enterprise, identified so closely with the rise of American industrial democracy, were qualities long known to Chinese society—but now were perceived as lying moribund and in need of rejuvenation.¹⁷ The American public's infatuation with machines and inventors also spread world-wide at this time. The growing mass market press, particularly magazine publishing, was integral to the diffusion of this interest in Shanghai.

Therefore, many Chinese publications seriously took on the responsibility to disseminate news of science and technology. This news also became a source of entertainment for readers, enhancing the marketability of Chinese magazines. With the combined zeal of the missionary and the publicist, periodicals set about informing the Chinese public of new inventions and discoveries and their marketable applications. For example, in *Zhenxiang huabao*, a lengthy, serialized translation appeared of a Japanese work titled

16. Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990), 44. See also the variety of designs for advertisements, packaging, tablecloths, and screens exhibited by students of the Shanghai Academy of Arts in *Meishu shenghuo* 36 (March 1937).

17. John Schrecker has implied that these qualities had long been stock resources among the secular, mercantile Chinese, but the nineteenth-century decline of the *junxian* system in China, concurrently with the rise of the Western Industrial Revolution, led to a certain cultural amnesia. John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 77-80.

"On recent world discoveries." Its self-promoting preface proclaims that the current scientific and material age was dominated by Europe and America precisely because of the widespread popularization of scientific knowledge in the West via publishing. To foster such popularization in China, the article intends to introduce the general reader to the recent history of contemporary Western science and invention.¹⁸ By making new scientific knowledge accessible to general readers, and by offering models of applied science, many Republican periodicals sought to rouse the imagination and innovation that would lead to material and social progress in China.

Feature articles ranged from entertainingly wacky to potentially transformative topics. One amusing piece in *Zhenxiang huabao* spotlighted the "waterbike," an impractical, muscle-powered cycle that moved on the surface of water. Intending "to encourage new invention" the article emphasizes that the Hong Kong inventor was ethnically Chinese. Articles and photographs on the new science and industry of aviation appeared frequently throughout the Republican period in Chinese periodicals of all kinds. They promoted readers' understanding of advanced technology in a developing field where the Chinese could establish themselves at the beginning, ostensibly rendering international competition more equitable.

Frequent reminders of the arms race in popular Republican era magazines admonished that the development of industry and technology in China was a life-and-death enterprise. The international context of Western and Japanese military domination is explicitly represented in the periodical press. In *Zhenxiang huabao* and *Meishu shenghuo*, whole pages of photos and charts detail British, French, German, and American naval ships and commanders stationed in China; photomontages proclaim the latest advances in weaponry; illustrated news articles compare the armies and navies of the world; great warships and their commanders are portrayed in in-depth stories about modern military training and strategy; and cartoons caricature the brutality of modern arms technology and mass warfare.¹⁹ The early Republican press, including these three popular art magazines, frequently used the example of Japan's

18. Bu Guosheng, trans., "Jinshi famingtan" (On recent world discoveries), *Zhenxiang huabao* 1 through 8, non-consecutively.

19. See for example the accompanying illustration, as well as "Lun lieqiang zhu Hua jiandui zhi shili" (On the strength of the Powers' fleets stationed in China) in *Zhenxiang huabao* 8 and the first and second issues of *Meishu shenghuo* (April and May 1934), which feature photos of a new style of American tank and its inventor, an article on international developments in chemical warfare, and photographs of Japanese and Soviet arms, German, British, and Japanese military airplanes and airplane carriers, and British warships and gas masks.

military-industrial complex to demonstrate how modernization could lead to national strength and international status.²⁰

"Guide to the Industrial Arts" represents *Zhenxiang huabao's* definitive statement on the subject. This detailed analysis takes a world historical perspective to craft a critique of China's comparative lack of progress in the industrial arts and to provide a firm rationale for their promotion. The article opens with this preface:

Since the mid-seventeenth century, the various countries of Europe and the West have competed in promoting the industrial arts, which have steadily advanced. Until now, the world's powers . . . have seen their industrial arts excel and their authority expand. Similarly, [we have] the recent [example of] Japan, whose . . . imitation, research, and advance [in industrial arts] have stunned Europe and America. Now, today's world is an industrial arts world. . . [and] those who do not think about how to advance, promote, and manage their industrial arts . . . will not be able to [compete] in the world.²¹

The rapidity of change becomes pressing when research in the ascendant nations can advance "one thousand *li* in one day" while "countries with thousands of years of civilization can only watch their backs."²² So, the article accuses, "to be content and not to seek progress, to taste the world and not to plan reforms, to hoard wealth and be unwilling to invest it" could have tragic consequences for China. The article warns that China's independence is at stake in this competition. "Twentieth century commercial battles intensify into the drama of military battles. For this reason, every country in the world competes (economically) to eliminate (its rivals)."²³

The article contends that the few workshops and schools built in recent years in China "do not amount to a drop in the ocean," especially given the size and resources of the country. Moreover, it maintains, the government's hardpressed financial administration exacerbates the situation by devoting all its funds to the military. "The economy would not be this bad if the government paid more attention to the industrial arts."²⁴ Instead of developing

20. After Japan took Manchuria, however, it served less often as a popular media model for Chinese modernization.

21. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan" (Guide to the industrial arts), *Zhenxiang huabao* 17, 5.

22. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan," 5.

23. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan," 7.

24. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan," 5.

new manufactured goods, as other countries were doing, China continued to experience only the decline of her ancient arts. The essay continued:

Various countries . . . seek unethical profit from us, and we, paradoxically, have no [will] to resist and boycott. Won't we be sorry! In the shops, foreign goods are everywhere. . . Even for small daily necessities we are willing to let foreigners profit from us and we do not seek out or promote [native] copies [of foreign goods]. That is the reason we have no industrial arts consciousness. And without industrial arts consciousness, then there is no industrial arts reality. And without it, it is hard to speak of competing [with the West].²⁵

Promoting "industrial arts consciousness" thus was meant to solve the problem of the increasing consumption of foreign goods at the expense of a decreasing consumption of Chinese goods. This version of economic nationalism is an adjunct to the patriotic boycott and native goods movements, especially after Tokyo pressured the Nanjing government to suppress anti-Japanese boycotts after the Tanggu truce. It is the tactic seized by many of the professional, commercial, and industrial elite, whose interests, not surprisingly, are most served by such a strategy. The new element in this form of economic nationalism is the urgent focus on technological awareness and development. As the article enthuses, public education and enterprise in the industrial arts could no longer be delayed, and multi-class and multi-generational solidarity over this issue held the promise of success:

The poor give their labor, the rich give their capital, the young study its principles, the strong plan its achievement. . . Unity of purpose is a formidable force. Our industrial arts will have its day of flourishing. . . We must plan for roads, mines, forestry, shipbuilding, management, architecture, medicine, textiles [and so on].²⁶

The article presents a painstaking analysis of the relationship of the industrial arts to society and to the nation, addressing the need for advances in agriculture, manufacturing, and academia, and the role of the military, government treasury, and rights and privileges under the Republic. Its mention of household commodities and clothing, "the small daily necessities" that competed with foreign manufactures and were a focus of the native goods movement, raises a topic that later became prevalent in both *Liang you* and

25. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan," 5.

26. Haifeng, "Gongyi zhinan," 5-6.

Meishu shenghuo. Those magazines often presented the decorative or graphic design potential in such light manufactures. *Liang you* urged the promotion of small-scale industrial arts by reporting on native goods exhibitions and by publishing regular "how-to" features on specific products like glassware and laquerware.²⁷ *Meishu shenghuo* also regularly published features and photographic spreads on various industrial and decorative arts that lent themselves well to the production of consumer commodities.

Liang you kicked off one series with an article titled "Should small industrial arts be promoted?" The article acknowledges that obstacles like limited capital, technology, and other resources made large-scale manufacturing dependent on foreign assistance. But it reprimands the Chinese people for their willingness to buy small foreign manufactures and "to let silver coins one by one fly away to foreign countries." It focuses its attack, however, on Chinese capitalists and entrepreneurs, who

think they always have to spend money building houses to rent. . . and that running a factory is dangerous. . . and that things with tiny profit margins like toys, cosmetics, and writing utensils are naturally to be looked down on. Young students think that if they study law and politics, when they graduate they can become officials or lawyers . . . [or] military officers. [They feel that] doing small-scale industrial arts is time consuming and troublesome, so the only people who engage in it are those from poor families with no means to study [their fields]. With low goals [in mind], they attain success. . . But I see a lot of unemployed people seeking work who don't even think of learning an industrial art and standing on their own feet.²⁸

Meishu shenghuo encouraged Chinese entrepreneurs to invest in consumer goods manufacturing in very concrete and educational ways. *Meishu shenghuo* saw itself as an active participant in China's modern industrial sector, and often printed diagrams and instructions for light industrial products, especially textiles. For example, one three-page article offers three different weave patterns, with loom instructions and photographs, to help China's textile factories "adapt to current world trends in consumer desires for beauty." It is

27. See, for example, Lin Er, "Xiao gongyi (kehua boli di yanjiu)" (Small industrial art (Research on glass engraving)), *Liang you* 6 (July 15, 1926): 14 and Lin Er, "Xiao gongyi: Meishu qiqi di zuofa" (Small industrial art: How to make artistic lacquerware), *Liang you* 4 (May 15, 1926): 24.

28. Lin Er, "Xiao gongyi yinggai tichang di ma?" (Should small industrial arts be promoted?), *Liang You* 2, 5.

followed by another illustrated article explaining fabric samples.²⁹ *Meishu shenghuo* published numerous articles and photo spreads on Chinese factories, providing shots of machines, processes, and workers' conditions. One two-page article describes in detail the writer's visit to a fabric dying mill in Changzhou, complete with scenic photos of old bridges, fields, and trees around the exteriors of the women workers' dormitory and the main plant, lending a certain amount of country charm. Shots of the interior of the factory show it to be ultra-modern, with huge rows of machines.³⁰

Frequently *Meishu shenghuo* published photo essays on manufacturing processes for goods that modern citizens might take for granted on Nanjing Road, like light bulbs, tin, and salt. These kinds of essays often focused on China's natural resources (tungsten for lightbulb filaments, for example) and on the types of labor needed (such as for young workers with fine eyesight and dexterity to make lightbulbs).³¹ They also emphasized advanced technical processes and equipment, such as in an early piece on a native cotton textile factory, which showed rows and rows of immaculate, complicated machinery. *Meishu shenghuo* even published a photo essay on a "scientific" chicken factory.³² In fact, these examples work well to illustrate *Meishu shenghuo*'s breadth of coverage of native industries, from advanced machine-processed goods to labor-intensive enterprises. Such articles show a continuing concern by Chinese modernizers to educate the public on new technologies and approaches, just as *Zhenxiang huabao* had published articles on inventions and industrial models of applied science.

By the seventh issue, these types of articles are enshrined in their own regular "industrial" applied arts section in *Meishu shenghuo*, complete with a heading in which the word *gongyi* in stylized, Art Deco-influenced calligraphy is incorporated into an impressive photograph of factory towers.

29. Ling Donglin, "Fangzhi: Zhiwu zhi sanyuan zuzhi" (Weaving: Three patterns of cloth) and Ling Donglin, "Zhiwu yangben jieshuo" (Explanation of fabric samples), *Meishu shenghuo* 7 (October 1934).

30. Zhang Sanli, "Canguan Changzhou dacheng fangzhi ranchang jilue" (A record of a visit to Changzhou's fabric dying plant), *Meishu shenghuo* 9 (December 1934). This discussion has tones of the New Village movement for workers' housing that the Chinese YMCA promoted in the 1920s. See also the article by Hua Lin, "Xincun yu xuequ" on creating industries in the countryside in *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934).

