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Los Angeles

Chinese Photojournalism 1937–1952:

Materiality and the Institutionalization of Culture

via a Computer Vision Approach

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Lin Du

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Chinese Photojournalism 1937–1952:
Materiality and the Institutionalization of Culture
via a Computer Vision Approach

by

Lin Du

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Michael Sanford Berry, Chair

This dissertation presents a computationally-aided analysis of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) use of photojournalism to forge a distinctive socialist media culture from the tumult of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), through the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), into the early years of the People’s Republic of China (1949–1952). It explores how CCP photojournalists, leveraging diverse media platforms, transformed photographic documentation into potent instruments of Party ideology. The dissertation introduces “digital historical forensics,” a novel digital humanities methodology that combines artificial intelligence technologies—specifically machine learning and computer vision—with traditional humanities approaches, including close reading and contextual analysis. This innovative method sheds light on previously unexamined textual and visual evidence, revealing patterns and strategies in

ideological materials. These include the strategic emphasis on human subjects and textual elements, and the deployment of misinformation, influenced by the constraints of print technology and material conditions. The findings uncover unrecorded photographic, editorial, and curatorial decisions, offering new insights into the interplay between textual and visual materiality, power dynamics, and media convergence. It identifies key factors that shaped the CCP's visual culture, including limited material supplies, military hierarchies, social interactions among cultural workers, and the drive to foster active participation among soldiers and local peasants. The study also highlights how wartime CCP photojournalism not only unveiled issues of social justice but also played a pivotal role in community-building efforts in 20th century China. This dissertation further examines how socialist culture prioritized ethical interactions between photographers and the local populace, enlightening them about their roles and responsibilities within their emerging political identities. Through an analysis of the institutionalization of photojournalism within the Party, this work reveals the genesis of the CCP's propaganda branch and the development of visual paradigms by newly recruited photographers, which were disseminated among communities in the rural areas of northern China. The fostering of photographic literacy catalyzed the formation of a new generation of photojournalists, engendering a community bound by shared emotions, and facilitating dialogues on empathy and sympathy. By examining the aesthetics, content, production, and circulation of CCP photojournalism, alongside its interaction with various cultural forms, the dissertation elucidates the intermedial and institutional dimensions of state propaganda during a critical period in China's history.

This dissertation of Lin Du is approved.

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2024

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- “Kimura Ihei and the New Photography Movement in Japan,” in *Material & Idea: Chinese Photography History 1840s–2011*, ed. Gao Chu and Du Lin. Huai’an: Huai’an International Photography Gallery-Photographic Library Publication., 2011
- “Eva Sandberg Siao: Photographs of the Reconstruction of Tian’anmen Square in 1959.” *Delayed Boundaries in the Wake of Media Expansions* (in Chinese). Museum catalogue, Beijing: Taikang Space, 2022. Pp. 44–57.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND TALKS

- “Probing Historical Image Contexts in China and Japan via a Computer Vision Approach,” Department of Chinese Studies, Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore, Singapore, April 3, 2024 (invited talk)

“Narrative Resonance: Wartime Experiments in Text and Image Through ‘Landmine Warfare,’”
Department of Chinese Language and Literature, The Chinese University of Hong Kong,
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Greenville, South Carolina, USA, March 18, 2024

“Decoding Wartime Propaganda: A Computer Vision Examination of Photographic
Manipulation in the *Jinchaji Pictorial*,” the Association for Asian Studies Annual
Conference, Seattle, Washington, USA, March 14–17, 2024

“Probing Historical Image Contexts: Enhancing Visual Archive Retrieval through Computer
Vision,” International Symposium on Transformation in Museums through Digital
Initiatives, organized by University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong
Kong and School of Arts, Nanjing University, virtual, January 12–13, 2024

“From Information to Metaphor: Tracking the Editing and Circulation of Photographs in the
Jinchaji Pictorial,” Young Scholars Forum in Chinese Studies 2023, Chinese University
of Hong Kong-Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation Asia-Pacific Centre for Chinese Studies
and the Institute of Chinese Studies, Hong Kong, September 7–9, 2023

“Image Retrieval in Visual Archives: Tracing the Circulation of Historical Photographs in Their
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Introduction

I. Overview

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), Chinese Communist Party (CCP) photojournalists took photographs around China in order to document the war and simultaneously publicize the Communist Party's ideology. Their photographs were not only published in newspapers and pictorial magazines, but also made into portable albums and exhibitions that were showcased in rural China. Despite its far-reaching influence on post-1949 Chinese visual culture, CCP photojournalism of this period has not received the academic attention it deserves. My dissertation fills in this lacuna by providing an overview of the evolution and development of CCP photojournalism from 1937 to 1952, tracing its changing aesthetics, technologies, institutions, and policies. My dissertation uses photojournalism in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War to examine the intermedial nature and cultural institutionalization of state propaganda. I argue that the visual culture of the Chinese Communist Party during the wars was shaped by four factors: 1) limited material supplies, 2) hierarchies within the military culture, 3) the social interactions among cultural workers, such as intellectuals, writers, and filmmakers, and 4) the goal of promoting involvement with soldiers and local peasants. I point out how photojournalism influenced and interacted with other cultural forms including film, theater, poetry, and reportage literature, all of which were collectively managed by the government. Photography is a praxis to investigate, to inform, to mobilize, to care for others as much as a viewing activity to witness and to document.

My research questions include: How were ideological constructs transmitted through photojournalistic mediums, especially in printed media, and what narrative logic did these images espouse within a socialist culture? How did the boundaries between the CCP's political propaganda in pictorials and news reportage evolve, and in what ways did these distinctions blur over time? What was the nature of the relationship between editors and photographers in shaping the ideological and aesthetic content of publications? How did photographic exhibitions function as platforms for ideological communication, and in what ways did they influence the emotional and political engagement of spectators? Amid the material scarcities of the “Mopping-up” campaigns, how were photographic training and practice affected, and what adaptive strategies were employed? What educational approaches did the CCP implement to equip undereducated wartime trainees with the skills necessary for effective photojournalism? How did the emphasis on “composition” and “investigation and research” in photography training courses reflect and influence the broader aesthetic and epistemological trends of the period? In order to answer these questions, I view the publication of newspapers and pictorial magazines as a set of intermedial cultural processes and study how the condition of material scarcity led to photographers' creative use of the environment to build tools for publishing magazines. I expand the scope of my examination through analysis of the key photographers, including Sha Fei (沙飞, 1912–1950), Shi Shaohua (石少华, 1918–1998), and Wu Yinxian (吴印咸, 1900–1994) and discuss their social networking with other cultural intellectuals in the army who also went to the frontlines during both the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War and extending into the post-1949 era.

This dissertation utilizes a computer vision application as its core methodology for finding visual evidence. In my paper for the *ACM Journal of Computing and Cultural Heritage (JOCCH)*, as the first author, I developed a computer vision pipeline that traces the circulation of photographs and uncovers their historical contexts. Our pipeline, which achieves a 77.8% accuracy rate, compares similarities between a source dataset of cropped printed images from pictorial magazines and a target dataset of original photographs. This comparison thereby unveils new insights into the editing strategies of pictorial magazines in China during WWII. Additionally, in collaboration with machine learning specialists at UCLA, the technical aspect of Chapter 3 employs cutting-edge AI models to reconstruct historical exhibition scenes, thereby offering unprecedented insights into the visual propaganda strategies of the time.

II. Introduction:

Since the introduction of photography from the West into China in the early 19th century, it served both as a documentation and a social justice tool. In the period of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese photojournalism reached a climax through its commitment to visual truth and its ability to create social bonds. Propaganda media were used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), and Japanese armies to advance their different political goals. Unlike the KMT or the Japanese armies, many CCP photojournalists were newly trained practitioners who were illiterate local peasants, especially after 1940. The grassroots nature of the CCP's photographic propaganda merits scholarly attention.

The practices of Chinese photojournalism during the wartime period are especially important for scholars of cultural studies in China, because they can shed light on questions in the history of

modern China, such as: how did China become a modern nation? In the community-building and subsequent nation-building projects, how did modern media, particularly photography, help connect intellectuals and subalterns? During the wartime period, Chinese photojournalism, particularly that produced by the CCP, played a key role in diversifying artistic forms in printed media and helping reconcile mass media forms with elite cultural forms. In this way, the wartime practices of Chinese photojournalism exposed social justice and contributed to the national-building projects in China during the 20th century.

The transformative years between 1931–1952 witnessed the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Civil War (1945–1949), and the emerging period of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). During the golden age of journalism in China, literary writers and photojournalists explored the territory of China both physically and metaphorically in their literature and photography. They approached social reality in a journalistic style and witnessed the cruelty and intimacy in people’s war-torn lives.

Complementing the achievements of realistic fiction and films, textual journalism and photojournalism constituted the main body of work under the category of realistic representation and showed the influence of scientism and the popularization of Marxism in China. Realism thus became a new way of knowing the world for Chinese intellectuals. Both art and science in the modern period were exploratory and investigative by nature, rather than simply making dogmatic claims for truth or reality. Art was not only an activity for aesthetic appreciation, but also maintained the same social standing as science for exploring possibilities in society. However, facing uncertainties in the deprived reality, the realist pursuit did not attempt to accurately

represent reality in a static, definitive manner. Rather, the rich details of realistic representation were geared towards the engagement with a dynamic, changing social reality.

The war provided a rare opportunity for the Chinese Communist Party to expand its sphere of influence through modern mass media, especially in Northern China's hinterland. Early scholarship represented by Prasenjit Duara noted that the traditional cultural nexus was undermined in the early 20th century by the undue expansion and exploitation of state power, which produced a cultural and political vacuum in which the Communists could publicize their policies.¹ As a result, scholars in modern Chinese history became interested in the various modern media that helped the Communists achieve their victory against the KMT party, establish a strong state immediately in 1949, and run a robust political and cultural institutions afterwards. Matthew D. Johnson discusses, for instance, the efforts of Chinese cultural elites to politicize film and other mass media and mobilize local people to join the revolution.² In terms of printed media, Timothy Cheek examines the publication of the *Jinchaji Newspaper*, arguing that intellectuals in the Jinchaji border region followed bureaucratic Maoism and systematically established an institution to promote Party policies.³ His argument emphasizes the role of institutional culture in resisting external pressure, including the military attack and the economic blockade on the Party base, while allowing urban intellectuals the freedom to join together efficiently for propaganda work on behalf of the Party.

¹ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

² Matthew David Johnson, "International and Wartime Origins of the Propaganda State : The Motion Picture in China, 1897-1955" (eScholarship, University of California, 2008).

³ Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China : Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*, Studies on Contemporary China (Oxford, England) (Oxford England: Clarendon Press, 1997).

While film and printed media are under the control of elite intellectuals, photography plays a significant role in organizing local peasants and soldiers, who were largely illiterate groups, to use modern media. As Frederic Wakeman, Jr. states, “When it came to mobilization, the Nationalists exhorted, passed down decrees, and herded. The Communists’ instinct was to go to the primary or grassroots level and commence organizing there, calling on the ‘masses’ to participate actively.”⁴ Even though Matthew Johnson acknowledges Wakeman’s emphasis on the importance of the CCP’s grassroots institutions for local control, he still heavily relies on John Fitzgerald’s central argument and believes that the Nationalist Party played an instrumental role in spreading modern media throughout Chinese society.⁵ However, there is also doubt as to whether CCP’s mass mobilization achieved cultural homogeneity or successfully brought about a “propaganda state.”⁶ Therefore, in his book *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China’s Era of High Socialism*, Johnson acknowledges that “conflict, tension, and variation” always existed at the grassroots level, even after the CCP established their new state in 1949.⁷ In light of this, it is necessary to investigate photojournalism from the perspective of the CCP, for it helps us see how they utilized visual media to expand their sphere of influence from the hinterlands of Huabei.

⁴ Frederic Wakeman, “2. ‘Cleanup’: The New Order in Shanghai,” in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown (Harvard University Press, 2007), 21–58, <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674033658-002>. 42

⁵ John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1996), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779319>.

⁶ Johnson, “International and Wartime Origins of the Propaganda State.”

⁷ Jeremy Brown, *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China’s Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015).

While the CCP photojournalists took photographs around China in order to document the war and simultaneously publicize the Communist Party's ideology. The CCP's first and largest photographic publication of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* series contributed to the mobilization of local peasants in local villages in Huabei (Figure 0.1). Published on July 7, 1942, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* was the first photojournalistic magazine published within the CCP-controlled region. Under General Nie Rongzhen's command, the CCP army was attentive to the use of wartime pictorials for mass mobilization and began to prepare the Pictorial at an early stage. On May 1, 1942, the CCP army founded the Jinchaji Pictorial Press despite military risks and financial constraints. According to Chen Shen and Xu Xijing's accounts, from 1942-1948, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* published 13 issues, with more than 32,000 copies, and the *Jinchaji Supplements* published 44 issues, with more than 830 photographs.⁸ Using the Photojournalism Division in the Jinchaji Military Region and the Jinchaji Pictorial Press as a platform, the Jinchaji Base Area also trained a large number of photographers for the CCP army and sent their outstanding talents to other military regions to found new photojournalism divisions in under 10 years.⁹ Hence, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* and related publications laid the foundation of CCP photojournalism theory and systematically preserved the pictorial materials of the CCP army from 1937 to 1948, covering various aspects of war, construction, and everyday life.

Printed media such as the *Jinchaji Pictorial* serve as not only a platform for visual arts, but also a stage for literary texts to meet visual art. In CCP-controlled areas, poetry, reportage literature,

⁸ Chen Shen 陈申 and Xu Xijing 徐希景, *Zhongguo she ying yi shu shi* 中国摄影艺术史 [A history of Chinese photography], Beijing di 1 ban., Zhongguo yi shu xue da xi (Beijing: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2011). 375

⁹ Jiang Qisheng 蒋齐生, *Zhongguo she ying shi, 1937-1949* 中国摄影史 1937-1949 [History of Chinese Photography: 1937-1949], Di 1 ban. (Beijing: Zhongguo she ying chu ban she, 1998)., 74

photography, woodcuts, and theater were all popular forms of culture, which were all displayed in the *Jinchaji Pictorial*. Thus, it provides a glimpse into the cultural activities of the CCP. It is noteworthy that the visual styles and the particular ways of arranging images and texts were consolidated long after the war and formed the socialist visual culture gradually.

The most distinctive feature of the contents is their close connection with war and salvation. Sha Fei, the founder of the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, advocated the slogan, “Photography as a weapon.” which emphasizes the role that photography plays in political mobilization and revolution in the Jinchaji military region.¹⁰ While the CCP’s wartime pictorials employed journalistic-style photography, they also employed formal elements and aesthetic strategies from modernist art photography. The aesthetics of modernist pictorials were still inherited and transformed into wartime pictorials to serve the purposes of journalism and mass mobilization. A similar phenomenon occurs in literature as well. The special political and cultural atmosphere of wartime, including the way of thinking and aesthetic mentality, formed the basis of many literary and artistic phenomena unique to wartime; war had a direct impact on the psychology and style of writers’ writing, as well as on the subject matter itself.

The publication of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* also changed the way of viewing artworks in the CCP-controlled area. The primary reason for promoting visual representation of the political news and ideology is that the soldiers and peasants had a low literacy level. Visual images could not only provide vivid details for the political messages they wanted to send, but seeing themselves

¹⁰ Yang Jian 杨健, “Zhengzhi, xuanchuan, yu sheying: yi jinchaji huabao wei zhongxin de kaocha 政治、宣传与摄影——以《晋察冀画报》为中心的考察 [Politics, Propaganda, and Photography: the Study on Chin-Cha-Chi Pictorial]” (Fudan University, 2014), 59

depicted in portraits and group photographs could greatly empower the soldiers to embrace their new identities within a political regime.¹¹ Local peasants were encouraged to visit the small mobile exhibitions that the Pictorial Press and CCP held in makeshift rooms. Because the pictorial had only limited copies for each issue, soldiers commonly borrowed one copy and circulated it among their troops, which promotes the collective ways of seeing and reading pictorial magazines.

Another aspect of audience reception is the critique section of internally circulated photographic journals, such as the *Photographic Web* (*Sheying wang*, 摄影网) and the *Dispatches of Photographic Web* (*Sheyingwang Tongxun*, 摄影网通讯).¹² Critiques like these were significant because they reflected how public feedback functioned as a corrective mechanism to gradually shape socialist visual conventions. Modernist aesthetics often favor geometric shapes and objects, literary symbolism, or the psychological depth of human subjects over functional objects and everyday activities. Several critically-written critique essays published in internal photographic journals directly question the traces and tendencies of modernist aesthetics. Criticisms became a powerful corrective force in the development of the new socialist visual convention.

¹¹ Gu Di 顾棣, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu* 中国红色摄影史录 [*The Historical Record of Red Photography in China*], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Taiyuan: Shanxi ren min chu ban she, 2009)., 107

¹² Shi Zhimin 石志民, *Jin cha ji hua bao wen xian quan ji: Han Ying dui zhao* 晋察冀画报文献全集 [*Complete Collection of the JinchaJi pictorial*], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Beijing: Zhongguo she ying chu ban she, 2015). Vol. 3

Jiang Qisheng and Shu Zongqiao in their co-written *History of Chinese Photography: 1937–1949* (1998) pay special attention to the regional differences in the development of Chinese photojournalism during the wartime period.¹³ Jiang, who focused on the history of journalism from the CCP's perspective, wrote separate chapters on the institutionalization of photojournalism in the liberated regions, centering on the building of a photojournalist team and the theoretical underpinnings of CCP photography policy. Jiang's interest in the formation of photojournalism's social organization and in the theoretic discourse among the journalists led him to observe how the CCP gradually centralized the use of photography for propaganda purposes. Gu Di and Cai Zi'e's research is titled *Historical Representation of Sublime Beauty: A Theory on the Aesthetic Style of News Photography in the Liberated Areas of China* (1995).¹⁴ Most of the primary sources used in this book were published by Gu Di's various publications on the *Jinchaji Pictorials* and this research is an attempt to use gestalt theory to construct the aesthetic values of the *Jinchaji Pictorials* from a nationalist perspective.

As a summary, the Chinese Communist Party's photojournalism, particularly the way in which it promoted institutionalization, trained and recruited new photojournalists, and used pictorial magazines and portable albums in making connections with people, made a great contribution to Chinese photojournalism. Accordingly, the CCP's photojournalism cannot be analyzed solely as

¹³ Jiang, *Zhongguo she ying shi, 1937-1949* 中国摄影史 1937-1949 [*History of Chinese Photography: 1937-1949*].

¹⁴ Cai Zi'e 蔡子锷 and Gu Di 顾棣, *Chong gao mei de li shi zai xian: Zhongguo jie fang qu xin wen she ying mei xue feng ge lun* 崇高美的歷史再現：中國解放區新聞攝影美學風格論 [*Historical Representation of Sublime Beauty: A Theory on the Aesthetic Style of News Photography in the Liberated Areas of China*], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban., Zhongguo jie fang qu she ying shu xi (Taiyuan: Shanxi ren min chu ban she, 1995).

visual materials. Scholars should instead consider the use of photographs as objects in the community and national building processes in modern China.

During the wartime period, photojournalism flourished in the KMT-controlled regions as well. The KMT controlled most of the urban areas, including Shanghai, Wuhan, and Chongqing, which were the main urban centers for the development of Chinese photography. Photo magazines were mostly owned by private companies. As a result, these newspapers and periodicals in the KMT-controlled regions were mostly profitable. In addition to publishing more diverse political views, they successfully combined traditional aesthetic and cultural values with foreign media elements. In her studies on *Shenbao* in 2004, Barbara Mittler argued that “Even though the Chinese press must be considered a sibling of the foreign press, fashioned after and deeply influenced by its foreign character, it aspired to become a force in the Chinese public sphere precisely by making itself-an alien product-palatable to Chinese readers, by becoming a ‘newspaper for China.’”¹⁵ As a result, photographs appeared more frequently in newspapers and other printed media during the war, as they were considered a timely source for news.

Moreover, periodicals and newspapers in the KMT-dominated regions published photographs mostly received from foreign news agencies, thus displaying a more hybrid and eclectic aesthetic sensibility, blending traditional Chinese aesthetic values and westernized modernist aesthetics resulting from their close interaction with the unfamiliar and exotic. In the 1930s Shanghai, artistic photography was a major trend published in photo magazines among urban intellectuals

¹⁵ Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912*, Harvard East Asian Studies Monographs, 226 (Cambridge, Mass., Baltimore, Md.: Harvard University Asia Center, Project MUSE, 2004), 51

in the KMT-controlled urban areas. As Matthew Johnson points out, “Nationalist propaganda state, while taking up many of the anti-colonial and modernizing agendas begun by Chinese cultural reformers during the earlier twentieth century, also evolved in relationship to the global spread of media technology as a tool of social transformation.”¹⁶ These photographs in urban photo magazines were imbued with the traditional aesthetics of Chinese paintings. In the wake of national salvation, artistic photography suffered an attack from leftist intellectuals for being indifferent to Japanese invasions. However, Chinese artistic photographers actively participated in international contests and exhibitions to change western-centered modernist aesthetics and shape the country’s national image.¹⁷

In the KMT-controlled areas, Shu Zongqiao emerged as a significant figure with his establishment of the *United Illustrated Newspaper* in Chongqing in 1942. This publication grew to become the sole widely circulated pictorial in the vast rear area during the later stages of the war. His co-authored work with Jiang Qisheng, *History of Chinese Photography: 1937–1949* (1998), documented his participation and cooperation with news agencies from the U.S. and other countries. According to photo historian Gu Zheng, the first pictorial edition of the *United*

¹⁶ Matthew David Johnson, “International and Wartime Origins of the Propaganda State : The Motion Picture in China, 1897-1955” (eScholarship, University of California, 2008).

¹⁷ “The person who engages in fine art photography, his ultimate goal, is to participate in international photography exhibitions, also known as salons. It is a matter of no reward, but of consumption...Another example is the international photographic salon, which has been held in other countries to dozens of times, but our country has not held one, and the national photography yearbook has not been published, because of the lack of contact and unity between domestic photographic groups, the society is still less aware of photography, and the authorities do not think to promote.” “从事美术摄影的人，他的最终目的，是参加国际摄影展览会，又称沙龙。这是一桩没有酬报，而是消费的事……又如国际性的摄影沙龙，在别国已是行至数十届，我国则一届都未办过，全国摄影年鉴也未刊行过，原因是国内摄影团体间缺少联络与团结，社会对于摄影尚少认识，当局者亦不思提倡。” See Wang Laosheng 王劳生, “Meishu Sheying de Yiyi 美术摄影的意义 [The Significance of Fine Art Photography],” *Feiying* 飞鹰 [*Flying Eagle*], October 1936.

Illustrated Newspaper was air-dropped by the U.S. Air Force as a “paper bomb” to the occupied areas of China.¹⁸ It played a significant role in breaking the information blockade imposed by Japan, transmitting the news of the anti-fascist war in the Allied battlefield, motivating the national anti-Japanese spirit and defeating the morale of the Japanese army. From 1943 onward, the *United Illustrated Newspaper* also continued to use news photos sent by radiofax from China and the United States, further improving the efficiency of the news.

This research focuses on the conditions within Communist-controlled areas during the wartime period, where poverty and danger were constant presences. It explores the experiences of young intellectuals from diverse backgrounds—many from affluent families or urban centers, educated in both the rich traditions of classical Chinese literature and the diverse fields of Western literature, philosophy, and science. Driven by a profound sense of responsibility and a desire to confront social realities, these individuals were compelled to leave the relative safety of “the vast rear area (*da houfang*, 大后方)” and journey to the frontlines of rural and frontier China. There, they stood in solidarity with the masses, immersing themselves in the harsh conditions of war. Their documentation also reflected the aspirations and resilience manifested through the images and objects that surrounded them. Crucially, the act of creating photographs and other cultural artifacts was not merely a mechanical process but a creative act deeply influenced by the material scarcities and emotional intensities of their environment. This dissertation argues that understanding the work and commitment of these intellectuals necessitates an appreciation of how they navigated and were shaped by these material and emotional landscapes.

¹⁸ Gu Zheng 顾铮, “Shu Zongqiao’s Wartime Propaganda Achievements,” *Oriental Morning Post*, September 30, 2013.

This argument may seem to corroborate the propagandistic discourse promoted by the Communist Party in recent years. Young intellectuals may not have their own agency to sacrifice their lives for the sake of national salvation. As Tsi-an Hsia discussed in his monograph *The Gate of Darkness* (University of Washington Press, 1968), even though young intellectuals have revolutionary passion, it is impossible that they could easily transform themselves to conform to the Party's policies and agenda. It is a difficult process for liberal individuals to unite as one and show solidarity with other Party members. Indeed, Hsia held deep sympathy for these young intellectuals, especially Qu Qiubai, and he characterized Qu's confessional text, *Superfluous Words* (1935), as "a dirge about a life misspent," because Qu bitterly regretted participating in political work due to his "unfitness" for it.¹⁹ Admittedly, many gifted writers must suppress their egos and inner passion to live up to their Marxist beliefs and the political demands of the Party. However, to attribute their sacrifice and transformation solely to external pressure from the Party is to reduce their literary and artistic careers to a personal enterprise. Communist ideology is but one of many pressures they faced during the early 20th century. The imperialist invasions, the pressing demands of modernization, and complex social relationships and environments all played a role in their decision-making processes. As Kirk A. Denton also argues, "Mao-era texts should not be corralled into tidy manifestations of Maoist ideology," because "these texts were part of a vibrant culture that people enjoyed, learned from, actively engaged with, and maybe even subverted."²⁰ While acknowledging the impact of political struggle and pressures in intellectual life, it is also important to understand why Chinese intellectuals turned to Marxist

¹⁹ Tsian Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*, Academic Monograph on Chinese Literature (The Chinese University Press, 2016). 51

²⁰ Kirk A. Denton, "What Do You Do with Cultural Propaganda," *The PRC History Review* 4, no. 2 (August 2019): 19–23.

ideology and contributed to the Party's political agenda in the first place. What other intellectual resources had they turned to in search of a future for China?

In examining the impact of wartime atrocities and deprivation on China's material and visual culture during the socialist period, this dissertation argues that these conditions significantly shaped the nation's artistic and literary expressions. The hardships of everyday life not only underscored the ambiguous definitions of modernity and modernism but also highlighted the dissonance between the Maoist ideological portrayal of material prosperity and the stark reality of widespread poverty. From the 1940s through the 1970s, while the state narrative emphasized building a prosperous society, the majority of the population remained impoverished. The party-state advocated for frugality and thrift through various political campaigns, including People's Communes and backyard steel furnaces, framed within a context of nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiment. This narrative of protracted warfare justified mass mobilization as a strategy to manage material limitations and prepare for ideological battles against perceived imperialist threats.

The austerity measures and the ideological commitment to frugality trace back to wartime compromises faced by photographers who struggled with limited access to essential resources like cameras, printing equipment, and film. Post-1949, these constraints continued to influence former army-commissioned artists who assumed roles at the Xinhua News Agency and other state-controlled media outlets. Operating under strict organizational disciplines inherited from military practices, these artists used minimal resources to produce impactful propaganda, documenting the inventive ways common people utilized everyday objects and tools.

The severe conditions of the war not only influenced artistic production but also led to profound psychological impacts on individuals involved in cultural production. Notable instances include photographer Sha Fei, who, haunted by wartime trauma, tragically killed his doctor during a delusional episode. Similarly, modernist poet Mu Dan's works reflect a depersonalization of his emotional responses to the harsh realities, crystallizing the experience of material and existential crises in his poetry. This dissertation posits that such poetic crystallization and the existential contemplations it provoked did more than capture personal torment—they spurred a broader exploration of the external world, the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and the development of new relational dynamics with the outside world as means of transcending the dire contemporary conditions. The scarcity of resources and the raw emotional responses elicited by their experiences played pivotal roles in shaping their creative outputs and ideological commitments. These intellectuals did not simply document their surroundings; they actively participated in the construction of a new social reality, using their limited resources to forge a visual and narrative vocabulary that spoke to both the hardships and the hopes of the times. Their creativity and agency emerged not in spite of but because of the material constraints, allowing them to build meaningful relationships within the community and contribute profoundly to the cultural and revolutionary fabric of their nation.

This existential engagement with harsh realities catalyzed a profound empathy and concern for others, laying a foundational ethos for Chinese reportage literature and photography. These artistic forms not only chronicled individual and collective struggles but also fostered a tradition of social reflection and critique, which has continued to influence Chinese cultural and

intellectual discourses. This study, therefore, explores the interplay between material scarcity, artistic expression, and ideological commitment in shaping the trajectory of Chinese visual and literary culture in the mid-twentieth century.

A series of questions embedded in the problem of poverty and hardships include: How do we understand the variety of leftist literature and photography that came to focus on the suffering and hardships of the common people across the vast territory of China in the 1930s? What kinds of representational strategies did they use to understand and document the suffering in society? How did their social documentation change their perception of the causes of and solutions to social problems? How did the Chinese intellectuals' observations, experiences, and documentation of poverty and deficiencies help us to understand their central concerns about modernization?

Another set of questions related to writers' and photographers' intellectual and aesthetic responses to the social challenges brought by the wars and famines include: Since many of these literary writers and photographers identified themselves as journalists, how did they reflect on their journalistic methods in investigating social problems and reporting the news? What were the broad intellectual trends in the 1930s and 1940s that potentially shaped their interests and methods of approaching social reality? How would attention to objects and the material state illuminate our understanding of the dominant mode of realistic representation in wartime China? How has the depiction of objects and the material world changed in Chinese realistic representation since the beginning of the Mao era? What intellectual trends shaped PRC intellectuals' interest in reality? How did these photographers and poets approach reality?

This research aims to address these questions by analyzing a variety of primary sources. I focus on propaganda pictorials published by the Chinese Communist Party, focusing on the *Jinchaji Pictorial* (*jinchaji huabao*, 晋察冀画报, 1942–1948) as a case study. In the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, one may see a collection of poetry, photography, woodcut paintings, and reportage literature produced by both professional writers and artists, as well as amateur peasant soldiers. The publication of their work functions primarily as the mobilization of their agency to participate in the wartime resistance against Japan. I complement my study of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* with an exploration of the training manuals, memoirs, and theoretical texts published in internally-circulated journals, such as the *Photographic Web* (*Sheying wang*, 摄影网, 1947–1954). In analyzing these sources, I aim to focus on the production process of CCP photojournalism and journalism.

I interpret these photographic materials and pictorial magazines by considering the intellectual trends of the popularization of scientism and Marxism in the 1930s and 1940s, which can account for their enthusiasm for external exploration with the aid of visual technology. I demonstrate how the constraints of the material state prompted intellectuals to acquire scientific knowledge, explore external reality, and forge deeper social relationships with others, because social bonds help actualize the use of technology and overcome the limits of technical skills.

Possibly the interest in external exploration to depict reality results from two intellectual trends: scientism and the popularization of Marxism. Scientism is embodied in the belief in and enthusiasm for acquiring scientific knowledge and applying scientific methods in both the

natural sciences and social sciences. It is a continuation of the empiricism and *kaozheng xue* (考证学) of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Kwok argues that science was worshiped as a panacea for all human problems in modern China from 1900 to 1950.²¹ He divides the trend of scientism into two branches: materialistic scientism and empirical scientism. The former believes that laws derived from natural science determine the natural world and human society alike; the latter, under the influence of pragmatism, emphasizes the functional value and practical side of science. Both were manifested in the photographic practices in the Jinchaji area: photographers and scientists organized the “Natural Science Study Group” to overcome technological problems in developing film and printing. The direct impact of scientism on modern cultural production is that it motivates artists and literary intellectuals to embrace the utility of science and acquire scientific knowledge in order to improve the quality of their work and solve practical problems in their production.

Scientism is also manifested in the fact that photography was used as a scientific tool to collect facts and assist in social surveys. In Tong Lam’s book *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900–1949*, he points out that journalists, artists, and writers during this time actively experimented with new literary genres and visual tools to conceptualize the social world.²² Sociologist Sidney D. Gamble’s photographs of rural villages in North China and David Crook’s “thick description” of the Party’s land reform movements in Ten Mile Village are two cases in point. In CCP photojournalist Shi Shaohua’s essay “Research on the Method of Collecting Materials for Photojournalism,” the method of research surveys to

²¹ D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought, Nineteen Hundred to Nineteen Fifty* (Biblo-Moser, 1972).

²² Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation State, 1900-1949*, Asia Pacific Modern 9 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). 175

assist in military action and scientific studies is also highlighted. In terms of literary journalism, intellectuals, such as Bian Zhilin (卞之琳, 1910–2000), Fan Changjiang (范长江, 1909–1970), and Mao Dun (茅盾, 1896–1981), have adopted the scientific method to survey social reality as a way to promote changes in political campaigns. Modern Chinese intellectuals have employed science as a Western system to directly challenge traditional values in China and lay the foundations for social transformation.

The whole cultural process of CCP photojournalism took place against the background of the popularization of Marxist materialism, which impacted film, photography, and literature during the wartime period and had a lasting impact in the People's Republic of China after 1949. This major intellectual change during the war was led by Marxist intellectual figures, such as Ai Siqi (艾思奇, 1910–1966). Ai's book *Popular Philosophy* (*Dazhong zhexue*, 大众哲学, 1936) was widely circulated among common people and intellectuals and called for young people to rise up and go to the frontlines to support the war of resistance against Japan. I argue that Ai's dialectical materialism encourages people to forge creative connections with the material world, which accordingly drives intellectuals to gain the scientific knowledge required to build optical and printing devices. The fact that artists not only created art by means of tools but also used their scientific knowledge to create those very tools that they used, granted them a degree of agency and confidence that they would then apply to their creative process during this tumultuous period. It also helped them evolve an ecological way of thinking, which had a far-reaching impact on common people to focus on the functional use of objects and exercise strict economy during the Cultural Revolution.

During the War of Resistance against Japan, the popularization of Marxism also aided the spread of scientism. One of the central claims in CCP Marxist theorist Ai Siqi's work is that human beings can grasp the scientific laws of the material world and, consequently, can make changes in matter which lead to changes in the situation. As a result, human beings have agency and the ability to change the world.²³ This claim was especially significant during the War of Resistance against Japan when people were in great danger to survive. Joshua Fogel rightly points out that Marxism was brought to China through translations from Japan, France, and Germany. It was not until Marxism, in combination with Leninism, could successfully unite people to bring about the Russian Revolution that Marxism became appealing to Chinese intellectuals. In other words, Marxism gained its popularity only after it showed the ideological power of a realistic and practical method for uniting people for a revolution. The practical goal of bringing about a social revolution explains intellectuals' interest in understanding social reality more deeply. It is for this reason that Ai Siqi reinforces Marx's idea of "man as a social being in a political-economic environment." Ai argues that one's worldview is determined by their social positions and their worldview can change. This viewpoint serves as the foundation for building social organizations in a socialist society as well as producing cultural work to correct one's worldview.

Scientism refines the tools of description by employing photographic techniques to capture and represent the social realities that these journalists and artists experienced. The incorporation of the methodologies brought about by scientism into a Marxist political praxis makes photographic representation political. Photographs no longer simply show the world, but they become arguments for transformation. Therefore, I argue that photography is a praxis rather than merely

²³ Joshua A. Fogel, *Ai Ssu-Ch'i's Contribution to the Development of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass. : Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University :, 1987). 43

a viewing activity. It is both a tool for thinking and a performance rather than merely an expression of political opinions. Photography requires a deep involvement with reality. In this sense, I would call scholars' attention to the close ties between these aesthetic mediums and the context of reality out of which they grew. The discussion of realism needs to be extended to photography, a medium that defies narrative logic, and considers the dimension of material reality in shaping cultural production in the modern period.

III. Literature Review:

My dissertation investigates the photojournalistic career of the CCP and their propagandistic strategy. As a central component of the dissertation, I ask: what is the representational strategy used by the CCP to convey political messages? How did the photographers and editors reflect on their methods and working principles to compensate for the disadvantaged material conditions? How can raw and unvarnished historical details be rescued from politicized pictorial magazines and exhibition scenes? How might scholars see beyond the visual to understand the material conditions of everyday life during the wartime era? How might the photographs published in pictorial magazines retain hidden affinities with the modernist artistic photography popular in Shanghai in the 1930s? Answering these questions helps us to better understand how the visual evolved according to the changes of historical, material, and technological conditions on the cusp of WWII. As such, I focus on the formational process of socialist visual representation and discourses during the wartime period from 1937 to the 1950s and engage with philosophy, critical literature of the period, and other secondary sources to address these questions.

In this dissertation project on Chinese photojournalism, I examine three important parts of the field: visual culture, the history of photography, and realism and material culture. Together, these three areas ultimately address the problem of modernity and modernization in modern China. This project discusses pictorial knowledge-making and bridge the gap between literary analysis, visual analysis, and material culture, by demonstrating that photojournalism and pictorial magazines during the wartime period provided rare opportunities for producers and readers to explore their political identities and to participate in community-building initiatives.

Rey Chow was among the first scholars to call attention to the problem of visibility in destabilizing the sign systems in modern Chinese culture. In her book *Primitive Passions* (Columbia University Press, 1995), Chow points out that previous studies have overlooked the role of visibility in disrupting and fragmenting narratives and the coherency of literary signs. Visibility preserves more traumatic experiences than literature and resists the subordination of its meaning to nationalist discourse. Despite the fact that Chow observes that “the connection between such ‘activity in the socio-material world’ and visibility is seldom made,” she still focuses exclusively on visibility itself while neglecting the indexical relationship between visual media and the concrete, material world.²⁴ Taking photographs is a way to capture an indexical relationship with the material world. Though Chow points out the elite class’s fear and suppression of visibility, she overemphasizes visual spectacles while neglecting other types of image production. The democratization of representation, which she argues is structured by primitive passions, is manifested only in the shock of the visual—visual spectacles and arbitrary representation of the material world.

