

# Repainting China: New Year Prints (*Nianhua*) and Peasant Resistance in the Early Years of the People's Republic

CHANG-TAI HUNG

*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*

On November 26, 1949, less than two months after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Ministry of Culture issued a directive to artists and writers about the importance and possible use in a new era of New Year prints (*nianhua*), a simple and inexpensive Chinese folk medium used to decorate homes in celebration of the New Year:

*Nianhua* is one of the most popular types of Chinese folk art. Under the feudal rule in the past, it was employed as a vehicle to spread archaic ideas. Since Chairman Mao [Zedong] delivered his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942, in which he called upon writers and artists to use old artistic forms to promote popularization of literature and art, artists in various old liberated areas had already used reformed *nianhua* with considerable results to disseminate the idea of people's democracy. New *nianhua* has proven to be a beloved art medium, rich in educational value. With Chinese Lunar New Year fast approaching—the first since the founding of the PRC—local cultural and educational organizations should look upon the development and spread of *nianhua* as one of their most essential tasks during this New Year's propaganda activities. The new prints should convey the following messages: the grand victory of Chinese people's war for liberation and the people's great revolution, the establishment of the People's Republic, the Common Program [for China], and the recovery and progress of industrial and agricultural production. . . . To launch a widespread *nianhua* movement, regional cultural and educational agencies, and art organizations, should mobilize artists to produce new prints, letting them know that this is an important artistic undertaking with wide impact. [We] oppose those artists who tend to belittle the task of popularization. Moreover, we should work with those who engage in the old *nianhua* trade and cooperate with folk artists, providing them with new sketches, reforming them, and, through them, reaching a wide audience.<sup>1</sup>

An earlier version of this article was presented at the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College in May 1998, and at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, in Taipei, Taiwan, in July 1998. I am grateful to these two institutions for their kind invitation. I also wish to thank the two anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions.

The directive was significant in a number of ways. It was one of the earliest documents on cultural policy issued by the newly established government, an indication of its importance and urgency. Delivered in the name of the Ministry of Culture and in unmistakable language, it instructed local governmental agencies to spread specific official messages through a popular print medium. The government also mapped out an ambitious plan for cultural propaganda in the immediate future: artists were asked to devise new prints and to reform folk painters so that new socialist ideas could be spread far and wide. How successful was this *nianhua* campaign? Did the Communists, antireligious by their political inclinations, allow the prints of door deities (*Menshen*) (Plate 1) and the Stove God (*Zaowang*, also known as *Zaowangye*) (Plate 2)—two prominent genres in *nianhua*—to exist? The government undertaking, as the leaders and reformers would soon find out, was a frustrating experience, for the populace were never passive receivers; they resisted radical changes imposed from above and were dogged in their attempts to preserve their traditional patterns of consumption.

On the surface, the directive came at a time of great optimism. A new socialist regime, different from what many regarded as the ineffective and corrupt Nationalist (Guomindang) government, had just been established in Beijing on October 1. The nation was filled with hope and jubilation. Despite the suffering that numerous Chinese endured in the past decades of Japanese invasion (1937–1945) and a ruinous civil war between Communists and Nationalists (1946–1949), the belief now spread that the new, unified government would restore social stability, economic prosperity, and political faith. The PRC was widely perceived as a new dynasty with the right to establish its own mandate. In reality, however, the regime faced a multitude of formidable problems: a shattered economy with rampant inflation, a vast social dislocation problem, a largely illiterate, discontented population plagued by hunger and poverty, and a nation beset by parochialism. Mao Zedong and his close comrades knew full well that, optimism and euphoria notwithstanding, the survival and ultimately the establishment of a new Marxist regime depended largely on their ability to control the nation and inculcate socialist ideas in the minds of the people as quickly as possible through propaganda and agitation. These twin goals would in turn require a tightly controlled party machine and a most efficient propaganda network capable of reaching the masses in the vast countryside.

In terms of control, a number of factors proved useful to the new leaders. Like the Bolsheviks, Chinese Communists had an all-encompassing ideology and a political monopoly; like the Russians, the Chinese came to power on the Leninist principle that a vanguard party led by professional revolutionaries was essential in bringing about a successful socialist revolution.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, like the Bolsheviks, the Chinese developed a sophisticated propaganda network. But there were differences between the two revolutions: Whereas the Bolsheviks did not develop a comprehensive blueprint for propaganda before they seized power,<sup>3</sup> Mao and his associates had mounted a well-coordinated propaganda

operation since the Yan'an days (1937–1947), if not earlier.<sup>4</sup> And in sharp contrast to the Bolsheviks, who first scored propaganda successes in cities with the help of workers and soldiers, the Chinese Communists' campaign originated in the countryside and was largely targeted at the peasants. It is true that when major cities in north China such as Tianjin and Beijing fell to the Communist troops in early 1949, Communist leaders realized that their revolution had entered a new phase. In a well-known speech delivered in March, Mao announced a change of strategy when he declared that "the center of gravity of the Party's work has shifted from the village to the city."<sup>5</sup> Such a decision, of course, was prompted in part by strategic necessity and in part by the need to uphold the official Marxist line. Communist planners saw clearly that the commercial capacity and industrial foundation of the cities would be a strong asset in the new nation's drive toward consolidation and modernization; but they were also following the orthodox Marxist assumption that socialism could hardly be developed on an agrarian base. In reality, however, Mao and his comrades understood that China was unique: it was a predominantly agrarian country, in which eighty-nine percent of the population of more than five hundred million (the 1953 census put the number at 582 million) were peasants who lived off the land; moreover, the majority of these were impoverished and illiterate. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Chinese Communists had long courted the support of peasants in their quest for power. Continued peasant support and the stability of the vast rural land remained the two single most critical factors in the new regime's survival. True, the Party should then have concentrated its work on the cities, but Mao was quick to add in the same speech that "attention must be given to both city and village," and "under no circumstances should the village be ignored." What kind of attention should be paid to the villages now that the country, with the exception of Taiwan, was finally united? How would the gargantuan task of nation-building begin in the ravaged rural areas? The Communists found a partial answer in *nianhua*.

This article examines the Communists' *nianhua* propaganda campaign and its reception among the masses in the 1950s, the formative years of a new government. In addition to looking at actors and institutions, it explores the cultural processes through which a new regime attempted to legitimize its power by using art as a propaganda tool. Further, it examines the grassroots resistance encountered by this campaign, raising the issue of interaction between state, art, and peasantry. A number of previously unexplored questions will be addressed: How exactly did the state manufacture and manipulate *nianhua* as a propaganda vehicle to spread its political message? What kinds of images were transmitted and through what channels? And how were these images received by the intended audience? In brief, a study of *nianhua* in post-1949 China raises two sets of broader questions in modern Chinese cultural history, about the production and dissemination of a cultural artifact by the state and its reception by the masses. The Chinese populace was thought by the elite to consist of passive

receivers who submissively accepted the state's political teachings. Contrary to this familiar image, this article will show that they were an active majority who, through active consumption, picked and chose from the official menu, and often mounted a vocal resistance that thwarted the government's conversion efforts. The *nianhua* campaign was therefore a cultural war waged between Communist officials and the masses, an ideological battle between Communist visions and China's native folk tradition.

#### A DISTINCT CULTURAL ARTIFACT

A revolution is by definition a monumental event that rejects the past and embraces the future. Although the Communists came to power without an overall blueprint for building a new government, they were determined to introduce new political agendas antithetical to the old. Yet no revolution can completely break with the past. Revolutionaries, for their own purposes, often appropriate traditional artifacts that continue to enjoy wide public appeal. That the Chinese Communists borrowed *nianhua* is a case in point.

It came as no surprise that the Communists viewed the *nianhua* prints as an ideal propaganda tool, for the prints contained the key cultural and political ingredients that they needed at a critical time in the nation-building effort. The prints were made with woodblocks, a folk art rooted in antiquity. Usually simple in design,<sup>6</sup> brightly colored, inexpensive (only a few cents each), and extremely popular, they provided an ideologically correct framework by which Mao could instruct his cadres and writers to study and eventually embrace the medium as a means for bridging the gap between intellectuals and the masses. Perhaps most important, they were among the most effective means for arousing powerful nationalistic feelings among the populace. Earlier in the Yan'an days Communist artists had already made successful use of *nianhua* as a tool for inspiring national reunification. Mao and his associates seized power principally by appealing to nationalistic sentiments, a force Friedrich Engels and especially Karl Marx underestimated.

Indeed, *nianhua* has a long history in China. Although its origins remain unclear, the practice of pasting images of deities on the doors of homes on New Year's Eve was known as early as the Eastern Han dynasty in the second century A.D.<sup>7</sup> By the time of the Song dynasty in the tenth century, the production of *nianhua* had become a thriving business, facilitated by the widespread use of woodblock printing.<sup>8</sup> The Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties saw the emergence of several major *nianhua*-producing centers in the country—Yangliuqing near Tianjin in Hebei Province, Yangjiabu in Shandong, Taohuawu in the city of Suzhou in Jiangsu, and Mianzhu, north of Chengdu, in Sichuan—all enjoyed nationwide reputations, although each center had its own distinct local characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

Many *nianhua* prints were designed by illiterate peasant artists and printed in village homes (especially in Yangjiabu).<sup>10</sup> They were popular in all walks of

life, but more so among villagers than urbanites. Their popularity stemmed not only from their bold, sometimes outrageous designs and dazzling colors (representing an optimistic view of life), but also from their ability to reflect the life of the common people. Although the exact meanings embedded in the folk prints are not obvious, the recurrent motifs of benevolent deities, bumper harvests, and rosy-cheeked children reveal a rural population, who, despite their precarious existence, work the land, marry, give birth according to venerable custom, and continue to hope for a better life in the future. The themes of the prints can be roughly divided into several categories: protective deities who bring good fortune and drive away malicious spirits (the Stove God and door deities); the everyday lives of the peasants (Yangjiabu's *Ten Labors of Men* [*Nanshimang*]); deities and spirits connected with the agrarian world (*The Ox King* [*Niuwang*]); propitious emblems (Yangliuqing's *Bearing Many Sons* [*Lian sheng gui zi*]); popular historical personages (heroes from such famous novels as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [*Sanguo yanyi*]); flowers and birds; and current events. Thousands of prints were sold each year.<sup>11</sup> In Yangjiabu alone, for example, based on more than four hundred different types of prints, the annual sales figure exceeded ten million copies in the early 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the popularity of the *nianhua* prints caught the attention of Communist propagandists even before they came to power. Of course, Mao and many of his close associates showed little interest in the aesthetic quality or intrinsic value of the prints. Artistic excellence was rarely an important issue for the Communists, who most often viewed art as a political tool serving the revolution. That *nianhua* was a people's art both delighted and comforted the Communists, however, for art, according to Mao Zedong in his famous 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," should serve the masses and depict the heroic deeds of peasants and workers. Cadres and intellectuals must learn from the people, Mao instructed, for the masses are the fountainhead of correct policies. Thus New Year prints were a perfect medium to bring artists and the masses together to build a new socialist regime. In these Yan'an years, under the influence of Lu Xun (1881–1936), one of the most influential writers of twentieth-century China and an avid promoter of woodblock art,<sup>13</sup> left-wing woodcut artists such as Gu Yuan (1919–1996) and Wo Zha (1905–1974) experimented in their prints with black and white lines influenced primarily by the radical German graphic artist, Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). But the Western-inspired sober colors and austere representations met with the disapproval of the peasants, who regarded them as foreign, forbidding, and, worse still, inauspicious. Suddenly the artists were in a desperate search for a new formula; they soon found the solution in the ubiquitous *nianhua* prints. By introducing bright colors and joyful scenes of bumper harvests into the prints, they gradually struck a chord with rural audiences.<sup>14</sup>

*Nianhua* as an art form, of course, did not in itself prove useful for the Communists as an ideological tool. The propagandists carefully filled the prints with

nationalistic designs by portraying the Communists as the sole supporters of China's sovereignty, on the one hand, and the valorous resisters against foreign aggression (especially the Japanese invasion), on the other. They also illustrated a life of joy and cooperation under Communist rule, juxtaposing it with portrayals of dreadful misery and chaos under the Nationalists.<sup>15</sup> In brief, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was promoted as China's only hope to reunify a dividing nation and save it from foreign aggression, thereby restoring its lost glory. Unlike Marx, Mao's primary political instincts were nationalistic. He understood that nationalist feelings could be fostered by invoking the nation's pride, as well as by appealing to the public's outcry against imperialist incursions. New Year prints were a handy tool to achieve these goals. By endorsing this unique Chinese art, the Communists not only championed a cultural heritage and showed their due respect for folk art, they also used it to advance their ideological agenda. The use of *nianhua* was therefore fashioned into a cultural campaign with unmistakable political intentions. Yan'an's *nianhua* undertaking, although unsystematic and sporadic, would later prove reassuring and extremely useful as the Communists embarked on an even more ambitious task of nation-building and thought reform.

#### PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION

The essence of totalitarianism, writes Hannah Arendt, lies in its ability to exercise total control over people's lives. Unlike traditional forms of despotic rule, which left a compliant population in relative peace, modern dictatorships, argues Arendt, erase the distinction between public and private, atomize citizens through ideology and terror, and invade the most intimate corners of private life.<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony suggests another method of domination by the ruling class. Gramsci argues that control of the means of material production alone cannot give the ruling elite power; they must also exercise ideological and cultural dominance over other classes, in areas such as religion and the media.<sup>17</sup> Arendt's view on the state's invasion into people's private lives and Gramsci's emphasis on culture allow us to view Chinese Communist rule from a fresh perspective. After the founding of the PRC, the CCP wasted no time in exerting its omnipresence and dominance. The unlimited power of the new regime was of course predicated on its monopoly of military force and economic resources, but it was also based on a total control of cultural policies, which the CCP used to direct people's lives and reshape their minds through an array of propaganda vehicles: newspapers, radio, and art. *Nianhua* prints were an effective tool within the artistic portion of the arsenal.

There were clear signs that the new government was eager to put the prints to good use after the Communist troops occupied Beijing in January 1949, even before the Ministry of Culture issued the *nianhua* directive in November of that year. In March a *nianhua* exhibition was held in the National Beiping Arts College (Guoli Beiping yishu zhuanke xuexiao) in Beijing;<sup>18</sup> two months later a

public show of *nianhua* and other proletarian art opened in the city's Central Park, drawing a large audience.<sup>19</sup> In one sense the new *nianhua* campaign initiated by the Ministry of Culture was a continuation of the Yan'an practice; it also differed in a number of ways. Technically, the new prints, which differed from traditional peasant woodblock *nianhua*, were painted by artists and then produced by an offset machine to allow for greater flexibility in production and more freedom in design and color variation. Politically, the campaign would now be conducted systematically and supervised by the government; it would be mounted nationwide; and, most importantly, it now had a sense of legitimacy.

Indeed, the *nianhua* reform was one of the largest art campaigns ever mounted by the Chinese Communist Party in their efforts to create a shared ideological universe.<sup>20</sup> It was a crusade conducted from the top down, and proceeded simultaneously on several fronts: through extensive publicity in official publications; the open support of celebrated artists; exhibitions; conferences; a search for and reforming of traditional folk artists; and award presentations in open competitions for the best new print designers. The intertwining of art and government in Chinese history was never more evident than in the early 1950s. From the outset *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*), the official Party newspaper, gave the new *nianhua* prints extensive coverage, parading the latest products and reminding its readers of their immense value.<sup>21</sup> Coverage became even more noticeable with the approach of the Chinese Lunar New Year.<sup>22</sup> Major art journals also printed *nianhua*, often devoting entire issues to them.<sup>23</sup> Enthusiastic support came from many corners, especially art circles. Prominent artists such as Li Hua (1907–1994), a woodcut artist, and Zhang Guangyu (1900–1964), a cartoonist, lent their support to the new endeavor.<sup>24</sup> Cheng Yanqiu (1904–1958), a renowned actor in the Beijing opera, traveled to Yangjiabu in 1950 to support the drive.<sup>25</sup> In line with the Party's policy of "serving the people," the Party reformers sought out folk artists (*minjian yiren*). They praised the folk artists' plebeian roots and then attempted to reeducate them, turning them into advocates of a new society. A certain Yang Wendong (1880–1958), a folk *nianhua* artist from Yangjiabu, for instance, was lauded for his ardent support of the government's endeavor.<sup>26</sup> Frequent exhibitions were held in both the capital and provinces to showcase the genre.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most prestigious recognition came in April 1950 when the Ministry of Culture, in the first national competition, presented awards to twenty-five artists for the best new *nianhua* prints. Their names and award-winning pieces were proudly presented in the national media.<sup>28</sup> Such competitions continued in subsequent years.<sup>29</sup> The *nianhua* campaign reached a crescendo when Premier Zhou Enlai made a well-publicized visit to Yangliuqing in the Chinese Lunar New Year of 1960, adding his enormous prestige to the cause.<sup>30</sup>

The *nianhua* reform epitomized the complete but uneasy merger of art and politics in the new regime. For the reformers, there was more at issue than a fight over artistic style. China's future was at stake. To them, the creation of a

correct socialist culture was paramount and urgent, and had to be duly reflected in the new prints. How should the reform proceed? What kind of new prints should be produced? The undertaking, as it turned out, was complicated. Although the reformers found many merits in the traditional *nianhua* prints, they were not entirely comfortable with the rural art form. Their ambivalence was perhaps understandable. The CCP, a Leninist vanguard party, was inherently condescending toward the lower classes, despite Mao's repeated calls to serve the people. Like the Bolsheviks,<sup>31</sup> the Chinese Communists were apprehensive about mass initiative. Activities at the grassroots had to be kept under the Party's watchful eye, lest they should get out of control. The Communists also realized early on that uncontrolled art could be politically dangerous to the regime.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Chinese intellectuals and artists held the traditional view that peasants were ignorant and superstitious, living in a world inhabited by strange deities and grotesque spirits. The fact that many of the traditional *nianhua* prints were religious drawings reinforced this negative impression. Of course, as faithful Marxists, Chinese Communists had long conducted campaigns against various forms of religious activity.<sup>33</sup> This time they were especially appalled by the abundance of what they called "superstitious products" in the New Year prints: the door deities; the Stove God; Zhong Kui, an exorcist who expels demons (Plate 3); and *zhima* (also known as *jiama*)—papers printed with images of deities such as *The Ox King* (Plate 4), which were burned at the end of the ritual. These religious prints, charged the prominent art critic Wang Zhaowen (1909—), were nothing more than the reflections of people's "feudal thoughts."<sup>34</sup> "They were poisonous old-style prints (*jiu nianhua*)," another artist echoed, "primarily serving the interests of the landlord class." A novel type of New Year print (*xin nianhua*) must be created to replace the old style, he suggested.<sup>35</sup> The reform was clearly more than an artistic exercise: it was a socialist campaign intended to weed out what the Communists considered the peasants' pernicious thoughts. Hence it was an assault against their behavior as well as their customs.

True, alarm had been sounded over the *nianhua* prints' "feudal elements" earlier in the Yan'an period, but no concerted effort had yet been mounted to deal with the problem.<sup>36</sup> Now the same issue had resurfaced, but with a new sense of urgency. In a joint statement issued in October 1951 by the Ministry of Culture and the Publication Bureau, the government ordered that "publication of any New Year prints which are reactionary and harmful be stopped," referring in particular to the religious prints. They cautioned, however, that the undertaking had to be carried out cautiously so as not to provoke public resentment or open protest.<sup>37</sup> Similar prudence was reiterated in the statements issued by provincial cultural bureaus.<sup>38</sup> A flurry of reform activities soon took place in *nianhua* centers in the early 1950s.<sup>39</sup> In 1951, 1952, and 1954, for example, a reform team, composed of a dozen printers and art students, was sent to Yangjiabu by the Ministry of Culture of East China and the Bureau of Culture

of Shandong Province to conduct on-site visits, hold conferences, and suggest changes.<sup>40</sup> The reformers divided traditional Shandong prints into four categories: “acceptable and can be preserved”; “requiring changes”; “reactionary”; and “superstitious.”<sup>41</sup> Religious prints, which were assigned to the last category (especially images of the Stove God and door deities), were the first to be criticized.

Traditionally, the Stove God was one of the most widely worshipped deities in the Chinese folk pantheon (Plate 2). Not surprisingly, he appeared as a central figure in the New Year prints.<sup>42</sup> Although ranked relatively low in the celestial hierarchy, the Stove God was considered extremely important because of his close link to people’s everyday lives. Woodblock images of the Stove God—usually accompanied by his wife (or flanked by two wives)—are placed above the kitchen stove. At the top of such prints was included a lunar calendar, which was vital in giving peasants a sense of time and the rhythm of agricultural production. It is believed that the Stove God is responsible for protecting the home and bringing fortune to family members; hence he is also known as “the master of the household” (*yijia zhi zhu*). According to custom, on the evening of the twenty-third day of the twelfth lunar month, the god’s image is burned and he returns to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor about the family he watched over in the past year. He returns to earth seven days later, on New Year’s Eve. The family then puts up a new print to mark the beginning of another annual cycle.<sup>43</sup> To ensure that the god makes as many good comments as possible (and preferably no bad ones) about the family in front of the supreme deity, sugared melons or other sweets are offered to “sweeten” his mouth. A common saying—“Speak well up in Heaven; bring good fortune back home” (*shangtian yan haoshi; huigong jiang jixiang*)—sums up the god’s presumed role. Thus the Stove God plays a double role: as both protector of the family and trusted servant of the Celestial Emperor, he forms a critical link between heaven and earth. The annual dispatch of the Stove God to heaven, observed Arthur Smith, a Protestant missionary in late nineteenth-century China, was one of the most important ceremonies of the “New Year worship.”<sup>44</sup>

The government saw the Stove God print as a problem precisely because of its popularity and perceived influence. The print was gradually banned from circulation.<sup>45</sup> Reformers devised two new designs to replace the old ones: a *Martyr Memorial Pagoda* (*Lieshi jinianta*),<sup>46</sup> and a novel agricultural calendar (*Nonglitu*).<sup>47</sup> Both prints had been purged of religious connotations; they now told the story of socialism, as carefully scripted by the state. The piece *Be Diligent and Frugal in Managing Your Home* (*Qinjian chijia*), a new agricultural calendar, is one telling example (Plate 5).<sup>48</sup> Appearing in the 1950s, the scene portrays a family celebrating the New Year. It is a bumper year, with abundant food and ample supplies; the house is filled with cheerful family members who have gathered together to enjoy a nice meal. In front of the table another scene bursts with excitement and activity: children are symbolically enacting the ac-

tivities of farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishing, all yielding bountiful results. The print's setting and atmosphere are familiar: a time-honored lunar calendar coupled with a joyful scene vibrating with rich hues and life; but its meaning is distinctly different. Flanking the family is a group of supporters and protectors: devoted cadres, selfless soldiers, and other good-hearted souls. The occasion is definitely not a remembrance of the past, but a paean to the present. The Stove God is nowhere to be seen; instead, common people are charting their own future. What makes this delightful scene possible, the print tells us, is not just the hard work and unflagging energy of the masses, but, more importantly, the favorable environment that has been brought about by the new government.