31. Luo Gusun, "Diandengpao zhizao" (Making lightbulbs), *Meishu shenghuo* 7 (October 1934); see also "Guangxi xikuang zhi cailian gongchang jishi" (Factual recording of the tin refining process in Guangxi), *Meishu shenghuo* 41 (August 1937).

32. "Guohuo baozhi zhizaochang zhi yi" (A native products cotton textile factory) and "Guohuo tangzi zhizaochang zhi yi" (A native products enamel ware factory), *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934). See also "Kexuehua di yangji" (Scientific poultry raising), *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934).

smokestacks and rail lines. In the next issue, the photo is replaced by a print of a Western painting of multiple belching smokestacks in a changing natural landscape, capturing the sense of dynamism and growth that *Meishu shenghuo* hoped to inspire. While this scene is a far cry from Nanjing Road's commercial scenery, it is the imagined source of growing numbers of goods to be sold there.

In an editorial postscript, the motivation behind the *gongyi* section is explained in this way: "The spirit of this section consists in its equal emphasis on theory and practice. . . because we understand clearly: National salvation lies first in relieving our rural communities and promoting industrial enterprise."³³ Elsewhere, an editorial states that the relationship of *gongyi* to the native goods movement was critical, and "We feel that this is truly 'real life,' worth our special advocacy."³⁴ *Gongyi* as the arts of everyday life, with their basic connection to everyday livelihoods, gave concrete materiality to the magazine's calls for national rejuvenation. Aimed at a bourgeois audience with the means for developing China's technological capacity, the message ultimately championed middle-class consumerism and utopian populism as the way to address the social, political, cultural, and economic issues of modernization. As Carlton Benson notes elsewhere in this volume, Shanghai culture found a way to undermine the New Life Movement's anti-consumerist messages even as it incorporated the ideal of national rejuvenation. Interestingly, the rhetoric almost anticipates some of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the 1980s, and particularly his promotion of consumer goods industries after 1989.

Inventing the Shanghai Style Home and the Gendering of Shanghai's Consumer Culture

A great deal of the discussion about commercial and applied art in these Republican era magazines is aimed at businessmen to try to get them to think in terms of the needs for artistic talent in their field as well as at artists to try to get them to think of applying their skills to economically productive enterprises. Middle-class women are also central to the magazines' promotion

33. "Bianhou" (Postscript), *Meishu shenghuo* 8 (November 1934). This view echoes Dong Ruzhou's position in the liberal debate over China's modernization priorities. See Susan Mann's analysis of the "reconstructionist paradigm" of Chinese urbanization in her "Urbanization and Historical Change in China," *Modern China* 10:1 (January 1984): 100-107.

34. "Bianhou" (Postscript), *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934). Photos of native goods rallies and exhibitions that were held as part of the government's New Life movement also appeared in *Meishu shenghuo*.

of economic modernization and Chinese consumerism, particularly through the championing of decorative arts for the home. For *Meishu shenghuo* especially, female subscribers were the foundation of its readership. Many sought and found in these art magazines the opportunity to polish their cultural proficiency through exposure to reproductions of Chinese and Western art and to gain information about news and trends while preparing to raise families under the radically new circumstances of urban Shanghai. As Wen-hsin Yeh has noted,

Already in Republican cities a new breed of cultured women was being brought forth through . . . [new-style] schools. Compared with old-fashioned ladies, these women saw the importance of speaking softly and conducting themselves with style. Those who had attended missionary schools had even acquired a love for Western visual arts and music for the elevation of the spiritual state of everyone in their future families.³⁵

Women consumers, responsible for outfitting and maintaining stylish Shanghai homes, could be counted on to pay close and enthusiastic attention to the decorative arts works on display in the magazines and to seek them in the stores on Nanjing Road.

Images of the modern Shanghai woman, confident, stylish and beautiful, abound in advertising and pictorials of the Republican period. By the mid-1920s, popular magazines often included large-scale, colorful photos and paintings of beautiful young women. In fact, the covers of *Liang you* magazine were almost exclusively pictures of beautiful women. Usually they were glamour portraits taken at commercial photographic studios. Color was applied to the black-and-white photos by artists. Each of the "covergirls" was identified by name, and sometimes also by school or vocation. Most were movie stars or students, who wore their hair fashionably bobbed, dressed in the latest Shanghai styles, and represented *Liang you*'s standard of modern Chinese womanhood: poised and confident, exquisitely coiffed and attired, the model of contemporary, urban propriety. Thomas Lawton has noted that the convention in Chinese figure painting was for women to illustrate moral stories, where well-bred, virtuous women represented paragons of filial

35. Wen-hsin Yeh, "Progressive Journalism and Shanghai's Petty Urbanites: Zou Taofen and the Shenghuo Enterprise, 1926-1945" in Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), 210.

piety.³⁶ There is something of that tone in these covergirls' portraits, even those of movie stars. Their seductive beauty was clothed in a certain wholesome, covergirl respectability. They represented both *Liang you's* physical and social ideal of the modern woman: the beautiful and virtuous prospective wife.