²⁴ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions* (Columbia University Press, 1995), 7

Ban Wang, in line with Chow's work, further explores the concept of visuality in his essay "Trauma, Visuality, and History in Chinese Literature and Film."²⁵ Upon a close-reading of Lu Xun's work, Wang points out that traumatic visuality unveiled the conflicts between progressive and regressive historical forces, which placed individuals in modern society in various historical predicaments. As Wang puts it, "Tragedy can be appreciated by historical materialism not so much as a form of drama as an objective manifestation of historical necessity."²⁶ In other words, Wang believes that traumatic visuality does not necessarily contain the shock of the visual but can still be the only way to directly confront reality in its darkest material conditions. This view is also addressed in Deborah Nelson's book *Tough Enough* (University of Chicago Press, 2017) that unsentimentality in the face of these traumatic visions is a way to face up to historical horrors directly without recourse to consolatory distraction.²⁷ Traumatic visuality proves that art is always embedded in "the specific social-historical circumstances."²⁸ Just as Adorno points out, "Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived."²⁹ Although the ideological overdose in leftist visual production conveys strong political ideas, the imagery still exposes "history's complexity, conflict, and myriad options and possibilities."³⁰ Oftentimes both antiwar sentiment and anti-colonial resistance were intertwined in the photographic messages.

²⁵ Ban Wang, "Trauma, Visuality, and History in Chinese Literature and Film," *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, 2004, 217–40.

²⁶ Ban Wang and E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, Pbk. ed. (Hong Kong: University Press, 2008), 220

²⁷ Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

²⁸ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 229

²⁹ Cited from Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 229

³⁰ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 234

Despite his defense of literature's ability to represent reality, Wang equally values photography's capability to illuminate history and social reality and refutes postmodernists' viewpoints that "all reality is representation and visual spectacle."³¹ Although it is true that the interpretation of an image is deeply influenced by social, political, and cultural conventions, it does not mean that the image representation of the material reality is necessarily "subjective" or "arbitrary." On the contrary, the vital conventions themselves "become cultural, expressive, realistic means for approaching the reality."³² Wang explicitly refuses to subsume leftist art of film and photography under the category of ideology and propaganda.³³ Instead, he views these artistic experiments as visual allegories that photographers and filmmakers resort to in order to overcome the problem in the existing cognitive structures that "our established signs do not refer nicely to real relations and things."³⁴ The corrupted sign systems failed to represent the traumatic experience of misfortunate individuals and thus render them as "stripped of support networks of meaning and emotion."³⁵

One limitation that both Wang and Chow have is that, while pointing out the problem with traumatic visuality, they do not acknowledge the vast diversity of photographic and filmic experience. Rather, they narrow down their analytical subjects and turn their attention to specific aesthetic forms. Wang argues that the montage and long take are two artistic forms of

³¹ Ban Wang, "Photographical History, Everyday Life, and Memory: Wang Anyi as a Storyteller," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 25, no. 2 (2012): 183–98.

³² Ibid.

³³ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*. 228

³⁴ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*. 231

³⁵ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 231

engagement with reality. These two forms “approach actual referents in history with the awareness that the present form cannot absorb traces of the past.”³⁶ Yet he did not specify what other artistic forms were used to approach and reconstruct the past. Chow, on the other hand, characterizes the democratization of media as seeking the “primitive passions.”³⁷ While this theoretical term certainly captures the fascination of modernity with the primitive, it tends to apply the same lens of primitivism to analyze all visual phenomena in modern China. Although many modern Chinese intellectuals were trapped in “the paradox of primitivism” to “see China as simultaneously victim and empire,” it neglects other intellectuals’ experimental attempts to construct China as a newborn modern state.³⁸

Another gap in Wang’s research is that he did not clarify the relationship between individual stories and the national allegory. Even though in Third World cinemas, individual stories often “merge into a unity with the social” and thus become “a part of communal and national destiny,” we must ask how the individual’s psychological and life trajectory might merge with the destiny of the community?³⁹ Would the imagery of Third World visual production look any different from that of Hollywood commercial films? My research could fill in this gap by addressing how the visual media of photography gave ordinary people a chance to represent their voices and document their political life and everyday life during the war. Unlike commercial films popular in 1930s Shanghai, fledgling wartime images on the CCP side were produced by newly-trained peasant photographers who democratized the production of images. By building a burgeoning

³⁶ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 239

³⁷ Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 19

³⁸ Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 23

³⁹ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 232

photojournalistic enterprise, the CCP drew up clear guidelines, developed handbooks, and trained both photojournalists and party cadres. Local peasants, represented by Gu Di, learned to use cameras to document their lives for the first time. Unlike the leftist musical productions described in Andrew Jones' *Yellow Music*, the CCP photojournalistic institutions incorporated fledgling photographers and technical staff to master the photographic technique much more easily than how they trained leftist musicians.⁴⁰ Heretofore, photojournalism by the new cohort of trained peasant photographers has been understudied as a critical site of inquiry when compared to other forms like cinema, music, and other photographic forms.

Moreover, editors and the press staff endeavored to remedy the defects and shortcomings of the raw images and consistently promoted and enriched the representations of the commoners with modernist editorial aesthetics. It was the defects and shortcomings in the photographs taken by these photographers that made the image production differ from what Walter Benjamin described in his 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," that "Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of the masses."⁴¹ I argue that when "the masses are brought face to face with themselves" with the aid of cameras, they did not adopt "a bird's-eye view" to capture the "gatherings of hundreds of thousands" but learned to see the different individuals in their community and thus effectively broke the stereotypical, orientalist gazes and imagine the fate of a national collectivity.⁴²

⁴⁰ See Chapter 4 in Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music* (Duke University Press Books, 2001).

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 251 see citation [21]

⁴² Ibid.

My dissertation still benefits from Wang's and Chow's studies in that their work concentrates on the distinctive features of visual media in representing history and historical trauma in particular. Their work serves as a bridge toward a dialogue with theorists of modernism. For example, Ban Wang drew on a variety of theoretical resources, ranging from Barthes, Deleuze, and Benjamin, to Kracauer and Eisenstein, to reflect on the aesthetic of montage. He points out that "Although Chinese film discourse did not delve into the materialist implications of montage theory, the radical films practiced montage in stunning, innovative ways."⁴³ This observation does not only apply to film media, but also fits the design and publication of wartime pictorial magazines in China, which used photographic montage as a key pictorial strategy. *Jinchaji Pictorials* photographers and editors dealt with various challenges posed by the cruelty of war destruction. As still media, these wartime pictorial magazines featured snapshots and stillness "to hold it fast and assert its presence against the threat of invisibility and immateriality," as described by Louise Hornby in *Still Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2017).⁴⁴ In addition, these magazines also possess distinctive features of modern design aesthetics and connect texts and images to encompass and map the relations of the real world.

In terms of the field of photography, I engage with two monographs to discuss the role of photography in the formation of political subjectivity and identity. One is Blake Stimson's *The Pivot of the World* (MIT Press, 2006), and the other is Ariella Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books, 2008). Stimson's work explores the ways in which photography helps create and visualize collective identities. Focusing on the postwar years of the 1950s, an era infused with distrust of nationalism and anxiety about nuclear weapons, Stimson argues that

⁴³ Wang and Kaplan, *Trauma and Cinema*, 237

⁴⁴ Louise Hornby, *Still Modernism: Photography, Literature, Film* (Oxford University Press, 2017). 15

the viewing experience of photography offers the audience a new sense of belonging by situating their subjectivities in the interstice between frames. He argues that photo essays “socialized representation rather than nationalizing it and collectivized the form of belonging rather than individualizing it.”⁴⁵ This point of view is shared by Azoulay, who also emphasizes the reception process of photographs. According to Azoulay, photography “opened” and “even necessitated” a “constructed space of civic relations.”⁴⁶

It was Stimson’s and Azoulay’s work that helped me realize how important photography could be in strengthening human bonds in the Jinchaji base area and mobilizing the peasants to join the army. As opposed to other important photographic critics, such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, Stimson and Azoulay focus on the ethics of spectators and photographers, rather than the ethics of viewing or seeing. In other words, instead of falling prey to the act of the gaze, photographers and spectators can actively use the camera and the power of images to explore the rights and responsibilities of their political identities and negotiate relationships with others within and outside of their community. Stimson’s work examines how photography “sought to develop and refine the emotional experience of relating or connecting to a group.”⁴⁷ His emphasis on shared emotions opened up new space to discuss how empathy and sympathy was created in a collective community. How does sympathy function in relating the self to others? Why can sympathy catalyze or fail to catalyze the documentation of social suffering? Why is sympathy not effective sometimes, especially when we do not relate to others who are different

⁴⁵ Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and Its Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 56

⁴⁶ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York : Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by The MIT Press, 2008). 85

⁴⁷ Stimson, *The Pivot of the World*, 7

from us in age, race, gender, disposition, or social standing? What visual and social strategies might the CCP take to foster sympathy and social documentation for political mobilization?

Azoulay criticizes these postmodern theorists for overemphasizing the ability of photography to anesthetize its subjects. In contrast, she points out that the audience has the responsibility to pose questions and provide their interpretations about the photograph. Stimson's and Azoulay's work both hold similar views with Wang and Chow but furthered Wang and Chow's inquiry in visual studies. When Chow raises the question about the power of the exhibit, Azoulay and Stimson provide specific examples of how this power manifests. In this sense, photography can also advance the agenda of democracy on the surface, for it creates an illusion of equivalence, leading to a false, utopian sense of universalism. According to both Stimson and Allan Sekula, "'the function of the photograph' is rendered 'as a universally exchangeable 'abstract equivalent' of its worldly referent,' that is, as homologous to 'the circulation function of paper currency.'"⁴⁸

Photography has thus become useful in finding commonalities among people and forging new social relationships. This medium specificity of photography, on the other hand, can also conceal underlying interest conflicts between social groups, which remain latent tensions for the future in local politics.

The medium specificity of photography can reveal much about its function in nation-building projects in the 20th century. In this dissertation I draw on adjacent work in the broader field of media studies to explain tensions and debates between mass media forms and elite cultural forms during this period. Andrew Jones's book *Yellow Music* (Duke University Press, 2001) offers an

⁴⁸ Stimson, *The Pivot of the World*, 73

excellent example of studying technology and the problem of representation in modern China. The book can be particularly useful to me for examining how popular media culture has been appropriated to bolster nation-building efforts by left-wing intellectuals since World War II. When studying the role of recording technology in nation-building, Jones points out that recording technology became a more reliable means to resolve the problem of representation and allow the formerly repressed voices to speak for themselves. Therefore, the subaltern group can be united to fight against foreign invasions. Furthermore, in the case of the recording of the mass music, the usage of standard Mandarin also helps homogenize regional and class identities and strengthen a unified national identity. In this sense, Jones argues that the concept of the masses is possibly “an aftereffect of the technological processes of mass mediation,” which conveniently contributes to the nation-building project.⁴⁹ More generally speaking, just as photography can offer an illusionary sense of universalism to its audience, Jones argues that all mass media can penetrate into domestic space and therefore, it can “knit people together by way of its mastery over time.”⁵⁰

Andrew F. Jones’ arguments about the tension between and political uses of yellow music and leftist mass music in *Yellow Music* can also offer a useful framework for thinking through similar debates in the field of photographic studies. In the field of modern Chinese photography, there is a debate between artistic photography⁵¹ and journalistic photography. Artistic photography was a

⁴⁹ Jones, *Yellow Music*, 110

⁵⁰ Jones, *Yellow Music*, 133

⁵¹ According to Mia Liu, in 1930s, “huayi sheying (Pictorialist photography), shalong sheying 沙龍攝影(salon photography), meishu sheying (fine art photography), and yishu sheying (art photography) were deemed interchangeable.” Mia Yinxing Liu, “The Allegorical Landscape: Lang Jingshan’s Photography in Context,” *Archives of Asian Art* 65, no. 1–2 (2015): 1–24.

major trend among urban intellectuals in 1930s Shanghai. These photographs are imbued with the traditional aesthetics of Chinese paintings. In the wake of national salvation, artistic photography suffered a similar attack as yellow music, which was condemned as “decadent sounds (*mimi zhi yin*).”⁵² However, both artistic photography and yellow music share elements of post-colonialism. Yellow music emerged out of the May Fourth ideological discourse of “anti-feudalism, emancipation of women, and nation-building.”⁵³ As part of similar efforts, Chinese artistic photographers actively participated in international contests and exhibitions to change western-centered modernist aesthetics and shape the country’s national image.⁵⁴ In contrast to artistic photography, Sha Fei’s slogan, “photography as a weapon” emphasizes its social function in political mobilization and revolution in the Jinchaji military region.⁵⁵ Although wartime pictorials published by the CCP rely on more journalistic-style photography, they actually employ formal elements and aesthetic strategies from modernist artistic photography. The aesthetics of modernist pictorials were still inherited and transformed into wartime pictorials to serve the purposes of journalism and mass mobilization. Artistic photography and journalistic photography, therefore, are not polarizing styles.

From the 1930s onward, the conflict between form and content and whether or not an intellectual should react or participate in politics became an important controversy in the field of modern

⁵² Jones, *Yellow Music*, 8

⁵³ Jones, *Yellow Music*, 76

⁵⁴ See Wang Laosheng 王劳生, “Meishu Sheying de Yiyi 美术摄影的意义 [The Significance of Fine Art Photography],” *Feiying* 飞鹰 [*Flying Eagle*], October 1936.

⁵⁵ 沙飞为吴印咸《摄影常识》写序（二）/ 1937年11月初版（复印件）. Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030, hyl00030c00842, hyl00030c00884, hyl00030c00915, hyl00030c00919. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

Chinese culture. Just like the criticism that yellow music faced in the post-1949 period, as described in Jones's book, artistic photography was also subject to attacks for its indifference to the social crisis and painful reality of its time. Artistic photography focuses mostly on polishing photographic and darkroom techniques. Famous practitioners of artistic photography during the 1930s in Shanghai faced severe criticism both in mainland China and in Taiwan after 1949. For example, Lin Zecang (林泽苍, 1903–1961) had a leading role in Shanghai's photographic circle. As an accomplished photographer, he published a bestseller book *Photo Instructions* (摄影须知) that emphasizes the exquisite and pleasing effects of photographs and the masterful skills of photographers, leading to a stinging denunciation of him in the circle of official photographers. As photo historian Jin Yongquan wrote, "From a technical point of view, Lin suggests that the 'common problems' of the art of photography in the early 1950s were the poor technique of developing and enlarging, the improper use of light, the irregularity of composition, and the mistake of choosing the subject. Di Yuancang believes that Lin's 'neglect of politics had reached a serious point."⁵⁶ Lin is correct to point out that the photographic techniques were immature, and the photo studio's poorly run business operations did not optimize its commercial services to bring in more customers. Di, however, believes Lin neglected the interests of the people and took a capitalistic path. Another representative artistic photographer, Lang Jingshan (郎静山, 1892–1995) earned his fame for this iconic style of "composite photography" that uses special darkroom techniques to imitate the aesthetics of Northern Song landscape paintings.

Nonetheless, his work was criticized by opposing political parties in both mainland China and Taiwan for being indifferent to politics and complicit in the government. Photo critic Bao Kun in

⁵⁶ Original Chinese version is: 林自技术角度提出 20 世纪 50 年初期摄影艺术的"通病"为：冲晒放大的技术欠佳，光线运用不当，构图不合章法和选择主题之错误。而狄源沧认为林"忽视政治已经到了相当严重的地步了"。Cited from Liu, "The Allegorical Landscape."

mainland China criticized him in 2014, stating: “He used photography to create effects that mimicked classical Chinese painting, almost never in relation to the life of the times in which he lived. At the time when he was painstakingly working on his art, it was a time of distress when the Chinese were facing the trampling of foreign powers...While other photographers were aiming their lenses at the bodies of their compatriots fighting at gunpoint, Lang Jinshan was carefully piecing together a collection of works of high mountains and distant waters and small bridges under the red light of the darkroom, puzzling over the aesthetic tastes of Westerners.”⁵⁷ In Taiwan, photo critic Guo Lixin and Xiao Yongqing accused Lang of “being responsible for the ‘anemic’ reality of Taiwanese photography” and of “stifling innovation,” “only favor[ing] the leisurely pursuits of the elites,” and being “an accomplice in the Nationalist Government’s suppression of free speech.”⁵⁸ The fact that Lin suffered significant political consequences following his death and Lang received similar criticism from two opposing parties on both sides of the Taiwan Straits indicates that the cultural forms were not the focus of their contradictions.

On the surface, the bulk of the criticism on artistic photography does not revolve around forms per se. The focus is, however, on the artistic standards that artistic photography imposed on the interpretation and circulation of photographs, which is an issue about the accessibility of art forms that both social political systems were concerned with. Artistic photography in Shanghai

⁵⁷ 他用摄影的方式营造模仿中国古典绘画的效果，几乎从未与他所生活的时代生活发生过联系。在他苦心经营他的艺术时，正是中国人面临外国强权铁蹄践踏的危难时期。当时的中国知识艺术界喊出了“国防文学”、“救亡文学”、“民族革命战争的大众文学”等口号，其时的摄影界也相应喊出了“国防摄影”的口号，表达了中国摄影家在历史抉择前的良知。在另一些摄影家将自己的镜头瞄向枪口下奋勇抗争的同胞之躯时，郎静山则在暗房红灯下精心拼对山高水远和小桥流水的集锦作品，琢磨揣测西方人的审美口味。Cited from Liu, “The Allegorical Landscape.”

⁵⁸ Cited from Liu, “The Allegorical Landscape.”

of the 1930s had a distinctive lineage with literati culture that reached back to the Song dynasty in terms of composition, subject matter, and symbolism. Its visual rhetoric also preserves Song poetry's literary devices as a continuation of Chinese lyricism, as literary scholar Wu Shengqing studies in her book *Photo Poetics* (Columbia University Press, 2020). A photographer could more easily create phenomenological experience in the visual realm than writers could in the literary field through sensationalism. The debate between artistic and journalistic photography continued well into the postwar years. Until the 1980s, indigenous theories of Chinese photography still talked mainly about the topos of visual content and considered it the unbreakable standard. An elite group of artists benefited from this artistic tendency. A group of educated photographers appropriated the Chinese literary tradition of topos and sought to extend it into the visual world; for many unfamiliar readers it became the only tool for interpretation. This misguided stance continued to inhibit the dynamic and diversity of the photographic scene in China even after the opening policy in the 1980s. It is for this reason that scholars still need to attend to formal analysis of these photographs.

While the tensions between the stakes and political ends of artistic photography versus journalistic photography are well-traced in the aforementioned section, I also consider studies on the more specific genre of reportage literature. In his book, *Chinese Reportage* (Duke University Press, 2002), Charles A. Laughlin explores the ideological complexity of reportage literature so as to explain how it gave rise to the leftist consciousness among the masses and how it transformed reportage literature into revolutionary literature. Reportage literature benefits from the dual promise of veracity and political positioning. As a result, its factual accuracy may be

leveraged by its writers for their agitational purposes for leftist causes.⁵⁹ Laughlin concluded that the reportage style in its stance on realism is “narrative verisimilitude” and the “‘characterization’ of events, environments, and collectives rather than individual characters.”⁶⁰ In this way, Laughlin aims to explain how the stylistic forms of realism reflect the collective consciousness of the period. The monograph, although it discusses an important genre in modern Chinese literature, focuses only on the work of the most prominent writers, without going into depth about their political associations with the KMT and the Communist Party. By contrast, I plan to demonstrate that the professional role of the Party directly influences the literary and visual representation of reality. Rather than relying solely on formal analysis, my general approach is to pay attention to external factors that shaped literary and visual practices.

My research draws on significant scholarship in Chinese studies as well as Japanese, Korean, and Russian studies to demonstrate that this controversy between the artistic function and social function of a cultural work has its roots not simply in the ideological complexity of photojournalism and realistic cultural production but also in the broader epistemological transition happening during the 20th century. The role of shifting epistemology in shaping realist practices of representation is crucial to this dissertation project. Though Chinese studies have been less attentive to this role, there has been fruitful research on the topic in modern Japanese and Korean studies. This work discusses mechanisms of meaning-making in the modern world and the notion that upheavals in epistemology in the 20th century centered on problems of realism and the crisis of representation. Scholars in Japanese and Korean studies bridge the gap

⁵⁹ Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Duke University Press, 2002), 15

⁶⁰ Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage*, 28

between modernism and realism, complicating the problem of truth and reality. Scholars in Russian studies take into consideration the historical specificity of the development of capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries and study the problems it posed for realist writers and how they responded to them in aesthetic representation.

Within Japanese studies, as a core field that I draw from, there remain conflicting concepts of realism that are active in the indigenous context, which this dissertation must explore. The most recent scholarly work on the conflicting concepts of realism in the Japanese indigenous context is Naoki Yamamoto's *Dialectics Without Synthesis* (Univ of California Press, 2020). By incorporating Bazin's theory on "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and Raymond William's *Keywords*, Yamamoto took a position to understand the paradoxical and dialectical relationship between "aesthetic (or true) realism" and "psychological (or pseudo-) realism."⁶¹ Realism is paradoxical in the sense that it integrates epistemology and aesthetics, which is "the core mentality of modernism" on this agenda.⁶² Thus, it explains why realism and modernism are compatible. Further complicating the oppositions between realism and modernism, matter and form, aesthetics and epistemology, Yamamoto delves into the complexities of debates concerning realism within the specific historical context of Japan.

Also crucial to my project is Gregory Golley's work in *When Our Eyes No Longer See* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2008). Golley reframes realism as a new "mode of perception" or "way of knowing the world that reaches beyond the limits of the human body," thereby also drawing

⁶¹ Naoki Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis: Japanese Film Theory and Realism in a Global Frame* (Univ of California Press, 2020), 11

⁶² Yamamoto, *Dialectics without Synthesis*, 13

similarities between realism and modernism through their shared pursuit of truth and reality.⁶³

Thus, modernism and realism have the same ultimate ends, but their paths to truth differ. Both have been influenced by the development of modern science. A realistic approach begins with a close observation of one's surroundings and reasoning as an inductive process from the concrete to the abstract. By contrast, modernism begins with "an earnest, if confused, aspiration toward an integrative ideal" and culminates in "a singular and anomalous moment of perceptual and referential expansion."⁶⁴ Since this is the case, modernism demonstrates how effective language is at mapping the relations of things rather than demonstrating the limit of language or the crisis of representation, even though it does not adhere to the verisimilitude of the visual.

Golley's book deals mainly with the capacity of language and signs in approaching an invisible reality. Signs take a central role in urban commercial culture and sustain the functioning of capitalism. This insight can be helpful in understanding photography. Borrowing Marshall Berman's elaboration on Marx's maxim "all that is solid melts into air," Golley concurs with Berman in that modern environments and experiences as "forming a 'unity of disunity,'" something that is "not really a unity at all," but a "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."⁶⁵ We live in a chaotic natural world, so what modernist art deals with is looking for a way to find a sense of unity within it. Modernist work thus addresses the complexity of the world and maps out a relationship with it.

⁶³ Gregory Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See: Realism, Science, and Ecology in Japanese Literary Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2008), 1

⁶⁴ Japanese modernist writers, including Tanizaki Junichiro and Yokomitsu Riichi, already widely accept this view and believe that the relations of things represent a higher form of objectivity and reality may exceed the sensory experience of human beings and thus need to be described in a new way. Golley also points out that this consistency of modernism's political aspiration "led inevitably and logically to Japanese fascism because of its very concern with totality itself." See, Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 3 and 8

⁶⁵ Cited from Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 4

Golley's insights can also be applied to understanding the photographic culture of 1920s Japan. Using Tanizaki Jun'ichiro as an example, Golley points out that Tanizaki's aesthetic of visual technologies is to "engage an ocular relation to the world that was non-mimetic, yet profoundly and attentively (often pornographically) referential."⁶⁶ This aesthetic logic is particularly useful in understanding the tension between the social function of photography and the artistic function of photography. Often, artistic photography is criticized for being indifferent to social problems. As well, the pictorial style it embraces conceals what the naked eye can see. In other words, the lenses and photographic techniques it employs beautify the subjects it portrays. Tanizaki acknowledges "the non-mimetic potential of photography and cinema as part of a narrative effect."⁶⁷ Photojournalism, if we take Tanizaki's view of photography, is thus a means to document the "transformation" and "metamorphosis" of a subject regardless of its ontology. Yet, despite its apparent departure from the visual appearance, Tanizaki still deems the photograph as being "objective" and "scientific."⁶⁸ As Golley explained, "Tanizaki's novel sacrifices naturalism for accuracy, focusing on a 'reality not of things seen,' as Gertrude Stein said of Picasso, 'but of things that exist.'"⁶⁹ In other words, although photography can only define the photographer's personal, observational relationship with the subject, the photographer claims this relationship is the one and only truth, the ultimate end of the development of the subject. This photographic aesthetic effectively complicates the concept of visual truth.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 51

⁶⁷ Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 51

⁶⁸ Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 52

⁶⁹ Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 52

⁷⁰ Golley then borrows art historian Jonathan Crary's theory of early photography and said, "By recognizing a discursive connection between the era's popular optical devices and 'empirical studies of subjective vision,' Crary's

Subjectivity plays an important role in the crisis of representation that makes up the contentious relationship between realism and modernism. Christopher Hanscom explains in *The Real Modern* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2013) how modernist Korean writers such as Yi T'aejun use the lyrical mode of narration to “undermine the illusion of full subjectivity found in standard definitions of lyric.”⁷¹ In his article “Matters of Fact: Language, Science, and the Status of Truth in Late Colonial Korea,” Hanscom further stresses the importance of the role of language and culture in spreading knowledge through the example of the leftist critic Sō Insik, who questions the objective language of science in the imperial context. By differentiating “scientific truth” from “literary truth,” Hanscom places the problem of subjectivity at the center by pointing out that “the gap between fact and subjective experience as a question of ethics.”⁷² Therefore, literary truth can be considered as a complement to objective, scientific truth.

It is a common misconception that modernism ignores its social context and presents a self-contained, autonomous art form. Fredric Jameson convincingly argues in “Modernism and Imperialism” that the forms and structures of modernism are isomorphic with the historical, political logic of imperialism to some extent.⁷³ According to Jameson, representation is simply incomplete in modernist literature, since it is limited to representing imperialist and capitalist

powerful argument tempts us to understand photography as inherently (because originally) ‘bound up in nonveridical theories of vision that effectively annihilate a real world.’” Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 52

⁷¹ Christopher P. Hanscom, *The Real Modern: Literary Modernism and the Crisis of Representation in Colonial Korea* (Brill, 2013), 151

⁷² Christopher P. Hanscom, “Matters of Fact: Language, Science, and the Status of Truth in Late Colonial Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 3, no. 1 (2014): 126–52.

⁷³ Fredric Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism*, Field Day Pamphlet. Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature (Derry [Northern Ireland]: Field Day, 1988).

logic and not the totality of reality. This reveals a fundamental problem with representation: the abstraction of representation in modernism is oversimplified and often reductive.

Both China and Russia experienced similar historical conditions due to their late entry into modernization and the influence of socialism and communism. Thus, Chinese and Russian realist artists were also confronted with the problems and challenges of aesthetic representation brought about by capitalism. Considering the political, ideological, and historical similarities, I also draw on Russian studies to have a more complex understanding of realist representation in art and literature. Vadim Shneyder's book, *Russia's Capitalist Realism: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), highlights the historical context of capitalism and its impact on Russian writers to reflect on the limits of literary representation and conduct literary experiments to expand the definition of realism to address these limitations. Capitalism, he acknowledges, is a transformative force that is inherently opposed to realist representation, which is based on observation and empirical evidence. The material changes in factories and other capital-driven environments have nullified these realist devices. Consequently, "the transformative potential of capitalism seemed to threaten some of the basic conditions of realist representation."⁷⁴ It is interesting to compare this literary phenomenon with the photographic documentation of war spoils in the wartime pictorials. Although war spoils have always been an important theme featured in propaganda magazines, the earlier issues of the *Jinchaji Pictorials* show more visual variations of how photographers depicted seized weapons, ammunition, and other wartime necessities during the most trying period of the war. However, later issues featured more victories, but used visual repetitions to illustrate the abundance of war spoils.

⁷⁴ Vadim Shneyder, *Russia's Capitalist Realism: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov*, Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 173

Historically, realism has always been associated with the concrete material life and economic imagery of a society. In his book, Shneyder quoted Harry Levin to point out that realism is thingism in terms of its etymology. Therefore, realism is intrinsically concerned with economic modernity in society. But Russia differed from other European countries in that “in terms of economic realities, Russia had fewer things— fewer manufactured goods, fewer factories, fewer units of currency.”⁷⁵ As a result, realist novels in Russia take on different meanings because the economic imagery of “commodities, factories, and rubles” seems “more threatening, more palpably alien.”⁷⁶ According to Shneyder, the stark presentation of “things” in everyday life in realism evades and suppresses the discussion of the economic logic behind the phenomena of life. In any case, the close engagement of realism with material reality is not necessarily associated with capitalism. Vadim Shneyder noted that in the study of modern Russian literature, there is a prevalent assumption that “all realism is already capitalist.”⁷⁷ His book argues that capitalism forced Russian writers to confront the limits of literary representation, and some of the greatest works of Russian realist literature incorporate these limits into their style. Correspondingly, the unfavorable material conditions during the wartime period led to an acute observation of the simple pleasures gained from everyday activities and during the march to a fond representation of idyllic natural scenery in the *Jinchaji Pictorials*. Factories and railways, by contrast, were portrayed as enemy targets or controlled areas, conveying a sense of danger and threat.

⁷⁵ Shneyder, *Russia's Capitalist Realism*, 201

⁷⁶ Shneyder, *Russia's Capitalist Realism*, 201

⁷⁷ Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge, *Reading Capitalist Realism* (University of Iowa Press, 2014). 1

The postcolonial visual studies presented by Rey Chow and Ban Wang destabilize the trite sign systems in modern Chinese cultural production and confront readers and audiences with the harsh material, historical realities. Their research motivates scholars to reassess the politicized, traumatic wartime images from a fresh perspective and discover historical details to understand how subaltern stories were woven into national narratives. The two works in the field of the history of photography, written by Blake Stimson and Ariella Azoulay, help to explore the role of the camera and photography in the formation of collective identities. By emphasizing the ethics of audience and photographers, instead of the ethics of seeing, these two scholars help me to closely examine the processes of production and reception of photographs simultaneously. Andrew Jones's work serves as a great example to gain a deep understanding of the tensions between the artistic and social values of cultural production, as well as between form and matter, in China during the 20th century. Parallel to the debate between yellow music and red music, I examine the debate regarding artistic photography and journalistic photography. Both formal analysis of photographs and an examination of external factors, such as the institutionalization of culture, are necessary to understand socialist visual practices. Lastly, Japanese, Korean, and Russian studies offer useful ways of discussing the problems in realist and modernist representations resulting from both ideological complexity and epistemological transition during the 20th century. The recent scholarship in adjacent fields reflects on the capacity of visual and literary representation and complicates our understanding of visual truth. Vadim Shneyder's Russian studies research, in particular, situates realistic representation in a specific historical context of modernization, and draws scholarly attention to the economic and material culture underlying realistic representations.

The study of visual culture has attracted attention from scholars in historical studies and in cultural studies and marked the visual turn over the last two decades. With the increasing interest in visual images in modern Chinese history, the use of visual images for historical studies has become more popular. In the field of cultural studies, this trend led to a boom in film studies. Scholars in both fields attempt to decipher visual texts, still images and moving images alike, with all their complexities and ambiguities. It is common for them to use a close-reading approach, which is to translate visual materials into linguistic meanings. However, the approach may be more fruitful if it adopts an art historical perspective and pays attention to the production process of the visual materials. I examine the production processes behind the scenes in front of our eyes as an art historical approach to reveal the invisible forces and power relationships that shape the visual materials. In this way, it can challenge the idea that the Party state is a monolithic entity and that socialist cultural production is tightly controlled by a one-dimensional authoritarian state. As a result of this approach, I am able to demonstrate the dynamic role that artists and writers played in the institutionalization of culture in socialist China.

In the last two decades, visual images have become an important source of insight for historians in the field of modern Chinese studies. On the one hand, many photo archives provide scholars with access to systematically study visual materials thanks to their well-built infrastructure. On the other hand, researchers in cultural studies and art history have produced impressive scholarship as well as provided a wealth of historical examples and methods to offer new perspectives on images. Despite the fact that most historians rely heavily on textual materials, the importance of visual materials has become widely recognized. In 2012 and 2013, Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh consecutively published two research collections: *History in Images:*

Pictures and Public Space in Modern China (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2012) and *Visualising China, 1845-1965: Moving and Still images in Historical Narratives* (Brill, 2012). Both volumes examine the use of visual images in historical studies. Henriot and Yeh and the scholars they invite in the collections reflect the visual turn in the field of modern Chinese history. In the last decade, the field of Chinese photography has also grown rapidly due to the discovery of new photo archives and other visual materials. Art historian Wu Hung's *Zooming In* (Reaktion Books, 2016) and photo historian Jin Yongquan's *Red Flag Studio* (Jincheng Press, 2009) can be brought into dialogue with Henriot and Yeh's collections in order to show that recent scholarship in the history of Chinese photography and Chinese art history could challenge the understanding of photography in cultural studies and further call the historiography into question. In neither book was the visual message taken at face value. Rather, they presented an approach to analyzing historical photographs by questioning the visual elements and examining the editing processes. I find the two scholars' work to be exemplary in analyzing especially the photographs of the Mao era, which seem to be tainted by bias.

It is first important to clarify which styles of analysis do not work in studying historical photographs before addressing a methodology for analyzing them. Henriot and Yeh note that although more historians are recognizing the significance of visual materials, most still tend to use images as mere illustrations. A disadvantage of seeing photographs as illustrations is that they are seen as auxiliary sources of textual archives, in which case they cannot advance arguments. For example, a portrait of a historical figure is commonly used to illustrate history books. While sometimes a portrait could capture the subtle or transient emotions of the subject, it

is always difficult to judge how much we can infer about the character or feelings of the subject from the portrait. Therefore, although providing readers with the rich texture of history, the removal of these pictures does not affect the validity of the argument. More often than not, using images as illustrations means that historians may risk distorting the visuality of the images for convenience's sake to extract meanings in support of their arguments.

Other attempts at using visual materials as historical evidence include reading images in the same way as reading texts. In this case, historians tend to see one image as a collection of symbols. Symbols function as a bridge between visual elements and words. This notion assumes that visuality could be deciphered directly into words. In Henriot and Yeh's words, "such practices, established as they are, have subjected the reading of pictures to that of words."⁷⁸ Some historians simply give a description of the images and take the content of pictures at face value. However, as Henriot and Yeh rightly point out, "Visual images do operate within certain discursive norms that are distinct from textual materials."⁷⁹ Propaganda or advertisements commonly juxtapose two images with irrelevant connections in reality in order to create visual effects or arouse feelings in the audience. The simple itemization and addition of the content in the images ignores the contexts and thus may distort the original meanings of the images.

By cautioning against illustrating the past with images and reducing visuality to words, I differentiate my use of images in historical research from previous researchers. I present an approach that builds upon Henriot and Yeh's understanding of photographs, which can be

⁷⁸ Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh, *History in Images: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China*, China Research Monographs ; No. 66 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2012), 3

⁷⁹ Ibid, 4

summarized as the following three points. First, Henriot and Yeh argue that photographs could “bring to life not only the sites and scenes in time, but also the highly circumstantial nature of certain historical scenes as they unfolded at specific sites.”⁸⁰ Secondly, Henriot and Yeh contend that by piecing together a series of relevant photographs and building a series of individual photographs into a visual narrative, historians may be able to reconstruct the causal relationship and unfolding of historical events. Henriot and Yeh emphasize the reliability and veracity of visual documents based on this strong belief. As a result, only a small number of photographs can be considered historical evidence and could withstand critical analysis since they appear more reliable than others, even if this might only be an illusion. Finally, historians such as Henriot and Yeh may insert their own assumptions into photographs and give some photographs inadequate credibility while denying others. By bringing into discussion the fruitful research in Jin Yongquan’s *Red Flag Studio* and Wu Hung’s *Zooming In*, nonetheless, I demonstrate that knowledge of the history of Chinese photography could enable us to rethink the assertions made by Henriot and Yeh.

To begin with, I propose to explore how photographers drew on visual conventions and created new visual paradigms for the later period of history. Researchers should acknowledge the role images play in creating new conventions rather than reflecting existing conventions. The purpose of this approach is to question the belief that a photograph can provide any faithful historical description. For example, Henriot maintains that photographs could vividly materialize historical knowledge, because “there is much less distance--both temporal and spatial--between a photographer and what he sees than between an author and what she narrates.”⁸¹ However,

⁸⁰ Ibid, 6

⁸¹ Ibid. 18

Henriot's assertion is still based on his belief in the immediacy and objectivity of photography. New scholarship in art history demonstrates that both photographers and authors distort their depicted truth, but they do so in different ways.

I found Wu Hung's art historical approach to be the best example to follow when we ask whether photographs materialize or create the past because he constantly reminds us that any attempt to preserve the atmosphere of the past can fall victim to the careful manipulations photographers perform on their images. For instance, photographer Milton M. Miller (1830-1899) took a series of portraits of Chinese officials, businessmen and women in a seemingly distinct traditional "Chinese" portrait style. In the past, scholars believed that Miller's photograph series possessed both artistic sensitivity and serious documentary purpose, showing the photographer's technical skill but also revealing the sitter's character. Wu Hung, however, proves that Miller's framed photographs do not depict real individuals, but rather his hired models who performed the identities based on local ancestral portrait conventions and Miller's imagination.