The door deities, another staple of *nianhua*, met a fate similar to that of the Stove God. In several print-producing areas (for example, in Zhuxianzhen, Henan Province) door deities topped the list in sales.<sup>49</sup> Posted on front gates and inner doors, the Door Gods' images were believed to ward off evil spirits. They were ubiquitous, even appearing in the Forbidden City in Beijing during the Qing dynasty.<sup>50</sup> Shen Shu and Yu Lu were the initial guardians of the gates, mentioned as early as the second century A.D.<sup>51</sup> Later, two equally famous generals—Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong (Plate 1) of the Tang dynasty (618–907)—were added to the illustrious list. Dressed in full armor and holding swords or axes, these warriors maintain an imposing presence. The multicolored prints appear in pairs and in symmetry, adopting the face-to-face pose (thus creating a sense of harmony). Although the size of the warriors varies, their images are sometimes life-sized in appearance. Their majestic and fear-inspiring presence guards the main entrance to the house, therefore assuming the most important task of protecting the home against malign forces. Besides their widely accepted magical power, the popularity of Door God prints also stemmed from their dramatic patterns: vivid colors, bold contours, exaggerated features, and rich narratives, as in the print of Generals Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong, which tells the story of how these two warriors of the Tang guarded the palace gates, protecting Emperor Taizhong from evil forces. Other types of Door God prints illustrated the deities either as a pair or as lone figures. While Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong guarded the front gates, prints of other door deities—such as paired civil officials (*Wenguan*) and the solitary Zhong Kui—were pasted on the interior doors of the home.<sup>52</sup> Zhong Kui, the exorcist who captures and devours demons, was especially admired, for he was believed to bring forth happiness and good fortune.

Similar to the Stove God prints, the Door God prints underwent dramatic changes at the hands of the reformers in the 1950s. A new series of socialist designs and themes began to appear, closely following the ideological rules dictated by the state. Luo Cheng's 1955 piece, *Defend Our Motherland! Protect Peace! (Baowei zuguo! Hanwei heping!)* speaks a new political language through the conventional framework (Plate 6). The print represents a pair of

well-decorated People's Liberation Army soldiers (one navy, one army) standing tall at the center and looking straight ahead, each holding a happy child in his arms. With toy warships and fighter planes surrounding the figures, the image connotes military strength and vigilance, a nation guarded against invaders. Yet another child holds a dove about to take flight, conveying a different message: China is also a peace-loving country. The soldiers are surrounded by five children representing five major ethnic groups (Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan). They are now living in a land of abundance as well as ethnic harmony. Similar to the old Door Gods, the soldiers appear in a pair, tall and Herculean; like the old deities, they exude an air of confidence and dignity. But instead of assuming the traditional face-to-face pose, they now gaze right at us, conveying an added sense of determination; instead of depicting children holding the traditional emblems of peonies and lotuses, respectively symbolizing wealth and noble sons born in succession, these new children are shown with symbols of military might (battleships) and peace (doves, lambs); instead of the soldiers being surrounded only by boys, girls are now included as well, reflecting the new government policy of sexual equality (as proclaimed in the new 1950 Marriage Law); and, finally, instead of picturing only Han children, the five youngsters are from different major ethnic groups, representing a country of great racial harmony. The new print's realistic portrayal was no doubt intended to strike a more authentic resonance among the audience. Ironically, however, the playfulness and imagination of the old prints has vanished, making the new images appear forced and uninspired.

Besides soldiers, common people also took the place of the discredited deities. Workers and peasants—the other two proclaimed pillars of the proletariat state—began to figure prominently and abundantly in the new prints produced in the 1950s.<sup>53</sup> They also assumed the role of door guards. A print of the later period in the 1970s—*Learn from Daqing! Learn from Dazhai! (Xue Daqing! Xue Dazhai!, Plate 7)*—is a celebrated example. Again in frontal pose and standing upright, a worker and a peasant join the chorus in celebrating the Communist regime's achievements. Their backgrounds, respectively, are an oil industrial complex in full production and lush, sprawling fields. The picture is based on a real life story: the worker, modeled on Wang Jinxi (1923–1970), leader of the Daqing oilfields in Heilongjiang, and the peasant, based on Chen Yonggui (1914–1986), head of the Dazhai model commune in Shanxi Province, were the Communists' models of ordinary people who, with little help from the government but through hard work and determination, could turn forbidding production conditions and impoverished fields into a success story.<sup>54</sup> This was another shining case of the Maoist virtues of self-reliance, local initiative, and devotion to a collective goal. The spirit of the prints is clearly buoyant and optimistic, but the propaganda message is plain and predictable.

Not all new door prints, of course, featured soldiers and workers. Another type conveyed no overt official message, yet was perhaps even more effective

in propagating socialist ideas precisely because of its *nonpolitical* nature. In 1954 Ye Zhenxing, a member of the *nianhua* reform team in Shandong, came out with a pair of inner door prints known as *Mother Teaches Me How to Do Embroidery; I Teach Mother How to Read* (*Mama jiao wo xue xiuhua; wo jiao mama xue wenhua*).<sup>55</sup> The prints drew instant attention (Plate 8).<sup>56</sup> In customary bright colors (especially red), the print tells a simple story: one scene depicts a mother teaching her daughter, a Young Communist Pioneer, the traditional craft of embroidering; the other scene portrays the daughter, in return, teaching her mother how to read and write. On the surface, the relationship between mother and daughter is not unusual, but the portrayal of their bond is fresh. The mother-daughter tie is no longer based on the archaic hierarchy of domination; rather, it is based on a new spirit of mutual help and care, each benefiting the other in a different way. The mother, who is illiterate, is now a student under her daughter's tutelage in a new society. Having been denied education in the old days, she now has a chance to learn, and the promise of a bright future, and she has taken up the opportunity with glee. At the same time she is passing on a venerable skill to her daughter, signaling the continuation of a traditional craft. The image of a daughter learning embroidery is not exactly a sign of sexual equality,<sup>57</sup> but it seems that the artist's intention is to present the importance of parental love and family bonds, both of which are enriched by new meaning: the significance of learning both the traditional and the new. The power of this new print lies not in its didactic message but in its calm reflection. Here is a cheerful family enlivened by a personal touch; it speaks a political language without appearing forced or contrived. The picture suggests that such a scene would not be possible without the wise leadership of the CCP.<sup>58</sup>

The Stove God and the door deities were not the only two religious motifs that underwent forced transformation; the condemned list included *God of Wealth* (*Caishen*), *Zhong Kui*, *Zhangxian* (the patron deity of childbearing women), *zhima* such as the *Ox King*, and others. They were, as one Communist supporter put it, "sheer nonsense" (*huangdan wuji*).<sup>59</sup> In brief, the attack against religious prints was a battle against folk beliefs as well as rural backwardness. The great socialist transformation could be accomplished, many reformers insisted, only when the villages were rid of these sorts of pernicious thoughts and practices.

The Chinese Communists' attack against religious *nianhua* bore a close resemblance to what had transpired earlier in the Soviet Union, but also differed in a number of ways. The Russians were equally determined to remove rural ignorance and backwardness (Gorky once described Russian peasants as "half-savage, stupid, ponderous people"). The assault on peasants' beliefs began in the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution and culminated in Stalin's policy of forced collectivization during the 1930s. Also in the 1930s, the Komsomol activists and party reformers arrested priests, closed down churches, seized icons (sometimes for mass burnings), and silenced rural elites for holding dissenting

views.<sup>60</sup> They also eliminated *lubki* (illustrated broadsides) and religious tales, with a clear intention to instill a new revolutionary culture of atheism and socialism in the countryside.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, similar to the Chinese, the Soviets did not completely abandon the old artistic forms. They also recognized the enormous potential of traditional art and folk idioms in the service of the revolution. Indeed, the widespread influence of icons and *lubki* was appropriated by some artists to promote the interests of the state. Dmitri S. Moor (1883–1946), the famed Soviet graphic artist, for example, used images drawn from icons to pour scorn on religion in antireligious journals such as *Bezbozhnik* (The Godless) in the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> But although their political goals were similar, the Chinese *nianhua* reform was conducted on a bigger scale, was implemented more systematically, and was placed under tighter government control than its Soviet counterpart. No sustained art reform was mounted by the Soviet government on a national basis. The Soviet war against religious prints was largely subsumed under Stalin's general policy of "liquidating kulaks as a class."

To be sure, China's *nianhua* reform was never confined to an attack against folk religions; indeed, it was intended to yield positive results, to reshape the minds of the populace according to socialist goals. Through the new prints, collective visions were carefully disseminated and enforced. Among these, three themes stood out distinctly: the glory of production, the younger generation's contributions to the cause of socialism, and selfless leaders who cared about the people and guided the nation to a brighter future.

Labor was central to the Maoist vision of a good society, and its importance was emphasized in the reformed prints. This can be seen in the transformation of yet another folk genre. Traditionally, a type of *nianhua* known as *The Money Tree* (*Yaoqianshu*), which depicts a tree decorated with coins and gold, was among the villages' favorites (Plate 9).<sup>63</sup> The print portrays a fantasy of growing wealth and prosperity. A Yangjiabu song reflected the lively imagination envisioned in the print:

With a money tree at home,  
I am richer than a millionaire.  
Once a day I shake it,  
Coins rain down like a storm.  
Together we harvest them,  
A pile of gold stands taller than my home.<sup>64</sup>

Such an idea did not sit well with the Communists, for it represented, as one critic promptly decried, the harmful and erroneous notion of "reaping without sowing" (*bu lao er huo*).<sup>65</sup> In 1952 Shi Banghua, a young artist of the Yangjiabu reform team, came out with a new print, *This Is the Real Money Tree* (*Zheshi zhenzheng yaoqianshu*), to replace the old one (Plate 10). Instead of being covered with coins, the new tree is full of apples. The setting is an apple orchard on a collective farm. But the real message lies in the cooperative spirit of the people who work together as a team. The labels on the truck sum up the

essence of the picture: "Mutual aid and cooperation form a huge force, and labor and production yield a bumper crop." Only through hard work and communal support, the picture tells us, can we guarantee good results.

The popular image of rosy-cheeked children (*pangwawa*) had to be repainted too. In the past, images of chubby little boys carried a blessing for the bearing of many sons. It was a genre commonly associated with two symbols, lotuses and pomegranates, both representing fertility because of their many seeds (*zi*, which also means "sons"). *Bearing Many Sons* (*Lian sheng gui zi*), a perennial piece from Yangliuqing dating back to the Qing dynasty, is a good example (Plate 11). A child is blowing the *sheng*, a reed woodwind (*sheng* is homophonous with another Chinese word meaning "giving birth"), and is surrounded by lotus seedpods (*lien*, a word also meaning "continuous"), suggesting a large family with many sons being born in succession. In the early 1950s a new image of children appeared after Zhang Ding (1917—), a noted cartoonist, became an eager participant in the reform. In his print, *New China's Children* (*Xin Zhongguo de ertong*), which won second prize in the 1950 new *nianhua* competition, the children are portrayed as soldiers gallantly fighting U.S. invaders, represented by a single American soldier, and their lackey Jiang Jieshi, both of whom are defeated and driven off in humiliation (Plate 12).<sup>66</sup> The children's formerly lovable and laughing faces have been replaced with fierce looks as the children bear arms to defend the nation against vicious enemies. The incongruity between the old and new prints could not be more pointed: once innocent and happy children are now armed patriots guarding the nation. Cai Ruohong (1913—), an artist who played a key role in shaping the *nianhua* policy, reminded people of the new rules for designing pictures of children: "Chubby boys can still be drawn of course, but if one uses these images to publicize the concept of infant hygiene, one can achieve the higher purpose of educating the masses."<sup>67</sup> In some later prints children were asked to serve an even nobler goal, namely, "the unification of our motherland, and the unity of all nationalities" (*Zuguo tongyi, minzu tuanjie*) (Plate 13).