In Western art history, John Berger's well-known essay on the female nude broke new analytical ground in suggesting the correspondence between Western representations of women in oil painting and in contemporary mass media, and some of his ideas about the social presence of women seem relevant here. The importance of a woman's looks, her appearance to others, has been critical to her success in life—a success conventionally predicated on marriage—both in the West and in China. The prevalence of foot-binding is the telling evidence that this was so in China, and not just among the middle and upper classes. The artistic representation of women thus has been the abstraction of socially-constructed standards of ideal beauty intended for the male gaze.³⁷ While each of the *Liang you* covergirls had her own distinctive "look," nevertheless, just like the court ladies in traditional paintings, "their faces were sweet and expressionless, conforming to ancient standards that emphasized elegantly arched eyebrows, hooked nose, and pursed lips."³⁸

Furthermore, most of the covergirls look directly at the camera, returning its gaze, fully aware of being seen, of being on display. Alice Hyland remarks of a Qing dynasty female portrait, "Her direct gaze implies erotic overtones."³⁹ This was also the case with the fetching portraits on the covers of *Liang you*, intimating fulfillment of the fantasies of the male audience/spectator of the magazine. Female *Liang you* readers would also have been attracted by the covers, in a "way of seeing" by which John Berger explains glamour as a function of social envy.⁴⁰ Given the lack of role models for the dawning

36. Thomas Lawton, *Chinese Figure Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1973), 9-12.

37. Berger has also noted that painting has traditionally been a celebration of material property and status in the West, and this may also be evident both in traditional Chinese court figure painting and in modern magazine covers. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1977), 45-64, 108-110, and 139.

38. Alice R.M. Hyland, *Deities, Emperors, Ladies and Literati: Figure Painting of the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1987), 70-71.

39. Hyland, *Deities, Emperors, Ladies and Literati*, 72.

40. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 146-149, and Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 58 and passim. Ellen Laing has admirably demonstrated that mildly erotic themes could also be suggested in the shinū genre through poetic imagery or references. See her "Chinese Palace-style Poetry and A Palace Beauty," *The Art Bulletin* 72:2 (June 1990), 284-295; "Erotic Themes and Romantic Heroines Depicted by Ch'iu Ying," *Archives of Asian Art* 59 (1996), 68-91; and

modern world, readers sought them "on the screen and glossy page."⁴¹ Shanghai was the Hollywood of China and many of the covergirls were movie stars—celebrity glamour incarnate. One of the most famous international stars to grace the cover of *Liang you* was Anna Mae Wong (Huang Liushuang), the Chinese American actress, who signed her publicity portraits "Orientially yours."⁴² Wong capitalized on exoticism in American society and at the same time afforded modern Chinese the image of an Asian woman successfully competing in a business dominated, like Western culture in general, by notions of white supremacy. The posh theatres on Nanjing Road showed mainly Western-made films starring caucasian actors and actresses, but *Liang you* had a Chinese face.

Female readers wanted to look like the covergirls, but at least two of *Liang you's* readers objected to the glamorous imagery, demanding "reforms" to place "real people" (*zhen ren*) on the magazine covers. The editor promised "reforms," publishing a photo of a decidedly plain-looking young student reading the next issue, which sported a cover showing a less colorful, more austere elegant woman's portrait.⁴³ However, subsequent covers were richly glamorous, as before. The fantasy of being beautiful supported the new-style daydream of modern love and romance preceding marriage.

The hierarchies of gender are similarly reinforced by all three magazines. They presented images of women as fashion plates and as objects of the male gaze, even though the women pictured also represented the new "modern woman" who was challenging traditional female social roles worldwide. They contributed to the *modern* social construction of the docile female body, self-regulated through fashion, through advertising, and through her beauty role. In a sense, the magazines fostered the democratization of beauty and of the New Woman through mass production of these images. In another sense these images are symbols for prescribed female behavior and for the reordering of

"Notes on Ladies Wearing Flowers in their Hair," *Orientalism* 21:2 (February 1990), 32-39.

41. Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 58.

42. Editor Liang Desuo notes that the *Liang you* cover of Ms. Wong sported her "new style of writing her signature." These were publicity portraits Ms. Wong presented to the founder of *Liang you*, Wu Liande, while he was visiting Hollywood. She also introduced Wu to her co-star Douglas Fairbanks. In the next issue of *Liang you*, a photo of Wu and Fairbanks appeared, and Wu wrote about seeing the Japanese house in which Fairbanks and Mary Pickford lived in Hollywood. See "Xie zai bianzhe zhi ye," *Liang you* 16 (June 30, 1927): 35.

43. "Bianzhe yu duzhe," *Liang you* 28 (July 1928): 38.

the social hierarchy itself.⁴⁴ The idealization of female beauty and domesticity, with an almost exclusive focus on appearance, contains a consumer imperative essential to the development of industrial society.⁴⁵

By the 1930s, Chinese women of means were told that they could play an important role in reconstructing the nation as homemakers, mothers, and consumers of art and household goods. *Meishu shenghuo* culminated this tendency to fuse popular interests in fashion, style, art and technology with modern industrial society's cult of domesticity. There are obvious parallels with the Victorian cult of domesticity, which, like *Meishu shenghuo*, emphasized the cultivation of taste and style among the middle class.⁴⁶ Both *Meishu shenghuo* and the Victorian cult of domesticity fostered bourgeois attempts to distinguish oneself through lifestyle. Given the difficult conditions that the Chinese majority lived in, the middle class no doubt did seek a superior lifestyle, particularly in material terms. Many articles in *Meishu shenghuo* are geared toward presenting new living options for modern families, such as one devoted to "the practice of artful living," which describes a Chinese version of the garden city movement. The piece is illustrated with photos of upper-class children, some artfully posed and others at play and study, a Western-type (Sears bungalow-style) model home, and bird's-eye view of "Rose Garden New Village." The article outlines the benefits and responsibilities of suburban versus city living. It even includes ideas about how women's businesses like silkworm and honeybee raising, embroidery, weaving, and sewing enterprises could be established to give women "opportunities for service." This describes a new, nationally contributive role

for women, as well as new kinds of urban-rural relations.⁴⁷ In Issue 4 (July 1934) Hua Lin writes in "Xincun yu xuequ" about a plan to create new suburbs and "academic districts" that would support a new, cultured and productive lifestyle.