Miller's performed portraiture challenges historians' understanding of photography. Henriot categorizes photo archives into three types: posed or staged photographs, target photographs, and random photographs. Miller's photo series, however, do not fit into any of those categories. Rather than being merely staged or posed, his subjects embody fictional identities because the models are portraying other identities than their own. Wu Hung keenly points out that "The combined outcome of these desires conforms to neither Chinese nor Western aesthetics in their own terms but mingles local visual norms, Western expectations and the photographer's personal

ambitions in a hybrid form.”⁸² By opening his studio in Hong Kong, Miller was able to disguise the colonial agenda and disseminate his reinvented local traditions to both local and global audiences by creating new visual paradigms. Miller’s fictional portraiture is not an exceptional example. Wu Hung points out that studying early historical photographs in China has always been difficult “due to the paucity of archival evidence.”⁸³ Therefore, it is likely that scholars will mistakenly identify images from other photo archives as well. Scholars would be deceived, for example, if they were deceived by the visual immediacy and wanted to study the daily life of political officials and merchants based on Miller’s photographs. For this reason, photo historians need to clarify “indications about its nature, source, conditions of production, purpose, and so on.”⁸⁴

Secondly, I suggest that scholars should have a sophisticated understanding of historians often promote “to work on a specific collection of photographs produced either by an individual photographer or by an institution or a press agency or newspaper.”⁸⁵ However, this method may not yield better historical insights. There is a flawed assumption that, given access to a well-preserved systematic photography archive, it is possible and even constructive to reconstruct a visual narrative and restore causal chains of historical events from images. The more systematic the photographs are, the more feasible he would consider this approach. A rigorous examination of the visual documents’ reliability and veracity is required in this attempt. As such, Henriot expects coherence or the possibility of reconstructing coherence through the archive. Henriot and

⁸² Hung Wu, *Zooming In* (Reaktion Books, 2016). 42

⁸³ *ibid.* 29

⁸⁴ Henriot and Yeh, *History in Images*, 17

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 17

Yeh pose the question “what stories do pictures tell?” in the introduction to their 2013 collection, which also indicates their strong interest and conviction that photographs are able to construct coherent narratives. In spite of the disjointed and fragmented nature of photographs, Henriot and Yeh emphasize that “One needs to explore the voice behind the images, to delve into the memories they may trigger, and to re-contextualise them in the more or less lengthy afterlife they enjoyed beyond the time and place in which they were produced.”⁸⁶

However, this belief is in conflict with Henriot and Yeh’s viewpoint that an image “once taken, gains a life of its own.”⁸⁷ The fragmented and disjointed nature of photography makes it easy to disassociate the image from its original context. Because of this, it is readily available to distort its original meaning to meet human needs. In Henriot and Yeh’s own words, “A framed image that had lost its contextual mooring functioned, more often than not, as an open invitation to an abstraction and misrepresentation of its situated meaning.”⁸⁸ Therefore, when we construct a historical narrative from images, we need to ask if the narrative has been adapted during its circulation. For instance, in his study of photographer Felice Beato’s work (1832-1909), Wu Hung indicates that Beato’s panoramas, architectural photographs, and most importantly, his war photographs in China are deliberately reorganized and sequenced in his photo collection. It is deceptive for readers who wish to reconstruct a visual narrative from his accounts because the photographer intentionally frustrates the attempt in order to conceal the brutality and recreate the experience of colonial conquest.

⁸⁶ Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, *Visualising China, 1845-1965: Moving and Still Images in Historical Narratives* (Brill, 2012). Xii

⁸⁷ Ibid. xvi

⁸⁸ Ibid.

A counter-example of Beato's work that denies the simple colonial narrative of foreigners' gazes may also hold true due to arbitrary narrative construction in photographs. In Henriot and Yeh's 2013 collection, researchers find that the assumption that all European China photographs inherently contain "a negative, colonial view of a static China of backwardness, barbarism, sickness and poverty" is unsubstantiated.⁸⁹ Robert Bickers indicates that many European colonialists "carried pictures from home and used photography, among other things, to soothe nostalgia."⁹⁰ Although I disagree that we should forsake altogether a critical position on imperialism and colonialism, for many debates have been done in the field of Chinese history to caution scholars about the problematic nature of archives and against the hegemony of language and visuality, these counterexamples of colonial gazes do remind us that the arbitrary and fragmented nature of photography complicates and even invalidates any narrative historian's hope to simply extract information from images through "a systematic itemization of what it shows" or "archaeological reading."⁹¹ Even if we can find accompanying texts written for the photograph, Wu Hung's research on the magazine *Old Photos* has shown that although these accompanying texts are written as reminiscences and even in the first person, it only means that "their authors assumed the role of storyteller or eyewitness," and the subjects may have "nothing to do with personal experience."⁹² Images elicit imagination and only serve as "stimuli, clues and sites for reconstructing history and offering recollections."⁹³ In other words, an ethnographic or

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Henriot and Yeh, *History in Images*, 20

⁹² Wu, *Zooming In*, 226

⁹³ *ibid.*

archaeological reading of images may uncover textual materials that appear to be instructions or keys to the images, but their reliability must always be challenged as well.

Using historical photographs to reconstruct a historical narrative is difficult because it requires the identification of historical photographs as well as the trustworthiness of the contents captured by the shutter. Henriot and Yeh have a firm belief in the content of photography. They claim that “Unless they (photographs) are manipulated or doctored, photographs show a real moment that corresponds to the exact time when the shutter let light in and left the imprint of an image onto a glass plate, celluloid film or digital support.”⁹⁴ In light of this faith, Henriot emphasizes that “a systematic itemization of what it shows (and what it does not show)” is the key to the interpretation of photographs.⁹⁵ However, historians underestimate the difficulty of identifying the manipulation of photographs. Unless other photo historians do research to restore the production and distribution process of photographs, historians may either be deceived by fabricated content or neglect seemingly manipulated images entirely, missing important historical insights into the knowledge and values these sources intend to convey.

Photographic historians are often able to reveal the complexity of visuality through their study of the conventional practices that influence the making process. According to Wu Hung’s studies and photo historian Jin Yongquan’s *Red Flag Studio*, the relationship between photography and reality is problematic, and the seemingly neutral recording of photographs may distort reality due to the photographer’s intention at the time, as well as the editor’s intent in the future. In chapter six, Wu Hung studied artist Zhang Dali (b. 1963)’s “Second History” project, which shows how

⁹⁴ Henriot and Yeh, *Visualising China, 1845-1965*. Xix

⁹⁵ Henriot and Yeh, *History in Images*, 20

politics may manipulate photographs and other visual materials to an extent to erase historical facts and invent the past in history and culture. Using 130 panels of examples of doctored photographs and news photographs, Zhang convincingly demonstrates the prevalence of photographic manipulation in the realm of politics and ideology, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Human figures can be added to or removed from one photograph or even displaced into a completely different context. Images are distorted to the point that it is more of a fabrication than a documentation. Therefore, in the Maoist period, “revolutionary photography” (*geming sheying* 革命摄影) is a controversial genre. Since socialist realism is widely accepted in both the political and cultural milieus, artists believe that reality can be readjusted to reach a level of sublimity that is “higher than life.” Almost all photographs that Zhang found were manipulated to some extent, which “challenge the notion of an ‘original photo’ (*yuanshi zhaopian* 原始照片), because the negative was already retouched, or the first print already combined multiple shots.”⁹⁶

However, given this phenomenon, should historians disregard entirely the possibility of studying the apparently manipulated photos taken during this complicated period to preserve the veracity of evidence? How do we see through the interference of politics and derive historical truth from photographs? The question is, what knowledge should historians equip themselves with to deal with problematic photo archives? The way scholars look at and analyze photographs is influenced by their pre-existing assumptions. As we have seen, Henriot rationalizes the presumptions in understanding photographs and argues that it is important and reasonable for historians to look at photographs with a corrective lens. For instance, he notes that scholars need

⁹⁶ Wu, *Zooming In*, 189

to be aware that many photographs taken by individuals were more likely to be lost than those taken by institutions.⁹⁷ Yet, Zhang Dali's project reminds us that we should not place more emphasis on only institutional photographs. Similarly, it is unreasonable to trust that private photographs provide an unmediated perspective of the past. Understanding the context of photography is essential.

I would argue that it is imperative to acquire a thorough understanding of Chinese photography history, since it can provide us a direct understanding of why and how a photographer took a photograph, as well as how he understood and imagined the world around him. Admittedly, as Henriot suggests, scholars should pay attention to both "what I see" and "what I know."⁹⁸ And when little background data is available to scholars, "one can only rely on preexisting 'knowledge' to read a photograph and give it a proper meaning."⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the problem is that we still know so little about the history of Chinese photography that it may lead historians to unreasonably place reliance on certain archives while disregarding the importance of others. To fill in this gap, I study the rarely accessible wartime archives in China. While Henriot states that the knowledge refers to "both knowledge on the photograph itself and knowledge outside the photographs," he is clearer about what is knowledge on the photograph (he refers to what, when, where, etc.). By comparison, his ideas about the broader context of the photograph is still ambiguous, as he only vaguely describes that the contextual knowledge is "as wide as 'this is

⁹⁷ Henriot and Yeh, *History in Images*., 18

⁹⁸ Henriot and Yeh, *History in Images*, 20

⁹⁹ Ibid.

China.”¹⁰⁰ As such, I hope to explicitly promote the study of the production and circulation process in Chinese photography.

My last point is that, despite the prevalence of photographic manipulation, we should not dismiss the socialist production of photographs as historical evidence. On the contrary, a study of the political situation and education background of socialist photographers could open up important discussions about the conditions facing cultural workers in a socialist regime. Researchers can better understand socialist visual production if they study the production process and gain contextual knowledge about the circulation of images. It is true that photojournalism during the Maoist period was particularly susceptible to the idealized sublime reality. This tendency of manipulating photographs eventually influences the private realm of people’s everyday lives, thus making socialist archival photographs an ideal component for examining how perceptions changed. The book *Red Flag Studio* by Jin Yongquan is one of the first books to reconstruct the historical and cultural contexts of PRC photojournalists. He focuses on the major debate of “arranging and refining”(zuzhi jiagong 组织加工) and “posing and staging”(baibu 摆布) in the history of Chinese photography. Jin illustrates the precarious positions of photojournalists through his analysis of debates and incidents from the photographic community. Hence, he presents photojournalists’ attempts to strike a compromise between Party policy and aesthetic expression.

Although it is well known that photography is subject to manipulation, Jin Yongquan examines how the line between deliberate framing, doctored manipulation, and veracious documentation

¹⁰⁰ ibid.

often blurs, especially during a time of political and ideological fervor. In terms of both production and circulation of photographs, the influence and wide circulation of a photograph results from collaboration between photographers, editors, publishers, government officials and others. The new crop of promising cultural workers, the photojournalists, fought to secure their professional position during their negotiations with the Party guidelines during the socialist era. The photographers were not passive victims who received orders from the Party. Contrary to this, many photographers, both at their own initiative and under political pressure, endeavored wholeheartedly to conform to the Party's policies. In this situation, some photojournalists looked only for positive attitudes in society. In some cases, the photographer did not even press the shutter if the subject did not smile.

It is possible to fall into the binary thinking that a photograph either reflects the truth or is utterly fake without any prior knowledge of socialist photographic production and circulation. Though Henriot stresses that he is aware that “the photographer does make choices” and that “his or her images are not a guarantee of more ‘objectivity,’” he still maintains that “the photographer can hardly change what is in front of the camera” and that photography has “more immediacy and more direct ‘contact’ with the past than textual sources.”¹⁰¹ Despite this, Jin Yongquan proves that a photojournalist took his own children as models to capture the happy faces of children playing toy cars in public parks in praise of socialist welfare in pursuit of better photogenic effects in news reports. As Wu Hung also notes, the complexity of the situation is that “we begin to realize that the distortion of photographs does not always serve political propaganda. In fact, it is accepted and employed by society at large, since everyone is attracted by ideal, ‘sublimated’

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* 18-19

images of themselves.”¹⁰² Even though the professional ethics of journalism of documenting reality are under severe challenge and contested, official archives reflect the photojournalists’ sense of socialist imagination shared by millions of people.

Therefore, my appraisal of the recent scholarship in both the China field and the visual field has proved that while it is important to “devise appropriate methodologies,” it is equally pressing to acquire knowledge in the history of Chinese photography in order to understand the mechanism of the production and circulation of photography.¹⁰³ We would be creating an intellectual vacuum if we dismissed the significance of the manipulated photographs developed in socialist China. Photographs are more complex historical materials that require the researcher’s knowledge of the cultural dynamics in the photographic circle, as well as his awareness that the visual documentation communicates the intention of the photojournalists and the party state to shape the viewer’s perception of reality.

IV. Chapter Breakdown

My dissertation is divided into five chapters. The Introduction Chapter lays out the historical background of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the theoretical foundations of this project. The war involved three main parties—the Chinese Communist Party Army (CCP), the Kuomintang Army (KMT), and the Japanese army—demonstrating how media propaganda operated differently for each party due to the varying material conditions they faced. The complex antagonism between the three parties made the CCP cautious in its propagandistic strategy.

¹⁰² Wu, *Zooming In*, 218

¹⁰³ Henriot and Yeh, *Visualising China, 1845-1965*. xii

Following the Battle of Shanghai in 1937, several short-lived pictorial magazines dedicated to war reporting emerged in the KMT-controlled areas, including *Kangzhan Huabao*, *Liangyou Zhanshi Huakan*, *Zhanshi Huabao*, and *Jiuwang Manhua*. These publications ceased abruptly with the KMT's retreat and the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in November 1937. Later, photojournalism within the CCP's propaganda branch expanded, recruiting and training novice photographers during the war. This period marked not only a source of inspiration and influence on other socialist visual production but also the cultural institutionalization and gradual development of a socialist aesthetic. Drawing on relevant work from literary studies and the broader field of media studies, this chapter explains the tensions and debates between mass media forms and elite cultural forms during this period and demonstrates how the medium-specificity of photography can shed light on its role in community-building projects in the 20th century.

Chapter 1 introduces my general methodology, which applies the digital humanities method to look into the production and circulation of copies of photographs. This method is particularly valuable because there is a limited number of copies of photographs that were taken during the war time period due to a lack of film and other photographic equipment. As a result, scholars can examine the circulation of famous photographs at a broader time scale. I do not treat copies of the same photograph as being equal and identical based on the methodologies taken from art historians and photo historians like Wu Hung and Jin Yongquan. I propose, instead, that by tracing the lineage of the transformations of images scholars can pay attention to the necessary duplicates of key shots on a scene, the cropping, editing, and other forms of manipulation of film, and the incarnation of images in different visual media. In contrast with Wu Hung's

research on early photography in the 19th century, when only limited copies of images existed for scholars to trace circulation, photography in the 20th century often had several copies of an image. In spite of this, because rural areas lack access to film and photographic equipment, there are only about two thousand wartime photographs remaining. With the help of Harvard librarians, I gained access to the digital collection of their Sha Fei archive and have collaborated with researchers from UCLA's Statistics Department and Computer Science Department to apply computer vision to track the circulation of original photographs and the provenance of printed photographs. A photograph's circulation can provide valuable historical information, such as how the photograph was cropped, edited, captioned, and deliberately manipulated.

This chapter examines the longstanding need and challenge of providing contextual analysis of historical images stored in digital visual archives and the accessibility of retrieving contextual information from these historical archives. Contextual analysis is essential for disciplines such as history and art history, as it allows for the contextualization of artwork and historical sources with historical narratives, which in turn enhances understanding of the artistic or political expression in the contents of cultural products. To address this challenge, a novel approach is proposed utilizing computer vision to trace the circulation and dissemination of historical photographs in their original contexts. This method involves first using YOLO v7 to crop historical images from pictorial magazines, then training machine learning models on the cropped printed images plus another large dataset of original historical photographs, and comparing the similarity of images between the datasets of printed images and original photographs. To ensure accuracy of image similarities between the two subsets with distinct image qualities, an ensemble of three machine learning models—Vision Transformer,

EfficientNetv2, and Swin Transformer—was developed. Through this system, contexts in the circulation of historical photographs were discovered and new insights regarding the editing strategies of propaganda magazines in East Asia during WWII were uncovered. These outcomes offer supporting evidence for previous research in the history and art historical disciplines, and demonstrate the potential of computer vision for uncovering new information from digital visual archives. Our model achieves a 77.8% top-15 retrieval accuracy on our evaluation dataset.

Chapters 2 to 4 describe in detail how propaganda photographs were created and their afterlife. I cover the social life of photographs in chapters 2 to 4, exploring how a photographer made plans and conceptualized his or her photographs, how he or she decided whether to capture a decisive moment or to stage their human subjects for a shot, how technicians developed the film, and how editors decided which images to publish, in what design, and how they should be edited. I also discuss who the target audience of these photographs was, how local peasants learned to interpret propaganda photographs, what feedback they provided to photojournalists and editors, and how critiques shaped socialist visual conventions. My use of digital humanities methods is crucial to tracing the genealogy of these wartime images and finding relevant visual evidence to support my arguments throughout these chapters.

Chapter 2 examines visual editorial strategies employed in the *Jinchaji Pictorial* with the aid of the computer vision pipeline. The plethora of photographs disseminated in the 20th-century print media presents a formidable challenge to humanities scholars tracing image circulation.

Nevertheless, this chapter demonstrates how computer vision can illuminate the intertextuality between images and accompanying textual captions, thereby providing deeper insights into the

evolution of editorial strategies. The study traces the transformative journey of photographs from informational news to metaphorical propaganda, with abstract meanings gradually emerging from a diversity of concrete, realistic images. Close scrutiny of multiple photographs in different contexts reveals a predilection for images accentuating human subjects and textual elements, suggestive of an adherence to socialist realism with its inherent aim to visualize social relationships and create visual evidence. Ultimately, this research elucidates the strategic shift in the *Jinchaji Pictorial's* editorial approach, moving from pure information dissemination to crafting a compelling visual narrative that served propagandistic purposes amidst the contingencies of war.

Chapter 3 is titled “Leveraging Sparse Visual Data for Historical Insight: Forensic Reconstructions of Wartime Spectatorship in WWII China” and examines exhibition culture and audience reception. This chapter explores the epistemological potential of limited photographic evidence in reconstructing historical spectatorship, focusing on exhibition photography during World War II in China. How much insight on the audience reception could scholars rescue from a photograph of a historical exhibition? Data-driven approach is often described as collecting a large amount of visual data in order to find certain patterns among the images. However, this study focuses on the unique challenge posed when historians have access to only a limited number of photographs, exploring how the historical exhibition scenes can be reconstructed using a forensic approach. By analyzing exhibition scenes from wartime China, this study not only aims to recreate the photographs exhibited in wartime exhibitions and various types of artwork displayed to soldiers and local peasants in North China to mobilize them for the war

effort and evoke revolutionary fervor but also to bring to light the poor conditions of the venues used for these displays.

Utilizing Aspanformer and super-resolution, the study conducts an analysis on six photographs of indoor exhibitions. This process reveals hidden details that are pivotal for understanding the historical contexts and the intentions behind creating specific affects in a social movement. The scarcity of materials during the wartime period led to innovative arrangements and decorations in art curation, reflecting the significant effort invested in revolutionary settings. Furthermore, the Aspanformer and super-resolution helps historians uncover new knowledge imparted by the exhibitions, such as advancements in printing technology, representing subtle elements of propaganda.

Crucially, this article delves into the empirical aspect of historical reception by examining internally-circulated working journals of the Pictorial Press for photojournalists, memoirs, audience letters, surveys conducted by journalists to collect comments, and photojournalists' feedback. These documents provide a rich examination of audience reactions and critiques, offering a window into how both soldiers and local peasants perceived the photographs. Their receptions were also shaped by insights from Soviet photojournalism, which influenced the photojournalists' approach and served as learning material. Such examination challenges the traditional view of passive spectatorship by highlighting the audience's active role in the image-building process, demonstrating engagement with the photographs that fostered a sense of participation in the revolutionary movement.

By focusing on the choice of images that often highlighted victories and achievements, the study suggests a strategic overlap with the content of pictorial magazines, pointing to a nuanced approach to censorship and image control. My dataset comprised six photographs spanning two distinct exhibitions. Four photographs originated from the November 1940 exhibition titled “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune,” and two depicted the “Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival,” showcasing the Eighth Route Army soldiers at a news photography and printing technique exhibition in July 1941. Although not all taken by Sha Fei, all photographs were selected from the Sha Fei’s collection, reflecting his dual role as curator and photographer, deeply aware of the documentary and historical value of such images. I focus on the two exhibitions, for which multiple scene photographs are available, enhancing the capacity to apply and demonstrate the forensic capabilities of our computer vision models. This approach allows us to better reconstruct the exhibition context and to uncover rich historical details, despite the inherent limitations of the available data sources.

The narrative further explores how the CCP strategically planned visual experiences amidst challenges such as forced migration and constant mobility, emphasizing the integration of political messages into the natural environment and the recycling of a limited number of photographs due to resource constraints. This research contributes to the discourse on the evidentiary value of photographs in historical scholarship. It underscores the significance of theoretical and interpretive frameworks in understanding visual media’s role in constructing social truths, especially within the context of wartime propaganda and audience interaction. Through a meticulous forensic reconstruction of visual spectatorship, the study not only enriches

historical understanding but also engages with the evolving role of AI in interpreting historical visual evidence.

Chapter 4 is titled “Training Neophytes and Fitting in with the Collective.” This chapter deals with the institutionalization of photojournalism during the wartime period, and explains various aspects of training new photographers. The CCP institutions aimed to encourage and include more young photographers in the propaganda system. Beginning photographers lacked adequate equipment and supplies to practice, making them unqualified to be photojournalists. Since beginning photographers had different levels of educational and class backgrounds, they displayed different levels of mastery of photographic skills. Most of them were teenaged peasants recruited as soldiers, and they were illiterate or semi-illiterate. They had grown up in a remote rural area all their lives; photography was an entirely new technique to them. In addition, they had not seen the high-quality pictorials that were widely published and distributed in Shanghai and other urban areas. As a consequence, they had little understanding of the western visual conventions that had emerged and were popularized in Shanghai during the early 20th century. I therefore investigate how social bonds facilitated understanding of technology and overcame the limitations of technical skills possessed by new photographers.

My approach provides an insider’s view of the training workshops used to educate new photographers. The training workshops taught photographers the foundations of photojournalistic practices as well as how to conform to military culture. By studying training manuals, class notes, memoirs and theoretical texts published in internally circulated journals, such as *Photographic Web*, I analyze how photographers collaborated with military and other cultural

workers to take expressive photographs to demonstrate the Party's ideology. Furthermore, I describe how socialist culture placed more emphasis on the ethics of spectators and photographers than on the ethics of viewing and seeing. Photographers were encouraged by the Party to engage with local peasants and soldiers, and thereby gained an education about their rights and responsibilities for their new political identities. Photographs helped generate shared emotions, which facilitated a discussion about how empathy and sympathy emerge in a community. A variety of socialist ideological positions were expressed not just in photographs and political essays but also in the regular activities of the Party's cultural organization, and these discussions led to the institutionalization of photojournalism within the Party.

I also describe the process of taking a photograph on the battlefield. I pay attention to photographs that seem to have been taken by chance and so are most likely snapshots. A major goal of this chapter is to examine the contested meaning of truth in modern Chinese history. I argue that the meaning of truth has changed significantly, and strains of chance have intermingled and shaped history. The outcome of photography is often affected by the haphazard decisions that photographers make at the time of taking the photograph, because of the various contingent factors that affect the outcome. The contingent factors would have to be tamed in order to convey clear messages to the audience. After 1949, these rare images of the war became canonical and were reprinted repeatedly in publications. Thus, these images also shaped the contemporary understanding of the history of the crucial wartime period.

Taking a photograph only requires one photographer to press the shutter. However, what does it mean for photographers to overcome their individualism and embrace the collective? We can

learn from photographic pamphlets that socialist culture and wartime conditions were conducive to photographers collaborating with one another. To prevent the themes of one event becoming too concentrated, photographers had to communicate with other photojournalists ahead of time and assign different shooting tasks to different people. Furthermore, it was important for photographers to maintain close relationships with military commanders and political commissars in order to envision military operations. Having communication with political leaders and military leaders helped ensure that photographers' shooting tasks were aligned with political ideology and military plans. These behind-the-scenes glimpses into photographers' working processes can help scholars understand when and how photographers needed to snap a decisive moment and why, at some point, they needed to direct their human subjects and stage a photograph.

This chapter aims to answer the following questions: How do we understand the haphazard nature of the process of taking a photograph during wartime? What was the thought process that a photographer went through when conceptualizing his or her ideas for a photograph? How was a photographer to prepare for a shooting task? What sort of research should a photojournalist do before a shoot? How did photographers take battlefield photos? I analyze Shi Shaohua's "Studies on Photographic Work in Attacking Towns" and "Research on the Method of Collecting Materials for Photojournalism." These two handbooks are the essential textbooks CCP used to train its novice photographers. In 2015, the class notes of these photographers were scanned and published. These first-hand sources provide insight into these questions.

As a conclusion, this dissertation focuses on the formation of photojournalism during World War II and its subsequent impact on socialist visual culture after 1949. Despite unfavorable material conditions, such as the lack of film and other photographic equipment, photographers and editors were still able to employ various visual strategies, including those imbued with modernist aesthetics, to convey their ideological messages. As a result of these aesthetic explorations, CCP's propaganda branch was founded, and thus the institutionalization of photojournalism consolidated visual paradigms for news publications after 1949. These visual paradigms were developed by newly recruited photographers in China and shared with the community in the rural areas of northern China. By developing a collective way of taking, reading, and commenting on photographs, photographic literacy fostered a new generation of photojournalists and created a community during the war.

Chapter 1

Probing Historical Image Contexts: Enhancing Visual Archive Retrieval through Computer Vision

As part of my scholarly endeavor to examine the history of Chinese photography through digital humanities, I also actively explore a computer-based methodology to conveniently and systematically gain contextual information about a photograph during its circulation.¹⁰⁴ As I demonstrated in the previous section, without knowledge of the production and circulation processes of photography, scholars will be at risk of misinterpreting photographs. This study has shed light on the significant challenges that researchers face when conducting contextual analysis using historical visual archives. These complexities emerge from a variety of factors: the obstacle of incomplete metadata, the dearth of primary sources detailing editorial activities, the potential manipulation and modification of historical images during distribution, and the inherent limitations of human memory when tasked with accessing and browsing extensive image databases. Thus, this study has proposed an innovative approach to tackle these issues. By utilizing cutting-edge computer vision techniques, researchers can now gain new insights into historical photographs and other types of images by accessing contextual information within archives. These insights have the potential to inform future research in the fields of history and art history, and pave the way for further advancements in the analysis of historical archives. Additionally, this study has also highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in

¹⁰⁴ This chapter, for which I am the first author, has been published and co-authored with Brandon Le and Eduardo Honig. My contributions included designing the pipeline and drafting the manuscript. Specifically, I authored the introduction, wrote the non-technical literature review, analyzed the results, and composed the discussion section. See Lin Du, Brandon Le, and Edouardo Honig, “Probing Historical Image Contexts: Enhancing Visual Archive Retrieval through Computer Vision,” *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 16, no. 4 (January 8, 2024): 84:1-84:17, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3631129>.

tackling complex research problems. Researchers from different fields can combine their expertise and create innovative solutions that have the potential to transform the way we think about history and the humanities.

I. Literature Review

Importance of Contextual Analysis for Humanities Research

The purpose of this study is to emphasize the significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted contextual analysis as a crucial research method in humanities, especially in the fields of history and art history. Traditionally, contextual analysis allows historians and art historians to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social and historical background that influenced the creation of artwork, and how it contributed to its meaning and significance. With the help of AI technologies, archives can make meaningful connections between their collections and provide scholars with a broader and more extended context, which is essential for understanding how meaning is determined by specific events and the historical and material world in which they occur. For example, studying individual photographs in WWII archives requires situating them back into their circulation history to understand the way a photograph was cropped, edited, captioned, and deliberately manipulated as well as how they were used to support propaganda aims in wartime magazines.

Tracking the provenance of printed photographs in magazines is a crucial issue for the arts and humanities, because the circulation of a photograph can provide valuable historical information. Previous research has been done in this direction. For example, Boudana et al. demonstrated how contextual analysis allows us to understand how the meaning of an iconic photograph changes

over time due to its republication and reframing.¹⁰⁵ According to their research, every republication of an iconic photograph is a reframing, even when the image is reused primarily as “direct evidence” of a past event, since the reference to the past is created in relation to a contemporary act of communication. Similarly, Smits and Ros tracked 940,000 online circulations of 26 iconic photographs and found that, through the use of document embeddings and other natural language processing techniques, researchers can map the relative changes in the context of a photograph over time.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, contextual analysis provides a semiotic understanding of how context is not fixed, but rather produced and influenced by various events. This insight allows scholars to adopt a range of interpretive strategies that can help them to better comprehend the meaning of the context and the artwork itself.¹⁰⁷ By highlighting the importance of contextual analysis, this study aims to promote a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to humanities research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the past and its cultural artifacts.

In this study, we provide two specific examples from archives to demonstrate how AI can help determine the circulation history of wartime propaganda photographs during the Second Sino-Japanese War, which was part of World War II. We will use two digital archives as case studies: the Papers of Sha Fei at the Harvard-Yenching Library and the North China Railway Archive from the Center for Open Data in the Humanities (CODH) at Kyoto University. To track the

¹⁰⁵ Sandrine Boudana, Akiba A Cohen, and Paul Frosh, “How Iconic News Images Travel: Republishing and Reframing Historic Photographs in Israeli Newspapers,” *Journal of Communication* 73, no. 1 (February 1, 2023): 49–59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqac036>.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Smits and Ruben Ros, “Distant Reading 940,000 Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs,” *New Media & Society*, October 8, 2021, 14614448211049459, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211049459>.

¹⁰⁷ Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, and Donald Preziosi, “Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford University Press Oxford, 2009), 242–56.

circulation of these photographs in the respective main target propaganda magazines (*Jinchaji Pictorial* for the Chinese side and *North China* magazine for the Japanese side), we will develop computer vision methods. By correlating individual photographs in the archive with their printed versions from the magazines, we can determine which photographs were selected for publication and how they were edited or manipulated to support propaganda aims in wartime magazines. This will provide new insights into the editing strategies for propaganda magazines in East Asia during World War II.

Overview of Accessibility in Historical Archives

Many scholars have identified the problem of accessibility in digital archives. For instance, Jaillant notes that there are numerous challenges and obstacles to accessing digital archives, such as the scale of collections.¹⁰⁸ Jaillant suggests that “Artificial Intelligence and machine learning can be used to unlock archives and make them more findable and accessible.” In other words, AI and machine learning can play a significant role in enhancing accessibility to digital archives. These technologies can help to overcome the challenges that scholars face when accessing archives, such as the vastness of collections. By using computer algorithms and technologies to view and analyze digital images, scholars can establish new connections between images or gain new insights regarding the reach of a specific motif or style or the frequency of artistic exchange. This is especially relevant given that the invention of reproducible images such as prints and photographs has made it increasingly difficult for scholars to identify authenticity and trace the evolution of images in varied contexts. According to Lang and Ommer, the use of computer

¹⁰⁸ Lise Jaillant, “How Can We Make Born-Digital and Digitised Archives More Accessible? Identifying Obstacles and Solutions,” *Archival Science* 22, no. 3 (September 1, 2022): 417–36, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-022-09390-7>.

algorithms and technologies to view, analyze, and connect images is one of the most promising solutions to the challenge of accessing digital archives.¹⁰⁹ The work of Colavizza et al. is also relevant in this context.¹¹⁰ Their research calls on AI methods embedded into tools for the use of historians, allowing users to explore archival contents in an accessible way. In this way, this project builds on the interdisciplinary attempt between humanities scholars and AI researchers to use AI methods to surface gaps and absences in the data in visual archives. By doing so, this project aims to enhance the accessibility of digital archives and help scholars gain new insights into patterns and connections within and across collections.

There are two ways in which AI can improve accessibility for archives: creating metadata and conducting image retrieval. Creating metadata involves using AI to generate descriptive information about the contents of an archive, which can make it easier to search and organize. This metadata can include information such as dates, locations, people, and subjects, and can be generated automatically by machine learning algorithms trained on large datasets of similar materials. As an example, the distant viewing toolkit developed by Arnold and Tilton was able to use the metadata created by the toolkit to create a visual recommendation system for images that appeared similar across time, place, and relative popularity, granting users access to a broader portion of the photographic collection.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Sabine Lang and Björn Ommer, “Transforming Information Into Knowledge: How Computational Methods Reshape Art History,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 015, no. 3 (August 21, 2021).

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Colavizza et al., “Archives and AI: An Overview of Current Debates and Future Perspectives,” *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 15, no. 1 (2021): 4:1-4:15, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3479010>.

¹¹¹ Taylor Arnold and Lauren Tilton, “Distant Viewing: Analyzing Large Visual Corpora,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 2019.

Conducting image retrieval is another way in which AI can improve accessibility for archives. By training machine learning models on large datasets of historical photographs, researchers can use computer vision to identify patterns in the circulation and dissemination of images. Wevers and Smits used a convolutional neural network to sift through Dutch newspaper archives, classifying images into categories based on their visual features to show long-term visual trends.¹¹² Using a neural network, Chumachenko et al. detected objects and shot scales in WWII Finnish photographs with the belief that clusters of objects and stylistic choices provided information about the focus of photographers and their work environment.¹¹³

The approach of this project combines both methods. While previous research has focused on transforming visual materials into concept-based data that coheres in human-identifiable objects and entities to draw connections among images across archives, as well as to grasp the content in its own right, this project focuses on finding duplicate images to improve retrieval accuracy. Our research also differs from Cordell's "Viral Texts Project," which focuses on the circulation of textual fragments rather than visual sources, although we both investigate the circulation and strategic reappropriation of historical primary sources using machine learning.¹¹⁴ The goal of this project aligns with Drucker's vision for "digital art history"—not simply using digital tools to assist with traditional art historical tasks, but using digital approaches to provide otherwise unavailable insights into the art historical object.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Melvin Wevers and Thomas Smits, "The Visual Digital Turn: Using Neural Networks to Study Historical Images," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 2019.

¹¹³ Kateryna Chumachenko et al., "Machine Learning Based Analysis of Finnish World War I Photographers," *IEEE Access* 8 (2020): 144184–96.

¹¹⁴ Ryan Cordell, "Reprinting, Circulation, and the Network Author in Antebellum Newspapers," *American Literary History* 27, no. 3 (2015): 417–45.

¹¹⁵ Johanna Drucker, "Is There a 'Digital' Art History?," *Visual Resources* 29, no. 1–2 (2013): 5–13.

Technical Literature Review

In the technical literature, the task of retrieving contextual images from digital archives is also referred to as image search or image similarity analysis. Many methods for performing image search involve obtaining representations of images stored in a database, such that a numerical distance can be computed between representations. For example, algorithmic feature detection methods such as SIFT and ORB can be used to conduct image similarity analysis, as well as methods such as image hashing.¹¹⁶ While there are existing services for locating similar or duplicate images, many of them are proprietary and/or costly. Resig demonstrates how the proprietary TinEye Match Engine can be used to match duplicate images in the Frick photoarchive.¹¹⁷ The TinEye Match Engine creates a digital signature of each image and compares the similarity between the signatures of each image to output the closest image matches. Resig shows some successful cases of matching between identical images with different lighting, color, and similar cropping. Additionally, some failure cases were shown consisting of “detail shots,” images from different viewpoints, and positive-negative image pairs.¹¹⁸

Deep learning methods have seen much progress over a variety of tasks in recent years, such as image retrieval Dubey.¹¹⁹ Additionally, deep learning models have shown the ability to learn

¹¹⁶ David G. Lowe, “Distinctive Image Features from Scale-Invariant Keypoints,” *International Journal of Computer Vision* 60 (2004): 91–110. And E. Rublee et al., “ORB: An Efficient Alternative to SIFT or SURF. In: IEEE International Conference on Computer Vision,” 2011.

¹¹⁷ John Resig, “Using Computer Vision to Increase the Research Potential of Photo Archives,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2014): 3–2.; TinEye. 2023. TinEye Match Engine. <https://services.tineye.com/MatchEngine>; Frick Collection. 2023. The Frick Photoarchive. <https://www.frick.org/library/photoarchive>

¹¹⁸ Resig, “Using Computer Vision to Increase the Research Potential of Photo Archives.”

strong representations with results in tasks such as image detection and image classification. Self-supervised learning techniques such as in Chen allow one to learn a deep model that outputs image representations from unlabeled data.¹²⁰ The representations learned from this model can then be compared to output similarity scores, as in other image similarity methods. We propose a deep learning method based on deep representation learning that will allow anyone to train and perform image retrieval on any dataset.

II. Methods

Computer Vision Pipeline

We introduce a computer vision pipeline for image retrieval. We consider the task where two image datasets exist: a source dataset of exact photographs to be searched for, and an archive dataset of scanned pictorials that contain potential image matches for the source dataset. Since each image in the original archive dataset may contain extraneous text or multiple images within a single file, it is necessary to preprocess the data to crop only single images for comparison.

Image Cropping Model

To obtain the cropped images from each pictorial, we use the YOLOv7 image detection model to automatically detect images from files in the archive.¹²¹ To this end, we first manually annotated 150 files from the pictorial data by drawing boxes around the images of interest. Using these

¹¹⁹ Shiv Ram Dubey, “A Decade Survey of Content Based Image Retrieval Using Deep Learning,” *IEEE Transactions on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology* 32, no. 5 (2021): 2687–2704.

¹²⁰ Ting Chen et al., “A Simple Framework for Contrastive Learning of Visual Representations,” in *International Conference on Machine Learning* (PMLR, 2020), 1597–1607, <http://proceedings.mlr.press/v119/chen20j.html>.

¹²¹ Chien-Yao Wang, Alexey Bochkovskiy, and Hong-Yuan Mark Liao, “YOLOv7: Trainable Bag-of-Freebies Sets New State-of-the-Art for Real-Time Object Detectors,” in *Proceedings of the IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, 2023, 7464–75.

annotated images, we then trained the YOLOv7 detection model to identify these images by denoting the annotations as a new label for the model to detect. After training, the YOLOv7 model was used to detect images across the entire pictorial data, which were then cropped and saved as new target images to be searched. Note that this step may be ignored if the images in the archive are already cropped from their original medium. The overall pipeline is described in Figure 1.1.