While Soviet activists replaced portraits of Saint Nicholas with posters of Marx and Lenin on the village walls,<sup>68</sup> Chinese reformers substituted images of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai for folk deities. Mao and his close associates were praised for their wise leadership and their devotion to improving the lives of the commoners. Gu Yuan's *Chairman Mao Talks to the Peasants* (*Mao zhuxi he nongmin tanhua*; 1951) depicts how deeply the chairman cared for the lives of ordinary people.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the most famous piece portraying the close relationship between the leaders and the people is Lin Gang's (1924—) *Zhao Guilan at the Heroes' Reception* (*Qunyinghui shang de Zhao Guilan*) (Plate 14). Winning first prize in the 1951–52 national *nianhua* competition, Lin's piece was based on the true story of a female chemical worker who repeatedly risked her own life to protect the state-owned factory from disaster.<sup>70</sup> She was received by Mao in 1949 and praised as one of new China's "model workers." In

this piece Zhao, whose right hand supports her disabled left hand (in a white glove), is having a friendly chat with the chairman, while Premier Zhou Enlai stands nearby, smiling approvingly. Replete with elegant colors and the attendants' vivid facial expressions, this is an impressive propaganda piece. Despite a crowded scene and evidence of lively conversation going on in the hall, nothing in the piece diverts attention away from the principal figure, Zhao Guilan, flanked by the two gratified leaders. The female worker, though small in stature, takes center stage. Other figures are carefully balanced to form a circle around her. This picture glorifies the heroic deeds of the working class, but, more importantly, it shows the care their leaders bestow on them. Lin Gang's *Zhao Guilan at the Heroes' Reception* and Gu Yuan's *Chairman Mao Talks to the Peasants* were but two images that artists wove into a colorful tapestry of Party hagiography.

#### THE RECEPTION

In the early 1950s millions of new socialist *nianhua* prints were produced, creating a publication boom. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Culture and published in *People's Daily* in 1950, between November 1949, when the new *nianhua* policy was announced, and April 1950, 412 types of new prints were issued in twenty-six localities, with a distribution of more than seven million copies. "The prints depict the face of a new China, communicate the sentiments of the Chinese people, and have won the wide acceptance of the populace," the Ministry told us.<sup>71</sup> The official assessment was echoed by zealous reformers eager to participate in the exercise. But such governmental data are hard to verify, for independent sources are unavailable. Do we really know the audience's reactions? Do we understand peasants' *mentalités*—the ways in which people's values were shared, how their attitudes were changed, and how their mental world was constructed? An investigation of *mentalités* reveals, in the words of Jacques Le Goff, "the impersonal content of [people's] thought."<sup>72</sup> Such an understanding is important because it examines history at ground zero, rather than from above.

Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain how the peasants received the new prints, since they were largely illiterate and left few written testaments to their reactions. Given that no explicit folk documents (such as interviews) seem to exist, and that questions of popular attitudes are extremely difficult to tackle, can this problem be circumvented? Perhaps. A few reports released by provincial cultural bureaus and reform teams may give us clues into the peasants' elusive *mentalités*.<sup>73</sup> Another indication of their reactions are the survey results which were occasionally published in magazines and journals about the *nianhua* reforms, and which included peasants' comments.<sup>74</sup> True, comments attributed to peasants could very well be tailored to the needs of elite participants in the debate, but the unsophisticated nature of their expressions lends credibility to the idea that their responses are genuine. I also propose to address this issue through an examination of elitist records, especially the writings of the *nian-*

*hua* reformers. Perhaps I risk committing the same error I propose to avoid. Yet certain elitist records can surely be used to explore the mentality of the forgotten peasant. A careful examination of the reformers' writings reveals far more than a slavish repetition of official views. Those sent to the front line were often embroiled in heated debates with respect to the appropriateness of certain techniques and print designs for the implementation of state policy. They reiterated the Party line, of course, but they also expressed frustration in dealing with the peasants. It is the reformers' frustration that proves most revealing, for, in their investigation, peasants' voices and anger were occasionally reported and, in some instances, directly quoted to support the reformers' disappointment. In other words, reformers' writings on the *nianhua* campaign comprise a mosaic of Party policies and popular reactions, providing another channel for us to look into the complicated mental world of the peasantry. This world, contrary to government propaganda, was far from submissive and quiet. The peasants were often blunt in their opposition to the new prints. They found many reformed pieces unacceptable and refused to buy them, frustrating the official *nianhua* policy and rendering it ineffective. This negative response was clearly reflected in the poor sales of the new prints, which furnishes yet another avenue to examine the peasants' *mentalités*.

What makes a good *nianhua*? A good print, according to art critic Wang Shucun, contains several essential ingredients: It tells a good story; the caption is written in propitious language; and the people it represents are men and women of great distinction or moral worth.<sup>75</sup> A northern Jiangsu proverb provides a broader definition: "A cherished print has five components: It is beautiful to look at (*you kantou*), carries auspicious ideas (*you xiangtou*), relates a good tale (*you jiangtou*), is forceful (*you jingtou*), and exudes a flamboyant spirit (*you bentou*)."<sup>76</sup> Measured against these standards, the *nianhua* reform was a failure.

From the outset, peasants were critical of the new prints. They found it hard to accept a novel kind of *nianhua* produced on an offset machine, a process dramatically different from that of the traditional woodblock style.<sup>77</sup> The problem, however, lies less in the peasants' unfamiliarity with the new technique and more in their uneasiness with the colors of the new designs. For many peasants, the machine-made prints were aesthetically unappealing and visually problematic. Color, of course, lies at the core of a print, and this is especially so in *nianhua*. Feng Zhen, a female *nianhua* expert, during her investigation of the sales of New Year prints in rural Hebei, observed, "Chinese peasants are first drawn to a print's colors, and only then to its content."<sup>78</sup> This comment is in accord with the conclusion drawn by sociologists studying people's artistic tastes. Herbert Gans and Pierre Bourdieu, for example, have argued that art appreciation is not an innate predisposition but, rather, is acquired. One learns to understand art through education, and education is differentiated by social class.<sup>79</sup> Bourdieu's theory of social distinction draws attention to the varied tastes expressed by people from different social strata. Those in the lower social classes, according to Bourdieu, tend to favor art that is more colorful and direct, to

demand immediate satisfaction, and stress function over form. Those from the upper classes, on the other hand, are likely to hold a more reflective and discriminating view of art.<sup>80</sup> “This print is sparkling (*xianliang*) and that one brings prosperity (*honghuo*)” was a common reaction among Chinese peasants to their favorite prints, noted Feng Zhen.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the two critical terms for traditional folk prints were “sharp” (*jian*) and “bright” (*yang*), which, according to painter Yu Feian, meant hues that were “bright and lively, bold and exaggerated, and completely enchanting whether viewed from near or far.”<sup>82</sup> Bright colors in *nianhua*, especially red, served more than a decorative and practical function, lightening up the bare, dark rooms inside a peasant’s home; they also represented felicity and prosperity. The traditional use in the New Year prints of a limited number of widely available, inexpensive red, green, and yellow pigments was also prompted by economic considerations, contends Yu Feian. Folk artists, he argues, with their limited resources, had little choice but to find pigments that were cheap and convenient to use. Moreover, these were expected to last for a considerable time.<sup>83</sup> But vibrant colors in the old prints seemed incongruous to art reformers’ academically-trained eyes. For many, bright red and sharp green were not only “offensive to the eyes (*tai cim*),” as one critic quickly dismissed them,<sup>84</sup> but they were also “in poor taste (*suqi*).”<sup>85</sup> Nor were the reformers comfortable with what they regarded as the monotonous use of a limited number of bright colors. Instead, they preferred muted tones, with the use of shading, to render volume and mass and give the picture a more refined appearance.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the new products were less spectacular in color and more subdued in mood. The peasants’ rejection was immediate. One spoke candidly: “These new prints are not bright enough (*bu huobao*).”<sup>87</sup> Another added, “They look stale (*bu xinjian*).”<sup>88</sup> A third peasant was no less critical, “They are just plain old!”<sup>89</sup> Prints with muted colors and shading drew particularly harsh criticism. As one peasant woman remarked on the shabby dress of a woman in a print: “It is true that women dress casually for work, but when they appear in a print, they should don more handsome clothing.”<sup>90</sup> Bright colors were therefore more than a visual expression; they also ignited the peasants’ idealization, providing an escape from their harsh and unpredictable lives.

For many peasants, the new *nianhua* prints failed to deliver an appealing story. Clearly the government had intended to purge traditional *nianhua* of unacceptable elements and fill them with new subjects. In so doing, however, the prints’ familiar storylines—one of their most endearing legacies—were eradicated. As indicated earlier, a high-quality *nianhua* must tell a good story. Moreover, the peasants seemed to hold a deep-rooted belief that much of a print’s appeal was in its ability to relate a tale. Familiar images in a traditional print were therefore more than the products of artistic expression; they also provided entertainment, as in the case of the abovementioned depiction of Generals Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong. What appealed to the peasants in a traditional print was a story with a familiar plot, relating well-known episodes from the past. The

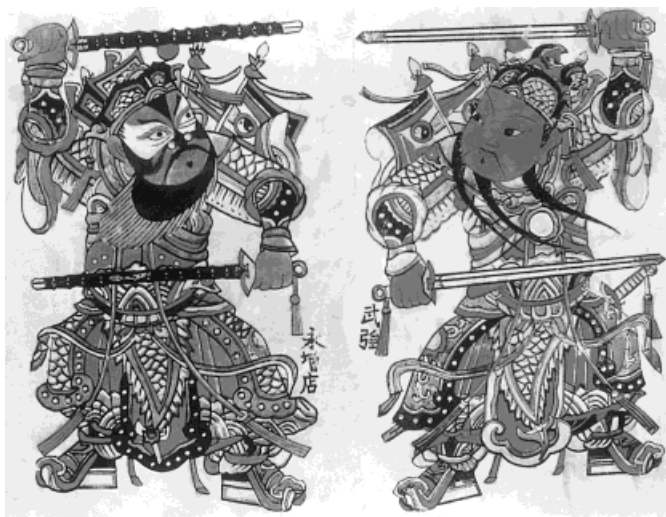


PLATE 1. *Generals Yuchi Gong and Qin Qiong*. Wuqiang County, Hebei Province. Height: 9.6 inches; width: 5.7 inches (each). The Characters “Yongzeng dian” on the left is the name of the print shop and “Wuqiang” on the right is the county where the print was produced. Source: Wang Shucun, *Paper Joss: Deity Worship Through Folk Prints* (Beijing: New World Press, 1992), p. 134.



PLATE 2. *The Stove God*. Fengxiang County, Shaanxi Province. Height: 10.8 inches; width: 7.6 inches. At the top of the print is a 1987 calendar (a reprint of a traditional version). Above the Stove God and his wife are the words “Residence of the Stove God.” The couplet reads, “The master of the people / The surveillance official [literally, “ear and eye”] of heaven.” Source: Author’s collection.



PLATE 3. *Zhong Kui* (Qing dynasty). Wuqiang County, Hebei Province. Height: 28.7 inches; width: 20.5 inches. The bat in the upper right corner is an auspicious symbol (the Chinese character for “bat” is homophonous with another character meaning “blessings”). The square is a Daoist emblem of exorcism. Source: Bo Songnian, *Chinese New Year Pictures* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1995), Plate 104.



PLATE 4. *The Ox King*. Beijing. Height: 12.2 inches; width: 9.8 inches. With a fierce expression, the Ox King is shown wearing an ox headgear. Source: Wang Shucun, *Paper Joss: Diety Worship Through Folk Prints*, p. 21.



PLATE 5. *Be Diligent and Frugal in Managing Your Home*. Yangjiabu Village, Shandong Province. Height: 20.8 inches; width: 14.5 inches. The calendar is for 1985, a reprint of a version issued in the 1950s. Below the calendar is the title of the print. The character on each of the two lanterns means “happiness”; the one in the diamond means “blessings.” Source: *Yangjiabu nianhua* [Yangjiabu’s New Year Prints], eds. Shandongsheng Weifangshi bowuguan [The Museum of the City of Weifang, Shandong Province] and Yangjiabu muban nianhua yanjiusuo [The Institute of Yangjiabu Woodblock New Year Prints] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), Plate 134.