Clifford Clark has noted the transformative effect of magazine reading on Victorian American women through the creation of "an imaginative world of new opportunities and experiences . . . (which) implied the possibility of a new individualism founded upon commodity consumption."⁴⁸ *Meishu shenghuo* published many "how-to" kinds of articles directed toward homemakers, such as one on fashion that includes directions for making a stylish child's coat, one on autumn snacks that includes recipes for mooncakes and dumplings, several on knitting, complete with patterns, and even a serialized feature on family medicine and hygiene.⁴⁹ *Meishu shenghuo*'s sixth issue was devoted to children, and the seventh issue was devoted to family life, making it very clear that the "modern girl" to whom it addressed itself was going to be married and have a family and still be concerned with China's future.

Meishu shenghuo's fourth issue is devoted to the theme *Funi guohuo*, "Women [for] national goods," 1934 having been designated the Women's Year of Domestic Products in support of China's native goods movement. The cover of the magazine shows a high-heeled woman doing embroidery at an Art Deco dressing table and seated in a modern, chrome-legged easy chair (see illustration 3.1). She is surrounded by tastefully decorated items of household

47. "Ertong yu xincun: Meishu shenghuo zhi shijian—Xincun shenghuo di jiazhi yu renwu" (Children and New Village: The practice of artful living—The value and responsibilities of New Village life), *Meishu shenghuo* 7 (October 1934). The Chinese name of the "ideal community" described in the article is Qiangweiyuan Xincun, but I have been unable to find more information about it beyond this article. One ideological assumption shaping this Republican discourse is the antinomial stereotype of corrupt city vs. pure countryside. See Susan Mann's valuable analysis of Republican Chinese paradigms of urbanization, "Urbanization and Historical Change in China," *Modern China* 10:1 (January 1984), esp. 87-113.

48. Clark, *American Family Home*, 140.

49. See "Shizhuang" (Fashion), "Qiutian di jiyang dianxin" (Several kinds of autumn snacks), and an untitled photo-article on women's fall fashions, featuring glamorous evening wear in *Meishu shenghuo* 7 (October 1934); Yu Zaixue, "Jiating yiyao weisheng jiangzuo" (Lectureship on family medicine and hygiene), "Chi xie di yishu" (The art of eating crab), and "Maoxian bianwu zhi jiben jishu ji qi yingyongfa" (Basic techniques and applications of hand knitting) (including diagrams and step-by-step instructions) in Issue 8 (November 1934); and a serialized article for pregnant women, "Renfu xuzhi" (What women with child should know), *Meishu shenghuo* 11-12 (February-March 1935).

44. The *xiao jiating* (nuclear family) movement in Republican China is treated briefly in Wen-hsin Yeh, "Progressive Journalism," 205-214, and is a central theme in Susan Glosser's work.

45. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 18. See also Janet Wolff, "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics," in her *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. 124-125.

46. Among the many works on this subject, one with direct relevance to *Meishu shenghuo*'s focus on home-making is the excellent book by Clifford E. Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).



3.1. The magazine cover for the fourth issue of *Meishu shenghuo* on "Women's National Goods" (*funü guohuo*) is shown here. Middle-class women were central to *Meishu shenghuo*'s promotion of consumerism and light industry. *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934).

use, such as a vase, carpet, lamp, and spittoon. An editorial explaining the illustration declares, "We take 'Promote Native Goods' as a way to advance toward the goal of 'mass production' and 'practical life.'"⁵⁰ *Meishu shenghuo* urged its audience in rhetoric echoing New Life Movement themes: "Citizens' most urgent tasks are to promote a national culture, build productivity, and reform social life."⁵¹ Yet, as with the *tanci* described by Carlton Benson, the actual implied task was to heighten female consumer demand on Nanjing Road.

Readers of the art magazines were especially encouraged to pay attention to the more private realm of home interior design and decorative arts. The tradition of interior design in China had been refined to exquisite extremes by the literati elite from the eleventh century on. Furniture, desk accessories, tea ware, and paintings together were taken as an embodiment of the taste and character of the owner.⁵² In Republican times, domestic material culture was likewise an important aspect of the Shanghai style. It is possible that the opening of the Forbidden City in the mid-1920s to sight-seers and photographers, whose photos were reproduced nationally in the pictorial magazines, contributed to a new popular focus on the aesthetics of private home life, but this attention was evident even in the first year of the Republic in *Zhenxiang huabao*.

In an ironic contrast to the New Life Movement's later encouragement of austerity, the magazine attacked traditional Chinese domestic austerity, initiating the pattern of subsequent periodical press coverage of home interior design by merging national social, political, cultural, and economic considerations with a concern for individual family attainment of middle-class domestic comfort. An intriguing article titled "Republican lens: American family and society" compares Asian and Western domestic practice, suggesting significant conclusions about the need for greater Chinese consumerism.

50. The magazine regarded this cover as very special, and provides background information about it in an editorial postscript. "Although we say our editing is all done by committee and the responsibility for ideas is collective, this time we especially applied Liu Puqing's main theme, ideas, and design." Liu Puqing was one of the editors who was intensely involved in promoting the decorative and industrial arts. The editorial thanks several "native goods" companies for supplying items for the cover, and it thanks Ms. Chen Yanyan, "who fervently promotes native goods, and who is the main subject of the photograph." "Bianhou" (Postscript), *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934).

51. "Fakanci" *Meishu shenghuo* 1 (April 1934): n.p.

52. See for example the catalog of the 1991 exhibit titled *Chinese Scholar's Studio: A Literati's Paradise* held at the Seattle Art Museum.