Deep Image Retrieval Model

After obtaining the cropped target images, we use all available images from both the source data and the cropped target images for training the deep image similarity model. We follow Chen et al., where a single image is augmented, or transformed by some mathematical operation, to produce a pair of similar input images which are then processed by the model during training.¹²² We applied a combination of three augmentations: adjusting the color via brightness, contrast, saturation, and hue, randomly cropping, and randomly flipping the image. While Chen et al. found using Gaussian Blur as beneficial, we found empirically in early testing that adding Gaussian Blur as an augmentation method did not improve results for this task.¹²³ The model architecture consists of an ensemble of three pre-trained image classification models: Vision Transformer,¹²⁴ EfficientNetv2,¹²⁵ and Swin Transformer¹²⁶ as well as a learnable multi-layer

¹²² Chen et al., “A Simple Framework for Contrastive Learning of Visual Representations.”

¹²³ Chen et al., “A Simple Framework for Contrastive Learning of Visual Representations.”

¹²⁴ Alexey Dosovitskiy et al., “An Image Is Worth 16x16 Words: Transformers for Image Recognition at Scale” (arXiv, June 3, 2021), <http://arxiv.org/abs/2010.11929>.

¹²⁵ Mingxing Tan and Quoc Le, “Efficientnetv2: Smaller Models and Faster Training,” in *International Conference on Machine Learning* (PMLR, 2021), 10096–106, <http://proceedings.mlr.press/v139/tan21a.html>.

¹²⁶ Ze Liu et al., “Swin Transformer: Hierarchical Vision Transformer Using Shifted Windows,” in *Proceedings of the IEEE/CVF International Conference on Computer Vision*, 2021, 10012–22.

perceptron model that processes the combined outputs from the pre-trained models. Note that the pre-trained models are not further trained. The learned model outputs numeric representations of input images, which can then be compared using a metric such as cosine similarity to output a similarity score. At test time we output the learned representations for all source and target images. These representations are then used to select the closest target images to a given source image, where the “closeness” of two image representations can be calculated using cosine similarity, a common metric for computing similarity between numeric representations. The training pipeline is described in Figure 1.2.

Jinchaji Pictorial Dataset

We have created a dataset with groups of source and target images from the Papers of Sha Fei in the Harvard-Yenching Library and one of China’s major wartime propaganda magazines, *the Jinchaji Pictorial*. The dataset contains 2146 original photographs and 1,122 magazine pages, from which a dataset of 4,390 different images were cropped using YOLO v7.

III. Results

Image Retrieval

To measure the performance of our method, we avoid costly human evaluation and automatically calculate top-K accuracy on a subset of 230 known manually annotated image pairs. A target image is considered a top-K match to a given source image if it is one of the K closest target images to the source image, determined by cosine similarity between model representations.

We train the proposed model for 25 epochs and record top-K evaluation accuracy in Table 1. To benchmark the model, we also compute top-K accuracy using an image hashing method which combines perceptual, difference, and wavelet hashing algorithms.¹²⁷

As can be seen from Table 1, the proposed model obtains much stronger results compared to the baseline. Note that due to the presence of near-duplicate scans in the source and target images, the top-1 accuracy may be considerably less than other top-k accuracies. Since our automatic evaluation method considers only one copy of a target image to be a match for a given source image, the best match as predicted by the model may not be the one chosen by our human annotators. This can be seen in the recorded accuracy over training time in Figure 1.3.

Interpretation for Current Results From a Humanities Perspective

The *Jinchaji Pictorials* and the *North China Magazine* were the two most important visual propaganda magazines during the Second Sino-Japanese War of World War II. They provide important historical information about the dynamic development of visual culture in China and Japan. The *Jinchaji Pictorial* and related publications were a series of photographic pictorials published by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) between 1942 and 1948. They were part of the Communist Party’s military propaganda system and systematically preserved images of all aspects of the war, culture, construction, and military and political life in villages in north China from 1937 to 1948. As an opposing propaganda organ, the *North China (Hokushi)* magazine was established in 1939 with sponsorship from the North China Transportation Company, Ltd., funded by the Japanese military government. The *North China (Hokushi)* magazine featured

¹²⁷ Johannes Buchner, “ImageHash: An Image Hashing Library Written in Python,” 2021.

photo reportages between 1939 and 1943, providing a Japanese military perspective on northern China and Mongolia during the Japanese military occupation. The magazine highlighted local customs, resources, and daily life in China and provided insights into the Japanese propaganda strategies.

Our AI-generated results obtained from matching individual photographs and tracing their circulation history in both magazines are highly relevant for historical studies. By running our model to match individual photographs and trace their circulation history in *the North China* magazine, we can identify which photographs in the North China Railway Archive were ever published in the magazine. According to the North China Railway Archive website (<http://codh.rois.ac.jp/north-china-railway/>), the vast majority of original photographs do not have proper metadata to specify the name of the photographer, date, shooting location, description, and purpose of use. Only very few of them have been specified in the original archival paper on which publications it was published. By associating the original photographs in this archive with their printed versions in *the North China* magazine, scholars can have a better understanding of how photographs were used as a medium for disseminating Japanese ideologies and shaping public opinion in occupied areas during World War II.

These AI-aided results in reverse image retrieval provide a useful starting point for further research by historians and art historians. Three possible research directions based on the generated results from the Papers of Sha Fei archive and the North China example include investigating the representation of the Chinese Communist Party in the *Jinchaji Pictorials*, examining the photographic practices employed by Japanese propagandists in *the North China*

magazine, and analyzing how photographs functioned as a tool for cultural diplomacy during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Contextualized photographs can help determine misinformation in their circulation history.

Misinformation and conflicting information are common phenomena in historical archives. The identification of these discrepancies can be crucial in uncovering hidden motives behind the editorial decisions that led to their inclusion. Upon conducting our image retrieval to the Papers of Sha Fei archive and the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, we have found that one photograph (Figure 1.4) in issue 4 of *Jinchaji Pictorial* in September 1943 was attributed to “Kong Wang” and titled “The Jinchaji Eighth Route Army outside Xifengkou.” A scholar [Si 2016] has confirmed that this photograph (Figure 1.5) was actually taken by photographer Sha Fei and the real shooting location was in Futuyu, Laiyuan County, Hebei Province, rather than Xifengkou in Qianxi County, Tangshan, Hebei Province. Looking at a map (Figure 1.6) created by the Japanese military in 1941, it is clear that Xifengkou was located at the border between hinterland China and Manchuria. Historians may assume that the use of a wrong caption was intentional misinformation by Chinese propagandists, as they sought to exaggerate their sphere of influence through modern mass media, reaching beyond China’s hinterland.

Contextualized photographs can demonstrate how they were edited and cropped during publication.

Our model has identified that one original photograph (Figure 1.7) taken by Sha Fei in our source was cropped into two separate photographs (Figure 1.8) and published in *Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV People’s War* in July 1946. The two photographs were titled “How did we

overcome the enemy's 'Mopping-Up' campaigns?" The Japanese forces carried out "mopping-up" campaigns against Chinese base areas behind enemy lines from 1940 to 1943, resulting in the mass killing of Chinese troops and civilians. During this period, the Chinese Communist Army faced hardships, including threats to their lives and material shortages, due to Japanese "combing" tactics in North China's military zones. Additionally, obtaining film and other supplies was difficult during this time. It is possible that due to these challenges, only a few photographs were taken by photographers, and editors had to split one film into two separate photographs to provide visual evidence of Japanese military invasion.

Contextualized photographs can also demonstrate how photographs were repurposed to illustrate changes in political ideologies.

Our source data contains a photograph (Figure 1.9) of local peasant Liu Hanxing's enlistment in the army. Our model found four matches in the target datasets, indicating that the photograph was published at least four times. As a pilot issue prior to *Jinchaji Pictorial's* official publication, the photograph first appeared in the first issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* (Figure 1.10), a special issue on current affairs. The page is titled "Model Families: Parents Send Their Children, Wives Send Their Boys." A thematic title like this clearly indicates that the editors focus on family relationships.

In *Jinchaji Pictorial's* first official issue (Figure 1.11), the photograph was published for the second time, and it was clear that family ties had diminished in importance. The theme of the current page had been changed from "Model Families" to "People of the Border Areas: Join the

Volunteer Conscripts in Large Numbers.” This introduction presents only a brief overview of the policy’s promulgation, contents, and vision in the section under the title.

The photograph was published for the third time in the third issue (Figure 1.12) of the *Jinchaji Pictorial Supplementary* on September 15, 1945. This publication gave very little space to the photo. However, it is noticeable that Liu Hanxing’s name has been removed from the photo and replaced with “common people.”

In the March 1946 issue (Figure 1.13) of Jinchaji Pictorial Series I—*The Eighth Route Army and the Folks*, this photo was published for the last time in the series of Jinchaji publications.

Likewise, Liu Hanxing’s name was omitted, and he was referred to as a “youth.” As the title of this article refers to the pioneering magazine of Chinese political enlightenment, *New Youth*, the term “youth” also has a political connotation.

Thus, our AI-aided results clearly help historians to track the changes in editing strategy and ideologies.

IV. Discussion

Limitations

Human evaluators cannot feasibly look for matched images in an archive containing thousands of images. While our proposed model can retrieve many matched images from a large archive, it still requires human evaluation to discover new image pairs. In particular, a human evaluator is necessary to identify whether or not a new image match has been retrieved, since there may not be a match in the top-K most similar images for a source image. Additionally, our proposed

method is more computationally expensive compared to the baseline image hashing method, although it vastly improves performance over the baseline.

Since our proposed model makes use of pre-trained image classification models, future improvements in image classification models may improve the performance of the proposed model. While we do not further train the image classification models so as to save time and computational resources, training these pre-trained models along with the multi-layer perceptron may improve the image retrieval results. Additionally, the currently proposed learned multi-layer perceptron may be replaced with a more complex and more powerful architecture such as a residual neural network or transformer that may lead to better learned representations. We leave further explorations into model architecture to future work.¹²⁸

Future Directions and Opportunities

Given the limitations of human memory and the vast number of image databases available, manually browsing through archives in search of patterns can be a time-consuming and error-prone task. In light of this, we plan to extend our automated approach that leverages machine learning to create an open-source reverse image retrieval system that can autonomously search historical images based on their content. Our model is freely available at <https://github.com/Ble720/ImageSimilarity>. While this paper focuses on the retrieval of historical photographs, there are numerous opportunities to further refine and extend our approach to tackle other retrieval problems and expand the scope of our research.

¹²⁸ Kaiming He et al., “Deep Residual Learning for Image Recognition,” in *Proceedings of the IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, 2016, 770–78. And Ashish Vaswani et al., “Attention Is All You Need,” *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems* 30 (2017), <https://proceedings.neurips.cc/paper/7181-attention-is-all>.

Retrieval from printed images: Tracking the provenance of printed images is an extension to our current study specified in this paper. The circulation of a printed image can provide valuable historical information, such as the way a printed image was cropped, edited, captioned, and deliberately manipulated. For example, a print that was created for a specific purpose may have been repurposed for something entirely different. This can help us understand how images can have multiple meanings and interpretations depending on their context. Additionally, by examining the materials used to print images, we can gain insight into the technological advancements of the time. We can see how printing methods have changed over time and how this has affected the quality of the images produced.

Retrieval from historical illustrations: Tracing the artistic techniques and styles used by illustrators can provide insights into the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of the time, as well as the evolution of artistic movements and trends. As with printed images, understanding the context in which these illustrations were produced and circulated can provide valuable historical insights. For example, through the meticulous examination of botanical and zoological illustrations from disparate historical epochs, scholars can reconstruct the pre-scientific conceptualizations of the natural world. This can help us understand not just the evolution of scientific knowledge, but also the history of human culture and society. Historians can ascertain how human knowledge accumulates over time by comparing differences and similarities between images. By analyzing the changes in these images, we can see how different cultures have approached the natural world, and how these approaches have changed over time.

Retrieval from stylized images: Using photographs as templates, artists often craft illustrations to commemorate historical events or transform historical figures into political symbols. This transformation can occur due to various reasons, such as aesthetic preferences or political agendas. It is thus important to investigate the source of the creation to find out when and where this stylistic transition occurs in order to understand how stylized images are manipulated and politicized. For example, as Du elucidates, photographs of influential historical figures, such as the postmortem photographs of Chinese leftist writer Lu Xun, may be altered into woodcuts and sketches, recasting historical figures into political symbols while conveying specific political messages, conforming to specific aesthetic norms.¹²⁹ With computer vision pipelines designed, scholars can more swiftly identify such transformations within a database. By understanding the context and motivations behind the transformation of photographs into stylized images, we can illuminate the internal mechanism through which art and politics intertwine within society. Furthermore, studying the techniques used to create these images can provide insight into the evolution of artistic styles and movements. By analyzing photographic prototypes, we can discern the relationships and interdependencies between photography and other art forms, such as woodcuts and hand drawings, and their collective influence on the trajectory of artistic development throughout history.

V. Conclusion

In this work, we have examined both the need and challenge of contextual analysis for historical images in digital archives. As retrieving contextual information is useful for understanding history, art, and culture, we propose an artificial intelligence model to aid in image retrieval from

¹²⁹ Lin Du, “The Early Photographic Propaganda in Chinese Communist Party (CCP): A Case Study of Photographer Sha Fei’s Photographic Practice from 1936 to the WWII” (Harvard University, 2016).

digital historical archives. In particular, we detail a computer vision pipeline that allows for cropping of historical images as well as retrieval of image pairs using a deep learning approach. We showcase our model’s performance on a historical dataset, discuss the findings, and suggest future areas of improvement for our proposed model and others like it. Our method can be replicated for anyone to use, so that digital visual archives may be more useful to researchers conducting contextual analysis.

Chapter 2

From Information to Metaphor: Tracking Photographic Editing in Chinese Wartime Magazines Using Computer Vision

I. Introduction

Inaugurated in 1942 amidst the throes of conflict, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* emerged as a pivotal photographic publication of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Its role was twofold: disseminating ideological content to soldiers and the local populace in North China and providing crucial visual documentation of the CCP's activities throughout the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the ensuing Civil War (1945–1949)—two notable full-fledged wars spanning a total of twelve years shaped the country.¹³⁰ As the CCP's inaugural venture into photojournalism, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* heralded a series of similar pictorial publications, amassing an expansive repertoire of visual materials. The print runs of the *Jinchaji* publications, some reaching up to 440,000 copies, alongside their strategic distribution among the military, suggest their significant reach as a form of mass media.¹³¹ Leveraging the platforms of the

¹³⁰ For further research on the formation of culture and society during wartime China and the impact of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, see Huang Daoxuan 黄道炫, *Tie shui liu : zhan shi Zhong gong ge ming xi tong de yun zuo, 1937-1945* 铁水流：战时中国革命系统的运作 1937–1945 [Metal Flow: : The Operation of the Revolutionary System of the Chinese Communist Party in Wartime] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, 2024); Qi Xiaolin 齐小林, *Dang bing : Hua bei gen ju di nong min ru he zou xiang zhan chang* 当兵：华北根据地农民如何走向战场 [To be a soldier], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Chengdu: Sichuan ren min chu ban she, 2015).; Nicole Elizabeth Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945*, 1 online resource vols. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018). Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³¹ In comparison, other contemporary pictorial publications, such as *Liangyou*, only had a peak circulation of 40,000 copies. See: Wang Chuchu, "Distributing *Liangyou*," in *Liangyou, Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945* (Brill, 2013), 248–58.

Photojournalism Division in the Jinchaji Military Region and the Jinchaji Pictorial Press, the CCP army honed a wealth of photographic personnel and seeded new photojournalism divisions across different military regions. Moreover, these efforts served as the bedrock for the Xinhua News Agency, the official state news agency of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Thus, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* and its associated publications embody a significant chapter in the genesis of CCP photojournalism, meticulously documenting diverse facets of war, construction, and everyday life from 1937 to 1948.

Media and visual studies have long recognized the importance of contextualizing media objects within their original historical backdrop. Investigating Chinese media history, an oft-asked question pertains to the precise propaganda strategy that underpinned the CCP's revolutionary triumph. Notwithstanding the recognized efficacy of mass media as a tool for disseminating ideological content and rallying wartime support, the mechanisms operating behind the utilization of photographs within such media remain largely elusive. The introduction of photography, a comparatively novel medium, became instrumental to the CCP's wartime propaganda arsenal due to its capacity for instantaneous capture, reproducibility, and efficacy in ideological communication. In the web of political propaganda, questions abound: Was there a demarcation between the CCP's political propaganda pictorials and news reports, and if so, how was this line blurred? How were ideological constructs transmitted through these mediums? What narrative logic underpinned the images in a socialist culture? What was the nature of the relationship between the editor and the photographer? The resolution of these queries necessitates a panoramic perspective on the publication of photographs during this era, to

comprehend the evolutionary arc of photographic publication editing and the subtle shifts in the CCP's understanding of the medium. As the Pictorial Press stood as a cardinal propaganda vehicle of the photographic medium, and a propaganda instrument of the CCP, the photographs necessitate a broader interpretation beyond the photographer's subjective aesthetic experience.

Exploring the trenches of wartime publication, this paper employs an innovative methodology, unifying the traditional approach of contextual analysis inherent to media studies with cutting-edge computer vision techniques. This study navigates the massive image corpus generated over the period under consideration, revealing the painstaking editing process and documenting the CCP's evolving understanding of the photographic medium. This analytical pursuit unfolds against the backdrop of the *Jinchaji Pictorial's* publication, marred by irregularities and resource scarcities, yet illuminating in its persistent commitment to building a visual record.

The study's significance emerges as scholars plunge into the ocean of images, systematically scrutinizing each photograph in its original form against its printed versions in the publication. This comparative methodology, underpinned by computer vision techniques, enables the decoding of subtleties of image editing—from the process of cropping to the strategic placement of captions. The scrutiny extends beyond the immediate visuals, delving into the contextual nuances, recurrent publication patterns, and evolving editorial strategies, leading to intriguing revelations about the shifting semiotics of the images. This research charts the transformation of a photograph's contextualization from concrete informative instances to abstract, metaphorical

representations, thereby tracing the expanding influence of the metaphorical dimension on viewer interpretation.

This study highlights the significance of the editorial process in shaping the reading and interpretation of images within wartime pictorial magazines, transforming original information into metaphorical narratives that can be used for propaganda purposes. This article illustrates the interplay between text and image in photographic pictorials, as well as the complex process of meaning-making in revolutionary photography. Furthermore, it highlights the power of photographs as contested documentary evidence and as historical narratives that frame a specific historical context. An in-depth examination of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* case studies reveals the divergent roles and responsibilities of the magazine's editors and photojournalists, as well as the distortion of photographic meaning derived from editorial manipulation. I explore the intertextual relationships between text and image, demonstrating the strong dependence of photographs on textual elements. I argue that the inclusion of textual elements within photographs underscores not only an indexical reliance on the visual medium, but also a certain unease about the potential instability of purely figurative images in conveying intended meaning. Finally, I argue that photographs are not merely factual units of history, but instead have the potential to evolve into potent symbols within propaganda narratives, depending on the contextual dynamics in which they are used.

II. Navigating Media through Traditional and Computational Approaches

1) *Contextual Analysis:*

The overarching influence of contextual analysis as a traditional method in media studies remains indisputable, integral as it is to a comprehensive understanding of media objects in their nuanced dimensions. Scholars including Christopher A. Reed, Laurence Coderre, and Yang Panpan have articulated this importance, underscoring the need for meticulous contextualization in their research. Reed's examination of Maoist China's visual culture propaganda uncovers the dualistic role that printed and published authoritative texts play in both inspiring and constraining visual memory and cultural production.¹³² Similarly, Coderre recognizes the crucial role of contextualization in a propaganda film, where carefully curated contexts guide audiences towards the 'correct' interpretation.¹³³ Echoing these sentiments, Yang emphasizes the invaluable role of contextualization in film and media studies, illustrating how a profound analysis of historical cinematic production environments, screening spaces, and reception scenarios can lead to the reconstruction and elucidation of various 'contexts.'¹³⁴

The critical need for contextual analysis of images is central to my own research on photojournalism in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, spanning the

¹³² Christopher A. Reed, "From Text (s) to Image (s): Maoist-Era Texts and Their Influences on Six Oil Paintings (1957–79)," in *Redefining Propaganda in Modern China* (Routledge, 2020), 205–37.

¹³³ Laurence Coderre, "Counterattack: (Re)Contextualizing Propaganda," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 4, no. 3 (January 1, 2010): 211–27, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.4.3.211_1.

¹³⁴ Yang Panpan 杨槃槃, "Dianying Yu Meiti Yanjiu de Kongjian Zhuanxiang 电影与媒体研究的空间转向 [The Spatial Turn of Film and Media Studies]," *Dangdai Dianying 当代电影 [Contemporary Cinema]* 2021, no. 3 (2021): 55–60.

1930s to the 1940s. This period, distinct from the 1950s to the early 1960s era analyzed by Jin Yongquan and Li Jie, reveals the early complexities in photographic and editorial practices that shaped visual media and contributed to the nascent socialist concepts of visual truth. This exploration builds upon Gu Yi's study on the evolution of photographic terminology from 1840 to 1911, highlighting the transformative nature of photographic meaning over time.¹³⁵ Though there is a difference between still photography and moving film, they are fundamentally visual media that rely on a complex process of signification linked to social conventions. Just as Coderre and Reed have noted how meanings evolve through processes of contextualization and recontextualization, where invisible forces and power relationships influence these visual materials during the Maoist era. This dynamic challenges the monolithic perception of the Party state and the conventional narrative of socialist cultural production as being under the tight control of a one-dimensional authoritarian regime.

The relationship between photography and reality is particularly problematic. Studies by Wu Hung on early photography by Felice Beato and Zhang Dali's "Second History," along with Jin Yongquan's examination of photographic debates between 1956 and 1959, illustrate how photographic neutrality may be compromised by the photographer's intent at the time of capture and subsequent editing processes.¹³⁶ Li Jie's analysis of Chinese photographic culture and practice during the Great Leap Forward era demonstrate the dual role of photojournalism in

¹³⁵ Yi Gu, "What's in a Name? Photography and the Reinvention of Visual Truth in China, 1840–1911," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (March 2013): 120–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2013.10786109>.

¹³⁶ See Hung Wu, *Zooming In* (Reaktion Books, 2016), 47–84. Jin Yongquan 晋永权, *Hongqi zhaoxiangguan: 1956-1959 nian zhongguo sheying zhengbian* 红旗照相馆: 1956-1959 年中国摄影争辩 [Red flag studio: debates on China's photography 1956-1959], 第 2 版., Di 2 ban. (Beijing: Jin cheng chu ban she, 2014).

projecting utopian aspirations alongside its implicit complicity in the era's famine. This relationship stems from the blurred boundary between testimony and propaganda among Chinese photographers of the time, highlighting the complex interplay between ideological representation and documentary realism.¹³⁷ Therefore, scholars must grapple with the manipulation of photographs, the trustworthiness of their contents, and the potential deceptions that could befall historians. A study of these production and circulation processes would foreground the dynamic role that photographers and editors played in the institutionalization of culture in socialist China, providing a richer context for interpreting historical narratives.

The integration of intermediality and intertextuality principles significantly enriches the analysis of this project by illuminating the interactions between different media forms and the mutual influences among various texts. In this context, emerging technologies such as computer vision play a pivotal role, establishing novel connections among sources within visual archives by identifying recognizable patterns. Consequently, this approach enhances traditional methods of contextualization, offering a more nuanced understanding of media's role and influence within society. A thorough contextual analysis enables us to explore the cultural dynamics that shape visual materials and their reception, providing deep insights into socialist visual production, the interplay between media forms, and the complex relationships between images and societal contexts. This methodology becomes particularly invaluable when addressing complex topics such as manipulated photographs in socialist China. It equips us with a comprehensive toolkit to

¹³⁷ Jie Li, "Utopian Photographs," in *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era*, 1 online resource (xv, 367 pages) : illustrations vols., Sinotheory (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 100–149.

unravel the multi-layered realities embedded within visual narratives, thereby facilitating a more informed interpretation of these images.

2) Computer Vision Pipeline: An Advanced Tool for Unearthing Historical Contexts

In this investigation, I leverage the methodological convergence of traditional media studies' contextual analysis with advanced computer vision technologies. I aim to address the longstanding challenge of extracting contextual data from historical photographs stored within digital archives, thereby elevating the accessibility and utility of these records. In light of my prior literature review highlighting the significance of contextual analysis in media studies, it is clear that the absence of knowledge about the production and circulation processes of photography can lead to scholarly misinterpretations. I propose a method of systematically tracing the genealogy of photographs. This involves an examination of the reproduction, transformation, and dissemination of photographic copies. I address this using computer vision, an AI and machine learning subset that identifies visual pattern similarities, thereby assisting in the discovery of multiple copies of a photograph within digital archives. Historically, scholars manually sifted through pictorial magazines and newspapers to identify visual trends. However, with the availability of digital databases of wartime pictorial magazines and photographic archives, scholars can now use computer-based methods to manage large collections of visual materials more efficiently.

This study identifies the significance of the recent ‘visual digital turn’ in digital humanities and how it addresses the text-centric problem in this field.¹³⁸ Advancements in computer vision employ computer-based methodologies to extract deep insights from images, enabling analysis of vast quantities of images in our digital era. This methodology provides an interpretive analysis of an image corpus, thus shifting the digital humanities towards a more visual perspective. My study also addresses the problem of accessibility in digital archives. Drawing from Lise Jaillant and Arran Rees’s work, this study acknowledges the obstacles archivists, historians, and digital humanists face when accessing digital archives, including the daunting scale of collections and lack of knowledge in technologies.¹³⁹ AI and machine learning can mitigate these challenges, enhancing archive accessibility by facilitating connections between images or identifying specific motifs, styles, and artistic exchanges. This study focuses on finding duplicate images to enhance retrieval accuracy, thus distinguishing my work from the ‘Viral Texts Project’ by Ryan Cordell which primarily targets textual fragments.¹⁴⁰ This goal aligns with Johanna Drucker’s vision for ‘digital art history,’ which advocates for utilizing digital tools to provide otherwise unattainable insights into art historical objects.¹⁴¹ The application of digital art history methods is instrumental not because it blurs the lines between documentary and fine art photography, but because it offers effective tools and techniques for analyzing visual materials.

¹³⁸ See Melvin Wevers and Thomas Smits, “The Visual Digital Turn: Using Neural Networks to Study Historical Images,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 35, no. 1 (2020): 194–207. And Taylor Arnold et al., “Introduction: Special Issue on AudioVisual Data in DH,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2021).

¹³⁹ Lise Jaillant and Arran Rees, “Applying AI to Digital Archives: Trust, Collaboration and Shared Professional Ethics,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 38, no. 2 (2023): 571–85.

¹⁴⁰ David A. Smith, Ryan Cordell, and Abby Mullen, “Computational Methods for Uncovering Reprinted Texts in Antebellum Newspapers,” *American Literary History* 27, no. 3 (2015): E1–15.

¹⁴¹ Johanna Drucker, “Is There a ‘Digital’ Art History?,” *Visual Resources* 29, no. 1–2 (2013): 5–13.

As part of this study, I will illustrate how computer vision can determine the circulation history of wartime propaganda photographs during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, using archives of ‘the Papers of Sha Fei’ at the Harvard-Yenching Library and Mr. Shi Zhimin’s personal archive of the series of *Jinchaji Pictorials* as a case study. To track the circulation of these photographs, I will employ a computer vision pipeline we designed, correlating individual photographs with their printed versions from magazines to understand publication selection and editing processes. This pipeline begins by employing YOLO v7 model for the cropping of historical images from pictorial magazines. Following this, an ensemble of machine learning models—Vision Transformer, EfficientNetv2, and Swin Transformer—is trained on the cropped images and a large dataset of historical photographs. These models compare the similarity of images between datasets, thus identifying patterns in the circulation of historical photographs and revealing the editing strategies of propaganda magazines. This model achieved a promising 77.8% top-15 retrieval accuracy on the evaluation dataset, offering a strong foundation for in-depth visual studies.¹⁴²

This approach provides an effective method to track the circulation ends of each photograph taken by an individual photographer, thereby contextually situating a photograph within its circulation process. Not only does this step provide convenience for scholars conducting media studies, but it also uncovers valuable historical information such as editing, captioning, and manipulation in socialist visual culture in China.

¹⁴² Lin Du, Brandon Le, and Edouardo Honig, “Probing Historical Image Contexts: Enhancing Visual Archive Retrieval through Computer Vision,” *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 16, no. 4 (January 8, 2024): 84:1-84:17, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3631129>.

III. Findings in Editorial Work: A Computationally Enhanced Examination of *Jinchaji Pictorial Magazines*

The incorporation of computer vision in the purview of media studies grants us a unique perspective into the editorial manipulation of images within historical pictorials. Based on the pairs of original photographs and their printed versions in pictorial magazines identified in our pipeline, computer vision has been instrumental in contextualizing historical photographs in two significant ways. Firstly, this comparative framework sheds light on the manipulations executed by editors and darkroom personnel prior to the images' publication. Additionally, the ensuing insight allows us to delve into details potentially obfuscated due to inferior quality prints and contingent factors. Secondly, computer vision affords us the opportunity to map the publication trajectory and circulation history of these photographs. The circulation history can track photographs which are published repeatedly and can allow scholars to better understand how editors shape the interpretations of these photographs into seamless historical narratives and the way they influenced the public's perception of historical events in experimenting different editorial approaches.

1) *Juxtaposing Original and Printed Images in a Comparative Framework*

a. *The Editorial Practice of Cropping:*

A perusal of the original photographs juxtaposed against their published counterparts reveals that while framing is an inherent aspect of photography, the act of cropping during the publication process accentuates this with a calculated focus on the human figures within the frame. This implies that the emphasis on the portrait's subject is not solely confined to the photographic act

but extends to the publication process, underscoring the multi-staged nature of a photograph's transformation towards its final, public form. Each juncture has the potential to significantly influence the ultimate depiction presented to the viewer.

For example, one photograph (Figure 2.1) found by our pipeline depicts villagers grappling with the devastating aftermath of the Japanese 'Mopping-Up' campaigns. An elderly man on the right of the frame, with outstretched arms each holding a rag, conveys a silent indictment of the unseen forces behind the catastrophe. To his left, two figures mirror his sentiment: a middle-aged man holding a bundle of rags underscores the elder's vexed interrogation, while an elderly woman, swaddled in a blanket with only her head visible, embodies an air of helpless desolation. This poignant portrayal was originally showcased in Jinchaji Pictorial Series II, *Accusation from Jinchaji*, with the caption, 'Can these rotten cloths be worn?' (Figure 2.2) Interestingly, in consonance with the accusatory tenor of the narrative, the woman was excised from the published rendition, possibly to suppress the message of Chinese victimhood while highlighting a quest for accountability.

An analogous instance of cropping for narrative clarity is found in a photograph (Figure 2.3) from the Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, *People's War*. This image captures captives descending a ladder from a fortress under the watchful gaze of four Chinese communist soldiers. However, in the final published version (Figure 2.4), the soldiers are reduced to mere busts, their guns notably absent. The accompanying caption — 'We do not kill prisoners: even when we conquer enemy forts, we do not kill them as long as they lay down their arms, but only those who commit the most heinous crimes are severely punished' — further emphasizes the non-lethal handling of

prisoners. It underscores the necessity of maintaining a clear, decipherable visual register, preferably devoid of ambiguous expressions that might distort the intended message or inadvertently transmit a different one.

b. *Dealing with Lost Details in Low-Resolution Pictorials:*

The comparison of original photographs with their subsequently published versions also reveals discrepancies — vivid details obfuscated due to the low resolution of printing, ranging from nudity and scenes deemed inappropriate for public consumption, to environmental elements imbued with revolutionary romanticism, or even corpses depicting the stark brutality of war. This divergence throws into sharp relief the interpretative disparities that arise between photographers, editors, and readers, each with their distinct phenomenological experiences of the captured event.

The divergence between original and published photographs lies in the pictorial's euphemizing of war's brutality. One case is Yuan Kezhong's 'The Ambush at Linbao,' appearing in the sixth issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* (Figure 2.5). The image documents a triumphant moment in the 1943 Linbao ambush when Jinchaji troops successfully destroyed two vehicles belonging to a Japanese squadron. However, an unassuming detail in the original picture—a body lying on the ground, seemingly about to be trodden upon—adds a stark layer to the narrative (Figure 2.6). The body's presence is subdued in the published version, and its existence is absent from the photograph's caption. The image's later appearance in the *People's War* series continues this omission, depriving readers of an essential aspect of the image's reality (Figure 2.7). This

discrepancy underscores the complexity of editorial decisions, particularly when confronting the representation of war's unvarnished violence.

Although editors shape narratives, they sometimes had to sacrifice visual elements that show the ethos of revolutionary romanticism due to print quality. The concept of revolutionary romanticism in Chinese socialist context has predominantly been discussed in relation to the utopian portrayal of socialist ideals and revolutionary fervor.¹⁴³ My focus on nature and environmental elements in wartime photography and their enhancement of the lyrical portrayal of heroic actions during wars fits within the broader framework of revolutionary romanticism. Yet, it introduces a distinct dimension by integrating natural landscapes into the narrative of war. This integration of nature not only enriches the aesthetic and emotional depth of the images but also potentially mitigates the perceived horrors of war, a feeling which the editors perhaps also deemed inappropriate to convey. This is noticeable in the lush natural elements incidentally captured in original photographs, often disappearing in the final publications. For instance, in Ye Manzhi's 'Battle of Shexian Mountain,' the original image (Figure 2.8) reveals vibrant weeds and a small tree in the background, elements blurred to near invisibility in the final print (Figure 2.9). Similarly, in the photograph 'Bell at Dawn,' an overexposed sky featuring wispy clouds turns into a blank canvas in the final published version, again erasing elements of natural beauty (Figure 2.10).

c. Strong Dependence on Texts in Photographs:

¹⁴³ Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu, "From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: The Echoes of Socialist Realism, Part I," *E-Flux Journal* 55 (2014).

A striking observation in the comparative analysis of original photographs and their published versions is the pronounced dependence on textual elements in the pictures. The recurrent presence of textual elements within the photographs underscores not only an indexical reliance on the visual medium, but also a certain unease about the potential instability of purely figurative images in conveying intended meaning. This leads to the observation that both photographers' compositions and editorial post-processing are inclined towards capturing and foregrounding textual elements within the photographic frame. These textual inclusions range from handheld or wall-painted slogans, to reprinted official documents and significant printed materials. They offer an intra-image interpretation and often serve as chronological and geographical markers for the event being witnessed.

In one instance, Rong Guanxiu, being honored as the 'Mother of People's Own Army,' is presented with a red flag by the political department. Notably, the original photographs reveal that the red flag carried a silhouette sketch of her (Figure 2.11). However, in the published version (Figure 2.12), the silhouette is omitted, allowing her facial features to gain more prominence. Despite this alteration and the poor-printing quality, the textual content on the flag remains untouched—clearly legible with the names of the military and political leaders of the Jinchaji Border Region, punctuated by a distinct timestamp. This underscores the power of the textual elements to reinforce the photograph's newsworthiness and political context.

Another striking representation of this textual interplay is evident in a photograph portraying women's political participation in Jinchaji (Figure 2.13). The image, ostensibly staged, presents two groups of women, armed and poised, sided with two wooden signs bearing politicized

messages, 'Women also participate in politics, armed to defend our village elections.' These signs not only provide a context for the image but also act as framing devices, establishing a standard interpretation for the image. Another photograph of Sha Fei's female standing guard features clear slogans such as 'We are women pioneers,' 'Women of the border area are always under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party,' and 'Commemorating the 8th of March,' encapsulating the female soldier in the center of the image in a prescriptive textual frame (Figure 2.14).

d. *Manipulation and Misinformation in Photographic Narratives*

In scrutinizing original photographs, I see misinformation as the result of the interplay of visual representation and political storytelling. Misinformation is defined not merely by the alteration of the image but by the creation of a new reality that aims to influence perception and understanding in ways that are not supported by the original scene. While cropping selectively focuses the viewer's attention, it does not inherently deceive about the content's origin or fundamentally alter its reality. Therefore, cropping typically remains within the realm of accepted photographic editing practices. In contrast, misinformation goes beyond mere emphasis and enters the realm of creating a false narrative. This manipulation at a more profound level can not only change the framing but also create an entirely new image or fabricate elements that were not originally present in the scene.

The analysis of the photographic manipulations in the July 1946 *Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, People's War*, exemplifies the phenomenon of misinformation. The original photograph by Sha Fei, identified by our computer vision pipeline, was ingeniously divided and mirrored to create

two distinct images (Figure 2.15 and Figure 2.16). Both are captioned, ‘How did we overcome the enemy’s “Mopping-Up” campaigns?’ The manipulation does not merely replicate the textual information on the page but strategically enhances it. By mirroring part of the photograph and presenting it as a separate image, the manipulation introduces elements that are factually incorrect—specifically, a reversed and thus misleading representation of the scene. The act of bifurcating a single photograph into two serves a dual purpose. First, the context in which the original photograph was taken is altered, leading viewers to believe they are seeing two distinct moments or scenes. This editorial decision artificially enhances the documentary value of the photographs, suggesting a more extensive photographic coverage of the events than the photographers were able to achieve. Second, the fragmentation allows the human subjects within the photograph to gain more prominence. Their activities become more discernible, thus enhancing the empathetic impact of the image.