PLATE 6. Luo Cheng, *Defend Our Motherland! Protect Peace!* (1955). Place of printing and size unknown. Source: *Nianhua xuanbian, 1949–1959* [Selected New Year Prints, 1949–1959], ed. Renmin meishu chubanshe [People’s Art Publishing House] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1961), Plate 134.



PLATE 7. Yu Xing, *Learn from Daqing! Learn from Dazhai!* (1970s). Place of printing and size unknown. Source: Mini-size sale sample, author's collection.

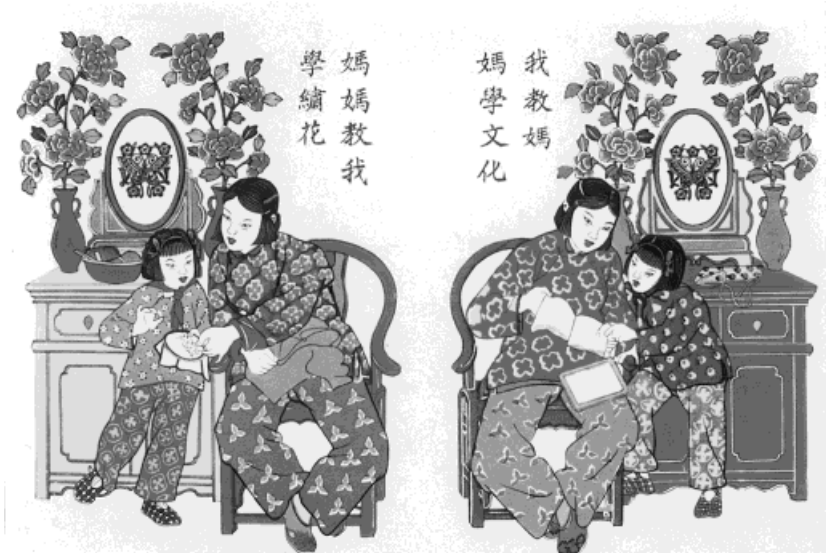


PLATE 8. Ye Zhenxing, *Mother Teaches Me How to Do Embroidery; I Teach Mother How to Read* (1956). Shandong Province. Size unknown. Source: *Nianhua xuanbian*, 1949–1959, Plate 41. This 1956 version is a reprint of the original 1954 piece.



PLATE 9. *The Money Tree* (Qing dynasty). Yangjiabu Village, Shandong Province. Height: 26.7 inches; width: 15.7 inches. The tree is painted like a dragon. A giant bowl is placed under the tree to harvest coins and other treasures. Source: Bo Songnian, *Chinese New Year Pictures*, Plate 165.



PLATE 10. Shi Banhua, *This Is the Real Money Tree* (1952). Yangjiabu Village, Shandong Province. Height: 28.3 inches; width: 16.5 inches. Source: Chen Yangqiao, Chen Qiucuo, and Zhu Shiji, eds. *Huadong minjian nianhua* [East China's Folk New Year Prints] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1955), p. 58.



PLATE 11. *Bearing Many Sons* (Qing dynasty). Yangliuqing, Tianjin, Hebei Province. Source: Bo Songnian, *Chinese New Year Pictures*, Plate 45.



PLATE 12. Zhang Ding, *New China's Children* (1950). Beijing. Size unknown. Source: *Nianhua xuanbian*, 1949–1959, Plate 1.



PLATE 13. Sun Minghua, *The Unification of Our Motherland; The Unity of All Nationalities* (1985). Place of printing and size unknown. Source: *Shanghai guohua nianhua suoyang, yijiubawu* (A sample, reduced in scale, of the 1985 national paintings and New Year prints) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, n.d.), p. 70.



PLATE 14. Lin Gang, *Zhao Guilan at the Heroes' Reception* (1951). Beijing. Size unknown. Source: *Nianhua xuanbian, 1949–1959*, Plate 7.



PLATE 15. Liu Xiqi, *China, My Motherland!* (1984). Place of printing and size unknown. Source: Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhuashi* [History of Chinese New Year Prints] (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1986), Plate Section, p. 27.

embedded story communicated a single coherent narrative; it focused on men and women, not circumstances; it dealt with the specific, not the abstract; and, of course, it was conveyed visually. The new socialist prints, with modern heroes and revolutionary themes, now replaced the familiar tales. Widely-known traditional figures such as Generals Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong were now replaced by the unfamiliar face of Zhao Guilan, the government-promoted, modern-day labor heroine with no roots in the peasants' collective memory. As one peasant remarked, "I have no idea what these prints are about; they have no story to tell."<sup>91</sup>

A narrative also means that a series of events is unfolded in sequential order. It has a specific design and a distinct sense of role-differentiation, enabling viewers to identify with the events of the story. The peasants found this lacking in the new prints as well. Li Qun (1912—), the famous woodcut artist, argued that some prints were either unduly complicated or extremely confusing, with no overall plot and structure. "This is a direct contradiction to the traditional New Year print," he wrote.<sup>92</sup>

To be sure, the realistic portrayals in the new prints run counter to the exaggerated and distorted depictions of folk artists' earlier works. In the traditional prints, the oversized heads, the huge eyes, the towering door guardians, the chubby babies, and the beautiful women were all idealized representations. Contrary to these traditional practices, the reformers, following the official doctrine of socialist realism in vogue at that time, produced new pictures in a stark, realistic fashion.<sup>93</sup> *Defend Our Motherland! Protect Peace!* is a case in point. In this print the People's Liberation Army soldiers are too realistic and straightforward to inspire one's imagination. The striking and exaggerated features commonly associated with the old formula (as in *Zhong Kui*) have disappeared; so, too, have its dramatic and entertaining effects. Peasants in the 1950s viewed such faithful depictions of human figures as dull. "The new prints are far too realistic (*tai xiang zhen de*)," some criticized.<sup>94</sup> "They are uninteresting (*mei kangtou*)!" others concluded.<sup>95</sup> For ordinary people, the denial of artistic exaggeration and distortion in the new prints was tantamount to an attack against their free flight of fantasy. Inevitably, these people displayed hostility to a reform that denied them imaginative entertainment.

The new prints also differed from their predecessors in language. The reformers employed a multitude of unfamiliar phrases, words, and neologisms. Gone were such titles as *Stove God*, *God of Wealth*, *Zhong Kui*, and *Bearing Many Songs*. Instead, an unfamiliar array of socialist slogans emerged: *Learn From Our Soviet Elder Brothers* (reflecting China's tribute to its socialist brethren), *Long Live the Great Friendship Between the Chinese and the Koreans!* (voicing support for the Communist forces in the Korean War), and *Great Unity of All Chinese Nationalities*. The reformers' repeated use of dense and embellished prose posed a further problem. Instead of clear, direct language, one critic complained, some artists used obscure sentences and complicated rhymes in designing their new prints, especially the "Four Hanging Scrolls," a

type of *nianhua* linking together four pictures to construct an overall theme. “Many suffered from a language of bewildering complexity, incomprehension, and pretension,” he asserted.<sup>96</sup>

Ye Youxin, a member of the 1952 Yangjiabu reform team,<sup>97</sup> put his finger on this problem of patronizing elitism. In an article published in 1954, Ye criticized the reformers as having a superior urban bias against the old prints, denouncing them as “backward” and unworthy of attention.<sup>98</sup> That the majority of reformers (especially art students) came from the cities blinded them to the rustic nature of folk art, as well as to the peasants’ emotions. Beginning in the early 1950s, urban scenes, especially of the capital, Beijing, occupied an increasingly prominent place in the new images. This was, however, a motif unfamiliar to the peasants. The protagonists in the new prints often looked more like city dwellers than country folk, and the images appeared foreign and strange to the villagers. Hence, instead of learning from the people, as the official Maoist line instructed, the reformers, bound by their own limited experience and prejudiced by their conventional disdain for the masses, presented the peasants with a preconceived urban culture, which only distanced the reformers further from the rural audience they wished to reach. “These are actually rather good pictures, but they are not my cup of tea (*Bu he women de daodao*),” one peasant commented on the urban scenes depicted in a print.<sup>99</sup>

This urban bias, as one artist confessed, reflected the fundamental problem of the elite’s implicit but widespread condescension toward this traditional art form. “Artists, in general, did not take New Year prints seriously,” he observed. “They view the prints as an inferior genre to painting,” and many “are compelled to produce them against their own will.”<sup>100</sup> Such criticism struck a sensitive chord. In the early years of the People’s Republic, elated by the promise of a new socialist regime, many noted artists, including Ye Qianyu (1907–1995), Li Keran (1907–1989), Li Hua, Zhang Guangyu, and Zhang Leping (1910–1992), rallied behind the government’s call to support the *nianhua* drive, giving the endeavor prestige and visibility. The veteran artists eagerly tried their hand at designing new prints. Ye Qianyu’s piece on the unity of all nationalities in China (1952) and Li Keran’s on labor heroes (1952) even gained accolades by winning prizes in the national *nianhua* competition in 1952. But such enthusiasm soon diminished as the veteran artists gradually turned their attention elsewhere. The shift largely reflected a change in government policy in 1953. With the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan and the end of the Korean War, the government announced its plan for industrialization and technological growth. The art associations followed the policy shift by promoting Soviet-style oil painting and reviving traditional Chinese painting (*guohua*).<sup>101</sup> Ye Qianyu and Li Keran soon abandoned *nianhua* and once again embraced their beloved traditional painting, especially when both artists were appointed to the newly revived Department of Traditional Painting at the Central Academy of Arts (*Zhongyang meishu xueyuan*) in 1954. Ye’s and Li’s brief stint in the *nianhua* camp therefore re-

flected a temporary digression from their principal devotion. It also indicated a more widespread phenomenon among artists: their unwillingness to commit time and energy to what they regarded as a minor art form, known neither for its status nor artistic worth. In 1953 *nianhua* was one of the three principal art forms catering to mass consumption (the other two were picturebooks and slides), something artists shunned. The three forms were derisively labeled by many artists as the “three don’ts”: that is, three types of art that artists avoided.<sup>102</sup> This elitist bent, art critics Bo Songnian and Wang Shucun charge, is evidence of how artists continued to despise the vital task of popularization, which, of course, spelled more trouble for the *nianhua* campaign.<sup>103</sup>

The reformers’ elitist bias, however, was only one of the problems in the campaign, and by no means was it the most serious. The campaign was fundamentally a political crusade and should therefore be analyzed in that vein. The government’s attempt to exercise political control over people’s lives was nowhere more evident than in its antireligious measures. But to lump together peasants’ religious beliefs as mere “superstitions,” as government officials and reformers did, is a gross simplification of the peasants’ enormously complicated mental and spiritual universe. The government attack against religious prints was essentially an assault against the peasants’ traditions, as well as against their psychological bent and artistic imagination. Sociologists and anthropologists studying China have long argued that religion, especially popular religion, plays a critical role in people’s lives. Following C. K. Yang, many hold that popular religion, which is syncretic and less concerned with doctrinal distinctions than elite religions such as Buddhism, has an integrative function in society.<sup>104</sup> Popular religion is closely related to life-cycle rituals (childbirth, weddings, funerals) and annual festivals (New Year’s day, seasonal holidays, and birthdays of deities).<sup>105</sup> It was tied to the well-being of the living and generated a sense of community and harmony in the villages. Chinese peasants worshipped deities who responded to their needs and could provide both psychological and spiritual comfort. China’s many deities furnished peasants with a spiritual blanket, but were also asked to meet practical needs. This was particularly evident with regard to the gods associated with agricultural production and the agricultural calendar in general. Like their Russian counterparts who worshipped saints for specific agricultural functions (Vlas, for example, was responsible for cattle),<sup>106</sup> Chinese peasants’ requests to their trusted gods were downright practical. For example, the Ox King, who accepted offerings on the first day of the tenth lunar month, was asked to protect cattle and guard them against diseases.<sup>107</sup> The Stove God was encouraged (even bribed) to bring good fortune to the home after his favorable report in heaven. Such a practice reflected the hopes and desires of a rural population, who, despite living under conditions of severe material constraint, continued to dream of a better life ahead.