Asian people's lifestyles are cheap and mean. Westerners' are the opposite. Chinese use the pretext of being thrifty and frugal not to be particular about food, drink, and clothing. We treat ourselves meagerly. The places we live are damp, narrow, and cramped. Even the wealth of the middle class and above is hidden behind poor, small doors of bamboo. . . . How can we blame the people? Simplicity has become common practice, and this restraint still has not opened up.⁵³

Objecting to "miserly" Asian lifestyles, the author's critique of Chinese austerity has as much to do with reconstructing national identity as it does with material culture. This condemnation of Chinese austerity is very much a part of the Republican attempt to create a new Chinese culture to contravene and replace that of the Qing dynasty.⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that the material culture of the home suggests a site for the creation of personal and national identity. What a person makes of his or her immediate private or family environment is an expression of identity.⁵⁵ The material culture of the home is thus a means of self and group expression. This focus on the home shifts the reader's gaze from public to private spheres and establishes the importance of the latter to the former. The article advocates loosening customary Chinese restraint in home design and furnishing, for instance maintaining that Chinese conventionally allocate half of the space in their homes to the traditional altar and receiving room,

and rooms where they live are dark, narrow, unhealthy, and don't count [for anything in the house plans]. In the West, no matter whether parlor, dining room, or bedroom, all are deliberately arranged so that there is no difference among them in quality.⁵⁶

This implication of egalitarianism in Western home design ostensibly represents "democratic" (in effect a code for Western middle-class) well-being and comfort to the Chinese audience. In criticizing traditional Chinese house

53. Youke, "Gongheguo zhi jing: Meiguo jiating ji shehui" (Republican lens: American family and society), *Zhenxiang huabao* 3, 17.

54. The historical inversion of this process may be found not only in the New Life Movement, but much earlier in the promotion of a relatively austere aesthetic by Confucians reacting to the highly ornamented styles of the Han aristocracy, which is a main theme in Martin Powers's *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

55. Mencius' strong sense of the influence of environment on the person would be a familiar notion to early Republican artists advocating such changes.

56. Youke, "Gongheguo zhi jing," 17.

design the article blames domestic environmental factors for personal ill health. Thus, drawing on the accepted duty to promote a strong and vital nation, the article obligates modern Chinese families to seek and create healthy home environments.

A Question of Class

Inevitably, one must recognize that the Shanghai consumer culture was a bourgeois-centered restructuring of Republican society that benefitted its own class based on its access to expertise and income. For example, in the first issue of *Meishu shenghuo*, contributing editors of the magazine provided examples of industrial arts that they had designed. Notable are the clean, functional lines of Zhang Derong's furniture designs for Bauhaus-type modular storage units and a desk belong to the emerging International Style of modernist art. Zhang's submission was titled "Economical Wood Furniture."⁵⁷ The accompanying text echoes the same concerns voiced by Deutscher Werkbund designers: economy, simplicity, and beauty. "An item must be multi-functional, its form beautiful, assembly simple, and price cheap in order to be enjoyed in human life."⁵⁸ German design themes likewise stressed the utilitarian, versatile, and standardized in order to bring costs down to middle-class affordability.⁵⁹ In fact, although modern German design repeatedly gave cheap industrial production as its *raison d'être*, many designs were barely industrial and not cheap. This paradox seems to have been replicated in China, where simplicity and economy were also empty slogans of the New Life Movement.

Much of the work *Meishu shenghuo* introduced as industrial arts, particularly that relating to home and interior design, could hardly have been accessible to middle-class families, even when they were portrayed as "economical." For example, three house plans, complete with artists' renderings of the landscaped homes and variations on the plans, were titled "Economical Homes" (*Jingji zhuzhai*).⁶⁰ The designs could have been taken

57. Zhang Derong, "Jingji muqi," *Meishu shenghuo* 1 (April 1934).

58. Untitled essay accompanying furniture designs by Zhang Derong and laquer painting by Lei Kueiyuan, *Meishu shenghuo* 1 (April 1934).

59. Tim Benton, Charlotte Benton and Aaron Scharf, *Design 1920s: German Design and the Bauhaus 1920-1932: Modernism in the Decorative Arts: Paris 1910-30* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: The Open University Press, 1975). See also Tim and Charlotte Benton, eds., *Form and Function: A Sourcebook for the History of Architecture and Design, 1890-1939* (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1975).

60. Peng Baigang, "Jingji zhuzhai yifu" and Liu Jiasheng, "Jingji zhuzhai erfu," *Meishu shenghuo* 1 (April 1934). Pattern books for building family homes were popular in the United States beginning with the early nineteenth-century Victorian housing reform

straight out of American or English magazines, although they are attributed to members of the Shanghai Architecture Association. The first was a colonial-style frame house with bay and dormer windows, wooden shutters, columned porch, shingle roof and brick chimney. The second is described as a simple variation on the colonial theme, a cosy English-style cottage with stone path and inset fireplace illustration. The third is a small version of a half-timbered Tudor manor house, complete with peaked gables.⁶¹ These designs are a far cry from the shikumen houses that housed the majority of Shanghai residents.

The cost of construction could not have been within the budgets of most of Shanghai's residents, although grand versions of these kinds of homes, such as the Sassoon Tudor mansion, were built—mostly by wealthy foreigners—in the Western “suburban” area off Bubbling Well Road in the International Settlement. Apparently a number of smaller, Western-style homes were also built around the western portion of Avenue Joffre in the French Concession where well-off Chinese lived.⁶² These house plans had a potential consumer audience both among the upper economic “crème” of *Meishu shenghuo* readers and among the imaginations of its other readers. As with many designs, *Meishu shenghuo* furnished models of upper class standards to a rising middle class. If we compare these designs in *Meishu shenghuo* with home designs in contemporary American magazines, doubtless very few American readers could afford such designs either. But “window shopping” continues to be a most popular entertainment both in Manhattan and on Nanjing Road. The elements of fantasy and glamour in wealthy lifestyles help to explain the wide popular appeal of *Meishu shenghuo* and the peculiar consumer culture of Republican Shanghai epitomized by Nanjing Road.⁶³

movement and may have provided the source for these designs. I am grateful to Trudi Abel for directing my attention to this subject.