It is crucial to situate this photographic manipulation within its historical context. The Japanese forces executed ‘Mopping-Up’ campaigns against Chinese base areas from 1940 to 1943, resulting in mass casualties of Chinese soldiers and civilians. The Chinese Communist Army endured significant hardships during this period, particularly within North China’s military zones, grappling with threats to their lives and material scarcity caused by the aggressive Japanese tactics. Photographic documentation during this period also confronted a unique set of challenges. Obtaining essential supplies, including film, was an arduous task. These circumstances may have led to a limited number of photographs being taken, prompting photographers and editors to adopt innovative strategies to convey the intense realities. While it might be argued that local audiences familiar with the subjects could recognize the origin of the

imagery, the *Jinchaji Pictorial Series I–IV* were compiled with a broader audience in mind. For instance, in the spring of 1946, the Jinchaji Military Region engaged the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) to distribute *Jinchaji Pictorial Series II, Accusation from Jinchaji*, to an international audience.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, although initially planned as a ten-issue publication, the series was prematurely terminated due to the outbreak of the Civil War. In contrast to the regular editions of *Jinchaji Pictorials*, which typically publish a number of photographs on each page, the photographs in the *Series* are presented in larger sizes, usually occupying one or two photographs per page. Additionally, the superior quality of the binding and printing indicates that the *Series* was targeted at an audience extending well beyond its local context.

2) *Photographic Circulation via Repeatedly Published Photographs*

The analysis of images' circulation and publication trajectories using the powerful tool of computer vision can also offer meaningful insights into their evolving significance. Photographs that were repeated reprinted over time— often delineating critical events or figures — become emblematic, crystallizing into enduring imprints of socialist realism. This process of repetition engenders the creation of visual archetypes in the socialist cultural milieu. Consequently, such images, by virtue of their continual republication, come to inhabit the collective visual memory of a society. Thus, by tracing the trajectory of image circulation, scholars can enhance the understanding of the cultural and political contexts of their production and distribution.

¹⁴⁴ Gu Di 顾棣, “Lianheguo Jiuji Wuzi Kongtou Jiefangqu: Huiyi Yizu Jueban Zhaopian de Paishe Jingguo” 联合国救济物资空投解放区——回忆一组绝版照片的拍摄经过 [United Nations Relief Supplies Airlifted to the Liberated Areas--Remembering the Shooting of a Group of Out-of-Print Photographs,” *Dangshi Wenhui* 党史文汇, no. 7 (2006): 35–37.

a. *Tracking the Shifting Narratives in Heroic Tales*

Heroic narratives, being one of the most recurrent subjects for image republication, serve as an insightful case study. An analysis of their circulation across different publications unravels the dynamics of image modification: the frequent addition and removal of photographs and changing narratives of textual coverages. An illustrative example is the story of war hero Lü Shunbao, published twice in pictorial magazines. The initial publication in the seventh issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial Illustrated* (April 1947) employs a comic strip arrangement, with seven photographs offering varied perspectives on Lü Shunbao's life (Figure 2.17). Detailed captions supplement the images, expanding the context and nuances, thus providing a rounded representation of the hero. However, the second publication in the eleventh issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* (October 1947) prioritizes text over images, reducing the photographs to mere illustrative functions (Figure 2.18). The exclusion of one photograph—'Understanding Each Other Is the Priority'—may reflect the editorial decision to exclude imagery deemed inconsequential or insufficiently heroic. The narrative of the Five Heroes of Wolf Teeth Mountain offers another intriguing instance of evolving visual representation. When initially published in *Jinchaji Pictorial Current News Special* (March 1942), the narrative included five photographs, one of which showcased the silhouettes of Wolf Teeth Mountain's rocks and trees, embodying the contemporary modernist salon photography style (Figure 2.19). Yet, in its subsequent publication in the first issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* (July 1942), the silhouette was removed and a scene featuring military district leaders awarding medals to surviving soldiers was included (Figure 2.20). By 1946, in the *People's War* series, the narrative was condensed to a group photograph of the two surviving heroes, accompanied by an elaborate text caption (Figure 2.21). This progressive alteration of the

narrative—from the *Current News Special* to *Pictorial*, then to *the Series*—reflects an evolving editorial preference, abandoning the modernist aesthetic in favor of a more people-centric reporting style.

While images lend visibility to social reality and imagination in heroic narratives, they simultaneously embody an ongoing tension with the accompanying text. The alterations made to these images across different publications disclose the underpinning values and priorities of each publication, echoing shifts in the cultural-political climate of the period. An examination of the trajectory of these images offers a nuanced understanding of the ideological forces that shaped their evolution.

b. Tracing the Transformative Narrative in Editorial Captions

When analyzing the evolution and circulation of photographs across diverse publications, one becomes aware that photographs portraying visionary social relationships are often the most reproduced, with the editorial captions accompanying these images subject to remarkable transformations. This progression underlines the photograph's transformation from an informational piece to an emblematic image, and eventually into a propaganda metaphor. To illustrate these transformations, photographers often resort to techniques of posing and staging. This is manifest in the photographic portrayal of Liu Hanxing's military enlistment by Sha Fei (Figure 2.22). All four photographs bear the mark of staged composition, yet they reveal Sha Fei's unique attempts to capture evolving social relationships. Certain photographs that were ultimately not published exhibit the unsuccessful staging of these relationships. However, in the final published photograph, all family members are seen smiling despite the stiffness of posing.

This represents a nuanced depiction of the family's shared honor of Liu's enlistment, subtly alluding to new social dynamics of labor and familial honor.

Interestingly, following the selection of the final photograph for publication, editorial adjustments were made. The caption, 'Model Families: Parents Send Their Children, Wives Send Their Boys,' as featured in the pilot issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial Current News Special* (March 1942), initially focused on familial relationships, emphasizing the joyous departure of the strongest family member to war (Figure 2.23). This narrative emphasis addressed the prevalent concerns among rural villagers about military conscription jeopardizing family farming cultivation.¹⁴⁵ However, in the official first issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* (July 1942), the caption became 'People of the Border Areas: Join the Volunteer Conscripts in Large Numbers.' (Figure 2.24) The familial emphasis was diminished, steering peasants towards a more political realm of thought. This shift is a testament to the fluidity of propaganda strategies, demonstrating a nuanced departure from directly addressing farmers' apprehensions, towards inducing them to contemplate political activities beyond familial boundaries. The transition in narrative focus from 'model family' to 'people of the border area' presents a new social concept—the collective identity of the people—in a genuine manner.

The photograph was subsequently published in the third issue of the *Jinchaji Pictorial Supplement* (September 15, 1945). Although the image occupied a small space (Figure 2.25), a significant transformation is notable: Liu Hanxing's name was replaced by 'common people.' When published in the *Jinchaji Pictorial Series I The Eighth Route Army and the Common*

¹⁴⁵ Qi, *Dang bing*. 38

People (March 1946), the individual was further distanced from his name, instead being referred to as a 'youth' (Figure 2.26). This term, drawing upon the connotations of Chinese political enlightenment from the pioneering magazine *New Youth*, carries with it a distinct political resonance. The last publication of this photograph, un-cropped, enhanced the visibility of the family's living environment, hence emphasizing the broader social context in which Liu's enlistment occurred.

c. The Darkroom Alterations and Misinformation of Repeatedly Published Photographs

Misinformation, due to the inextricable entanglement of photography and political narratives, becomes particularly salient in the analysis of historical photographs that are published repeatedly. Scrutiny of these images, aided by computer vision, reveals surprising traces of darkroom processes and textual manipulations that mediate the viewer's interpretation yet not mentioned in textual records. This examination furnishes insightful explorations into the aesthetic, political, and cultural significances embedded in these images.

Liu Feng's photograph of the Dongdamiao Victory Celebration Ceremony serves as a compelling example of darkroom manipulation. Initially published in the third issue of the *Jinchaji Pictorial Monthly* (July 1945), the photograph celebrates the liberation of Laiyuan County by the Jinchaji troops on May 13, 1945 (Figure 2.27). The visual spectacle of a large group of soldiers entering the ceremony site, with peasants observing nearby, is accompanied by a conspicuous slogan on the wall: '...Mutual help to carry out the great production movement.' However, upon its second publication in the *Jinchaji Pictorial* Combined Issue of Ninth and Tenth (December 1945), the distant wall appears bare, the once-prominent slogan seemingly

vanished (Figure 2.28). With the advent of victory of the Second Sino-Japanese War, could this alteration reflect the discarding of an outdated or politically contentious policy, despite the slogan still holding relevance during the time of the photograph's first publication? Although there is no additional contextual information about this photograph on record, and the reasons for the disappearance remain speculative, this particular instance illuminates the potential for photographs to be manipulated, recontextualized, or even decontextualized through darkroom processing.

Shi Shaohua's 'Militia Burying Mines,' a widely published photograph, demonstrates another aspect of post-production alteration. In its original form and in most of its republications, the image appears untouched. However, in its rendition on the cover of the Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV *People's War*, there is a clear manipulation (Figure 2.29). Soldiers who were marching in the distance disappear at the head of the militia in the original photograph, creating a discontinuity in the visual narrative of a never-ending march. In an attempt to maintain the aesthetics of continuity, the editor adds a hand-drawn column of marching soldiers in post-production. Despite this minor enhancement, this manipulation demonstrates how photographs can be subtly adjusted to better align with prevailing aesthetic and ideological norms.

A subtler form of misinformation often surfaces through textual captions that reframe the visual narrative. Misinformation in photography does not solely manifest through visual alterations such as cropping or mirroring; it also arises through textual interventions, particularly through captions that can significantly shift the perceived context and meaning of an image. Take, for example, a scene depicting Muslim individuals in a mosque in Ding County, Jizhong region.

This photograph was published in the seventh issue of *Jinchaji Pictorial* in 1944 (Figure 2.30) and in the 1946 *Jinchaji Pictorial Series III Democratic Jinchaji* (Figure 2.31). The variance in the captions is striking. The initial publication aligns the image with a political pledge, whereas the later version refers the same scene as a religious activity. Given that the photographic subjects are shown from the back, the actual nature of the scene remains ambiguous. In this instance, the photograph of Muslim individuals in a mosque does not undergo physical alteration in terms of visual content manipulation; instead, the misinformation stems from the shifting narrative imposed by differing captions. This can be particularly powerful and insidious because it exploits the viewer's trust in textual aids as explanatory tools accompanying visual information.

Republishing of a photograph within a socialist artistic and political system bears witness to its significance and widespread acceptance. Are they aesthetic achievements, political tools, or testimonies to the photographer's standing? The answer likely encompasses all three, yet at its core, these images are instrumental as historical artifacts within the socialist artistic and political framework. Their repeated publication represents their recognition and endorsement, by both editors and Party leaders, and their potential influence on fellow photographers and the wider public. Thus, these images form an integral part of socialist realism's cultural fabric and offer unique insights into the editorial strategies and socio-political dynamics of their time.

Therefore, I employ our computer vision pipeline to identify these repeatedly published photographs. Their recurrence assures us of their significance, granting us a window into the minds of the editors, Party leaders, and the socio-political climate of the time. Furthermore, these

iconic images can shape other artists' works, serving as archetypes in working manuals and trade journals, thereby reinforcing the perpetuation of socialist realism in visual culture.¹⁴⁶ These computer-vision-aided findings underscore the power and influence of these 'representative images,' not only as significant artistic works but also as cultural artifacts of a specific historical context.

IV. Insights into Editorial Practices

In my exploration of the case studies of the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, a closer look at the distinct yet interconnected roles of editors and photographers—unified under the category of photographic staff (*Sheying Gongzuozhe* 摄影工作者)—sheds light on the complexities of wartime pictorial magazines' publication processes. From the inception of the magazine, editorial roles evoke a mosaic of duties, ranging from crafting headlines and composing articles to managing archives, conducting darkroom operations, handling photographic plates and printing, and graphic designing. The common personnel turnover within the editorial department, compounded by the scarcity of talent, sometimes even resulted in a single individual grappling with multifaceted tasks. Due to the scarcity of talent in wartime, sometimes better-educated photojournalists also worked as editors, such as photographers Sha Fei (1912–1950), Lei Ye (1916–1943), Zhao Lie (1920–1943), Zhou Yuwen (1912–1950), Ye Manzhi (1917–?), and others. But in most cases, editors and photojournalists were handled by different people. This confluence of duties has led to a dearth of primary historical narratives that expound upon the specifics of each role, and how these discrete editing roles coalesce and interact within the editorial environment. Therefore, this analysis will approach these editorial positions as a unified entity, juxtaposed against the

¹⁴⁶ Lin Du, "The Early Photographic Propaganda in Chinese Communist Party (CCP): A Case Study of Photographer Sha Fei's Photographic Practice from 1936 to the WWII" (Harvard University, 2016).

responsibilities of photojournalists. To examine the interplay of text and image within pictorial magazines, one must first grapple with the divergent roles and responsibilities of the magazine's editors and photojournalists.

In the evolving cultural framework of revolutionary China, editors held a pivotal role, often characterized by significant social prestige and political influence, especially in the aftermath of Mao Zedong's talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942. Robert Culp highlights how these editors, though not directly engaged in journalism, were integral to the propagation of socialist ideologies through cultural productions. Tasked with creating works for political education, these individuals' contributions were assessed based on their ability to advance socialist political agendas, a quality Culp describes as their 'redness.'¹⁴⁷ Echoing this transformation, Lu Yang argues that post-Yan'an, literary and art workers in CCP-controlled regions experienced a profound shift in their professional identities—from creators to workers, and from 'warfront propaganda workers' to 'rural grassroots workers.'¹⁴⁸ Lu highlights that in this context, arts that were concrete, figurative, accessible, 'audible,' or interactive became prioritized art forms. These mediums were valued not just for their aesthetic qualities but for their capacity to engage directly with the masses and fulfill political objectives. Echoing Lu's observation, this prioritization also underscored the status of photographic magazine editors, positioning them as crucial literary and art workers. Their role was not merely to curate images

¹⁴⁷ Robert Culp, *The Power of Print in Modern China* (Columbia University Press, 2019). 17

¹⁴⁸ Lu Yang 路杨, "Cong Chuangzuozhe Dao Gongzuozhe: Jiefangqu 'Wenyi Gongzuozhe' de Zhuti Zhuanhuan" 从创作者到工作者: 解放区 '文艺工作者' 的主体转换 [From Creators to Workers: The Subjective Transformation of 'Literary Workers' in the Liberated Areas], *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxue Yanjiu* 中国当代文学研究, 2020.

but to weave the visual imagery into the broader narrative of Party ideology, enhancing the ‘redness’ of the publications. Thus, the identity of these editors as cultural agents was reinforced, as they navigated the interplay between artistic expression and political directive.

Working collectively, editors rarely used their names as bylines to express their political perspectives. Instead, they often authored unsigned or collectively signed articles with authoritative voices in the series of the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, wartime photographic trade journal *Photographic Web*, and in the PRC period publication *Photographic Work*. These articles closely align with a specific genre of writing prevalent in Chinese magazines and newspapers before and during the PRC period known as the editor’s note (*Bianzhe’an*). Li Jianli observes that the elusive anonymity in the editor’s note wields ‘significant discursive force.’¹⁴⁹ These authoritative articles frequently communicated the specific photographic needs of the contemporary era, delineated the progression of battles and the significance of political meetings, and issued a call to arms to all photographic staff. The mandate was to ensure that the political underpinnings of the pictorial content echoed the shifting military and political objectives of the CCP during the differing phases of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War. Further, these articles took on the task of explicitly or implicitly commending or criticizing the work of individuals, thereby subtly weaving personal performance into the fabric of broader political narratives.

A striking differentiation between photojournalists and editors emerges when one juxtaposes the former’s embodied experiences with the latter’s interpretive manipulations of images. As evidenced by the case studies discussed earlier, where vivid pictorial elements succumbed to low

¹⁴⁹ Jianli Li, “Literary Journals,” in *Literary Information in China*, ed. Bruce Rusk et al. (Columbia University Press, 2020), 548–60, <https://doi.org/10.7312/chen19552-060>. 553

print quality or unsuitable representations, the power of the image was either intentionally or unintentionally diluted. The consistent disappearance of these vivid details due to print quality serves as a testament to the divergent interpretations a single image can spawn among photographers, editors, and readers. This contingent factor elucidates the varying degrees of embodied experience in relation to the image, ranging from the photographer's firsthand encounter of the event, the editor's interpretive lens through a detailed photograph, and finally, the reader's rough reconstruction through printed pictorial images. They each bear witness to a different reality. A photograph's journey from the lens to the printed page invariably involves a reduction in visual information, which require editors to shape its core narrative.

As first-hand witnesses, photojournalists naturally shape the final photograph, their subjective experiences—captured through their immediate surroundings, physical positioning, and emotional states—filtering into their work. In stark contrast, the photograph's meaning within a magazine enters a realm of mediation, subject to the physical constraints of the print medium, ranging from cropping and resizing to darkroom processing, paper texture, and contextual juxtaposition with other images or text. This process inherently distorts the photograph's meaning, often diverging from both the photographer's original intent and the editor's interpretation. The resultant blurring of pictorial clarity occasionally leads to misleading representations for the audience, such as misidentifying surrendering prisoners as Eighth Route troops.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Yuan Ling 袁苓, "Jiu Lv Dui Zhaopian Zhanlan de Fanying 九旅对照片展览的反映 [Reflections of the Ninth Brigade on the Photo Exhibit]," *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], August 26, 1948.

The complexity of wartime photojournalism, exacerbated by the physical constraints of the print medium, demonstrates an inseparable relationship between photographic skill and editorial necessity. Even for skilled photographers like Sha Fei, who possessed extensive training and a keen artistic eye, the inherent demands of the medium frequently necessitate cropping, editing, and the incorporation of detailed captions to enhance compositional power, provide necessary background, ensure clarity, and guide interpretation. Unlike video, which conveys context and emotion through movement, a photograph must encapsulate narrative, emotion, and context in a static, silent image. The practice of modifying images is not merely a reflection of artistic preference but a critical adaptation to the communicative efficacy required by the publication's objectives—whether educational, motivational, or propagandistic. In the context of wartime China, where strategic image dissemination was crucial to socio-political campaigns, even well-composed photographs by Sha Fei were often significantly cropped, mirrored, or annotated to align more closely with propagandistic goals, as demonstrated by previous examples. This modification process underscores a complex interplay between individual creativity and collective media strategy to optimize the impact of photojournalism. These alterations, while potentially detracting from photographic authenticity, reflect the multifaceted role of images in shaping public perception and historical narrative.

The gap between photojournalists and editors further widens when examining their educational backgrounds. While editor-photographers such as Sha Fei benefited from substantial education and training, many photographers recruited during the Civil War had only basic education,

typically only primary or high school, before joining the revolution.¹⁵¹ Their photographic training, administered in CCP-controlled areas, was also remarkably brief—ranging from a few weeks to a few months.¹⁵² Consequently, the constraints of limited literacy and inadequate training often resulted in images that did not meet publishing quality standards without substantial retouching, and struggle to articulate political ideological messages accurately. The predicament becomes evident when scholars review the previous examples of photograph cropping, where the act of editing to streamline image information in alignment with textual captions becomes an accepted necessity. And a closer examination of the original photographs often unveils richer historical details, as stated in the previous section on case studies.

Given these contextual limitations, editors have actively promoted the collective reading of pictorial magazines. As an example, textual editor Zhao Qixian (1922–1965), under the pseudonym Yi Yi, published an article advocating for photographic staff’s organization of communal reading sessions among soldiers, including verbal readings for those who were literate to help with those who were illiterate.¹⁵³ This practice underscores the crucial role of textual

¹⁵¹ Gao Chu 高初, “Sheying Xunlianban: Zhanshi Sheying Jizhi de Shengcheng” 摄影训练班：战时摄影机制的生成 [Photography Training Course: Mechanism for Wartime Photo Reportage],” *Zhongguo Sheying* 中国摄影, no. 7 (2016): 96–105; Also, Gu, Di. 2009. *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu*. 第1版., Di 1 ban. Taiyuan: Shanxi ren min chu ban she. 101

¹⁵² Gu Di 顾棣, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu* 中国红色摄影史录 [*The Historical Record of Red Photography in China*], 第1版., Di 1 ban. (Taiyuan: Shanxi ren min chu ban she, 2009). 18

¹⁵³ The Chinese characters ‘亦’ and ‘一’ combined together become 赤, which means ‘redness’ with political connotations. Zhao Qixian 赵启贤, “Jiaqiang Huakan Yu Zhanshi de Lianxi: Renzhen Zuohao Zuzhi Yuedu Gongzuo 加强画刊与战士的联系：认真做好组织阅读工作 [Strengthen the Connection Between the Picture Magazine and the Soldiers, and Carefully Organize the Communal Reading Work],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], July 1948.

elements existing in and alongside photographs. This preference for textual elements presents a dual implication: while it reflects a concerted effort to prescribe the meaning of images, it also raises questions about the target audience for these photographs. Considering the illiteracy level of peasants and the common practice of collective and communal reading among soldiers, the inclusion of text may have been strategic for communicating with a broader audience, ensuring the consistent message delivery especially among oral reading within a collective group.

Over time, photographs became increasingly disconnected from their creators—the photographers—due to circumstances such as submission, circulation, and exhibition. In the submission stage, photographers' captions frequently failed to align with editors' expectations—a concern that was repeatedly underscored in the trade journals, such as *Photographic Web*. Even as late as 1950, editor Pang Mei (b. 1925) found himself reemphasizing the same sentiment—lamenting the inadequacy, vagueness, and illegibility of textual descriptions that rendered them nonsensical.¹⁵⁴ In such instances, an emerging divide between image and text becomes apparent, whereby the textual accompaniment deviates from the image, either by adding unseen elements, fabricating events, or challenging the viewer's ability to verify authenticity. This phenomenon finds an illustrative example in the previously discussed 'Muslim in Mosque' case, wherein the image's content was effectively altered through manipulative textual captioning.

Another significant factor contributing to the increasing detachment of photographs from their photographers lies in the frequent loss or destruction of negatives. This was a particularly

¹⁵⁴ Pang Mei 庞媚, "Cong Tong Rong Tongzhi de Laixin Tandao Xie Zhaopian Shuoming 从佟戎同志的来信谈到写照片说明 [From Comrade Tong Rong's Letter to Talk about Writing Photo Captions]," *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], April 15, 1950.

prominent issue during the war, when the negatives archived at the Jinchaji Pictorial Press were personally safeguarded by photographers during marches. A particularly grievous incident ensued after a decision was made to centralize the storage of negatives within the Pictorial Press. In June 1946, an inexperienced staff member inadvertently removed and incinerated over 2,000 negative bags containing essential photograph information. This left approximately 10,000 negatives bereft of written descriptions.¹⁵⁵ Such instances led to a troubling predicament where even photographers themselves struggled to recall the photographs they had captured. The resultant confusion birthed myriad inconsistencies, with identical photographs sporting differing temporal, geographical, and content descriptions.¹⁵⁶ There were also instances where the same photograph would be credited to different pseudonyms or even incorrectly attributed authors.¹⁵⁷ Disputes over the ownership of photographic copyrights have likewise been a recurring issue since the 1990s. These challenges highlight the multifaceted complexities involved in the editing and circulation of photographs within the context of the *Jinchaji Pictorial*.

The dissociation of photographs and negatives from their creators propelled the power vested in the editorial role, overseeing the circulation and presentation of images. This maneuver by the Jinchaji Pictorial Press and the CCP's political department to constitute a photographic archive mirrors Allan Sekula's critique of 'archival desire' in bourgeois culture, manifesting as an

¹⁵⁵ Gu, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu* 中国红色摄影史录 [*The Historical Record of Red Photography in China*]. 142

¹⁵⁶ Di Gu, "Letter of Congratulations from Gu Di to the China Photographic Association for Holding a Symposium on the Compilation of the History of Chinese Photography in Guangzhou," August 10, 2007, Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

¹⁵⁷ Si Sushi 司苏实, "Sha Fei Yu Jinchaji Tuandui: Yingxiang de Kaozheng Yu Yandu 沙飞与晋察冀摄影团队——影像的考证与研读 [An Examination of Sha Fei's Series of Works]," *Chinese Photography* 中国摄影, 2016.

exercise of power rooted in ‘accumulation, collection, and hoarding.’¹⁵⁸ This power is further amplified by the editor, given their command over the lexicon and grammar of the textual language, a skill that generally surpasses the literacy levels of the photographers. Editors, armed with linguistic proficiency, hold the reins over the representation of historical narratives. They strategically employ photographs, manipulating these visual fragments of history to weave a specific narrative. This makes the interplay between text and image a cornerstone in analyzing pictorial magazines.

This interweaving of text and image in photography consequently foregrounds the importance of text in shaping photographic narratives. The editing of photographs and the inclusion of text are not merely adjuncts to the photographic process but crucial interventions that refine the political message conveyed by the image. The interplay of photography and editing illuminates the transformational trajectory of an image from a captured moment to a politically charged narrative artifact, shifting from factual information to abstract metaphorical narratives as propagated by the publication. The dialectic between the visual image and the incorporated text challenges the idea of photography as a purely representational medium, emphasizing the constructed nature of what is perceived as reality.

Within the pictorial magazine medium, text and image coexist in a symbiotic relationship. They augment each other—the textual element often extending the photograph’s contextual reach and meaning beyond its inherent temporal and spatial boundaries. Our pipeline, designed to scrutinize this nuanced relationship, brings to light a multiplicity of instances that build upon

¹⁵⁸ Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital,” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 443–52.

W.J.T. Mitchell's foundational discussion of the 'word and image' interplay. As Mitchell astutely notes, this dialectical relationship serves as 'a relay between semiotic, aesthetic, and social differences,' always subtly linked to 'questions of power, value, and human interest.'¹⁵⁹ This insight into Mitchell's theoretical paradigm invites further exploration of the dynamic relationship between words and images in shaping historical narratives.

Both text and image serve as foundational elements in the construction of historical narratives, despite their distinct modes of expression. Their integration within historical narratives stems from a web of intertextuality embedded in the fabric of pictorial media. This intertextual dialogue not only amplifies the indexical nature of images but also juxtaposes them with complementary texts to engage the reader's reservoir of knowledge. Considering the illustrations of the heroic tales of Lü Shunbao and the five heroes of Wolf Teeth Mountain, the individual photographs in the initial publications were chiefly denotative in nature. Textual captions provided direct references to human figures, objects, or events within the photographs. In their subsequent republications, the recurrence of the imagery served to elaborate and invite the audience to envision the expansive narrative of revolutionary developments. According to Zhou Dengyan, recurring images in content and form are more likely to resonate with the audience and therefore contributes to the mobilizing effect of the exhibition, which in fact contradicts "the eight-legged" formula attacked by editors such as Zhao Qixian.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Word and Image," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2010, 51–61

¹⁶⁰ Zhou Dengyan 周邓燕, "Sheying Dazhonghua Yu Yingxiang Zhenshixing: Yi Jiefang Zhanzheng Zhong de Jinchaji Huabaoshe Wei Zhongxin" 摄影大众化与影像真实性：以解放战争中的晋察冀画报社为中心 [Photography Popularization and Photographic Realism: Civil Wartime Practice of the Jin-Cha-Ji Pictorial], *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究, no. 5 (2020): 121–31.

This interplay between textual and visual elements echoes the filmic narratives of the socialist era, as observed by Guo Yanping in her study of rural film projectionists. Guo elucidates how projectionists used verbal commentary to lead the audience to believe that the presence of an image on the screen equates to the persistent existence of its referents, thus linking the imagery with socialist ideas. For example, the display of farming machines was narratively transformed into a metaphor for the connection between socialist progress and agricultural mechanization, effectively translating ‘abstract political ideas into obtainable realities for peasants.’¹⁶¹ Echoing Guo’s assertion, it is evident that the symbiosis of text and image in pictorials was instrumental in tethering abstract concepts to visually tangible entities. This interplay not only builds the narrative but also facilitates a deeper public engagement with the ideological constructs being presented.

My preceding case studies underscore the idea that a photograph’s meaning, as depicted in a pictorial magazine, is invariably shaped by its contextual milieu— its title and its narrative within the larger storyline. The bifurcated coverage of the heroic Lü Shunbao provides a telling case of the editor’s exploration of the differential expressive potency of words and images. The pictorial narrative in the *Monthly Magazine*, constituted by comic strip-style images, presents discrete photographs that fail to weave a coherent story. This absence of a narrative thread negates the possibility of explicating the causes and outcomes of the heroes’ evolution and curtails the emotional resonance it might engender in the audience. However, when textual reports adorned with photographic illustrations replace these isolated images, a more cohesive narrative is born. Lü’s story unfolds from his impoverished childhood, aligning with the

¹⁶¹ Yanping Guo, “The Cinema of Make-Believe: Rural Viewers’ Early Reception of Film Propaganda in Socialist China,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 0, no. 0 (July 22, 2022): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508061.2022.2101853>.

prevalent socialist realism narrative of the time. The interplay of words and images intensifies at critical junctures of the narrative, with photographs serving as intertextual references to the textual narrative, providing indexical evidence. Echoing Charles Laughlin's observations in his study on Chinese reportage literature, the visual storytelling paradigms align with the limitations of reportage's concentration on the 'externally observable,' through an emphasis on appearance, words, and behavior.¹⁶² These interwoven complexities of textual and visual discourse call for further deliberation. Thus, these varied approaches to visual storytelling helped to set the conventions established by wartime reportage literature, highlighting the mutual restrictions between images and texts.

Intertextual relationships manifest in multiple ways within pictorial magazines, one of which is through the conspicuous presence of text within the photographic frame itself. The editing process further echoes this preference for text. The darkroom techniques applied to enhance the legibility of textual elements and cropping strategies aiming to foreground the text demonstrate an understanding of photography's semiotic potential. This textual dominance underscores its fundamental role in fabricating the photograph's visual narrative, simultaneously accentuating photography's indexical function. This parallels the impulse in both cinematic images and reportage literature to refer to observable objects, underscoring how abstract ideological texts, once embedded in tangible objects such as flags, flyers, or walls, enter the realm of everyday life. Their existence attracts the photographer's gaze and receives subsequent reinforcement from editors.

¹⁶² Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Duke University Press, 2002). 216

This translation of the abstract into the concrete gives life to ideological imagetexts, which serve as a testament to the manifestation of socialist ideologies as tangible realities. Such a transformation creates what W. J. T. Mitchell refers to as ‘a heterogeneous field of representational practices,’ cemented by the indexical power of photography.¹⁶³ Mitchell’s *Pictorial Theory* introduces the concept of ‘imagetext,’ articulating its function as revealing ‘the inextricable weaving together of representation and discourse,’ which can either materialize as a ‘composite, synthetic form’ or as a ‘gap or fissure in representation.’¹⁶⁴ My analysis of female exemplars such as Rong Guanxiu and various female soldiers and guards bears testimony to this. Textual elements, in these instances, serve as framing devices, molding their postures for political purposes. Notably, these photographs are staged, suggesting a pattern—textual intervention becomes crucial for staged photographs, seemingly destabilizing authenticity. The text prescribes a standardized interpretation, instilling meaning into the seemingly artificial scene.

The inherent fragmented and disjointed nature of photographs presents a formidable hurdle to the pictorial’s endeavor to depict a comprehensive narrative, specifically in terms of portraying the character’s developmental trajectory. Acknowledging this limitation, female CCP leader Deng Yingchao, following a visit to the Pictorial Press, penned a letter offering guidance. She wrote, ‘I only want to raise one point for reference, that is, it is better to take photographs of an activity or a thing, so that the main connection and the development process can be taken, so that the photographs do not become separate, but should illustrate the development of one thing in an

¹⁶³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (University of Chicago Press, 1995). 100

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 83

organized way.’¹⁶⁵ Her advice crystallizes the need for the photograph not just to be a static image, but a dynamic narrative in its own right, capable of tracing the evolution of a subject. Her counsel nudged editorial staff to reconsider the potential of photography as a medium of storytelling, transforming it from a mere recorder of moments to a weaver of complex narratives.

Anatoly Detwyler’s illuminating perspective invites us to conceive historiography as an intricate constellation, with its myriad details—’events, names, places, dates, and minutiae that constitute the historeme, or the elemental unit of a historical fact.’¹⁶⁶ Detwyler describes these details as having a ‘particularly granular quality...which makes them particularly mobile, transferable from one document to the next.’¹⁶⁷ Notably, this perspective predominantly applies to textual history, while my counterpoint emerges from the data generated by our computer vision pipeline, which brings to the fore how fragmented sheets of photographs are interlaced with specific political narratives within pictorial layouts. In observing the enlistment of Liu Hanxing, I notice how an initial journalistic report, replete with the date, location, Liu’s name, and an emphasis on his familial relationships and the joy of consigning the strongest man to war, gradually shifts focus in subsequent publications. As the story progresses, familial ties yield to broader political activities, with individual details gradually receding into the background, and abstract meanings communicated through text supplanting them to forge a unified narrative. This seamless transition towards collective concepts like ‘the people’, ‘the youth,’ underscores the

¹⁶⁵ Deng Yingchao 邓颖超, “Deng Yingchao Tongzhi Laixin Zhailu 邓颖超同志：来信摘录 [Excerpts from Comrade Deng Yingchao’s Letter],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], July 1948.

¹⁶⁶ Anatoly Detwyler, “Section C Histories,” in *Literary Information in China: A History*, ed. Jack Wei Chen et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 347

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

metamorphosis of a photograph from a mere vessel of information to a representative image, eventually crystallizing into a metaphor within the realm of propaganda.

The journey of this photograph—from Liu Hanxing’s individual story to its evolution into an emblematic image of broader social and political narratives—shows its evolvement from an individual narrative to a universally relatable visual metaphor. The shifts in framing, captions, and publication emphasis reveal the layers of sociopolitical considerations and the strategic propagation of new social relationships underpinning socialist visual culture during this period. Exploring such transformations offers a nuanced understanding of how the power of imagery was harnessed to shape and reflect the changing perceptions and priorities of a society in transition. This transition underscores the critical role context plays in both historiography and pictorial magazine editing, as the significance of individual units of information (historemes or photographs) is often context dependent. The same historical fact or photograph may assume diverse meanings when employed in different narratives or analyses. This phenomenon, in turn, unravels the fluidity of photographs as historemes—their ability to be manipulated or adapted to various contexts, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Photographic pictorials hold a distinct position separate from conventional textual newspapers such as the *People’s Daily* and literary journals. Except for a few classic texts and political pieces, most articles in newspapers rarely see a reprint.¹⁶⁸ Even when they do, they are often preserved as whole articles, rather than as fragmented texts continuing to circulate. On the contrary, photographs snapped by photojournalists are archived and preserved by the Pictorial

¹⁶⁸ Li, “Literary Journals.” 555

Press, and later by official news agencies, republished and recontextualized in appropriate publications and contexts. This ongoing circulation of images underscores the necessity for comprehensive image archives to effectively trace the history of image circulation.

In revisiting the reminiscences of Zhang Wenlong (1917–2015), another textual editor of *Jinchaji Pictorial*, one is taken back to his initial involvement with the Pictorial Press in late 1941. The moment was marked by a consequential gathering of the Jinchaji Military Base’s key leaders—Photographic Director Sha Fei, General Nie Rongzhen, Political Department Director Zhu Liangcai, and Propaganda Department Director Pan Zili. Their collective intent was to determine the guiding principles for the creation of the pictorial magazine. Emerging from this confluence of minds were two primary objectives for the pictorials: ‘to stir, enlighten, and stimulate, nurturing confidence and aiding in wartime victory, and to forge an authentic chronicle of the people and history.’¹⁶⁹

What transpired next was a powerful archiving process—these image records were incorporated into the repositories of the PLA Pictorial Agency, the Photo Department of the Xinhua News Agency, the Military Museum, and the National Archives. As if frozen in time, these records would later find their way into several commemorative publications celebrating the revolutionary triumph in the war following the founding of the nation, ultimately becoming foundational elements of the official history. Photographs in this context were viewed as mechanical, and therefore ‘scientifically’ objective pieces of evidence or ‘data.’ This positivist conception of history leans heavily on the ‘silent authority of the archive,’ providing the spectators an avenue

¹⁶⁹ Yan 王雁 Wang, *Wo de fu qin Sha Fei: dian cang ban* 我的父亲沙飞 [My father Sha Fei], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2015).

to witness ‘the appearance of history itself.’¹⁷⁰ However, it is noteworthy that historical narratives that rely primarily on photography often espouse both a positivist and historicist standpoint, as Sekula reminds us. Such a perspective potentially leads to ‘a reductive view of historical causality,’ and an unwavering faith in the representational power of history.¹⁷¹

From its inception, the *Jinchaji Pictorial* occupied the dual roles of a periodical of news and propaganda pictorials. During the direst days of the Second Sino-Japanese War, which coincided with the nascent stages of the publication, the emphasis was firmly placed on the veracity of the news. Echoing Qian Ying’s thoughts, it is compelling to note that ‘historiographically, documentary’s deep bond to the present moment and its capacity for temporal re-structuring and mass mobilization allowed it to intervene radically into the making and writing of history.’¹⁷² Indeed, this assertion about documentary bears important resemblances to the role of photojournalism, which found itself precariously balanced between its staunch commitment to capturing the present moment and its aspiration to manipulate that very moment for a promising future.

This internal conflict of photojournalism finds a manifestation in Sha Fei’s original photograph of the Japanese ‘Mopping-up’ campaign, where a single image is dichotomized into two distinct entities, fabricating visual evidence of the Japanese military invasion. Even as the contingent factors necessitating such falsification are acknowledged, it is crucial to recognize these

¹⁷⁰ Sekula, “Reading an Archive.” 443–52.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ying Qian, “Visionary Realities: Documentary Cinema in Socialist China” (PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 2013). iii

instances as misinformation, with the political undertones of news reports and photographs being progressively elevated. This culminated in Mao Zedong's proposition of the creative principle of 'combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism,' made during the second meeting of the Eighth Party Congress in 1958.