The change of *The Stove God* to a *Martyr Memorial Pagoda* was therefore met with instant disapproval. That the new image was purged of its religious

blessings, which meant protection and good fortune, angered the peasants. Worse still, unlike the Stove God image, which represented the festive New Year, the renewal of the seasonal cycle, and hope, the new image was viewed as a symbol of death and mourning. Thus the meaning it conveyed was the exact opposite of the traditional print. "Inauspicious!" was how peasants put it.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, the issue of auspiciousness (*jili*), an essential ingredient in the traditional prints, came up repeatedly in the peasants' harsh criticism of the new prints. Even the image of heroic soldiers was interpreted in this light. Viewers objected to the new pattern of prints featuring heroic militia in resolute frontal poses, as in *An Entire Nation in Arms* (*Quanmin jiebing*). "After an exhausting winter, I long for a pleasant New Year; the armed militia with their fierce gazes really make me nervous. I wouldn't display it even if it were given to me for free."<sup>109</sup> Another simply said, "Brandishing weapons as if going to war. Unlucky!"<sup>110</sup>

Negative reactions to such prints as *An Entire Nation in Arms* epitomized the predicament faced by the reformers: new designs with overt propaganda were often frowned on by the consumers. To be sure, propaganda and artistic quality are not necessarily mutually exclusive, if creativity and imagination are allowed free reign. But communism and art often make an uncomfortable couple, with the former playing a suffocating and abusive role. The government's concerted effort to bring *nianhua* prints under central control caused problems by imposing the primacy of politics and ideology on cultural matters and demanding that the people speak with one voice. Politics now invaded the new prints at every level. The official status of the new *nianhua* meant that artists were only permitted to operate under prescribed rules and portray approved subjects such as heroic soldiers, selfless workers, wise leaders, and peasant cooperative society. This, of course, was in sharp contrast to the old prints, which drew inspirations freely from multiple sources, ranging from daily experiences to memorable heroes of the past, and allowed the folk artists a greater degree of freedom in their creations. The poverty of the subject matters and the stilted language in the new works made them predictable and dull, and the images and plots, as one critic wrote, became "formulaic and lifeless."<sup>111</sup> Refashioning *The Money Tree* into *An Apple Tree* was yet another indication of the rapid politicization and routinization of folk art. One peasant reacted with sarcasm: "How much is an apple tree worth?"<sup>112</sup>

Despite official propaganda to the contrary, the results of the reform were disappointing. Of course some pieces were well-liked, such as *Mother Teaches Me How to Do Embroidery; I Teach Mother How to Read*, but in general peasants were apathetic to the new products, and hence refused to buy them. Statistics issued by the Ministry of Culture of East China in 1952 revealed that new prints occupied only one percent of the total sale of 7.8 million copies of *nianhua* in Yangjiabu in that year. The Ministry was forced to admit that "feudal, superstitious old products still exercised enormous influence on the masses."<sup>113</sup> According to a later report, 860,000 copies of new prints featuring "workers,

peasants, and soldiers" (*gong-nong-bing*) were produced in Shanghai and Tianjin in 1955, amounting to thirty-eight percent of the total production, while the rest were devoted to "classical theatrical scenes and chubby boys" and other similar subjects. The following year, the percentage of "workers, peasants, and soldiers" took a surprising plunge to 8.8 percent, but the output of "classical theatrical scenes and chubby boys" soared to 56.6 percent. The production of new prints continued to drop in 1958, falling to 2.6 percent, while the manufacture of traditional-themed prints climbed to seventy-two percent. Although the reporter who presented these statistics blamed the disappointing print sales of the socialist heroes on poor distribution and ineffective promotion, the real problem undoubtedly lay in the insipid propaganda art itself.<sup>114</sup> A report in the early 1980s showed no improvement in the situation:

It is by now a familiar problem: the traditional prints of chubby babies, ancient costumes, beautiful ladies, and propitious contents [reappear and] sell briskly. They are printed in large quantities, easily in the millions, whereas those new prints that reflect real life and are rich in new ideas and educational value have few takers; sometimes only a few thousands are sold. Others have ceased printing altogether.<sup>115</sup>

Worse still, to the astonishment and fear of officials and reformers, many previously-condemned religious prints were making a comeback (see Plate 2). A report published in the early 1980s related the alarming news: "In villages, people are once again surreptitiously printing superstitious *nianhua* such as the door gods."<sup>116</sup> A decade later, in the early 1990s, the situation was completely reversed, as Door God prints made a new, public appearance. In 1991 the prestigious People's Art Publishing House (*Renmin meishu chubanshe*) in Shanghai sent out catalogues and openly solicited orders for the once-condemned deity prints such as Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong.<sup>117</sup> The continued strong public interest in Door God prints is an indication not only of the powerful hold of tradition but also of the peasants' successful resistance against imposed politicized art.

In brief, the *nianhua* reform proved to be a failure when measured against the government's original intention. There were many reasons for its demise.<sup>118</sup> Most importantly, the political prints never elicited much interest among the masses. The peasants refused to accept the government-initiated designs, and hence declined to buy them. Instead, they continued to express their nostalgia for the old style. In resisting state pressure, the peasants let their consumption, or lack of it, do the talking.

#### RESISTANCE

It is true that modern forms of political dictatorship, as Hannah Arendt has argued, have the power and means to invade an individual's private life, but, as this article illustrates, they can never completely dominate it. They face a populace that is by no means passive. Similarly, the Gramscian model of cultural hegemony also overestimates the elite's ability to exercise influence over the lower classes, when in fact common people are often quite vocal in thwarting

cultural impositions. They are extremely active when it comes to determining their own lifestyle and customs. The Chinese *nianhua* protest was a reaction against an unprecedented nationwide art campaign mounted by a government that intended to infuse its populace with socialist ideals through the vehicle of folk art. But far from submitting to the ideological constraints imposed on them by the state, the populace stubbornly adhered to their own traditional methods of consumption and refused to purchase the socialist prints. In so doing, not only did they delimit and redefine the publicly perceived relations of domination, they also challenged the common notion that officials have the ability to freely impose cultural hegemony on the lower orders.

The study of peasant resistance has moved forward by leaps and bounds in recent decades, especially through the works of Barrington Moore, Jr., Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf, and James Scott.<sup>119</sup> Although scholars dispute what exactly constitutes resistance,<sup>120</sup> they have reached a consensus that peasants are neither passive nor inert, nor are they hapless victims. Ample evidence shows that peasants take charge of their own lives and create their own social space to protect themselves against external (especially state) oppression. This conclusion is a product of the study of history “from below” (borrowing E. P. Thompson’s well-known phrase)<sup>121</sup>; it also assumes that an appreciation of peasants’ voices is central to our understanding of agrarian protest. In other words, we must examine the peasants’ everyday existence and allow them to speak their own language.

The Chinese peasants’ resistance to the new *nianhua* prints was evident in their decision not to buy them. By emphasizing the role that selective consumption played in the resistance culture, one also shifts the focus from the state’s cultural production to popular reception, from producers to consumers, and from officials to peasants. Indeed, the process of consumption, which is of no significant value in orthodox Marxist theory, can be of great use in analyzing Chinese peasants’ behavior. The idea that consumerism is a form of activism brings to mind Michel de Certeau’s influential work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in which de Certeau describes a much-neglected kind of resistance among ordinary individuals. Instead of looking at the producer (writer, landlord), de Certeau studies the active role played by the consumer (reader, renter), and sees active consumers taking charge of their lives.<sup>122</sup> He argues that consumption is a form of production, a process through which consumers in capitalist societies skillfully adjust mass-manufactured artifacts to meet their own needs, as in the case of an audience responding at will to a television drama. By emphasizing cultural consumption and not production, de Certeau not only places the users of culture at the center of everyday practices, he also challenges the ability of the powerful to impose their will freely and unopposed. The consumers, according to de Certeau, clearly know how to withstand pressure from the top. Through tricks and disguise, they can subvert power and confuse, if not reverse, relations of domination.

That popular taste poses a problem for the communist regimes has already been conclusively demonstrated by Richard Stites, among others. In his study of Russian popular culture, Stites uncovers a vibrant consumer culture in the Soviet Union. Even in the years of harsh control and oppression under Stalin's rule, Stites argues that an element of consumer choice was always available and a strong public desire for entertainment, not politics, persisted.<sup>123</sup> Popular taste often befuddled and frustrated the state's attempt to use mass culture to indoctrinate the masses.

Similarly, peasants in rural China made choices and played an active role in the face of a state-imposed agenda, as was evident in the *nianhua* reform. In general, peasants viewed the *nianhua* drive with deep suspicion and disapproval. Most of the new products failed to meet their traditional standards of a good print. The new prints were visually problematic, religiously inauspicious, too realistic, and did not tell a good story. Moreover, the prints were designed by a group of urban reformers who knew little about peasants' lives and certainly seldom considered their views. Worse still, the drive was an ideological campaign initiated by a new Communist state, one that intended not only to indoctrinate the peasants, but also to change their customs and common practices. Political prints proved to be suffocating, depriving peasants of artistic imagination and denying them their practical and psychological needs; moreover, the prints denied peasants their traditions and, ultimately, their very sense of worth. Peasants, Samuel Popkin argues, are intelligent calculators who control their own destiny based on self-interest. They view collective goods largely through the lens of self and family. They are "rational," according to Popkin, because "they make the choice which they believe will maximize their expected utility."<sup>124</sup> The Chinese *nianhua* campaign, based on socialist collectivism, ran counter to the peasants' general outlook and inevitably provoked their opposition.

This article argues that culture is central in understanding peasant behavior. The communist state's domination over its populace is never simply in the arenas of politics or economic life; it is, perhaps even more important, in the area of culture. However, the CCP's use of popular cultural artifacts to disseminate socialist ideals to its people was a shaky and unpredictable endeavor. The production of cultural artifacts (in this case, the new *nianhua*) was a complicated process of creation and reception, over which the state had no absolute control. It was an ideological war between state and society, and between producers and consumers. In the *nianhua* reform, the state proved unable to impose a new type of political propaganda on a seemingly quiescent public. The peasant consumers loudly voiced their displeasure against this imposition from above.

Consumerism is quickly spreading in today's China, especially since Deng Xiaoping unleashed market reform in the late 1970s.<sup>125</sup> In fact, the political *nianhua* prints are available even today,<sup>126</sup> but recent studies indicate that peasants continue to favor traditional visual expressions and auspicious em-

blems.<sup>127</sup> Many prints have also assumed a different look. In 1984 Liu Xiqi's *China, My Motherland! (Zuguo a, Muqin!)* appeared and became an instant hit (Plate 15). The print depicts a young Chinese woman returning to Beijing from overseas for a nostalgic visit. With the customary bright colors and familiar doves, she is enjoying a leisurely walk at Beijing's Tiananmen Square. But why is the print so popular? Is it the capital (with its monumental Great Hall of the People in the background) that evokes the visitor's sense of belonging and patriotism to her motherland, as the title would have us believe? Or is it the beautiful young woman with her sweet smile? We do not know for sure, of course. But given the fact that the country is now awash with consumerism, and that calendars and magazines featuring attractive female movie stars and alluring female models are a hot commodity in the publication industry, it is likely that consumers are drawn to the print less for its patriotic call, and more because of the enchanting woman.

## NOTES

1. "Zhongyong renmin zhengfu wenhuabu guanyu kaizhan xin nianhua gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions on How to Launch the Work of the New New Year Prints, the Ministry of Culture, the Central People's Government], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 27 November 1949, 4; see also *Guangming ribao* [Enlightenment Daily], 27 November 1949, 4.

2. Lenin developed this idea in his influential work *What Is To Be Done?* Although Mao Zedong placed greater emphasis on the spontaneity and voluntarism of the lower classes, he never resolved the contradiction between the party's leadership role and the voluntarism of the people.