61. A later issue ties such house designs to the New Village Chinese suburban ideal mentioned earlier in this chapter. The house sample illustrating that article resembles a standard American prefab family home available in the 1920s through the Sears mail-order catalog. See “Ertong yu Xincun” (Children and New Village) in *Meishu shenghuo* 7 (October 1934).

62. Sun Yat-sen's home there is a famous example.

63. Although the need for affordable middle class and working class housing was a driving force in the modern architecture movement in Europe and the United States in this period, the innovative designs rarely met the criteria for affordable housing. Nevertheless, the designs ended up having a profound impact on later art and architecture. It is interesting to see Shanghai design participating in this international movement—and intriguing to conjecture about its ultimate impact on Chinese design. In the early 1980s, I saw appliances and household goods in tourist hotels and in department stores on Nanjing Road that had decidedly 1930s Art Deco influences.

Meishu shenghuo's examples of furniture and interior design also seem unlikely to have been affordable for most readers. An elegant, modernist design for the lounge of the West Lake National Art Academy utilizes clean, straight lines of chrome tubular chairs and a simple, streamlined aesthetic to convey functionalism and economy. The European theorists of this style expounded on the value of new materials and claimed that these forms were best suited to machine mass production.⁶⁴ Contrary to their views, the machines in Europe and the United States were not able to mass produce these avant-garde designs with given materials, and they promoted an aesthetic that was ultimately elitist or even utopian.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, furniture design and manufacture coverage in *Meishu shenghuo* is extraordinarily wide-ranging. Photographs of the latest French room designs and avant-garde designs by Chinese artists were published alongside photos of working students and their furniture products from the Shanghai School for Blind Boys. Or, for example, photographs of the “Moroccan Room” (“Salle Marocain”), a French interior designer's exoticized, highly ornamented entry in a design competition, precede a page of sketches of “1935-style small wooden furniture,” which included mostly simple (and affordable) shelf units, dressing tables, planters, and desks.⁶⁶

Another “useful art” that *Meishu shenghuo* promoted was porcelain and glassware design and manufacture. Perhaps as part of the attempt to persuade potential investors and artists that China had a long-standing engagement in this area of useful decorative art, in one issue priceless Qing and Song dynasty porcelains were displayed right before a page of modern European crystal and glassware.⁶⁷ In another issue, a full page of “Europeanized” Chinese porcelain designs were displayed and followed by a full-color, full-page print showing a very practical thermos, cup and saucer and two tumblers from the Shanghai Bakelite Products factory, and decorative mirrors and cosmetics cases

64. Alastair Duncan, *Art Deco* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 34.

65. Tim Benton et al., *Design 1920s*, esp. 37 and 61.

66. “Morogeshi di shineibu zhi tu (yi), (er)” (Two interior designs of a “Moroccan Room” [“Salle Marocain”]) and “Yijiusanwu-shi xiaomuqi” (1935-style smallscale wood furniture), *Meishu shenghuo* 12 (March 1935).

67. The Chinese porcelains were Kangxi Qinghua vases and Sung “tortoise-shell” glazed bowls; the European crystal and glassware were designs from Marianne Rath of Vienna's J. & L. Lobmeyer factory, O. Haerdtl of the Vienna firm of E. Bakalowitz, G. Stromberg of the Swedish Eda glass manufacturers, Keith Murray of Stevens & William, Stonbridge, and Barnaby Powell of the London firm of James Powell and Sons (Whitefriars) Ltd., *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934). That *Meishu shenghuo* printed the manufacturers' names is completely in keeping with its interest in developing manufacturing in China, even though manifestly it endorses foreign manufactures.

produced at the Zhongxing Celluloid factory.⁶⁸ In another instance, Wedgewood china, stylish table lamps, and examples of interior decoration with plants received a two-page photo spread.⁶⁹ Clearly *Meishu shenghuo* was a consumer culture booster.

All kinds of "practical arts" engaged the editors of *Meishu shenghuo*. Public architecture is featured in Issue 3 in a particularly striking juxtaposition of an elaborately ornamented Chinese Buddhist temple on the same page as a Belgian architect's rendering of a new Art Deco Shanghai apartment building.⁷⁰ The implicit message seems to be that past greatness in Chinese architecture and art more than matches the magnificence of modern skyscrapers, and makes such avant-garde work seem attainable for China.

In fact, *Meishu shenghuo* editors seem to have been quite struck by the modernism of their own city's architecture, and printed photo collages that highlight the dynamism and richness of Shanghai's modern buildings. One two-page spread, titled "Uphold Shanghai's Thriving Big Businesses," portrays hotels, theaters, banks, apartment buildings, and shops, many of them on Nanjing Road, with the added message that capitalism and art make impressive partners.⁷¹

Conclusion

The ongoing professionalization of the Chinese art field combined with the needs and strengths of the business elite favored the conception of industrial arts as good for everyone: artists, businessmen, manufacturers, consumers and the greater Chinese economy and nation. In Republican art periodicals, *gongyi* often appears to be a euphemism for the design and manufacture of consumer goods. These magazines' remarkable attention to the industrial arts thus constituted a strong endorsement of consumerism. Republican Chinese

68. Zhang Yifan, designer, "Ouhua zhi Zhongguo taoqi" (Europeanized Chinese porcelain); "Shanghai jiaomu wupin zhizaochang chupin" (Items from the Shanghai Bakelite Products factory) and "Zhongxing sailuoluchang chupin" (Zhongxing celluloid factory products) all in *Meishu shenghuo* 4 (July 1934).

69. "Xinshi xiyang ciqu" (New-style Western porcelain), "Xiandai zhaoming zhi zhuangshi yishu" (Decorative art in contemporary lighting), "Shinei xiaochenshe" (Small-scale interior decoration), *Meishu shenghuo* 14 (May 1935).