A case in point is Shi Shaohua's 'Militia Burying Mines,' where, despite minimal alterations across its various renditions, the cover of the *People's War* series introduces a whole column of marching soldiers absent from the original frame. As David Apter and Tony Saich have elucidated, Mao's strategy of employing narrative and metaphor in crafting his revolutionary discourse served to disseminate his interpretation of Marxism.¹⁷³ He accumulated symbolic capital, utilizing storytelling and logical explanations to guide his followers. Unveiled through computer vision, the deliberate manipulation of images illuminates a key facet of image circulation—the interplay of aesthetics, politics, and misinformation. This observation, coupled with my previous analyses, presents a multifaceted understanding of photographic manipulation as an art form, a political tool, and a historical artifact, each aspect deeply entwined with the other, revealing a complex web of representation and reality.

This scholarly examination, tracing the trajectory of photographic images from the domain of factual data to the realm of metaphor within the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, casts a spotlight on the robust potency of photographic historiography in shaping collective memory and perceptions. A critical revelation drawn from this investigation is the transformative capacity of photographs. Emerging initially as factual, granular units of history – or historemes, these images have the potential to

¹⁷³ David Ernest Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Harvard University Press, 1994). 224

metamorphose into potent symbols within the narratives of propaganda. The contextual dynamics, comprising both the explicit elements of the photograph and the broader sociopolitical narratives in which they circulate, are instrumental in this evolution from the tangible to the abstract.

At the forefront of this study stands our innovative computer vision pipeline. It serves as a powerful analytical tool that has allowed scholars to discover and analyze the pertinent case studies. My exploration of the *Jinchaji Pictorial*, therefore, serves as more than just a linear examination of the past—it is a multidimensional foray into the nature of representation and the power of political narratives. By enabling the precise identification and tracking of image modifications and circulations, it provides an unprecedented opportunity to delve into the complex intersections of aesthetics, politics, and misinformation that underpin image circulation.

Chapter 3

Leveraging Sparse Visual Data for Historical Insight: Forensic Reconstructions of Wartime Spectatorship in WWII China

In the exploration of wartime China, the photographic exhibition emerges not merely as a cultural artifact but as a crucible of socio-political engagement and identity formation. This study delves into the complex interplay between sparse visual data and historical spectatorship, reconstructing the experiential realities of viewing wartime exhibitions. Positioned within Hito Steyerl's theoretical framework of the "poor image," these exhibitions, primarily aimed at soldiers and local peasants, functioned both as instruments of propaganda and as forums for participatory engagement, thereby contributing to the revolutionary fervor of the time. The study foregrounds two meticulously reconstructed exhibitions—the Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune in November 1940 and the Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival in July 1941—as pivotal case studies that illuminate the varied ways audiences interacted with visual media in exhibitions in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-controlled area.

Central to this inquiry are the questions of how photographic exhibitions served as platforms for ideological communication and how these settings influenced the spectator's emotional and political engagement with the content. This investigation challenges the conventional views of passive spectatorship by revealing a dynamic feedback loop, where the audience actively participated in the image-building process, engaging with the photographs in ways that transcended mere observation to foster a sense of collective identity and participation in the

revolutionary movement. Furthermore, this paper explores the nuanced roles of exhibition guides compared to film projectionists, highlighting a distinctive aspect of audience interaction with visual media. Exhibition guides, often knowledgeable volunteers or seasoned veterans well-versed in the narratives and significance of the displays, played an instrumental role in shaping the spectators' experiences and understandings. Their contributions were crucial in creating a participatory viewing environment, where the historical and ideological contexts of the images were articulated, enhancing the spectators' connection to the imagery. In contrast, film projectionists, while also pivotal in contextualizing the visual media, operated within a different register, often enhancing the cinematic experience through performative narrations that complemented the visual spectacle on screen.

The reconstructed exhibitions serve as focal points for this analysis. The first, "the Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune," showcases the emotive power of photography in commemorating Bethune's humanitarian efforts, while the second, the Second Jinchaji Border Region Art Festival, highlights the use of visual media to promote military and revolutionary achievements to soldiers and local communities. These case studies provide a profound understanding of how exhibitions were curated to maximize emotional impact and ideological effectiveness, demonstrating the complex dynamics of viewing, interpretation, and memory formation in wartime China. By reconstructing these wartime exhibition experiences through advanced digital methodologies including super-resolution and image matching, this paper not only recovers but critically interprets sparse visual data to offer new insights into the complex interrelations of visual culture, spectatorship, and political engagement shaped and were shaped by the exigencies of war. The goal is to extend the discourse on visual media's role in shaping

public perceptions and historical memory, situating Chinese wartime photographic practices within a broader East Asian context. This approach underscores the transformative power of visual media in wartime and its enduring impact on collective memory and identity.

I. Literature Review

Photography, as a pivotal medium, has incited considerable scholarly interest across the disciplines of history, visual culture, and media studies. This interest is notably pronounced in the context of wartime, where the news media's reliance on photographic images has been critically examined. Western scholarship has extensively explored the role of photography during conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), World War II (1939–1945), and the Vietnam War (1954–1975). For instance, scholars such as John Tagg and Susan Sontag have debated the construct of photographic “truth,” while John Berger has dissected the socio-political impact of visual representations in shaping public perceptions of war.¹⁷⁴ In particular, Tagg critically argues that photographs are not objective records and “its history has no identity” but are loaded with institutional and ideological contexts that shape their interpretation and function.¹⁷⁵ This dynamic is similarly echoed in studies on the Vietnam War, where iconic photographs have transcended their immediate journalistic contexts to become symbols of political and ethical discourse, as explored in Thy Phu's critical work on the transformative power of war imagery.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Regarding the Spanish Civil War and Robert Capa's “Death of a Republican Soldier”, read Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). 32–37. As for the ethical issue of displaying graphic violence, see John Berger, “Photographs of Agony,” in *The Photography Cultures Reader* / Edited by Liz Wells, 2019, 123–25.

¹⁷⁵ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Communications and Culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1988), 63

¹⁷⁶ Thy Phu, *Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam* (Duke University Press, 2021).

However, these analyses often overlook the exhibition cultures that contextualize these photographs, particularly in non-Western settings. This gap is critical, as the exhibition setting—be it in a museum or a makeshift outdoor gallery—plays a pivotal role in mediating the spectatorship experience and the reception of photographic content. Shehram Mokhtar’s analysis of the 1971 India-Pakistan war underscores this bias, revealing how Anglo-American media coverage frequently rendered these conflicts as visual spectacles, thus perpetuating a skewed portrayal that favored Western perspectives.¹⁷⁷ This critique aligns with Jana Teplá’s research on socialist era photographs, which underscores the significance of understanding visual strategies and communication within modern societies, particularly post the visual turn.¹⁷⁸ Teplá’s analysis delves into how socialist press photographs are not mere depictions but are embedded with ideologies, power relations, and the socio-cultural contexts that significantly influence their interpretation and representation.

In aligning with these scholarly conversations, this paper seeks to extend these discussions by exploring how limited photographic evidence can be leveraged to reconstruct historical spectatorship in WWII China, an area still underexplored in visual culture studies. The unique challenge presented by sparse visual data highlights the need for innovative methodological approaches, such as the use of forensic reconstructions and super-resolution technologies, to uncover the latent details and contexts obscured in the historical record. By analyzing how exhibitions of wartime photographs were staged and received by audiences of soldiers and local

¹⁷⁷ Shehram Mokhtar, “Reading War Photographs: The 1971 India–Pakistan War in the Anglo-American Press,” *Visual Communication* 19, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 121–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219838602>.

¹⁷⁸ Jana Teplá, “Analyzing Socialist Press Photographs: A Contribution to Critical Visual Methodology,” *Visual Communication Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2017.1417048>.

peasants in North China, this study aims to shed light on the interactive dimensions of spectatorship. It examines how these exhibitions served as both propaganda tools and participatory spaces for viewers, thereby contributing to the war effort and the cultivation of revolutionary fervor under challenging conditions.

The application of Hito Steyerl's concept of "the poor image" in digital humanities methodologies presents a robust theoretical framework for examining the visual culture of wartime exhibition photography in WWII China. Steyerl's "poor image" epitomizes the low-resolution, compressed, and hastily reproduced visual content that emerges under conditions of urgency and necessity and creates "visual bonds."¹⁷⁹ This theory, which elucidates the circulation and reception of degraded images within the digital age, can be insightfully adapted to interpret the sparse and often deteriorated visual data from historical exhibition scenes. This paper capitalizes on the dual nature of the "poor image": first, as a reflection of the limited, cropped images salvaged from archival exhibition photographs; and second, through the literal poor quality of these photographs, which were exposed and often weathered in rural and makeshift exhibition settings.

In this study, the initial dataset—cropped images extracted from photographs of exhibition scenes—perfectly embodies the first fold of the "poor image." These images are inherently sparse, having been secondary captures of the primary photographs displayed during wartime. This sparseness is significant as it highlights the challenges of digital reconstruction and interpretation. These secondary images, often of low resolution and limited detail, require

¹⁷⁹ Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-Flux Journal* 10, no. 11 (2009), <https://media.icamiami.org/2020/10/bf726fc0-steyerl-in-defense-of-the-poor-image.pdf>.

intensive processing to become analyzable. The very act of relying on such fragmented visual data reflects the precariousness of historical digital reconstruction, where the completeness of the visual narrative is always in question.

The second fold of Steyerl's concept that I emphasize involves the original exhibition photographs themselves, which were displayed in less-than-ideal conditions. Exposed in rural village rooms, subjected to environmental elements and repeated handling, these images physically deteriorate over time, becoming emblematic of the "poor image" as described by Steyerl. Christine Ho's observations on the wartime art production in Maoist China, marked by a shift towards "art for life's sake," also highlights the creation of transient, utilitarian art forms such as cartoons and mural paintings.¹⁸⁰ These forms prioritized "abbreviation, urgency, conciseness, legibility, and rejection of technical polish," aligning with the material conditions that Steyerl's theory explores. This degradation of photographic images not only impacts the visual quality but also signifies the socio-economic conditions of the time—scarcity of resources, urgency of message dissemination, and the marginalization of rural communities. The physical state of these photographs upon discovery, coupled with their mode of display, aligns with Steyerl's depiction of the "poor image" as a lower-quality, highly accessible artifact that is pivotal in the dissemination of cultural and political narratives.

Building on Joan Kee and Emanuele Lugli's discussion on size and scale in relation to institutional ambitions and agendas in the context of museums and display venues in visual culture, this paper also integrates Olivier Lugon's analysis of the physical dimensions of wartime

¹⁸⁰ Christine I. Ho, "The People Eat for Free and the Art of Collective Production in Maoist China," *The Art Bulletin* 98, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 348–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2016.1150755>.

photographs.¹⁸¹ Lugon’s observation that photography’s small-scale tradition influenced its reception as a collectible rather than as an exhibitable medium adds another layer to understanding the “poor image” in its historical context.¹⁸² This consideration of scale not only broadens our comprehension of the visual dynamics at play but also highlights the adaptive strategies employed in wartime image display and dissemination.

This study engages deeply with the implications of digital reconstruction, guided by a critical examination of the methodologies employed in the analysis of historical images. The process of digital reconstruction, particularly through the lens of computer vision, raises pivotal questions about the limits and ethical considerations inherent in such technological interventions. Drawing on the insights of Smits and Wevers, this paper acknowledges the intrinsic biases that may be perpetuated by computer vision models. These biases, as Smits and Wevers argue, are often a result of the methodologies used in the collection and labeling of datasets which form the foundation of these models.¹⁸³ The approach of this project utilizes a diffusion model for super-resolution and a transformer-based model for image matching, both of which are pre-trained on general-purpose datasets. This choice necessitates a rigorous examination of the potential biases these models may import into the reconstruction of historical visual data.

¹⁸¹ Joan Kee and Emanuele Lugli, “Scale to Size: An Introduction,” *Art History* 38, no. 2 (2015): 250–66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12148>.

¹⁸² Olivier Lugon, “Photography and Scale: Projection, Exhibition, Collection,” *Art History* 38, no. 2 (2015): 386–403, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12155>.

¹⁸³ Thomas Smits and Melvin Wevers, “The Agency of Computer Vision Models as Optical Instruments,” *Visual Communication* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 2022): 329–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357221992097>.

The ethical discourse surrounding the application of these technologies is further enriched by Meredith Cohen's examination of the 1964 Venice Charter by ICOMOS. Cohen questions the extent to which digital restoration and photorealistic rendering should be pursued, highlighting the Charter's mandate that restoration must cease "where conjecture begins" and that any necessary additions must be clearly distinct and contemporaneously marked.¹⁸⁴ This principle raises important considerations for digital reconstructions, which, while striving for accuracy, must avoid overstepping into speculative fabrication.

However, Cohen's call for new approaches that "open up new perspectives and allow for rigorous interrogation" of historical artifacts challenges these constraints, suggesting that there is value in rendering "plausible, if hypothetical," reconstructions.¹⁸⁵ In the context of this research, where digital techniques are employed to reconstruct and analyze WWII Chinese wartime photographs, Cohen's argument invites a methodological openness. By leveraging advanced computational models—specifically, a diffusion-based model for super-resolution and a transformer-based model for image matching—this study navigates these ethical waters by providing interpretations that, while grounded in empirical data, acknowledge their conjectural nature.

This approach does not seek to definitively replace the historical record but rather to enrich our understanding of it. The use of plausible conjectures, based on rigorous digital enhancement and analysis, allows for the exploration of scenarios that, while not certain, are supported by

¹⁸⁴ Meredith Cohen, "Visualizing the Unknown in the Digital Era of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 104, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 6–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2022.2000271>.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

sufficient data to warrant scholarly consideration. Such conjectures are invaluable, particularly in dealing with sparse or degraded historical datasets where traditional methods of historical analysis may fall short. Furthermore, the employment of digital reconstruction techniques under the guidance of Cohen's interpretation of the ICOMOS principles supports a dynamic interaction between historical accuracy and interpretative innovation. This balance ensures that digital enhancements serve as a bridge to the past, offering new insights while clearly delineating the speculative elements of the reconstruction. This distinction is crucial in maintaining scholarly integrity, ensuring that the digital reconstructions provide a complementary perspective to traditional historical narratives without overstepping into unwarranted fabrication.

In synthesizing these viewpoints, this literature review addresses both the technical challenges and ethical imperatives of using digital humanities tools for historical analysis. It acknowledges the potential of computational methods to introduce biases, as noted by Smits and Wevers, while also considering Cohen's call for a balanced approach that respects historical authenticity yet allows for innovation. This dual focus ensures that the digital reconstructions contribute constructively to historical scholarship, providing insights that are both grounded in rigorous analysis and open to critical interpretation. By integrating these discussions, the literature review sets a robust framework for understanding the complexities involved in digital reconstruction projects. It underscores the importance of maintaining a critical awareness of the tools and methods used, ensuring that they enhance rather than obscure our understanding of the past. This approach not only aligns with the ethical guidelines set forth by ICOMOS but also pushes the boundaries of traditional historical scholarship, advocating for a nuanced and reflective use of digital technologies in the humanities.

II. Methodology

This investigation into the wartime exhibitions of WWII China employs a robust computer vision pipeline that harnesses the capabilities of super-resolution and image matching technologies to critically analyze and reinterpret sparse visual data. By leveraging these techniques, the aim is to digitally reconstruct the exhibition scenes using extant photographic sources that are significantly compromised in terms of resolution and detail. This paper outlines the methodological steps undertaken to achieve these reconstructions, integrating historical inquiry with advanced digital tools to provide a unique vantage into the visual culture of the period.

The foundational datasets for this research are sourced from the Sha Fei Archive at the Harvard-Yenching Library¹⁸⁶ and the Jinchaji Pictorial series publications.¹⁸⁷ The Sha Fei collection, deriving from the archives of the People's Liberation Army Pictorial and the extensive personal collection of Gu Di, comprises predominantly original images that document various aspects of the Chinese Communist Party's visual propaganda efforts during the war. The Jinchaji Pictorial series, on the other hand, encompasses the complete range of publications by the Jinchaji Pictorial Press, offering a rich repository of visual material from this tumultuous era.

¹⁸⁶ Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University., This collection of images was scanned from the original archives of the People's Liberation Army Pictorial Press by Sha Fei's daughter, Wang Yan, and Gu Di, the contributing editor of "The Historical Record of Red Photography in China", and invited researcher of the Sha Fei Image Research Center at Sun Yat-sen University, Si Sushi, and the many years of collection of Sha Fei's student, Gu Di, and was donated to Harvard by Ms. Wang Yan in 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial

The initial phase of the methodology involves applying diffusion model-based super-resolution techniques to the low-resolution photographs typically taken with constrained wartime technology.¹⁸⁸ Following enhancement, the focus shifts to isolating specific segments within the enhanced images, particularly targeting the photographs displayed within the wartime exhibitions. This precise cropping is manually executed to ensure that only the relevant exhibition content is extracted for further analysis, thereby minimizing the inclusion of extraneous visual information that could skew the interpretation. The enhanced and segmented images are then processed through an image matching system, utilizing an advanced transformer model framework—referred to as the Aspanformer.¹⁸⁹ This system compares the visual features of the segmented exhibition images against a comprehensive database comprising original wartime photographs and those featured in contemporary pictorial magazines. This expansive database facilitates to trace the exhibition photographs back to their original sources or identify the closest approximations. The ultimate objective of this phase is to reconnect the displayed images with their historical origins, thereby enriching our understanding of the visual discourse and its impact on wartime spectatorship in China.

The methodology employed in this study deployed a combination of cutting-edge machine learning techniques—diffusion model-based super-resolution and transformer model-based image matching—to engage in what might be considered a form of digital archeology. This approach has facilitated the identification of approximately 30% of wartime exhibition photographs that were previously obscured or degraded. However, this success rate, while

¹⁸⁸ Robin Rombach et al., “High-Resolution Image Synthesis with Latent Diffusion Models,” in *Proceedings of the IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, 2022, 10684–95.

¹⁸⁹ Hongkai Chen et al., “ASpanFormer: Detector-Free Image Matching with Adaptive Span Transformer” (arXiv, August 30, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2208.14201>.

notable, also underscores a significant gap in the capacity to recover the entirety of the visual data. This shortfall is largely attributable to the degraded condition of the original artifacts and the intricate decay processes characteristic of historical materials.

The limitation in recovery rate is not merely a technical shortcoming but a reflection of the substantial challenges inherent in dealing with archival materials that have undergone various forms of degradation. Furthermore, while the computational techniques of this project are robust, the precision of the matches this pipeline produces cannot be asserted with absolute certainty. Factors such as variations in image quality and the fidelity of the images post-super-resolution contribute to this uncertainty. Additionally, the complexity of accurately matching these images against an extensive, albeit sometimes incomplete, historical database further complicates the task.

To mitigate these challenges and bolster the credibility of the results, this research adopts a multifaceted strategy. Central to this strategy is the process of cross-verification, which is essential for enhancing the accuracy of the image matching. By utilizing multiple reference points within the expansive database for each image, the goal is to fortify the consistency and reliability of the identifications. This layered verification process significantly reduces the likelihood of misidentification and augments the validity of the findings. Moreover, the integration of expert review into the validation protocol is critical. Each photograph that is algorithmically identified is subsequently examined by the author who is a specialist in Chinese wartime photography and art history. This scrutiny ensures that each identified image resonates not only visually but is also contextually congruent and historically authentic. In addition to

these qualitative measures, the research includes quantitative statistical confidence measures for each match. These metrics provide a standardized scale to assess the reliability of each identified photograph, thereby introducing an element of objectivity into the evaluation process. This quantitative assessment is vital for maintaining scholarly rigor in the conclusions. Transparency in the methodological approach is another cornerstone of this research. Detailed documentation of the image processing and matching algorithms is made available, allowing for replication and critical assessment by the academic community. This openness is crucial for nurturing scholarly debate and for the verification of the contributions by peers. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the methodologies are not static; they are continuously refined as new data becomes available and as technological advancements are made. This commitment to ongoing development ensures that this research remains at the forefront of technological and historical inquiry, progressively enhancing both the identification rate of images and the reliability of the insights derived from them.

In sum, by harnessing sophisticated machine learning tools, this methodology not only recovers but also enriches our understanding of historical wartime exhibitions. It provides a novel digital pathway for exploring and reinterpreting the visual narratives of history, thus contributing a significant digital dimension to the study of wartime spectatorship in WWII China. This innovative lens offers fresh perspectives on historical events, inviting a reevaluation of visual data as a crucial element of historical narrative and analysis.

III. Analysis

My analysis of the exhibition photographs from the Harvard-Yenching Library's Sha Fei Archive has offered a compelling insight into wartime Chinese photographic exhibitions from 1940 to 1941. My dataset comprised six photographs spanning two distinct exhibitions. Four photographs (Figure 3.1) originated from the November 1940 exhibition titled "Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune," and two (Figure 3.2) depicted the "Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival," showcasing the Eighth Route Army soldiers at a news photography and printing technique exhibition in July 1941. Although not all exhibited photographs taken by Sha Fei, all photographs of exhibition scenes were selected from the Sha Fei's collection, reflecting his dual role as curator and photographer, deeply aware of the documentary and historical value of such images. I focus on the two exhibitions, for which multiple scene photographs are available, enhancing the capacity to apply and demonstrate the forensic capabilities of our computer vision models. This approach allows us to better reconstruct the exhibition context and to uncover rich historical details, despite the inherent limitations of the available data sources.

From the exhibition "Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune," this research successfully identified origins for six photographs using the models of this project and two photograph by the author herself (Figure 3.3). Notably, the photographs related to Norman Bethune significantly overlap with those later circulated in newspapers and other media, which helps with cross-referencing to identify the sources of the exhibited photographs. This exhibition dedicated to Dr. Norman Bethune (1890–1939), a Canadian surgeon celebrated for his commitment to providing medical care in wartime conditions under the Chinese Communist Party, held in November 1940 within a makeshift tent constructed from straw mats. From the

identified photographs, it is found that the exhibited photographs were captured through the lenses of photographers Sha Fei (1912–1950) and Wu Yinxian (1900–1994). These photographs were notably enlarged and mounted on black paper with white borders, arranged in a staggered layout and complemented by artistic handwritten captions. The wintertime setting is further indicated by the attire of General Nie Rongzhen (1899–1992), the highest military leader in the Jinchaji military region. Additionally, the exhibition featured a poignant handwritten eulogy (Figure 3.4) to Bethune on white cloth, which writes, “This flower of mankind, such a great human flower that once bloomed, should be a pride of all humanity. This intense love, a life dedicated to China, let us remember forever!”¹⁹⁰ The eulogy profoundly praised the contribution of Bethune as belonging to the whole humankind.

One photograph (Figure 3.5) shows General Nie Rongzhen viewing Bethune’s own 28 pieces of photographic works along with other images; these photographs were displayed as small-size samples, approximately one inch in size. Bethune himself was an amateur photographer and exhibiting photography as his hobby was a deliberate curation that adds a personal dimension to his revolutionary career. Other photographs are in standardized sizes, approximately five inches as estimated through comparative analysis, and their varied arrangement at different eye levels during exhibitions played a significant role in how these images were perceived and engaged with by wartime audiences.

¹⁹⁰ The Chinese version is “这是人类底花，这样伟大的人类底花存在过，人类应该引为夸耀。这种无限强烈的爱，为中国而工作的人底死，让我们永远追忆吧！” and the translation is mine.

Adjacent to these, one of the AI-identified photographs (Figure 3.6) was taken by Sha Fei in early October 1939, depicting Bethune conducting a medical examination at a rear hospital in the Jinchaji military region in Hebei Province, China. The image centers on Bethune, distinguishable by his attire and focused engagement, is seen examining wounded soldiers, who are visibly in various states of distress and recovery. The arrangement of subjects and objects—patients, medical staff, and military personnel—is informal, emphasizing the urgency and pragmatic approach of field medical practices. Another photograph (Figure 3.7), identified by the author herself and taken by Wu Yinxian on October 24, 1939 at a medical post near the Laiyuan frontline, captures the tense atmosphere near the combat zones. Soldiers, some on stretchers, are laid out in a makeshift outdoor triage area, indicative of the lack of permanent medical facilities in proximity to the front lines. Bethune, positioned near the opening of the thatched hut, serves as a focal point in this dynamic wartime scene. The soldier next to him, carrying what appears to be medical supplies or possibly aiding another wounded soldier out of the hut, suggests the ongoing movement and urgency typical of a frontline medical station. The setting is rustic and sparse, with the rugged landscape partially visible in the background, emphasizing the harsh conditions under which these medical teams operated. The use of depth in the image, with figures both in the foreground and background, creates a sense of scale and the number of wounded needing attention. The photographic technique not only captures the severity of the situation but also serves as a documentary tool that brings the viewer into the immediacy of the moment.

At the center of this exhibition stood the central image of Norman Bethune's portrait and his posthumous photographs. This historical photograph (Figure 3.8), identified by the author herself

and seemed to be cut from one of his portraits taken by Sha Fei, depicts Bethune clad in a winter military outfit, seated against a snowy, rocky backdrop. The attire, captured here, was originally worn by Japanese pilots and subsequently provided to Bethune by the Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army following their capture of these items. This image is rich in narrative, illustrating the harsh environmental conditions faced and the practical repurposing of enemy resources during wartime. Dr. Bethune's expression in the photograph is contemplative, suggesting resilience and a quiet endurance amidst challenging conditions. The use of this photograph as the central portrait at Norman Bethune's funeral underscores its importance not just as a record of his experience in China, but also as a symbol of the deep respect and admiration he garnered for his contributions.

Just under this central display, an evocative photograph (Figure 3.9) from November 1939 captures the serene and dignified visage of Dr. Norman Bethune in repose following his death. The image is both a poignant personal portrait and a powerful political symbol, embodying themes of sacrifice, international solidarity, and martyrdom. Bethune was lying on a fur-lined pillow and covered by a quilt, suggesting the modest circumstances surrounding his final moments. Notably, behind him, an American flag provides a symbolic backdrop, its stars visible, because the staff could not find a Canadian flag in the border area. This inclusion is significant as it not only points to Bethune's internationalist perspective but also subtly connects his Canadian identity and global humanitarian efforts to broader themes of liberty and democracy. Adjacent to these posthumous photographs, a photograph of Nie Rongzhen (Figure 3.10), paying homage to Bethune's remains, reinforces the solemnity and reverence afforded to international solidarity. The photograph is set against a roughly textured stone wall, which adds a raw, almost rugged

quality to the scene, suggesting the austere conditions under which Bethune worked and ultimately died. The composition is centered on Nie Rongzhen, whose expression is contemplative and mournful as he stands over Bethune's shrouded body.

The placement of surgical scenes involving Bethune on the right side further underscores the theme of sacrifice and medical fraternity in the face of adversity. The above photograph from 1938 (Figure 3.11) vividly captures Norman Bethune during a surgical procedure at a model operating room at Songyan Mouth, Wutai, Shanxi Province. Dr. Bethune is performing surgery, accompanied by Ye Qingshan, the Health Minister of the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region, identifiable to the left in the image. Bethune, in the midst of surgical action, is captured with great detail, highlighting his hands and the surgical instruments, which become focal points of the composition. Interestingly, the below photograph (Figure 3.12) captures the intense and intricate activity of a surgical procedure, emphasizing the hands and instruments engaged in the operation. The blur of movement in the image, especially around the hands, adds a sense of immediacy and action, conveying the swift movements typically required in surgical settings. Most of the records indicate this below photograph was taken in 1944, presumably due to the fact that its first appearance (Figure 3.13) in printed magazines was in the eighth issue of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* in 1945.¹⁹¹ However, given that this photograph appears in this exhibition and

¹⁹¹ See Sha Fei 沙飞, *Sha Fei she ying quan ji* 沙飞摄影全集 [*The collected photography of Sha Fei*], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Beijing: Chang cheng chu ban she, 2005). p. 378; Sha Fei 沙飞, "Baiqiuen Guoji Heping Yiyuan 白求恩国际和平医院 [Norman Bethune International Peace Hospital]," *Jinchaji Pictorial* 晋察冀画报, April 30, 1945. The below photograph was identified by our computer vision pipeline to trace the circulation of photographs in printed publications. See Lin Du, Brandon Le, and Edouardo Honig, "Probing Historical Image Contexts: Enhancing Visual Archive Retrieval through Computer Vision," *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 16, no. 4 (January 8, 2024): 84:1-84:17, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3631129>.

directly under Bethune's photograph in the model operating room, judging from the cloth used in the surgery, it is likely that this photograph was taken also in 1938.¹⁹²

Furthermore, the inclusion of specific photographs in this particular exhibition also displayed in other later photographs, which underscores their propagandistic use to advocate for internationalism. A notable instance involves a photograph taken by Sha Fei of two wounded U.S. soldiers in 1944 (Figure 3.14). Behind them, three photographs are displayed; one prominently features Chairman Mao Zedong (Figure 3.15), while the other two, appearing non-political at first glance, are revealed through our computer vision pipeline to be deeply connected to Bethune. One commemorates the establishment of his memorial tomb (Figure 3.16), and the other depicts him performing a blood transfusion to wounded Chinese soldiers (Figure 3.17). The transfusion photograph shows exactly in the “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune” exhibition. This strategic placement of images serves not only as a tribute to Bethune but also subtly reinforces the themes of international solidarity and heroism for the two wounded U.S. soldiers in Yan'an.

In analyzing the exhibition featuring Norman Bethune, the exhibition underscores a deliberate construction of his persona as a symbol of internationalism, reflective of broader themes of medical solidarity and communist devotion. Supported by recovered images, these exhibitions transcended mere hero worship, aiming to present a holistic overview of Bethune's life by

¹⁹² Zhao Ye 肇野, “Bianqu Yizhan Yinxiang Ji 边区艺展印象记 [Impressions of the Border Region Art Exhibition],” *Jinchaji Daily Newspaper* 晋察冀日报, July 29, 1941., cited from Zhongguo ge ming bo wu guan 中国革命博物馆, *Jie fang qu zhan lan hui zi liao* 解放区展览会资料 [*Liberated Area Exhibition Materials*], 第 1 版., Di 1 ban. (Beijing: Wen wu chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1988), 237

intertwining his professional endeavors with personal life. The exhibitions were strategically utilized to portray Bethune as a well-rounded individual, integrating aspects of his personal hobbies with his professional activities. This approach served to humanize him beyond his iconic status, providing a more relatable and comprehensive representation.

The other example, the exhibition held from July 1st to 7th, 1941, not only chronicled the front lines but also emerged as critical pedagogical tools within military bases in North China. According to the exhibition review published in *Jinchaji Daily Newspaper*, this exhibition was part of the Second Jinchaji Border Region Art Festival and one of the four exhibition rooms was dedicated specifically to photography and the technique of copperplate printing, while other rooms were a mixture of literature, woodcuts, series illustrations, posters, political cartoons, and sculptures. This photographic collection, markedly different from the editorial strategies employed in pictorial magazines post-1942, vividly illustrates the bustling activity and spirited atmosphere prevalent in the military regions at that time. The images, brimming with life and motion, offer a window into the daily realities of the soldiers and their environments.

There exist two photographs of this exhibition scene from different angles of the room. Judging from the first photograph (Figure 3.18), there are 28 photographs hanging on the wall, among which 20 photographs were showing in their entirety. This model can identify 9 photographs from the database of original photographs and printed photographs from the Jinchaji Pictorial. Judging from the second photograph (Figure 3.19), there are at least 36 photographs hanging on the wall. After conducting super-resolution and image matching, this model can also identify 8 photographs. The combined results of 17 photographs lend us a glimpse of the curation of

wartime photo exhibitions. These 17 photographs identified entirely by this model are the best efforts can be made in super resolution. Some of the lower-resolution photographs in the exhibition photographs are more immediately identifiable with their sources, while others are not easily recognizable and even may still leave room for questioning the correct sources.

The exhibition's layout, with photographs arranged on black paper boards and framed on papers in three rows, creates a narrative flow that guides the viewer through the unfolding events. This exhibition predated the inaugural issue of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* by a year, providing a unique perspective on the unfolding war. The photographs present an unvarnished view of the frontlines, including intense street fighting and positional warfare. One evocative photograph (Figure 3.20) captures a moment during a military drill simulating alley combat, part of a larger military exercise. Soldiers are shown with bayoneted rifles, advancing in a coordinated effort that suggests the urgency and tactical discipline required in such combat scenarios. Another image taken by Shi Shaohua captures two soldiers manning a machine gun (Figure 3.21), their figures hunched in a defensive posture, suggesting the urgency and peril of their situation. The composition of the photograph is particularly striking, focusing on the soldiers' backs and the machine gun, which directs the viewer's gaze outward towards the smoky and indistinct background.

There are little historical records on the shooting location of the photographs. Notably, the images underscore the significant participation of women in the war effort, depicting them in roles ranging from armed guards at large conventions, actively practicing grenade-throwing techniques, and to rifle drill. One photograph (Figure 3.22), dated March 8, 1940, provides a

visual documentation of women training in grenade throwing during a significant period in history. The woman in the foreground, captured in a vigorous throwing stance, is the focal point. It highlights the involvement of women in military activities, a testament to the broader mobilization efforts during this era. Similarly, scenes of soldiers navigating rivers by boat (Figure 3.23) and cavalry formations riding across the plains (Figure 3.24) resonate with thematic consistency, reinforcing the omnipresent rhythm of revolutionary movements beyond the frontlines. The horse-riding scenes also echoes what Craig Clunas noted in exhibitions of Chinese painting at the time as a “fondness for images of vibrant defiance” during wartime.¹⁹³ According to an audience review published in the *Jinchaji Daily Newspaper*, this exhibition featured “primarily newsreels containing politically and combatively charged content.”¹⁹⁴ The AI-identified results correspond to the observation.

One of the standout images this research identified was taken in August 1940 at the Jingxing Coal Mine (Figure 3.25). It depicts Eighth Route Army soldiers positioned at a machine gun post, aiming towards the distant chimneys and mining headframe—just before the launch of the Hundred Regiments Offensive. The composition offers a glimpse into the militarized landscape, showing the juxtaposition of natural and industrial elements. The foreground is occupied by soldiers, possibly in a moment of vigilance or preparation, gazing toward a complex industrial backdrop. In fact, the scenes of industry and machinery were typical for modern exhibition cultures at the time. As Kari Shepherdson-Scott studies, the South Manchuria Railway Company-sponsored art photography exhibition served as an example of this trend by

¹⁹³ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Painting and Its Audiences*, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts 2012 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 195

¹⁹⁴ Zhao, “Bianqu Yizhan Yinxiang Ji 边区艺展印象记 [Impressions of the Border Region Art Exhibition].”, 240

showcasing a variety of subjects, including factories, machinery, smokestacks, mines, as well as rural and industrial scenes.¹⁹⁵ The exhibition in Chicago in 1933 aimed to promote a relationship between Japanese and American cultures and industries, utilizing art photography as a cultural and diplomatic tool. By contrast, this photograph by Sha Fei effectively captures a moment of tense anticipation, while also documenting the contextual setting of industrial labor turned into a war zone. Another photograph by Sha Fei captures the aftermath of the Eighth Route Army's demolition of the mine's chimney (Figure 3.26). The structural remains create a dramatic interplay of lines and shadows, framing the soldiers in action. The soldiers' positioning and movement suggest urgency and purpose. The high contrast between the stark, geometric remnants of the industrial structure and the chaos of destruction speaks to the harsh realities of war, where creation and ruin are intimately intertwined.

Moreover, a photograph by Yang Guozhi from the Hundred Regiments Offensive in 1940 shows Commander Li Yongsheng from the Second Battalion during the battle in Laiyuan Sanjia Village (Figure 3.27). Commander Li became a figure of resilience and capability in this photograph, as he stands laden with captured weaponry: a light machine gun and three Type 38 rifles. His posture, upright and bearing the weight of the captured arms with a sort of casual prowess, communicates not only victory but also the personal strength and burden of command. It serves not only as a historical record but also as a tool of morale. The photograph's ability to convey both the immediate aftermath of combat and broader themes of endurance and resistance makes it a significant piece of visual military history.

¹⁹⁵ Kari Shepherdson-Scott, "Art Photography, Industry, and Empire: Japanese Soft Power in America, 1933–34," *Art History* 41, no. 4 (2018): 710–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12355>.

Additionally, this research identified photographs of military exercises and sporting events, such as a fencing competition held at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University in 1939 (Figure 3.28). Also noteworthy is Luo Guangda's May 1941 photograph (Figure 3.29) as part of a series commemorating Youth Day in Pingshan, Hebei. It captures a significant moment during a ceremony where local militia members present victory spoils to General Nie Rongzhen, as a gesture of respect and celebration. General Nie at the center is engaged in a salute, which acts as a focal point, drawing the viewer's eye and emphasizing the ceremonial aspect of the event. The occasion—Youth Day—adds layers of meaning, connecting the historical significance of the May Fourth Movement with contemporary expressions of nationalism and military readiness.

Within the context of these photographic exhibitions, a forensic reconstruction of the exhibition scenes has enabled the identification of chronological inconsistencies that challenge the historical record. For instance, two side-by-side photographs raise questions: one (Figure 3.20), taken by Sha Fei in 1943, was titled "Intensive Training: Alley Combat," and the other (Figure 3.21), captured by Shi Shaohua in 1941, titled "Clearing the Remnants." The juxtaposition of these images is historically implausible as the 1943 photograph could not have been exhibited in 1941. This suggests either an error in the dating or thematic categorization of Sha Fei's photograph. Another image (Figure 3.30), according to existing records, supposedly displayed during the Eastern Front Victory Celebration in Northern Yue Mountain in 1943, shows captured Japanese Type 92 rifles.¹⁹⁶ However, given that the exhibition was confirmed to have been held in July 1941, the date and location of this photograph are in question.