3. See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13.

4. See Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), chap. 6, "Popular Culture in the Communist Areas." See also David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), section 2, "Yangge: A New Model Genre."

5. Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], "Report to the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 4 (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1969), 363.

6. However, some prints (such as those of Yangliuqing), influenced by academic paintings of the Song and Ming dynasties, are intricate in layout and known for their elegant hand-painted images.

7. For a brief history of *nianhua*, see Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhuashi* [History of Chinese New Year Prints] (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1986), 1–5. For an excellent introduction in English, see Po Sung-nien [Bo Songnian] and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China* (Berkeley: Publications of the Chinese Popular Culture Project; The IEAS Publications, 1992), especially 9–18, 105.

8. Meng Yuanlao of the Song wrote in his *Dongjing menghua lu* [Recollections of the Eastern Capital] that when the New Year drew near, the streets of the capital Bianliang (present-day Kaifeng) were filled with folk prints, especially pictures of door guardians and Zhong Kui (the demon exorcist). See Meng, *Dongjing menghua lu zhu* [Recollections of the Eastern Capital], annotated by Deng Zhicheng (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), vol. 10, 249, 253.

9. For example, Yangliuqing was known for its meticulous fine-line printing and Yangjiabu for its lively rustic patterns.

10. *Yangjiabu cunzhi* [History of the Village of Yangjiabu], ed. Shandongsheng Weifangshi Hantingqu Yangjiabu cunzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui [The Editorial Committee of the History of Yangjiabu Village, Hanting District, Weifang City, Shandong Province] (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1993), 381–93.

11. Foreign scholars also showed interest in collecting New Year prints. Russian collectors—for example, Vasily Vasilyev and Vasily Kovalevsky—assembled *nianhua* in the 1830s and 1840s. In the late nineteenth century Vladimir Komarov also brought many prints from China. See *Chinese Popular Prints*, selection and text by Maria Rudova, ed. Lev Menshikov, trans. Viacheslav Sobolev (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1988), 11. See also *Sulian cang Zhongguo minjian nianhua zhenpinji* [A Collection of New Year Print Treasure in the Soviet Union] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1990; Leningrad: Aurora, 1990).

12. Ye Youxin, “Weixian minjian muban nianhua de chuantong tezheng” [Traditional Characteristics of Weixian’s Folk New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1954): 18–20; quoted from p. 18. The *nianhua* prints became a big business in Ming-Qing China. In mid-Qing period, the town of Mianzhu in Sichuan had more than three hundred workshops engaged in making the New Year prints, producing more than ten million copies each year. See Gao Wen, Hou Shiwu, and Ning Zhiqi, eds., *Mianzhu nianhua* [Mianzhu’s New Year Prints] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), 4. Seasonal peddlers acquired prints from major centers and then distributed them to remote village corners, often accompanied by pitch songs. See Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo minjian nianhua* [Chinese Folk New Year Prints] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), 124–28. Sales of the prints plummeted during the Republican era because many print-producing centers were ruined by wars and social upheavals. The Communists revived the *nianhua* prints after seizing power in 1949.

13. Information on Lu Xun’s interest in woodblock prints abounds. See, for example, Liu Xian, “Lu Xun geiyu de jiaoyi—Guanyu Zhuxianzhen muban nianhua” [Lu Xun’s Teaching: On Zhuxianzhen’s Woodblock New Year Prints], *Banhua yishu* [Print Art] 20 (October 1986): 8–9.

14. For the Communists’ use of *nianhua* prints in the Yan’an days, see Chang-tai Hung, “Two Images of Socialism: Woodcuts in Chinese Communist Politics,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39 (January 1997): 34–60.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1958), especially chap. 13, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government.”

17. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

18. See Li Xiqin, ed., *Meishu cilin: banhua yishu juan* [The Dictionary of Art: Prints] (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), 583.

19. Derk Bodde, a Fulbright Fellow living in Beijing during the Communist takeover in 1949, attended the exhibition in Central Park. He wrote that among the pieces put on display

were the less sophisticated works prepared by Communist propagandists for use among the peasants. There were colored lantern slides illustrating the prowess of the Liberation Army or its cooperation with the people; . . . colored New Year pictures (traditionally posted in peasant homes at [the] Chinese New Year) in which the traditional God of Wealth and the Eight Immortals are replaced by such up-to-date themes as peasants working together in the field[s] or participating in a ‘bean election’ (voting for village officials by casting beans into jars set beneath the names and pictures of candidates).

See Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 228; see also 182, 227.

20. For a comprehensive discussion of the art policy in the early years of the People's Republic, see Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), especially chap. 2, 58–64. See also Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

21. See, for example, *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 25 November 1949, 4; 27 November 1949, 4; 23 December 1949 and 31 December 1949, *passim*.

22. See, for example, a special issue of new New Year prints published a few days before the Chinese Lunar New Year in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 11 February 1950, 5. Similar pages were devoted to the prints in 1951, see *Renmin ribao*, 3 January 1951, 5.

23. For example, *Renmin meishu* [People's Art], the flagship journal of the Association of All-China Artists (Zhonghua quanguo meishu gongzuozhe xiehui), published a special issue on *nianhua* in April 1950. See *Renmin meishu* 2 (1 April 1950).

24. *Meishu* [Art] 3 (15 March 1956): 37. Other prominent artists, including painter Li Keran and cartoonist Zhang Ding, also expressed their enthusiasm about the new art. See *idem*, and 8 (15 August 1954): 44–5.

25. Cheng Yanqiu and Du Yingtao, "Hanting de nianhua" [Hanting's New Year Prints], *Minjian wenyi jikan* [On Folk Literature and Art], 2 (15 May 1951): 29–33.

26. On the reform of folk artists, see Xie Changyi, "Xiang minjian nianhua xuexi" [Learn from Folk New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 2 (15 February 1960): 36–8; and Gao Wen, Hou Shiwu, Ning Zhiqi, eds., *Mianzhu nianhua*, 4. Well-known artists were singled out for praise. On Yang Wendong, see *Yangjiabu cunzhi*, 388–9. See also Zhang Dianying, *Yangjiabu muban nianhua* [Yangjiabu's Woodblock New Year Prints] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1990), 162–4. Other folk artists, such as Yangliuqing's Zhang Gongze, were praised for their skills. See Wang Shucun, "Jiwei zhuming de minjian gongyi meishu yiren jieshao" [An Introduction to Some Noted Folk Handicraft Artists], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1957): 48–9.

27. A national *nianhua* exhibition, for instance, was held in Beijing's Central Park from February 17 to 23 to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year. See *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 21 February 1950, 3. Conferences on *nianhua* were held in provinces. See *Meishu* [Art] 6 (15 June 1958): 28, 35.

28. The Ministry of Culture announced the results of its first national new New Year prints competition in April 1950. Prizes were given to a total of twenty-five artists, divided into three categories. See *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 16 April 1950, 4.

29. National competitions were held in subsequent years, such as 1951 and 1952. They were again sponsored by the Ministry of Culture. See the announcement of Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun, 1896–1981), the Minister of Culture, in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 5 September 1952, 3. Many award-winning prints were later issued in book form for wider circulation. See, for example, *Nianhua xuanbian, 1949–1959* [Selected New Year Prints, 1949–1959], ed. Renmin meishu chubanshe [People's Art Publishing House] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1961), and *Shandong huojiang nianhua xuanji* [Selected Prize-winning New Year Prints from Shandong] (N.p.: Shandong meishu chubanshe, 1992).

30. See *Meishu* [Art] 2 (25 March 1978): 7. Zhou's visit was captured in a print by Zhang Fulong, entitled *Spring Willow* (*Chunfeng yangliu*), *Meishu* 4 (25 July 1978): 17, 35.

31. See the discussion in James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

32. Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, chap. 6.

33. See Donald E. MacInnis, ed., *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

34. Wang Zhaowen, "Guanyu xuexi jiu nianhua xingshi" [On Learning from the Form of Old New Year Prints], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 19 March 1950, 5.

35. Wang Yaping, "Cong jiu nianhua dao xin nianhua" [From the Old New Year Prints to the New New Year Prints], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 26 April 1949, 4.

36. See Li Qun et al., "Guanyu xin de nianhua liyong shenxiang geshi wenti" [Questions on the Use of Images of Deities in the New New Year Prints], *Jiefang ribao* [Liberation Daily], 12 April 1945, 4.

37. The statement, "Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhuabu, Chuban zongshu guanyu jiaqiang nianhua gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions on How to Strengthen the Task of the New Year Prints, the Ministry of Culture and the Publication Bureau, the Central People's Government], was jointly issued by Shen Yanbing, the Minister of Culture, and Hu Yuzhi (1896–1986), the publication bureau chief. See *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 26 October 1951, 3.

38. For example, the East China Military Administrative Council issued a similar statement on 24 August 1952, and Shandong Province followed suit in November 1953. See Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui wenhuabu yishu shiye guanlichu [The Art Office of the Bureau of Ministry, East China Military Administrative Council], "Dui Shandong Weibeixian jiu nianhua gaige de yijian" [On the Reform of Old New Year Prints in Weibeixian County, Shandong Province] (24 August 1952), in Zhang Dianying, *Yangjiabu muban nianhua*, 183–6. For the Shandong statement, see Shandongsheng renmin zhengfu wenhua shiye guanliju [The Cultural Management Bureau, Shandong People's Government], "Guanyu ruhe duidai 'zaoma' de yijian" [On How to Deal with the Stove God Print], issued on 12 November 1953; mimeographed document.

39. Besides major *nianhua* areas such as Shandong's Yangjiabu, reforms were conducted in other centers such as Zhuxianzhen, Henan Province, and Fengxiang, Shaanxi Province. See Liu Tiehua, "Muban shuiyin nianhua fayuan di Zhuxianzhen diaocha shiliao" [Historical Materials on the Investigation of the Place of Origin of the Watercolor Woodblock New Year Prints in Zhuxianzhen], *Meishujia* [Artist] 17 (1 December 1980): 37–43; Tai Yi, "Fengxiang muban nianhua jianwenji" [Notes on Fengxiang Woodblock New Year Prints], *Meishu yanjiu* [Art Research] 2 (15 May 1985): 72–5.

40. See Weixian muban nianhua yanjiusuo [The New Year Prints Research Institute of Weixian], "Weixian muban nianhua shiliao shiling" [Notes on the History of Weixian's Woodblock New Year Prints], *Meishu yanjiu* [Art Research] 2 (15 May 1984): 17–22, 28; Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu* [Studies on Weifang's New Year Prints] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1991), 7, 25, 143; and Zhang Dianying, *Yangjiabu muban nianhua*, 29–30. Interviews with Xie Changyi, 8 and 9 June 1997, Ji'nan.

41. Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 25.

42. *Ibid.*, 53.

43. For the discussion of the Stove God, I am indebted to Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo zaojun shenma* [China's Stove God and Paper Horses] (Taibei: Bohaitang wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1993), 13–31. See also Po Sung-nien and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems*, 23–58.

44. Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China: A Study in Sociology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), 199.

45. Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 26.

46. *Ibid.*, 143.

47. Shandongsheng renmin zhengfu wenhua shiye guanliju, "Guanyu ruhe duidai 'zaoma' de yijian."

48. *Yangjiabu nianhua* [Yangjiabu's New Year Prints], eds. Shandongsheng Weifangshi bowuguan and Yangjiabu muban nianhua yanjiusuo [The Museum of the City of Weifang, Shandong Province, and The Institute of Yangjiabu Woodblock New Year Print] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), Plate 134. The print was originally made in the 1950s and was reissued in 1985. See "Illustrations," 14, 51.