70. "Wanshoushan foxiangta hofang fotang (Hebeisheng Beiping jiaowai)" (Buddhist hall behind the Wanshou Mountain Buddhist pagoda in the suburbs of Beiping in Hebei Province) and "Shanghai zuixinshi zhi gonggongzhuzhai (zai Fazujie Shafeilu)" (Newest style of Shanghai apartment building [on Avenue Joffre in the French Concession]), *Meishu Shenghuo* 3 (June 1934).

71. "Zhichi Shanghai fanrong di daqiye" (Uphold Shanghai's thriving big businesses; English title "Vanity Fair of Shanghai"), *Meishu shenghuo* 3 (June 1934).

promotion of the industrial arts incorporated many aspects of global economic and technological competitiveness. It championed the connection between the industrial arts and a prosperous economy, strong nation, and comfortable society. The promotion of light industry was seen as a contribution to economic growth and national strength through full employment. And import substitution, a key initial element in the later, mid-twentieth-century rise of several East Asian economies,⁷² was explicitly favored by many early Republican Chinese. Patriotic Chinese were obligated to consume what Chinese industry produced, including the images and ideas put forth in Shanghai's art periodical press. Often designed and edited by avant-garde artists with new and foreign ideas, the magazines also used and advocated advanced technology to broaden access to culture.

Judging from these leading Shanghai art periodicals, the relationship between art and the developing consumer culture engaged many Chinese concerned about the aims and conditions of modern aesthetic practice and Republican nationhood. The commercialization of Chinese art and the Shanghai art press is thus a central thread in the story of the invention of Nanjing Road.

Artists and publishers were self-conscious inventors of Shanghai's new-style consumer culture. Literate, especially foreign-educated Chinese, and especially those living in the foreign administered sections of the treaty port, had investments—social, educational, and economic—in certain directions of cultural development. Ironically, it was their international orientation combined with their strong economic and cultural nationalism that gave the Shanghai style its own unique and local flavor.

Moreover, the bourgeoisie was the class most identified with Shanghai the city and, not surprisingly, the Shanghai style. As the promoters of the industrial arts, through their own strategic and pragmatic interests, acted to establish the idea of *gongyi* as an internalized element of Chinese culture, they also guaranteed their own role and position in that culture and society. As Ernest Young explains with regard to late Qing-early Republican reformers, "What had come to seem so admirable about the new, Westernizing policies to a socially privileged Chinese nationalist was the conjunction of a vigorous reform movement with his class interests."⁷³ Their subjective intention was to

72. East-West Center, "Developing Economies of the Asia Pacific Region," in Mark Borthwick, ed., *Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), 281.

73. Ernest P. Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-k'ai: Liberalism and Dictatorship in Early Republican China*, Michigan Studies on China (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1977), 82.

help determine Chinese attitudes toward modern urban life, to synthesize a new necessary ethos that coincided with their own.

Magazine contents show how these reformers shifted focus away from the public political sphere toward the private sphere of personal and family culture, all the while affirming the importance of the latter to the former, just as the arts were seen also as integral to changes in the society and culture-at-large. Permeable boundaries between public and private are evident in Confucian thought as well, which encouraged the "gentleman" to identify his private interests and values directly with the interests and values of the community and state. Art periodicals promoted the modern movement in Chinese art as a means, editors claimed, to invigorate the culture with fresh ideas and styles, proclaiming that art's place was in Everyman's home. The popular press, in other words, was used to promote and disseminate images of a new private culture while it simultaneously engendered a new public culture among its reading audience.⁷⁴

Zhenxiang huabao was Shanghai's prototypical Republican art magazine. Its key themes, of art and cultural reconstruction, truth and national rejuvenation, and industrial arts and global competition, articulated and shaped the concerns of middle- and upper-class urban Chinese in its and later reading audiences. The leadership role of the printing industry in building a strong Chinese Republic assumed by all three magazines was intimately connected with their own technological basis and capacity to appropriate and match the technologies of the West. Their editors' education and social class provided a basis of familiarity with cultural works and with the categories of perception of the dominant culture. Consequently, within the democratizing society of the new Chinese Republic and the expansion of the urban Chinese middle class under industrialization, existing cultural hierarchies were ultimately reinforced by means of these magazines.⁷⁵

As described above, Republican period artists and entrepreneurs were often among the liberal elite who advocated a Chinese-style modernism as the solution to China's search for material and political power. The three

periodicals highlighted in this study serve as key examples of the relationship between the cultural elite, the modern business bourgeoisie, and advanced technology. Their roles in the "modernization project" were an expression of the goal to promote the new urban consumer culture as a model for all of China. Those involved in the project hoped to bolster Chinese national identity by focusing on the industrialization of art to meet the needs of society, including the practical needs of consumers as well as the commercial needs of industrial society. By advocating an integration of art with daily life through the publishing of articles on practical and applied arts, these periodicals commodified and promoted an urban, middle-class lifestyle for Republican Chinese society that carried messages for women and men about their roles both as shoppers on Nanjing Road and as inventors and managers of a new culture for China. While new social and cultural hierarchies appear to be under construction in contemporary China, we would be well advised to look closely at this earlier era.

Shanghai commercial culture as an expression of modernism has become an increasingly relevant topic for study since the priority granted to modernization over revolution in the 1980s began prompting the reappearance in China of elements of the emergent Republican Shanghai culture, together with the century-long critique of traditional culture that it had sought to replace. Chinese commercialism in the 1990s, while in many ways unprecedented, also resounds clearly with the nationalistic tones of Republican Shanghai culture. If these elements are significant constituents of the contemporary transformation of Chinese culture, then their history can provide a vehicle for understanding past and future cultural developments in China.

74. Letters to magazine editors are evidence of how individual reading means consciously to join a group of other readers—in a sense taking part in public life. See Alain Corbin, "The Secret of the Individual," in *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *A History of Private Life*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1990), 536.

75. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Artistic Taste and Cultural Capital," in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 206-208 and 212-213; and Tom Gretton, "New Lamps for Old," in *The New Art History* ed. by A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1988), 67.