¹⁹⁶ Sha Fei 沙飞, *Sha Fei she ying quan ji* 沙飞摄影全集 [*The collected photography of Sha Fei*], 第1版., Di 1 ban. (Beijing: Chang cheng chu ban she, 2005)., 168

It is important to note that many of the identified photographs were taken by Sha Fei. This is partly due to the nature of the dataset, established mainly by Sha Fei's daughter, students, and friends, and thus comprises images predominantly attributed to him. At that time, Sha Fei was the most experienced photojournalist and highest authority in photography in the Jinchaji Border Region, possessing access to the best camera equipment and sufficient film stock. As the official photographer appointed by Nie Rongzhen, he had the privilege to capture a wide range of events. The photographs selected for exhibition predominantly employ a candid photographic language, capturing the spontaneity and dynamism of wartime China. This approach not only reflects the photographic style of the period but also Sha Fei's distinctive perspective, highlighting the resilience and vigor of the subjects amidst the harsh realities of war. Through these images, the exhibition conveyed powerful narratives of courage, solidarity, and resistance, serving both documentary and propagandistic purposes.

During the early 1940s, the CCP effectively expanded its military army by recruiting local peasants, though many of these new recruits lacked formal military and political training. Consequently, exhibitions held at military bases served a dual purpose: they were not only morale-boosting events but also critical components of military education for these nascent soldiers. Analysis of the photographic content from these exhibitions reveals a focused thematic alignment with battlefield scenes, military drills, and portraits of soldiers and generals. These themes celebrate military achievements, display captured war trophies, and underscore the importance of training for young recruits, thereby reinforcing their emerging identities as competent soldiers.

The analysis further shows that as part of the second Border Region Art Festival in 1941, this exhibition was significantly marked by a special engraving display. The displayed photograph along with the engraving glass titled “The Border Region People’s Opposition to the Anti-Communist Civil War” was taken by Zhou Yuwen in April 1941 (Figure 3.31). This image was captured amidst the broader backdrop of the Second Sino-Japanese War, specifically following the Wan-Nan Incident (or the New Fourth Army Incident) in January 1941. This event was a severe military clash between the Nationalist forces and the Communist-led New Fourth Army, resulting in the disbandment of the army, the casualties of over 3,700 soldiers, and the capture of its commander, General Ye Ting.¹⁹⁷ Zhou Yuwen’s photograph, capturing a moment of intense political demonstration against the Nationalist’s anti-communist policies, became an iconic representation of resistance and unity. It appeared in the *Kangdi San Ri Kan* (Resistance War Tri-Daily), marking the first use of photoengraving technology in the newspapers of the Jinchaji border region, which is why it is on display. The use of photoengraving technology in its publication represented a milestone in print media within the Communist-controlled areas, enabling the mass production and distribution of a powerful visual narrative. The exhibitions evidently required considerable time, money, labor, and effort in curation. Notably, items within the exhibition space, such as the shelf of glass image plates, appear to have been moved from one side of the table to the other, possibly to facilitate better photography of the event and the plates (Figure 3.32). This adjustment highlights the curators’ attention to detail and their

¹⁹⁷ For a more detailed introduction for the historical background, see John King Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 13, Republican China 1912-1949. Part 2* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986). p. 665–671; also see Yang Kuisong 杨奎松, “Wannan Shibian de Fasheng, Shanhou Ji Jieguo 皖南事变的发生, 善后及结果 [The Incident of the New Fourth Army, Its Aftermath and Results],” *Jindaishi Yanjiu* 近代史研究 6, no. 3 (2003).

intention to emphasize the dramatic aspects of printing during the war through the strategic presentation of the plates.

In sum, these photographic exhibitions not only served as educational tools and morale boosters but also as carefully curated events that highlighted the spectacle of war. The deliberate selection and presentation of images played a crucial role in shaping soldiers' perceptions of their roles and the broader wartime narrative, despite occasional historical inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the exhibition records.

IV. Discussion

Photographic exhibitions in North China during WWII were not mere repositories of visual documentation but vital arenas for social engagement and collective identity formation. Unlike traditional media such as newspapers and pictorial magazines, these exhibitions fostered a direct, palpable connection between the soldiers at the front and the broader populace. They transformed everyday scenes of strife into potent symbols of defiance and endurance, thus elevating the photographic medium beyond simple reportage to become a crucial element in the socio-cultural fabric of wartime China. This transformative role of exhibitions in Chinese visual culture can be traced back to significant reforms initiated by Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), the Republic of China's first Minister of Education, in the early 20th century. Cai was instrumental in organizing China's first national art exhibition in 1929, where photography was prominently featured among the seven categories of artworks. This inclusion was part of Cai's broader program for art and education, which aimed to canonize photography as a major art form.¹⁹⁸ His

¹⁹⁸ Julia Frances Andrews, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2012), 64

efforts were pivotal in shifting the perception of photography from a mere technical skill to a legitimate and influential category in modern Chinese art, thereby setting a precedent for the later wartime exhibitions.

Historically, photographic practices in China before the 1920s, as highlighted by art critic Wang Laosheng in 1936, were predominantly confined to photographic societies focused on skill exchange among enthusiasts rather than public engagement. Wang criticized the elite and insular nature of these circles, proclaiming that “no artwork is private property; it should enable public appreciation, move the masses, and thereby transform and beautify public life.”¹⁹⁹ This sentiment underscores a pivotal shift from private to public realms in the visual culture of China, a transformation crucially advanced by wartime exhibitions. Lisa Claypool’s analysis of exhibition culture during the Republican period further elucidates this evolution. She contrasts the “inherited model” that cultivated the connoisseurial eye with a “modern mode” encouraged at exhibitions, which marked a shift from text-centric to image-centric engagement, from elite audiences to a broader demographic, and from a focus on tradition to an embrace of international perspectives.²⁰⁰ This paradigm shift is emblematic of a broader reconfiguration of visibility in Chinese society, wherein the exhibition space became a site for the active participation of all attendees, challenging traditional hierarchies of cultural authority. In a similar vein, Stephanie Su emphasizes the role of Chinese art exhibitions in the 1930s in “establishing the category of modern Chinese painting in Europe,” highlighting the international implications of China’s

¹⁹⁹ Wang Laosheng 王劳生, “Meishu Sheying de Yiyi 美术摄影的意义 [The Significance of Fine Art Photography],” *Feiyang* 飞鹰 [*Flying Eagle*], October 1936.

²⁰⁰ Lisa Claypool, “Ways of Seeing the Nation: Chinese Painting in the National Essence Journal (1905-1911) and Exhibition Culture,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 19, no. 1 (2011): 55–82.

evolving artistic expressions.²⁰¹ The exhibitions during WWII can be seen as a continuation and expansion of this trajectory, where the act of witnessing within these spaces was not passive but an active engagement that marked social and cultural statuses.

The Republican era witnessed a pivotal shift in visual culture from elite to inclusive practices, as exemplified by the formation of the Black and White Society. The engagement of Sha Fei with the Society during the 1930s represents a pivotal moment in the democratization of visual culture in China. This group, diverging from the previously elitist photographic circles, sought to maximize inclusivity by recruiting an expansive membership. Their motto, “Art has no locality, no nationality, or national boundaries; our works are contributed to the nation, and even to the whole world,” encapsulates a new paradigm of artistic expression and public participation.²⁰² This ethos of inclusivity and public engagement found resonance in the military regions’ exhibitions, which not only displayed artistic works but also propagated values of cosmopolitanism and internationalism. These exhibitions mirrored broader aspirations to utilize visual media as conduits for public influence and engagement, underlining the transformative potential of art in societal contexts.

The evolution of photographic exhibitions from the 1930s through the 1940s in China was marked by significant shifts in both the form and ideological content of these events, catalyzed

²⁰¹ Stephanie Su, “Exhibition as Art Historical Space: The 1933 Chinese Art Exhibition in Paris,” *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 125–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2021.1882808>; On the exhibition of Asian Art in Japan from 1920s to 1940s, see Younjung Oh, “Oriental Taste in Imperial Japan: The Exhibition and Sale of Asian Art and Artifacts by Japanese Department Stores from the 1920s through the Early 1940s,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 45–74, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911818002498>.

²⁰² Chen Chuanlin 陈传霖, “Banian Lai de Heibai Yingshe 八年来的黑白影社 [Eight Years of Black and White Shadow Society],” in *Heibai Yingji 黑白影集 [Black and White Photo Book]*, vol. 3, 1937.

by the exigencies of the era and the shifting political landscape. Shen Kuiyi notes that the inception of mobile and traveling exhibitions in the 1930s in Shanghai, particularly those showcasing woodcut prints, established a model for using visual arts as tools of political engagement and resistance against fascist forces.²⁰³

Distinct from their predecessors, the photographic exhibitions of the 1940s crafted pathways for more tangible and direct public engagement with the revolutionary cause. The strategic use of multiple photographs to depict various temporal and spatial dimensions of warfare and community gatherings enhanced the viewer's connection to the depicted events, intensifying their emotional and experiential engagement with the revolutionary narrative. These exhibitions provided clear delineations of roles and actions that individuals could adopt, fostering a sense of participation and agency among the populace. The profound impact of these wartime exhibitions lies in their ability to democratize the act of viewing, transforming it from passive consumption to an active engagement. The exhibitions served as public forums where the very act of witnessing became a means of “marking truth and determining social and cultural statuses.”²⁰⁴ This was a radical departure from the more restricted, elite-focused viewing practices of earlier times.

Unlike the depictions in commercial pictorial magazines like *Liangyou* (the Young Companion), which often portrayed the suffering of the “other” in a fragmented manner, the exhibitions curated during the war emphasized a narrative of unity and collective resilience. Photographer

²⁰³ Julia Frances Andrews et al., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum : Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1998). 219–220

²⁰⁴ Claypool, “Ways of Seeing the Nation.”

Sha Fei's work is emblematic of this shift. Inspired by the woodcut and photo exhibitions he encountered in Shanghai, Sha Fei abandoned traditional motifs such as porcelain or florals in favor of depicting the stark realities of war. His photographs did not simply capture moments; they wove a cohesive narrative that underscored the collective endeavor and strength of the Chinese people, thus resisting the typical fragmentation seen in other wartime media.

As can be seen in the identified photographs, the thematic organization of these exhibitions reinforced this unified narrative. Photographs were grouped to depict various aspects of military life and civilian participation in the war effort—ranging from peasants undergoing military training to scenes of cavalry regiments and naval maneuvers. This arrangement allowed for an aesthetic of immediacy and proximity, linking the battlefield with the home front. For example, the poignant segment focused on the Jizhong Region during the Japanese 'Mopping-Up' campaigns from 1940 to 1943, which were marked by severe casualties among Chinese soldiers and civilians. Here under the theme caption of "The Three Columns Riding the Great Plains of Jizhong," however, the curators chose to highlight images (Figure 3.20, Figure 3.21, Figure 3.23, Figure 3.24) that conveyed bravery and resilience rather than despair, thereby fostering a spirit of optimism and valor amidst the harsh realities of war. Such choices in visual representation were not merely artistic but were laden with significant ideological weight. The exhibitions served as a medium to acknowledge military achievements and the spoils of victorious battles while also providing a training ground for nationalist sentiment among the populace.

The photographic exhibitions during WWII in China strategically utilized images of ruins to narrate stories of resilience and recovery, rather than mere devastation. Consistent with Wu

Hung's observation that ruins in modern Chinese art symbolize not just the scars of war but also the vigorous efforts at self-rescue when internalizing the war ruins,²⁰⁵ these images depict transformative actions—soldiers preparing for ambushes, engineers demolishing structures to reuse materials—thus reframing ruins from symbols of destruction to embodiments of resilience and recovery. This selective portrayal eschews graphic depictions of violence and suffering, which as Rebecca Scoggin McEntee notes, typically evoke stronger empathetic responses from viewers.²⁰⁶ By focusing on ruins and reconstruction rather than direct violence or visible casualties, the exhibitions crafted an image of endurance and renewal. Indeed, the absence of graphic violence in these exhibitions, even in commemorations of figures like Dr. Norman Bethune who was known for treating war casualties, suggests a deliberate curatorial choice to boost morale rather than depict the grim realities of war. Such images were excluded perhaps to maintain a focus on victory and recovery, aligning with a broader narrative strategy that emphasized the positive outcomes of the Communist Party's efforts rather than the painful costs.

Moreover, the exhibitions strategically emphasized heroic figures and deeds, illustrating the careful selection and framing of images to foster ideals such as bravery and loyalty. These images served dual purposes: externally, they amplified the military's victories in local media, and internally, they aligned soldiers with their unit's historical trajectory. The portrayal of these heroics reinforced a "revolutionary historical tradition," as noted by photographic leader Shi

²⁰⁵ Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 144–145

²⁰⁶ Rebecca Scoggin McEntee, "Shooting Straight: Graphic versus Non-Graphic War Photographs," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 221–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2015.1105103>.

Shaohua (1918–1998), guiding behavior and solidifying a collective identity rooted in a shared past and aspirational future.²⁰⁷

In the milieu of wartime China, photographic exhibitions predominantly featured collective narratives rather than individual accomplishments. This emphasis on the collective over the individual aligns with the broader ideological atmosphere of the period, which favored the sublimation of personal identity into a unified, communal entity. The rarity of exhibitions dedicated to individual photographers, such as Zheng Jinggang (1904–1978) and Liu Ying (1922–2007), underscores this trend.²⁰⁸ Even prolific photographers such as Sha Fei adopted multiple pseudonyms to diffuse their personal identity across various works, thus maintaining the collective focus of the pictorial magazines and exhibitions. As Christine I. Ho argues, collective production started as a practice rooted in populist nationalism and evolved into a medium of

²⁰⁷ Shi Shaohua 石少华, “Tan Yezhan Budui de Sheying Gongzuo: Yi Jiu Si Qi Nian Yi Yue Zai Jinchaji Huabaoshe de Jianghua 谈野战部队的摄影工作——一九四七年一月在晋察冀画报社的讲话 [Talk on the Photographic Work of Field Troops--A Speech at the Jinchaji Pictorial Press in January 1947],” in *Sheying Lilun He Shijian* 摄影理论和实践 [*Theory and Practice of Photography*], Di 1 ban (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1982), 119–120

²⁰⁸ Zheng Jinggang has his Jinggang Photography Exhibition held on May 9 and 10, 1942 at the Yan'an Literary Anti-Enemy Writers' Club. See “‘Jinggang’ Yingzhan Jiangzai Zuojia Julebu Juxing ‘景康’影展将在作家俱乐部举行 [The ‘Jinggang’ Photo Exhibition Will Be Held at the Writers’ Club.],” *Jiefang Ribao* 解放日报, May 7, 1942.; In the summer of 1943, Liu Ying held a large-scale photography exhibition in Kangjiayu, Fuping, Hebei Province, the temporary residence of the Jizhong Military Region after it moved into the mountains, because all the photographs were the work of one person, and it was actually a personal photography exhibition. See Gu Di 顾棣 and Wang Xiaoli 王笑利, “Jinchaji Huabao de Dansheng Yu Fazhan 《晋察冀画报》的诞生与发展 [The Birth and Development of Jinchaji Pictorial]” (2001), Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University. Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

participatory socialism.²⁰⁹ The collaborative effort showcased the unity and collective identity of the participants involved in creating the artwork.

The practical constraints of wartime also significantly shaped the logistical and curatorial strategies of these exhibitions. The scarcity of resources necessitated a pragmatic approach to the display and reuse of photographs. As Olivier Lugon notes, the sensitivity of photographic materials to light meant that they faded even as they were exhibited, which paralleled the ephemeral nature of the exhibitions themselves.²¹⁰ This recycling of photographs across various venues was not just a matter of conservation but a strategic adaptation to the exigencies of war.²¹¹ The repeated use of a consistent set of images allowed these exhibitions to be both mobile and cost-effective, circumventing the traditional needs of curation for each new display and focusing instead on the practicalities of conveying a consistent narrative amidst challenging conditions.

The strategic use of captions in photographic exhibitions emerged as a critical tool for ideological dissemination and viewer engagement. In his seminal text, *Jinchaji Pictorial* press editor Zhao Qixian articulates a fundamental division within the domain of visual media during wartime China, identifying two primary functions of photographic captions: journalistic and propagandistic. His insights, detailed in “How to Write Headline Descriptions,” provide a robust framework for understanding the dual-purpose nature of these captions. Zhao states: “Generally,

²⁰⁹ Ho, “The People Eat for Free and the Art of Collective Production in Maoist China.”

²¹⁰ Lugon, “Photography and Scale.”

²¹¹ Li Min 黎民, “Zhaopian Zenyang Peihe Zhongxin Gongzuo 照片怎样配合中心工作 [How Photos Support the Central Work],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], June 24, 1948.

we, as photographers, are required to compose two types of captions: one is journalistic—used when sending images to pictorial magazines; the other is propagandistic—utilized during photo exhibitions.”²¹²

This differentiation not only reveals the distinct objectives that captions served depending on their context but also highlights a deeper, ideological manipulation of visual media. The journalistic captions were expected to narrate events with utmost fidelity, avoiding subjective embellishment, thereby adhering to a semblance of objectivity: “For news captions...the task here is to faithfully and objectively describe the development and outcome of events without any subjective coloring.”²¹³ Conversely, the propagandistic captions, often employed in photographic exhibitions, transcended mere description. They adopted a slogan-like quality, transforming captions into directives that shaped the viewer’s interpretation. These captions did not merely inform but instructed, aligning viewer perception with specific ideological frameworks. This is evident in the usage of captions that directly invoked familiar figures as military leaders or movements, such as “General Nie,” “Director Song,” or specific slogans familiar to the audience. Such strategic textual placements were not coincidental but were meticulously crafted to dominate the narrative flow and bolster the ideological message intended by the exhibitors.

The effectiveness of these slogan-like captions was further amplified through their resonance with folk forms, such as ballads or rhythmic slogans, making them particularly memorable to

²¹² Zhao Qixian 赵启贤, “Zenyang Xie Biaoti Shuoming 怎样写标题说明 [How to Write Headline Descriptions],” *Shaying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], August 26, 1948.

²¹³ Ibid.

rural audiences.²¹⁴ This technique is also discussed by photojournalists Zhang Bingxin and Yuan Ruxun in “Exhibition Experience Introduction,” where the integration of powerful, familiar slogans with photographic content is noted to significantly impact viewer reception: “It is highly effective to write concise slogan captions that align with the central theme of the photograph. Because of the continuous impression made by the series of photos, coupled with one or two powerful slogans familiar to the audience, viewers often recite them aloud.”²¹⁵

The use of such folkloric devices in captions ensured that the blend of imagery and textual narrative not only enhanced the engagement but also deepened the viewers’ understanding and acceptance of the conveyed messages. This is further reinforced considering the curators “gathered the masses with gongs and drums and loud speakers” and thus created ambient rhythmic sounds.²¹⁶ The interplay between image and text in wartime Chinese photographic exhibitions underscores a complex narrative strategy aimed at molding public perception. These captions, far from being mere appendages to the photographs, were central to the exhibitions’ success in disseminating ideological messages. They transformed passive viewing into an interactive ideological engagement, wherein the viewer was not just a spectator but an active participant in the narrative constructed by the state.

²¹⁴ Shi, “Tan Yezhan Budui de Sheying Gongzuo: Yi Jiu Si Qi Nian Yi Yue Zai Jinchaji Huabaoshe de Jianghua 谈野战部队的摄影工作——一九四七年一月在晋察冀画报社的讲话 [Talk on the Photographic Work of Field Troops--A Speech at the Jinchaji Pictorial Press in January 1947].”, 122

²¹⁵ Zhang Bingxin 张炳新 and Yuan Ruxun 袁汝逊, “Zhanlan Jingyan Jieshao 展览经验介绍 [Exhibition Experience Introduction],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], October 10, 1948.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

The role of exhibitions during WWII-era China extended beyond mere displays of revolutionary zeal; they were instrumental in transforming local peasants into new, ideologically aligned subjects by displaying artifacts and objects as well. As Laurence Coderre articulates in *Newborn Socialist Things*, the strategic deployment of objects, notably photographs and the innovative use of copperplates in news photography, provided a unique lens for both understanding and reconstructing ideological narratives. Exhibitions showcased the scientific advancements underpinning the revolutionary ethos. Coderre explains that these exhibitions were not merely displays but dynamic sites where “newborn things were therefore understood—especially in the wake of Mao Zedong’s 1957 disquisition ‘On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People’—as a key engine of history’s forward progress.”²¹⁷ The exposure to printing processes and revolutionary artifacts within these contexts did more than educate; they redefined the viewer’s world, aligning everyday perception with the revolutionary cause. The showcasing of copper plates, crucial in the photoengraving process, highlighted the intersection of technology and propaganda. By demonstrating the capabilities of photoengraving, the exhibitions promoted the narrative of scientific and technological progression under socialism. This approach aligns with Coderre’s insights where material objects like copperplates act as agents of transformation. These objects were employed to symbolize the forward-thinking nature of the socialist agenda, thereby educating and molding the public’s perception towards an acceptance of and alignment with the new socialist ideologies.

²¹⁷ Laurence Coderre, *Newborn Socialist Things: Materiality in Maoist China*, 1 online resource (xi, 246 pages) : illustrations vols. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 2

Mieke Bal in *Double Exposures* asserts that “exposition is also always an argument” and should be understood in terms of their syntax and rhetoric.²¹⁸ This view is critical in analyzing the internal arrangement of exhibitions which combined photographs, models, and other artifacts in a calculated manner to showcase the revolution’s internal mechanisms, thus demystifying operations for the audience. Bal’s perspective on the rhetorical function of exhibitions resonates with the display of technological advancements, such as copperplates, underscoring their dual role in educational and ideological propagation within the revolutionary cause. Denise Ho’s work *Curating Revolution* reinforces the idea that exhibitions, guided by Marxist dialectics of perception and rational knowledge, used material displays to concretize abstract revolutionary ideas.²¹⁹ This was essential for educating the uneducated peasants, who could grasp revolutionary concepts through tangible objects and imagery, thus deeply internalizing the movement’s principles and objectives. This educational aspect of exhibitions, employing both visual and material rhetoric, was crucial in fostering a new understanding among the peasants, reshaping them into informed subjects of the socialist agenda. Moreover, Donald Preziosi’s theory that objects in exhibitions act as the embedded product in historical time and effect of a specific spirit or mentality, actively contributes to constructing a revolutionary narrative.²²⁰ These objects, far from being passive artifacts, became essential elements of storytelling, linking together to craft a coherent evolutionary history that shaped a shared sense of time and place for the people. This notion highlights the exhibitions’ role in embedding a collective historical narrative among the spectators.

²¹⁸ Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2

²¹⁹ Denise Y. Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao’s China*, 1 online resource (xvi, 308 pages) : illustrations vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108283830>, 23

²²⁰ Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19

For instance, the advice from the “Artillery Second Brigade on Magazine and Photographic Work”—to prominently display captured new weapons and elaborate on their structure and functionality in photographs—illustrates the practical application of these theories, as Figure 3.30 demonstrates.²²¹ The intent was clear: to make the abstract tangible, the unseen visible, and the ideological understandable, thereby weaving individual elements into a larger, coherent historical narrative that was accessible and engaging to all layers of society. Through this intricate mesh of visual rhetoric, materiality, and rational knowledge, wartime exhibitions in China were not simply educational or propagandistic. They were dynamic spaces where the transformation of public perception was actively pursued, embedding new ideological frameworks into the very consciousness of spectators, thus crafting not only new subjects but a new social ethos aligned with the revolutionary cause.

In dissecting the spatial and social contexts of these exhibitions, it is worth noting that their locations—ranging from dilapidated thatched huts to bustling temple fairs—were not merely a matter of convenience or necessity. Instead, they represented a deliberate strategy to embed modern media forms within traditional rural life. As photojournalist Wu Qun notes in his 1949 work, “Photographic Exhibitions were often held in towns and temple fairs for the masses to see. Even those who were illiterate could understand the photographs, making them immensely popular. These vivid photographs also indirectly inspired enthusiasm for supporting and joining

²²¹ “Pao Er Lv Dui Huakan Yu Sheying Gongzuo de Yijian 炮二旅对画刊与摄影工作的意见 [Artillery Second Brigade on Magazine and Photographic Work],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], November 6, 1948., 14

the military.”²²² By situating photographic narratives in communal spaces, the organizers effectively used the inherent communal behaviors characteristic of rural settings, where the collective engagement with media could foster a shared sense of purpose and identity among the viewers.

Exhibitions also embraced a plethora of media forms to maximize outreach and engagement. Central to these strategies was the use of magic lantern slides, a projection technology that effectively democratized visual information by transforming party-held photographic collections into public spectacles. Several essays in the first issue of the major trade journal—*Photographic Web*—offer a window into this era’s innovative spirit, noting how “lightweight magic lanterns could project a range of images—from sequential drawings on glass to portraits of dignitaries, and even detailed plans of accomplishments by institutions and individuals.”²²³ This technology not only mobilized photography but also enhanced its narrative potential, enabling it to convey complex stories and revolutionary ideals in a format that was both accessible and captivating.

Moreover, magic lanterns were adeptly utilized in cinemas, particularly in newly liberated cities where the film repertoire was limited. As scholar Zhou Chenshu has discussed, “slide projection and live performance” were two main “media interfaces” in socialist film exhibitions.²²⁴ She

²²² Wu Qun 吴群, “Huabei Jiefangjun de Xinwen Sheying Gongzuozhe 华北解放军的新闻摄影工作者 [Press Photographers of the North China Liberation Army],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], September 1, 1949.

²²³ Xia Lan 夏蓝, “Xia Lan Tongzhi Zanyang Qingbian Huandeng 夏蓝同志赞扬轻便幻灯 [Comrade Xia Lan Praises Lightweight Lantern Slides],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], June 24, 1948.

²²⁴ Chenshu Zhou, *Cinema off Screen: Moviegoing in Socialist China*, 1 online resource (xii, 266 pages) : illustrations, maps vols. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021). 82

further stressed that the more rustic and indigenous aspect of the magic lantern slides were celebrated, “the more importance was given to slide projection over the showing of films.”²²⁵ In the case of photographic exhibition, magic lantern slides were found as a standalone form of exhibiting photographs to soldiers, but were also used in company with cinemas. As photojournalist Cai Shangxiong notes in his report, “In the cinemas, we used magic lanterns to fill the time before and after screenings with slides created from our reporting materials. This was an optimal use of about twenty to thirty minutes to educate and propagate.”²²⁶ This strategic use of pre-existing cinematic gatherings highlights a clever integration of different media forms, utilizing the audience’s anticipation for film to insert educational and propagandistic content.

In addition to these technological adaptations, there was also a significant reliance on more portable and versatile forms of visual media, such as “small albums” and “field notebooks.” These contained images that could be easily transported and shared across various military districts, ensuring that consistent messages reached diverse audiences. Wu Qun describes how “photographic workers published photo wall-newspapers in the troops and compiled photo cards and foldable photo albums on the battlefield.”²²⁷ These alternative forms of exhibitions not only facilitated the widespread dissemination of propaganda but also adapted its content to meet local needs, fostering a unique sense of intimacy and immediacy with the audience.

²²⁵ Zhou, *Cinema off Screen*, 89

²²⁶ Cai Shangxiong 蔡尚雄, “Zai Xin Jiefang Chengshi: Zenyang Zuohao Benzhi Gongzuo 在新解放城市：怎样做好本职工作 [In Newly Liberated Cities: How to Do Your Job Well],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], November 6, 1948., 8

²²⁷ Wu, “Huabei Jiefangjun de Xinwen Sheying Gongzuozhe 华北解放军的新闻摄影工作者 [Press Photographers of the North China Liberation Army].”

The endeavor to reconstruct the spectatorship of wartime propaganda photography is fraught with complexities, primarily due to the overt political intentions that underpin these visual artifacts and the inherent instability of photographic meaning. While it is challenging to ascertain the effectiveness of these images in shaping public perceptions due to the lack of records on deviations from the intended narrative, a forensic approach can yield significant insights. As Roland Barthes suggests in his essay “The Photographic Message,” the photograph is a “message without a code,” inherently polysemous and open to multiple interpretations.²²⁸ In the context of wartime China, the political message was intended to be unambiguous, yet the reception by the audience—how they interpreted and internalized these images—remains an elusive aspect of historical visual media studies. The dynamic and unstable nature of photographic meaning presents significant challenges in the curatorial process of wartime exhibitions. As Ariella Azoulay articulates in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, each photograph forms a tacit agreement among all participants involved—the photographer, the subject, and the viewer—allowing space for varied interpretations based on the principle of equality.²²⁹ This openness, while democratic, renders photographs susceptible to renegotiating power relations, where no single participant can fully dictate their meaning.

This fluidity introduces risks of unintended interpretations, which can diverge significantly from the intended ideological messages, potentially leading to undesired political or ideological consequences. Aware of these risks, the CCP used exhibition guides to ensure that the viewers’ interpretations aligned with the official narrative. These guides in photographic exhibitions, often

²²⁸ Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982)., 196

²²⁹ Ariella Azoulay, Rela Mazali, and Ruvik Danieli, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, First paperback edition (New York, Princeton, New Jersey: Zone Books ; Distributed by Princeton University Press, 2008)., 81–82

volunteers, played pivotal roles in enhancing viewers' understanding of and connection to the images. Their interaction with the audience endowed them with a sense of authority and responsibility over the reception of the images.

During the wartime, the role of exhibition guides was akin to that of film projectionists who provided oral explanations during screenings. Jie Li describes socialist moviegoing as “guerilla tactics” and the projectionists were “‘spirit mediums’ whose bodies and spirits supplanted and supplemented technological media.”²³⁰ Rather than viewing film exhibitions as a cult, Zhou Chenshu sees the physical and creative labor of the film projectionists as indispensable for the propaganda machine to “exercise their agency” on a variety of media interfaces and make “changing and sometimes conflicting messages intelligible.”²³¹ Unlike film projectionists, whose oral and performative narrations during screenings were considered part of a live performance, exhibition guides did not rely on technological prowess but on their authority and interaction with the audience to guide the reception of images. This difference highlights a distinct separation in the roles within different visual media: film projectionists employed their expertise to enhance the filmic experience, often becoming part of the visual spectacle themselves, as Zhou also points out,²³² whereas photographic guides focused more on direct communication and educational engagement.

The decision to use experienced soldiers as guides in photographic exhibitions is particularly telling. As mentioned, photographic exhibition guides, distinct from their counterparts in film,

²³⁰ Li, Jie. 2020. “Cinematic Guerrillas in Mao’s China.” *Screen* 61 (2): 207–29.

²³¹ Zhou, *Cinema off Screen*, 12

²³² Zhou, *Cinema off Screen.*, 69–71

were also often volunteers rather than professionals. These veterans used photographs as pedagogical tools to instruct new recruits, employing personal narratives and military knowledge to anchor the visual representations in lived experiences and strategic learnings. As described in photojournalists Zhang Bingxin and Yuan Ruxun's report of their exhibition experience, "Old soldiers were mobilized to use photographs to educate new recruits about how to utilize terrain, the achievements of heroes, and their brave and cunning use of strategies in accomplishing missions."²³³ This practice not only facilitated a deeper understanding of military tactics but also served to embed a collective ethos within the viewers, fostering a shared sense of purpose and valor. The use of personal stories by veterans personalized the experience, making the abstract notions of valor and strategy tangible and relatable.

The contrast between exhibition guides and film projectionists underscores a fundamental difference in how feedback influenced the respective mediums. Exhibition guides prioritized collecting audience feedback to refine photographic methods and narratives, which makes photography a more agile medium. This contrasts with film projection, where viewer feedback rarely influenced immediate filmic production. Trade journals such as *Photographic Web* documented these feedback mechanisms extensively, showcasing an active effort to tailor content that resonated more effectively with both soldiers and the general populace. As detailed in Li Min's article on the feedback loop, exhibition guides played an essential role in "patiently explaining and collecting reflections and opinions from soldiers, which were then reported for reference and improvement."²³⁴ This responsiveness to viewer engagement is further evidenced

²³³ Zhang and Yuan, "Zhanlan Jingyan Jieshao 展览经验介绍 [Exhibition Experience Introduction]."

²³⁴ Li, "Zhaopian Zenyang Peihe Zhongxin Gongzuo 照片怎样配合中心工作 [How Photos Support the Central Work]."

in Liu Keji's advocacy for individual portraits over group photographs to foster a more personal connection with the viewer, enhancing the identification with the virtues depicted.²³⁵ This strategy aligns with contemporary media theories, such as those explored by Alex Scott, which suggest that visibility and personalization in imagery can exert subtle controls over public perception and behavior, reinforcing societal norms and expectations through individual exemplars.

The responsive nature of this engagement indicates that the swift and agile strategic exhibition of photographs was essential for ensuring that images could effectively "reach the masses." This immediacy was integral to the propaganda strategy of "from the masses, to the masses," designed to solidify the relationship between the photographers and their audiences, both military and civilian.²³⁶ The need for rapid exhibition is stressed with the understanding that the impact of these photographs was significantly heightened when they were displayed promptly. The article by photojournalist Ji Lianbo articulates this by noting the importance of establishing a rapport and trust between photographers and the broader military community.²³⁷ Immediate display was not just about visibility but also about enhancing the credibility and relatability of the photographers. The struggles and frustrations of military photographers, who often felt their efforts were unseen and underappreciated, also reveal the complexities of wartime photography.

²³⁵ Liu Keji 刘克己, "Danren Xiang Paizhao Fa 单人像拍照法 [Single Portrait Method]," *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], June 24, 1948.

²³⁶ Ji Lianbo 冀连波, "Shiyi Lv de Sheying Gongzuo Shi Zenyang Kaizhan Qilai de 十一旅的摄影工作是怎样开展起来的 [How Photographic Work in the 11th Brigade Was Developed]," *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], August 26, 1948.

²³⁷ *ibid.*

The sentiment that photography was seen as a “futureless endeavor” by some within the military underscores the challenges faced by photographers in making their work visible and impactful.²³⁸

Further emphasizing the importance of contextual and temporal relevance, sources such as photojournalist Yuan Ling’s “Reactions to Photo Exhibitions by the Ninth Brigade” critique the timing of displays, with instances where delayed exhibitions led to negligence from viewers. An exhibition of the South Chahar Campaign (May 12–July 18, 1945), for instance, was critiqued for displaying images of soldiers in winter attire during summer, prompting viewers to dismiss them as outdated.²³⁹ Another article states, “Local exhibitions often had greater impact, but transferring these to other units or regions could diminish their significance”²⁴⁰ The immediate and localized exhibition of photographs thus emerges as a fundamental tactic.

The immediacy and authenticity of battlefield photographs allowed viewers to perceive their personal involvement from a distinct perspective, thereby deepening their connection to the broader wartime narrative. Shi Shaohua, later the first photographic director of the Xinhua News agency, posits in one of his talks in 1947 that soldiers, immersed in the tedium and isolation of military life, found solace and significance through the photographs that mirrored their existence. He writes, “Long accustomed to the monotonous life within the troops, soldiers feel a deep sense

²³⁸ Nineteenth Corps Photography Unit 十九兵团摄影股, “Er Bingtuan Shengan Dui Benzhi Gongzuo de Jiantao 二兵团摄干对本职工作的检讨 [II Corps Regent’s Review of His Work],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], February 9, 1949.

²³⁹ Yuan Ling 袁苓, “Jiu Lv Dui Zhaopian Zhanlan de Fanying 九旅对照片展览的反映 [Reflections of the Ninth Brigade on the Photo Exhibit],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], August 26, 1948.

²⁴⁰ “Zuopin de Fabiao Yu Gongzuo Chengji 作品的发表与工作成绩 [Publications and Work Achievements],” *Sheying Wang* 摄影网 [*Photographic Web*], July 1948., 6

of familiarity and meaning when they see their photographs in exhibitions or on wall newspapers.”²⁴¹ Shi also comments on the scarcity of stimulation and entertainment in the soldiers’ lives, which was mitigated by the infusion of visual media. Photographs not only provided entertainment but also imbued soldiers’ routines with significance, allowing them to visually reaffirm the value of their efforts and the impact of their service.

Shi further articulates the emotional resonance evoked by these wartime exhibitions, which often generated robust, favorable responses from audiences familiar with the depicted scenes. Both as a young visitor and later as a photojournalist, Gu Di’s account from the period of intense conflicts during 1943 when he was 14-year-old elucidates this effect. He recalls, “In winter 1943, after devastating raids where thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed, the mood among civilians was somber. During a large exhibition celebrating a supposed victory against these raids, civilians initially questioned the victory itself. Yet, upon viewing over a hundred photographs depicting victorious battles and captures by the Eighth Route Army, the spirits of the viewers transformed. Seeing these images, they felt a surge of confidence and pride in the army’s accomplishments.”²⁴² This was the second time in his life that he visited a photographic exhibition, and he later left records in different occasions that this visit

²⁴¹ Shi, “Tan Yezhan Budui de Sheying Gongzuo: Yi Jiu Si Qi Nian Yi Yue Zai Jinchaji Huabaoshe de Jianghua 谈野战部队的摄影工作——一九四七年一月在晋察冀画报社的讲话 [Talk on the Photographic Work of Field Troops--A Speech at the Jinchaji Pictorial Press in January 1947].”, 121

²⁴² Gu Di 顾棣, Shi dipian ru shengming 视底片如生命 [Treat negatives as if they were your life], interview by Xiaoxia 贾晓霞 Jia and Yuping 尹玉平 Yin, June 25, 2009.. Cited from Gao Qin 高琴, *Touguo xiaoyan de jingtou: 1937-1949 zhongguo zhandi sheyingshi fangtan 透过硝烟的镜头: 1937-1949 : 中国战地摄影师访谈 [Through the Lens of Gunfire: 1937-1949 : Interviews with Chinese War Photographers]*, Di 1 ban, kou shu ying xiang li shi cong shu (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 2009)., 306

left an important impression on him about the effects of photographic exhibitions.²⁴³ His narrative vividly captures how photographic exhibitions could shift public sentiment from despair to empowerment, highlighting the strategic use of visual media to bolster morale and foster a collective sense of achievement.