49. Wang Jindong, "Henansheng muke nianhua diaocha xiaoji" [A Brief Report on the Investigation of the New Year Prints in Henan Province], *Meishu yanjiu* [Art Research] 2 (15 May 1984): 25. Other key centers, such as Yangjiabu, Taohuawu, and Mianzhu, also produced these types of prints in abundance. See Zhang Dianyong, *Yangjiabu muban nianhua*, 35–62. Zhang Ding, "Taohuawu nianhua" [Taohuawu's New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 8 (15 August 1954): 44–5. Gao Wen, Hou Shiwu, Ning Zhiqi, eds., *Mianzhu nianhua*, 5–6.

50. Bo Songnian, *Chinese New Year Pictures* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1995), Plates 1 and 2.

51. Bo Songnian, *Zhongguo nianhuashi*, 2.

52. Wang Shucun, *Men yu menshen* [Doors and Door Gods] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1994), 180–202.

53. See, for example, *Nianhua xuanbian, 1949–1959*, Plates 2, 4, 9, and 11.

54. It was later discovered that many production figures from Dazhai were inflated and incorrectly reported.

55. *Yangjiabu cunzhi*, 416. The print also had an abbreviated title, *Xue wenhua* [Learning how to read]. See *Meishu* [Art] 3 (15 March 1956): 36.

56. The print was originally designed in the mid-1950s by the New Year Print Production Team in Weifang City, near Yangjiabu. It was repeatedly singled out for praise. See Mu Xun, "Tan menhua, lihua chuanguo" [On the Production of Door God and Calendar Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 1 (15 January 1956): 12; *Meishu* 3 (15 March 1956): illustration; *Meishu* 6 (15 June 1958): 35.

57. This image reflects the official discourse of sexuality in the People's Republic in the 1950s, which, as Harriet Evans has argued, was "premised on a naturalized and hierarchical view of gender relations," one that assumed a biological difference between female and male and implied, among other things, that women are passive and weak whereas men are active and strong. See Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender Since 1949* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 6.

58. A similar approach was used ingeniously by the woodcut artist Gu Yuan during the Yan'an years. In his work, Gu depicted peaceful everyday scenes but full of promise under the Communist rule. See Hung, "Two Images of Socialism."

59. Yiding, "Dui 'Tianguan cifu' de yijian" [My Views on *God's Blessings*], *Meishu* [Art] 6 (15 June 1958): 32. See also Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 14.

60. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 45, 61–2; Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38–44.

61. Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 53–4.

62. Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 6–7. See the discussion of the influence of Russian traditional art on Soviet artists in Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 53–4.

63. *The Money Tree* was a favorite print in *nianhua*. Besides the Yangjiabu example shown in Plate 9, Yangliuqing and Mianzhu also produced their respective versions. See Wang Shucun, ed., *Zhongguo minjian nianhuashi tulu* [A Pictorial History of Chinese Folk New Year Prints] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991), vol. 1, 70; vol. 2, 466.

64. Xie Changyi, "Yaoqianshu de fazhan he yanbian" [The Development and Evolution of *The Money Tree*], *Gugong wenwu yuekan* [The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art] 11 (February 1994): 124.

65. Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 35.

66. *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 16 April 1950, 4.

67. Cai Ruohong, "Lun xin nianhua chuanguo zhong jige zhuyao de wenti" [On Several Key Questions Related to the Producing of New New Year Prints], *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 6 October 1951, 3.

68. See Beatrice Farnsworth, "Village Women Experience the Revolution," in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 239.

69. See *Nianhua xuanbian, 1949–1959*, Plate 4. The print won second prize in the 1951–52 national *nianhua* competition. See *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 5 September 1952, 3. Besides Mao, other Communist leaders such as Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping also figured prominently in the new prints.

70. *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 5 September 1952, 3. The print was well received. See, for example, He Rong, "Quyinghui shang de Zhao Guilan" [Zhao Guilan at the Heroes' Reception], *Meishu* [Art] 2 (15 February 1960): 18.

71. *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 16 April 1950, 4.

72. Quoted in Rogert Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 27.

73. See, for example, Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui wenhuabu yishu shiye guanlichu, "Dui Shandong Weibeixian jiu nianhua gaige de yijian" (24 August 1952), 183–6. Shandongsheng renmin zhengfu wenhua shiye guanlijuhui [The Cultural Management Bureau, Shandong People's Government], "Wei guanche nianhua gaige gongzuo banfa" [Ways to Implement the New Year Print Reform], issued on 2 January 1953; mimeographed document. See also "Yijiuwuernian Shandongsheng nianhua gaige gongzuodui gongzuo zongjie" [A Summary of the Work Done by the Shandong New Year Print Reform Team in 1952], in *Yangjiabu cunzhi*, 401–15.

74. See, for example, *Meishu* [Art] 6 (15 June 1958): 31.

75. Wang Shucun, *Zhongguo minjian nianhuashi lunji* [Essays on the History of the Chinese Folk New Year Prints] (Tianjin: Tianjin Yangliuqing huashe, 1991), 243.

76. Quoted from Ye Wenxi, "Shitan nianhua de zuoyong he tedian" [A Preliminary Investigation into the Functions and Characteristics of the New Year Print], *Meishu* [Art] 2 (25 March 1978): 42.

77. Zhang Zhi, "Qunzhong huanying muban nianhua" [The Masses Welcome Woodblock New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1956): 46.

78. Feng Zhen, "Nianhua diaochaji" [An Investigation of New Year Prints], *Meishu yanjiu* [Art Research] 4 (15 November 1980): 58.

79. Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 67–9, 128–9; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 177–200.

80. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 34–41.

81. Feng Zhen, "Nianhua diaochaji."

82. Yu Feian, *Zhongguohua yanse de yanjiu* [Colors in Chinese Paintings] (Beijing: Zhaohua meishu chubanshe, 1955), 36. Translated by Jerome Silbergeld and Amy McNair as *Chinese Painting Colors: Studies of Their Preparation and Application in Traditional and Modern Times* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 43, with modifications.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Ye Youxin, "Weixian minjian muban nianhua de chuantong tezheng," 20.

85. Wenhua, "Tan nianhua de chuanguo ji chuban wenti" [On the Creation and Production of the New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1956): 52.

86. See the discussion in Lin Chen, "Nianhua de secai" [Color in the New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1956): 51–2.

87. Quoted in Li Qun, "Lun nianhua de xingshi wenti" [On the Question of Form of the New Year Print], *Meishu* [Art] 3 (15 March 1956): 14. See also Ye Youxin, "Weixian minjian muban nianhua de chuantong tezheng," 20.

88. Quoted in Lin Chen, "Nianhua de secai," 51.

89. Quoted in Ye Youxin, "Fandui baoshoude kandai qunzhong dui nianhua de yaoqiu" [Opposition to Hold a Conservative View about the Popular Demand for the New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 1 (15 January 1956): 10.

90. Quoted in Lin Chen, "Nianhua de secai," 51.

91. Mao Zaisheng, "Qunzhong xi'ai minjian nianhua de jige yuanyin" [Several Reasons Why People Like Folk New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] (15 June 1958): 31.

92. Li Qun, "Nianhua de xingshi wenti," 14.

93. Mu Xun, "Tan menhua, lihua chuanguo," 11.

94. Yu Feng, "Xiang minjian nianhua xuexi" [Learn from Folk New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 3 (15 March 1956): 10.

95. Mu Xun, "Tan menhua, lihua chuanguo," 11.

96. Cao Zuurui, "Tantan sishanping nianhua de peici" [On the Language Used in the Four Hanging Scroll Set of New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 12 (15 December 1956): 51.

97. *Yangjiabu cunzhi*, 409.

98. Ye Youxin, "Weixian minjian muban nianhua de chuantong tezheng," 20.

99. *Ibid.*

100. Mu Xun, "Tan manhua, lihua chuanguo," 11.

101. For an account of this shift in art policy, see Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China*, chap. 3, "From Popularization to Specialization."

102. Bo Songnian and Wang Shucun, "Shinianlai woguo xin nianhua de fazhan he chengjiu" [The Development and Achievement of the New New Year Prints in the Last Ten Years], *Meishu yanjiu* [Art Research] 2 (15 May 1959): 12–7, esp. 14.

103. *Ibid.*

104. C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), especially chap. 4, "Communal Aspects of Popular Cults." See also Arthur Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

105. For a succinct discussion of cultural life, especially life-cycle rituals and festivals, in late imperial China, see Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), chap. 3, "Cultural Life."

106. See the discussion in Moshe Lewin, "Popular Religion in Twentieth-Century Russia," in Ben Eklöf and Stephen Frank, eds., *The World of the Russian Peasant: Post-Emancipation Culture and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 158.

107. Wang Shucun, *Paper Joss: Deity Worship Through Folk Prints* (Beijing: New World Press, 1992), 20, Plate 3.

108. Xie Changyi, "Women shi zenyang jicheng he fazhan minjian nianhua chuantong de" [On How We Inherited and Developed the Tradition of Folk New Year Prints], *Meishu* [Art] 1 (25 January 1978): 43.

109. Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 144.

110. Ye Youxin, "Fandui baoshoude kandai qunzhong dui nianhua de yaoqiu," 10.

111. Ye Wenxi, "Shitan nianhua de zuoyong he tedian," 42.

112. Xie Changyi, "Women shi zenyang jicheng he fazhan minjian nianhua chuantong de," 44. See also Zheng Jinlan et al., eds., *Weifang nianhua yanjiu*, 143.

113. Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui wenhuabu yishu shiye guanlichu, "Dui Shandong Weibeixian jiu nianhua gaige de yijian," 183.

114. Xu Ling, "Nianhua gongzuo zhong cunzai de zhuyao wenti" [The Key Problems of the New Year Print Campaign], *Meishu* [Art] 4 (15 April 1958): 6–9.

115. Wu Dong, "Xin nianhua ying liqiu bode nongmin huanxin" [The New New Year Prints Should Make Every Effort to Win the Peasants' Hearts], *Meishu* [Art] 9 (20 September 1982): 19.

116. Wang Shucun, "Xianhua menshen" [Notes on Door Gods], *Meishu shilun congkan* [Essays on the History of Art] 2 (August 1983): 220.

117. See *Shanghai nianhua, 1991* [Shanghai's New Year Prints, 1991], vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, n.d.), 294–5. For the most recent ones, see *Shanghai yishu tupian, 1996* [Shanghai's Art Photographs, 1996] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe meishu tupianbu, 1996), 31–2; *Shanghai yishu tupian, 1997* [Shanghai's Art Photographs, 1997] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe meishu tupianbu, 1997), 35–6.

118. Among them, the strong challenge of calendar posters (*Yuefenpai*), which were prints that originated in Shanghai and were generally graced by pictures of beautiful women. For a brief history of calendar posters, see *Chinese Women and Modernity: Calendar Posters of the 1910s–1930s*, compiled by Ng Chun Bong et al. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1996). For calendar posters in the new *nianhua* style, see Li Mubai and Jin Xuechen, *Li Mubai Jin Xuechen nianhua xuan* [Selected New Year Prints of Li Mubai and Jin Xuechen] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985).

119. Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965); Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); and James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

120. Some scholars, such as Eugene Genovese, question the theory of "everyday forms of resistance" as a form of dissent, a theory proposed most notably by James Scott, for such resistance does not challenge the system. Scott takes a broader view, arguing that resistance includes an act by a member of the subordinate class to deny the claims made by the superior class. This summary owes much to Allen Isaacman, "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa," in Frederick Cooper et al., *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 226–7.

121. Quoted in Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 25.

122. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi, and chap. 3.

123. See Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*.

124. Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 31. Refuting the theory of moral economy put forth by James Scott and Eric Wolf, Popkin argues that a "rational" peasant acts to achieve long-term, personal gain, not community stability.

125. For a recent discussion of consumerism in China, see Li Conghua, *China: The Consumer Revolution* (New York: John Wiley, 1997).

126. See, for example, *I Love My Great Motherland (Wo ai weida de zuguo)*, in *Shanghai yishu tupian, 1997* [Shanghai's Art Photographs, 1997] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe meishu tupianbu, 1997), 2.

127. Ellen Johnston Laing, "The Persistence of Propriety in the 1980s," in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 156–71.