In the wake of the World War II, the role of photographic exhibitions in China underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a wartime communication tool to a more sophisticated instrument of propaganda and public engagement. As the CCP consolidated control over urban territories, they harnessed enhanced resources, including vast printing facilities. This access facilitated the production of larger-scale photographs and more elaborate documentation of war scenes. These exhibitions became grander and visually arresting, reflecting an intensified endeavor to mold public perception through compelling visual narratives. The strategic utility of photography during this period is articulated in photojournalist Cai Shangxiong's article, "In Newly Liberated Cities: How to Do Your Job Well." Cai elucidates the instrumental role of photography in cultivating public trust within these regions. He observes that overcoming public skepticism necessitated a coordinated approach across various media forms, including photography. He argues, "It is insufficient to simply gather materials; during military control, before the troops are assigned new tasks, we should plan to utilize the propaganda power of photography in conjunction with other departments to quickly familiarize all sectors of society with our policies and dispel their doubts."²⁴⁴ This indicates a shift toward more dynamic and

²⁴³ See, for example, Gu and Wang, "Jinchaji Huabao de Dansheng Yu Fazhan 《晋察冀画报》的诞生与发展 [The Birth and Development of Jinchaji Pictorial]." Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁴⁴ Cai, "Zai Xin Jiefang Chengshi: Zenyang Zuohao Benzhi Gongzuo 在新解放城市：怎样做好本职工作 [In Newly Liberated Cities: How to Do Your Job Well]." 8

interactive uses of photographic exhibitions to foster a sense of familiarity and trust with the CCP's policies. The immediate post-1949 period highlighted the crucial role photographic exhibitions played in stabilizing public sentiment amidst the unrest that often followed liberation. This strategic enhancement of exhibition practices reflects a broader shift in the political landscape and underscores the CCP's increasing sophistication in using visual media to craft and control the public narrative.

The overall deployment and strategic curation of photographic exhibitions in wartime China underscore a nuanced orchestration of image production, curatorial practice, and audience engagement. I demonstrate the critical insights derived from the meticulous reconstruction and analysis of two key wartime exhibitions. These case studies—the Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune and the Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival—provide profound understanding into how visual media, curated meticulously under constrained conditions, orchestrated public sentiment and ideological engagement during a tumultuous period in Chinese history. The Chinese Communist Party's approach actively involved viewers in the construction of meaning, drawing them into a participatory role in the narrative being shaped. The strategic interplay of visual elements with public engagement facilitated by the CCP demonstrates a profound recognition of the power of images to communicate complex messages and evoke deep emotional responses. This approach did not just capture the historical narrative but actively participated in its creation, using carefully curated exhibitions to craft a version of history that supported the CCP's vision of a new social order.

Employing cutting-edge techniques such as super-resolution and image matching, the use of advanced digital tools has allowed for a forensic level of detail in the reconstruction process, revealing not only the images themselves but also their historical contexts, the conditions under which they were displayed, and their reception by contemporary audiences. The integration of digital humanities tools has not only facilitated the restoration of visual data but has also enabled a more nuanced analysis of the ideological undercurrents guiding the wartime exhibitions. This approach emphasizes the potential of digital methodologies to expand the scope of historical understanding, providing a bridge between traditional historiographical methods and modern technological capabilities.

Chapter 4

Training Neophytes and Fitting in with the Collective

This chapter scrutinizes the institutional mechanisms through which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) augmented its propaganda apparatus during the Sino-Japanese War, culminating in the establishment of the Xinhua News Agency and the proliferation of local pictorial magazines post-1949. Jonathan Spence, along with the scholars of the *Cambridge History of China*, have highlighted the Japanese “Mopping-Up” campaigns from 1940 to 1943 as a period of severe adversity for the Eight Route Army in the regions of Jinchaji and the broader military zones of North China. They faced not only existential threats from Japanese military strategies but also endured profound material shortages. Paradoxically, it was under these exacting conditions that the CCP’s photographic propaganda machinery underwent its most rapid development, marked by significant efforts in training photographers and publishing photographic materials.

The focus of this analysis is twofold. First, it probes the impact of the challenging wartime environment—characterized by the constant threat to life and scarcity of resources—on the organization and efficacy of photographic training programs initiated during the “Mopping-up” Campaign. This inquiry extends into an examination of how these adversities mirrored broader trends in modern Chinese art education, particularly in the domains of photographic printmaking and photo development techniques. Second, the investigation addresses the pedagogical strategies employed by the CCP to integrate often minimally educated wartime recruits into competent photographers capable of operating within such a fraught milieu. This segment explores the rapid training methodologies that not only equipped these individuals with technical

skills but also inculcated a specific aesthetic ideology that later influenced socialist photographic practices. This leads to an analysis of the guiding principles of photojournalism during this era. Specifically, it assesses the shifts in pedagogical focus towards “composition” and “investigation and research,” exploring how these priorities were both a product of and a response to the contemporary characteristics of photography.

On the question of the environment and material scarcity, this chapter examines how photographic training groups in the revolutionary base areas of northern China creatively overcame practical difficulties. By examining the interplay between workforce complexities and material shortages, I aim to illuminate how these constraints fostered a hybridity of literary and artistic activities, ultimately facilitating the integration of diverse regional cultures. The creative responses to physical adversity and limited resources not only transformed the material world but also cultivated a collective consciousness among photographers. Drawing on the work of photo historian Thy Phu on Vietnamese photography, I highlight parallels in the practices of socialist photographers across different regimes, thus broadening our understanding of socialist visual culture. This comparative approach prompts a reevaluation of Marxian materialism, engaging thinkers such as Heidegger, Fredric Jameson, and Elaine Scarry to enrich our dialogue on the materiality of culture. In practical terms, the chapter details how rudimentary darkrooms were constructed and film was sparingly used, reflecting the prevalent enthusiasm for hands-on experimentation and pragmatic approaches characteristic of the Republican era. This vernacular industrialism in rural areas, as Eugenia Lean terms it, corresponds with her portrayal of the Republican urban gentry and petty bourgeoisie’s fascination with household experimentation. The emphasis on pragmatism during times of scarcity influenced not only the creative practices

but also the pedagogical approaches within photographic education, contributing to the broader spread of scientific education and the emergence of design as a discipline in modern China.

Furthermore, this analysis explores the pedagogical emphasis on composition and investigation and research in photographic training, which were vital in addressing the practical challenges faced within the base areas. The focus on composition aided trainees in developing an abstracted and holistic understanding of images, a necessity when dealing with low-definition print media, as detailed in Chapter 2. As art historian Craig Clunas notes, this focus has historical precedents in the spread of painting techniques since the Ming Dynasty. This pedagogical approach helped standardize the capture of complex realistic images, facilitating rapid and effective photographic training. Conversely, the emphasis on investigation and research methods resonates with the late Qing and Republic periods' enthusiasm for positivism and factual accuracy. While existing scholarship, like that of Tong Lam on social surveys, predominantly explores positivism's impact on the social sciences, this chapter extends the discourse to its influence on visual arts, asserting the critical role of images in revolutionary endeavors. These methods not only served to document military and political achievements but also laid the groundwork for the development of socialist realist aesthetics. Photographers were required to meticulously plan their shots in collaboration with military and political leaders, thus deepening their social connections and contributing to what I describe as the "emotional turn" in photojournalistic practice.

In sum, this chapter argues that the photographic training programs of the CCP were not merely reactive measures to wartime exigencies but were also proactive efforts in shaping a new visual culture that aligned with socialist ideals. The material and environmental constraints of the

revolutionary base areas were not mere obstacles but catalysts for innovation and creativity in photographic training, leading to significant developments in both the technique and ideology of Chinese photojournalism. These programs were instrumental in the CCP's broader agenda of cultural institutionalization through media, illustrating a complex interplay between art, politics, and education under conditions of war and political upheaval. Photographic training in the CCP's revolutionary base areas transcended the mere technical mastery of the camera, evolving into a profound engagement with the larger sociopolitical context in which the photographer operated. This training emphasized the construction of a narrative that aligned with the ideological goals of the CCP, turning the act of photography into a pivotal element of the revolutionary struggle. As Ariella Azoulay articulates, photographs were not merely images but "evidence of the social relations that make it possible," embedding the photographer and the photographed within a network of mutual responsibilities and identities.²⁴⁵

The transformation of photographers from regional peasants to citizens of a nascent socialist nation was marked by an expansive educational agenda that included exposure to world literature and the natural sciences of the Western world. This broadened intellectual horizon was crucial in fostering a new political identity among photographers, who came to see themselves as active participants in the creation of a new social order. The rigorous training regime, therefore, did more than prepare photographers to document the realities of war; it equipped them to contribute to the construction of a collective identity and a shared revolutionary purpose. The dual role of photography as both a tool of propaganda and a means of practical information dissemination was critical in these contexts. By mobilizing emotions and fostering community solidarity,

²⁴⁵ Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, p. 119

photography complemented other forms of literary and military endeavors, amplifying their impact. It also served pragmatic functions, providing essential information that facilitated the effective operation of both military strategies and political campaigns. In arguing that photography during the CCP's wartime efforts was a multifaceted tool for both propaganda and practical governance, this analysis reveals the medium's capacity to influence and alter not only public perception but also the very identity of those wielding the camera. Through their lenses, photographers shaped and were shaped by the revolutionary ethos, ultimately contributing to the collective narrative of struggle and transformation that characterized this pivotal period in Chinese history.

I. Practical Challenges: Complex Workforce Development and Material Scarcity

When Sha Fei joined the Chinese Communist Party, the Jinchaji Base Area was in its nascent phase of formation and consolidation, having been officially established under the auspices of Nie Rongzhen's 115th Division in January 1938. Endorsement also came from both Chiang Kai-shek and Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan, underscoring a complex interplay of regional and national interests. Concurrently, the establishment of other strategic base areas such as Jinsui, under He Long's 120th Division, and Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu, under Liu Bocheng's 129th Division, marked a significant expansion of Communist influence across northern China, albeit amidst considerable geopolitical challenges. These newly formed bases, while crucial to the CCP's expansion, were plagued by a fundamental dilemma highlighted by Jonathan Spence: the Communist army's control was tenuous at best, characterized more by guerrilla presence than by overt territorial dominance. The CCP's decentralized operations in Jinchaji and other areas meant that their influence was often punctuated by the presence of Japanese forts and a labyrinth of railway lines

that both connected and divided the various bases, making inter-base communication exceedingly difficult. Moreover, the political and military landscape within these regions was exceedingly complex, marked by the coexistence of disparate forces including local militias (like the Red Gun Club, Tianmen Club, Lianzhuang Club), bandits, the Kuomintang, the Japanese army, and various puppet troops (*weijun* 伪军) allied with the Japanese. These groups often pursued divergent and sometimes conflicting goals—some aimed to survive, others to resist Japanese incursions, some to suppress Communist activities, and still others sought to exploit the chaos for personal gain. This intricate mosaic of interests required the CCP to continuously adapt and recalibrate its strategies to maintain and extend its influence.

In this volatile environment, the CCP's ability to forge a united front was not merely a tactical necessity but a survival strategy. Building alliances with neutrals and swing forces provided multiple tactical advantages, such as acquiring critical information, securing supplies, and fostering commerce with local populations. These alliances were instrumental in enhancing the CCP's operational flexibility, enabling it to mobilize a broader spectrum of support and navigate the tumultuous political landscape. This strategic flexibility was also crucial in shaping public opinion, which required careful negotiation among various ideological and political forces to garner support. By creating a shared experience and common cause among diverse groups, the CCP aimed to solidify its base and enhance its legitimacy amidst the prevailing uncertainties. Thus, the party's efforts went beyond mere military engagements, encompassing a broader socio-political campaign that sought to transform social structures and align them with the Communist vision. This approach was pivotal in ensuring the CCP's resilience and eventual dominance in wartime China.

The CCP faced multifaceted challenges in shaping and controlling public opinion, pivotal for maintaining support and legitimacy among local populations and beyond. These challenges were exacerbated by a combination of military conflicts, educational deficits among the rural populace, supply shortages, and internal political dynamics. Firstly, the region was rife with military engagements. Although not the primary battlefield, North China witnessed frequent skirmishes and larger scale conflicts, such as those following the Hundred Regiments Offensive in 1940. These military actions kept the CCP in ongoing confrontation with Japanese forces. Concurrently, the Kuomintang's anticommunist rhetoric accused the CCP of inadequately confronting the Japanese threat, necessitating a robust propaganda effort by the CCP to document and publicize its anti-Japanese activities. Secondly, the demographic composition of the CCP's base areas—predominantly uneducated peasants—posed significant challenges for effective communication and propaganda dissemination. The CCP's propaganda and political departments thus had to develop strategies that transcended conventional literacy barriers, utilizing visual propaganda and oral transmission to foster trust and ideological alignment among the local masses. This effort was also aimed at legitimizing local political movements, thus strengthening the party's grassroots base and ensuring broader regional support. Thirdly, the acute shortage of supplies and the exigencies of war preparation underscored the necessity for the CCP to communicate these hardships to a global audience, seeking international solidarity and support. The establishment of pictorial presses and photography departments played a critical role in this strategy, enabling the dissemination of articles and images that highlighted the struggles and resilience of the CCP-controlled areas. This not only served to garner external support but also helped in shaping a narrative of perseverance and defiance that was crucial for

internal morale. Finally, the internal dynamics within the CCP, particularly the initiation of the Rectification Movement by Mao Zedong in 1942 and his subsequent efforts to consolidate power, had profound implications for the party's propaganda machinery. The publication of Mao Zedong's talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942 marked a significant ideological realignment within the party, emphasizing the role of art and literature in revolutionary struggle. The appearance of Mao's portrait in the *Jinchaji Pictorial* following these developments indicated a strategic effort to strengthen Mao's cult, aligning the party's visual propaganda with his leadership. This period also highlights Mao's concerns over military control in North China, particularly after the Hundred Regiments War, which was perceived as initiated without his full consent.²⁴⁶ The vigilant oversight of Mao over the activities of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* and the Photojournalism Section underscores the strategic importance of these entities in the broader context of Mao's efforts to assert control and unify the party's military and propaganda efforts.

The early strategic decisions of the Communist Party's Eighth Route Army in establishing the Press and Photojournalism Section prior to launching the *Jinchaji Pictorial* are indicative of the approach the CCP took towards the roles of photojournalism and propaganda during the war. Initially, the more pressing need was not for broad-scale propaganda, but for effective news reporting, which underscores the urgency of documenting the ongoing conflict and its impacts. This sequence of developments highlights a tactical prioritization within the CCP's media efforts, where capturing the immediacy of news events was initially deemed more crucial than the production of mass-oriented pictorials. As founding members of the Photojournalism

²⁴⁶ Fairbank and Feuerwerker, *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 13, Republican China 1912-1949. Part 2*. 678

Section, Sha Fei and Luo Guangda frequently traveled between the 115th and 120th Divisions to photograph news events, conduct interviews with important people, and take combat photographs during the first year after the Section was founded in 1939.²⁴⁷ The initial placement of the Photojournalism Section under the Political Department rather than the Military Command further indicates an early recognition of the intrinsic value of photography in shaping internal morale and external perceptions.

The transition towards propaganda became more pronounced with the establishment of distinct photography sections and training programs. For instance, the establishment of a dedicated photography section in the Jizhong Military Region in 1940, and subsequent training initiatives in the summer led by Shi Shaohua, reflect a gradual institutionalization and specialization of photographic functions within the military regions. Sha Fei's formation of the first photography training team in July 1941 and the launch of the *Jinchaji Pictorial* a year later mark significant milestones in this evolution, signaling a shift towards more structured and systematic approaches to both photojournalism and propaganda. In 1944, the Jinchaji military region established a photography training team, and most of its students were from the Beiyue area. In spring 1945, Jireliao Pictorial Press conducted the first photography training class in preparation for upgrading the Jireliao military region to one of the large military regions. Luo Guangda, the director of Jireliao Pictorial Press, taught the class. The narrative of these developments culminates in the activities of the Jireliao Pictorial Press, which further solidified the role of photographic training and publication within the military framework. The brief existence of the only issue of the *Jireliao Pictorial* in July, its transformation into the *Northeast Pictorial*, and the

²⁴⁷ Here the 129th Division led by Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping was farther away from the main force of the 8th Route Army, so the photojournalism section photographed relatively few military and political activities of the 129th Division. The later photojournalism in the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu base area was mainly led by Gao Fan.

relocation to Shenyang in September, illustrate the fluid and adaptive nature of the CCP's propaganda apparatus as it responded to changing military and political circumstances.

This history underscores a key aspect of the CCP's media strategy: the dual function of photography as both a tool for immediate historical documentation and a medium for long-term ideological influence. While photographs taken by the photojournalism section intended for immediate news reporting captured critical historical moments, those curated for pictorial publication and exhibitions were often chosen for their emotional and propagandistic impact, demonstrating the CCP's adept manipulation of media to serve both immediate tactical needs and broader strategic objectives. The distinction between the photojournalism section and the pictorial magazines, thus, reveals a deliberate and strategic bifurcation of media roles within the Communist media ecosystem, tailored to meet different operational and ideological needs.

In the CCP's revolutionary base areas, the integration of diverse personnel—varying widely in class origin, regional, and cultural backgrounds—posed significant challenges. Gu Di's diary from 1944 illustrates how the training camps leveraged literary gatherings and sports events to foster unity among this heterogeneous group. These activities were not merely recreational but functioned as critical social glue, knitting together a collective identity from disparate elements. Photographic training at the base was distinctly influenced by regional expertise, notably from Guangdong, a province advantaged by its coastal access and early exposure to photographic technologies. As pioneers in modern Chinese photography, Cantonese photographers like Sha Fei and Shi Shaohua brought a rich cultural heritage to the base areas. During cultural events, the interaction between these Cantonese photographers and the predominantly Northern-dialect-

speaking soldiers highlighted the cultural diversity within the ranks. An anecdote from one such event where Sha Fei and Shi Shaohua were asked to sing “Combat Production March (*zhandou shengchan jinxingqu* 战斗生产进行曲)” in Cantonese illustrates the cultural interplay—resulting in a humorous, if musically incongruous, rendition that underscored the lighter side of cultural integration.²⁴⁸

Further enriching the cultural landscape of the base areas was the eclectic mix of musical instruments featured at these gatherings. For instance, a photograph (Figure 4.1) captures a moment of musical fusion between East and West, where Gu Di plays the balalaika—a traditional Russian instrument—alongside another photographer on the *jinghu* (京胡), a staple in Beijing opera. The juxtaposition of these instruments at a cultural party not only showcases an unexpected integration of musical traditions but also symbolizes the broader syncretism at play within the base areas. The presence of the balalaika, an instrument uncommon in China,²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Diary of Gu Di on November 7, 1944; Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁴⁹ Its earliest mention in literature may be in Yu Dafu’s “A Drunken Evening in Spring”, where he writes about “the Russian wandering maiden,” who played the dirge of the balalaika in the slums. Xiao Jun, a writer from the northeast of China, was skilled at this instrument. In a record, Xiao Hong’s high school alumnus, Yang Fan, recalls them being in Harbin in the 1930s: “Xiao Jun had a black bow tied around his neck and a balalaika in his hand, playing as he walked, while Xiao Hong was wearing a short flowered coat and a black skirt usually worn by female high school students, but with Xiao Jun’s pointed leather shoes on her feet, looking particularly striking. They sang as they walked, just like wandering musicians.” But the instrument was probably not widely popular, as Mongolian writer Borji Yuanye wrote in his own musical essay that he “thought no one played the balalaika in all of China, except for the Chinese and Russian descendants on the border.” Since the photo was taken in May 1945, it seems likely that the Balalaika came from a batch of instruments hand-made by the Northwest Field Service Corps (*xibei zhandi fuwutuan* 西北战地服务团) during rehearsals of the Yellow River Cantata (*huanghe dahechang* 黄河大合唱) in 1939 in order to find vocals that could match the chorus’s volume. And according to historical sources, the final version of “Yellow River Cantata” was played with an ensemble of *sanxian* (三弦), cello, violin, balalaika, and other instruments. See Borgi Yuanye 鲍尔吉·原野, *Heliu chuanguo zhenyan* 河流穿过针眼 [*The River Passes Through the Eye of the Needle*], Di 1 ban (Huhehaote: Nei Menggu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2012); Wang Xiaoping. *Falling Red: Xiao Hong’s Youthful Past* [M]. 2014; Feng Xizhe, Jing Xiaoqing, editors, *Yan’an Literature and Art Archives - Music of Yan’an*, (Tai Bai Wen Yi Press, 2012)

alongside the distinctly Chinese *jinghu*, is emblematic of the broader effort to blend Chinese folk art with Russian influences, reflecting the internationalist spirit of the Communist movement.

The material scarcity prevalent in the CCP's revolutionary base areas necessitated a pragmatic and innovative approach to photographic training, transforming what was traditionally an intellectually demanding discipline into a physically oriented craft. This shift was crucial in making the technology accessible and manageable for recruits who, like many of the local peasants transformed into soldiers, lacked basic education and were initially intimidated by the sophisticated technology and scientific principles photography seemed to require. Sha Fei's selection of Ji Lianbo, a future Xinhua photographer, exemplifies this challenge. Ji's apprehension about his lack of formal education in physics or chemistry was common among the recruits.²⁵⁰ The training regimen therefore adapted to these constraints, focusing not on the underlying scientific theories but on practical, hands-on skills that could be directly applied in the field. This approach demystified photography, making it accessible to individuals who had never encountered such technology before. The transformation of complex optical and chemical principles into tangible, craft-based actions is illustrated by the innovative teaching methods employed by Chief of Reconnaissance Section Su Jing in 1938. By using sand as a stand-in for photographic chemicals, Su Jing not only circumvented the shortage of actual developing and fixing chemicals but also enabled the trainees to develop a tactile understanding of the processes involved.²⁵¹ This method of teaching was not just about imparting knowledge but also about building confidence and competence through experiential learning. This tactile approach helped

²⁵⁰ Wang, *Wo de fu qin Sha Fei*, 152

²⁵¹ Gao, "Sheying Xunlianban: Zhanshi Sheying Jizhi de Shengcheng" 摄影训练班：战时摄影机制的生成 [Photography Training Course: Mechanism for Wartime Photo Reportage].” 105

bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that recruits could effectively operate photographic equipment and execute photographic processes despite their educational limitations. By grounding the training in the physical realities of the recruits' experiences, the instructors effectively translated the arcane language of science into the familiar language of manual labor and everyday actions. This methodological shift from intellectual discourse to manual skill was not merely a response to material scarcity but also a strategic adaptation to the educational backgrounds of the trainees. It underscores a broader theme in revolutionary training programs: the necessity of tailoring education to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the participants. Thus, the base areas became sites where intellectual challenges were met with innovative responses, transforming potential barriers into opportunities for creative problem-solving and skill development.

These forms of photographic training are in line with Eugenia Lean's description of "vernacular industrialism" in Chen Diexian's case in modern China. In her definition,

"This industrialism was local and 'homegrown' (as opposed to imperialist or foreign), informal and part of China's consumer cultures (rather than state sponsored or located in academia), as well as artisanal in spirit and family run even if eventually situated in factories. It included equal parts material work—to produce ingredients and manufacture gadgets—and knowledge work, including the compilation of how-to columns on manufacturing knowhow in magazines, newspapers, and other publications."²⁵²

²⁵² Eugenia Lean, *Vernacular Industrialism in China: Local Innovation and Translated Technologies in the Making of a Cosmetics Empire, 1900–1940*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7312/lean19348>, 8

Eugenia Lean, influenced by recent studies in the history of science, summarized Chen Diexian's case as an example of vernacular industrialism, and she explored the variety of aspects of vernacular industrialism—formal and informal manufacturing and tinkering, home-grown experiments and active adaptation to global trends as well as the construction of industry and lettered knowledge. Lean reaffirmed the importance of informal industrial work, since ad hoc, workshop-style chemical experiments laid the foundation for industrialization.

In the exigencies of war, the photojournalists stationed in the CCP's revolutionary base areas were compelled to innovate with local materials, transforming the practice of photography from a specialized craft to a more broadly accessible activity. This shift not only democratized the scientific processes involved in photo development but also served as an illustration of China's industrial modernity under constrained conditions. Unlike Chen Diexian, who had access to financial resources and advanced experimental equipment, these photographers operated under starkly different circumstances, often improvising with whatever materials were at hand. During the fourth photography training course held in Jizhong in early spring of 1942, the rudimentary nature of the facilities became strikingly apparent. Liang Mingshuang, the instructor of the course, described the makeshift darkroom: "The negatives and photographic paper were clamped with glass and then the corner of the quilt blocking the windows was lifted, exposing the negatives to daylight."²⁵³ This method, though ingeniously resourceful, also highlighted the vulnerability of such setups: rain could render the darkroom unusable, underscoring the precariousness of their situation.

²⁵³ Liang Mingshuang 梁明双, "Zhanhuo Zhong de Sheying Xunlian Ban 战火中的摄影训练班 [Photography Training Classes in the Midst of War]," *Sheying Shiliao* 摄影史料, no. 8 (May 4, 1989).

Students Dong Qing and Yuan Ling provided further insights into the ingenuity required to maintain a functional darkroom. Their description paints a vivid picture of adaptation: farmer's earthen houses doubled as darkrooms, with sorghum poles supporting quilts that blocked light from doors and windows. The lack of formal photographic equipment was compensated for with a host of substitutes—two pieces of glass, incense or vegetable oil lamps, washbasins, tile jars instead of printing frames, security lights, chemical basins, and even clear pools. “As an alternative to scales, Chinese medicine star scales are used to measure liquid, military small bowls are used to measure liquid, daylight magnifiers are made with broken cameras, and hemp rope used to tie luggage to replace leather rulers.”²⁵⁴ This spirit of resourcefulness extended even to the end of the war in November 1944. The photography training team of the Jinchaji Military Region, lacking a dedicated darkroom, resorted to digging caves and building fires to maintain the necessary temperatures for chemical reactions. This not only ensured the continuity of their work but also symbolized the persistent adaptability and resilience of the photographers.

“The photography training team's darkroom technique class was taught by Song Beiheng, a darkroom technician at the Pictorial Press, who also coached the trainees in practice.

Since the Pictorial Press darkroom was too small and the workload was too busy to allow more time for the trainees to rotate in, the leaders decided to build another darkroom for the team. However, they could not find a ready-made house, so they let the students dig a

²⁵⁴ Liu Keji 刘克己, Dong Qing 董青, and Yuan Ling 袁苓, “Huiyi Kangri Zhanzheng Shiqi Jizhong Junqu Di Siqu Sheying Xunlian Ban 回忆抗日战争时期冀中军区第四期摄影训练班 [Recollections of the Fourth Session of the Photography Training Class in the Jizhong Military Region During the Anti-Japanese War Period],” *Sheying Gongzuo* 摄影工作, no. 4 (October 1951): 14–16.

cave by themselves and borrowed a straw curtain from the villagers to hang up as a door. The cave had no windows, but it was a very good darkroom as long as the opening was blocked. It was already a cold winter, and the chemical solutions were put in the cave overnight and would freeze on the second day. The trainees went up to the mountain to cut wood to make a fire for heating, the temperature increased, but the cave had no ventilation, the smoke got in everyone's eyes, choking them breathless. The trainees simply removed the fire and insisted on learning in the cold cave. Some of the trainees carried bottles of chemical solution in their arms to keep warm. Later, they built a fire just outside the cave, and water was boiled to warm up the medicine. When people could not stand the cold, they went outside the cave to warm up by the fire and then returned to the cave to continue their study. In such a small cave, more than two dozen students learned the techniques of punching and printing. Soon after the students graduated and went to various battlefields, the pictorial agency received photo manuscripts from all over the world.”²⁵⁵

Besides building a darkroom lab on their own, miscellaneous ordinary objects found their usefulness in serving multiple purposes for people at war. “Waste Not (wujin qiyong 物尽其用),” a philosophy of life, characterizes the importance of human agency within the context of photographic training and the way people deal with the uncertainty of the war's outcome.²⁵⁶ Memoirs and recollections from wartime photographers reveal how they ingeniously

²⁵⁵ Gu, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu* 中国红色摄影史录 [*The Historical Record of Red Photography in China*], 148

²⁵⁶ Reminiscent of Song Dong and Wu Hung's 2009 exhibition “Waste Not” at MoMA; See Wu Hung et al., *Wujin Qiyong: Zhao Xiangyuan Song Dong* 物尽其用：赵湘源 & 宋冬 *Waste Not: Zhao Xiangyuan & Song Dong* (Tokyo: Tokyo Gallery + Beijing Tokyo Art Projects, 2009).

repurposed materials that were ostensibly meant for single uses. Zhou Congchu's anecdote about using discarded film to make badges for labor and combat heroes is a vivid illustration of this practice.²⁵⁷ This repurposing not only extended the utility of scarce resources but also imbued everyday objects with new symbolic and practical values, reinforcing the photographers' roles as both creators and conservators. The inventive spirit extended beyond mere repurposing of photographic materials. For instance, film processing technicians including Gu Di, Song Beiheng, and Liu Keji exemplified this ingenuity by converting a canister box, seized from a Japanese soldier, into a camera obscura. This not only allowed them to continue their photographic work despite equipment shortages but also enabled them to conduct experiments, such as taking portraits of the young Gu Di.²⁵⁸ This adaptation was not just a practical solution but also a form of resistance, transforming an object of war into a tool for artistic and personal expression.

“Developing film, printing images, we do not have a special disk and photographic jar, so we used rice bowls instead; to measure the chemicals without a balance, we stitched straw paper with thread to make a steelyard-like scale, with corn and soy beans as weights; no measuring cup, we used the military small bowl or ink bottle instead; no film clip, we used small pieces of glass instead; developing film with no safety lamps, use incense, kerosene lamp instead. If we cannot even find these things, we would light the

²⁵⁷ Zhou Congchu 周从初, “Huiyi Balujun Zong Zhengzhi Bu Dianying Tuan 回忆八路军总政治部电影团 [Recollections of the Eighth Route Army's General Political Department Film Group],” in *Xinwen Dianying: Women Cengjing de Niandai* 新聞電影: 我们曾经的年代 [*Newsreel: The Era We Once Lived In*], ed. Siji 马骥骥 Ma, Di 1 ban (Beijing: Zhongguo Sheying Chubanshe, 2002), 13–15.

²⁵⁸ Gu Di's dairy on Dec. 15, 1944; Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

rag on fire instead. These things could be taken from anywhere, saving money and not having to march with bulky equipment on your back, which was very adaptable to the war environment.”²⁵⁹

These examples underscore a broader theme within the photographic community during the war: the transformation of constraints into opportunities for creativity and innovation. The principle of “Waste Not” thus transcends its immediate practical implications to reflect a deeper, more profound engagement with the material conditions of war. It highlights how wartime photographers were not merely passive recipients of the war’s challenges but active participants in redefining the boundaries of their craft under adversity. This approach to material scarcity and repurposing not only facilitated the continuation of photographic practices but also contributed to a resilient cultural identity that valorized creativity and adaptability.

Despite the fact that the descriptions and specific details mostly come from memoirs or oral interviews with the survivors conducted between the 1970s and the 1990s, their richness still leaves us wondering how these details became part of history through their memories in the face of the approaching Japanese “Mopping up” campaigns. In his book on historical violence and trauma, Michael Berry focuses on the relationship between history and literature, fact and fiction in the process of representing historical violence after traumatic events have occurred. He notes that “works of imagined trauma are in fact no ‘less real,’ or less powerful, in the impact they have on the construction of cultural memory, popular discourse, and the national psyche.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Gu Di 顾棣, “Anshi Gongzuo 暗室工作 [Darkroom Work],” 1974, Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁶⁰ Michael Berry, *A History of Pain*, (Columbia University Press, 2008), 18

Even though the memories may have some deviations due to the passing of time, it is worth exploring the meaning represented by these details because these reminiscent texts are in the hands of those who lived through them and multiple witnesses can corroborate one another.

The fourth photography training course in Jizhong, which Liang Mingshuang, Dong Qing, and Yuan Ling attended, began in the spring of 1942. As each course in Jizhong typically lasted from three to six months, the Japanese launched the “May First Mopping-up” halfway through the fourth course, inflicting heavy casualties upon the CCP army. Only four months after delivering his opening speech on the first day of the training course, Zhang Renhuai, the head of the propaganda department and the political department of the military region who initiated the Jizhong photography training course, died during this military attack, because his unit was besieged by the Japanese.²⁶¹ The trainee Dong Qing himself was shot in the left elbow by a Japanese machine gun during the retreat, while the trainee Liang Mingshuang suffered from a relapsing fever.²⁶² Another trainee, Song Yisheng, who was a darkroom worker in the photography group of the 8th Sub-District of the Jizhong Military Region and a member of the 3rd Photo Training Team in Jizhong, was shot in the leg by the Japanese while he was carrying photographic paper and medicine to break out of the siege. After returning to his village with his photographic materials later, he was eventually forced to amputate his leg due to his injuries.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Shaohua 石少华 Shi, “Liu Jin Baiyangdian —— Kangzhan Huiyi 六进白洋淀——抗战回忆 [Six Advances into Baiyangdian — Memories of the Anti-Japanese War],” *Sheying Wenshi 摄影文史*, 1996, “[Sha fei dang an = Papers of Sha fei], 1933-2011.” 1933. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁶² Gu, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu 中国红色摄影史录 [The Historical Record of Red Photography in China]*. 159

²⁶³ Gu, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu 中国红色摄影史录 [The Historical Record of Red Photography in China]*. 109

This creative and instrumental use of objects around people to overcome the difficulties of material conditions for artistic production under the threat of death can be interpreted in various philosophical ways, especially in relation to Marxism and existentialism. The conceptual framework for this analysis draws heavily from Fredric Jameson's interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy as articulated through a Marxian lens. Jameson's notion of the "pragmatic Heidegger"—a figure deeply engaged with the materiality of tools, work, and production—resonates with the Marxian concept of praxis,²⁶⁴ where the transformation of the tool into "readiness to hand" (*zuhandenheit*) signifies a merger of human action and planning into the object itself. This fusion encapsulates a world where the human subject—now understood as *Dasein*—is inseparably embedded within the world, effectively minimizing the traditional subject-object bifurcation.²⁶⁵ In addition to bridging the rift between subject and object, Jameson sees a distinction between this utopian historical moment and religion. He argues that "it is only that larger, Marxian Utopian drive that can compete with various religious impulses."²⁶⁶ Here, Jameson's critique extends beyond the philosophical to the sociopolitical, positioning Marxism not merely as an ideology but as a mobilizing force capable of rivaling religious fervor in its capacity to spur collective action and innovation.

²⁶⁴ Xudong Zhang and Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *New Literary History* 29, no. 3 (1998): 353–83.

²⁶⁵ Frederic Jameson, "Lun Haidegeer 论海德格尔 [On Heidegger]," trans. Zhu Yu 朱羽, *Wenyi Lilun Yanjiu* 文艺理论研究, no. 5 (2013): 4–20. .

²⁶⁶ Zhang and Jameson, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory."

From this perspective, the practice of photography in the base areas is fundamentally different from the case of Chen Diexian, as described by Lean. Because in Chen Diexian's story, his practices emerge as a commercial branding strategy. As Lean points out, "turning the scrappy and meager resources he had at his disposal into strengths" was intentionally packaged by Chen Diexian as a virtue and entrepreneurial spirit, which eventually helped him achieve business success.²⁶⁷ Although these domestic industrial experiments were inherently difficult to scale up, his small craft experiments and inventions, whose recipes were often published in urban leisure magazines and business writings, popularized the work of these home experiments and inventions and "facilitated the self-cultivation of urban readers or helped define status and taste."²⁶⁸ In other words, the experimental nature of their practical activities became commercially valuable, in contrast to the pursuit of industrial product outcomes, which became secondary.

In contrast, socialist photographic practices during the wartime were the result of necessity, and as soon as the conditions permitted, they still pursued more advanced and complete production conditions. Under socialist cultures, the scarcity felt by the body can manifest itself in a strong reliance on material and natural resources. For example, after the end of the Japanese "Great Mopping-up" in 1943, the Jinchaji Pictorial Press no longer faced great threats to its existence. Although the conditions were still difficult, their working equipment was replaced with professional ones from the spoils of war or purchased from the city: "The working equipment consisted of two daylight enlargers, two printing folders, three 6-inch wash trays, three 12-inch wash trays, one 12-inch cutter, one steelyard-like scale, one balance, one hoof-shaped desk

²⁶⁷ Lean, *Vernacular Industrialism in China*, 17

²⁶⁸ Lean, *Vernacular Industrialism in China*, 16

clock, two basins, one water bottle, two cameras, four pieces of red and black cloth, enlarging paper, photographic paper; and various chemicals were also available.”²⁶⁹ The improved conditions can also be seen in another photograph (Figure 4.2) of the photography training group during the late Civil War. Instructor Shi Shaohua sits in the outer circle of the table, observing the trainees as they do experiments from a distance, while the two trainees standing in the middle are fixing images on the washboard. The table is equipped with scales, drugs, timers, clocks, and tweezers. Clearly, the whole photography training group has been striving for better material conditions.

Reflecting on these historical accounts from the period between the end of the Cultural Revolution and the early years of the Reform and Opening Up provides a critical insight into how narratives around material scarcity and innovation were perceived before the advent of consumer culture in the 1990s. These narratives, which once celebrated the innovative repurposing and recycling of resources, stand as a testament to the values of an era characterized by a profound commitment to communal resilience and ideological purity—the last vestiges of what might be termed China’s Era of High Socialism. This retrospective view not only enriches our understanding of the material conditions that shaped photographic practices but also highlights the transformative impact of socio-political shifts on the media landscape in China.

This was also true during the Vietnam War. As part of her book, *Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam*, on understanding the production of indigenous Vietnamese images during the Vietnam War, scholar Thy Phu describes a similar example of overcoming material scarcity:

²⁶⁹ Gu, *Zhongguo hong se she ying shi lu* 中国红色摄影史录 [*The Historical Record of Red Photography in China*], 148

“This approach of making do is the hardscrabble response of the disadvantaged, of which the refashioning of discarded enemy equipment to protect film and camera is only one of many tactics. Conditions of scarcity fueled innovation. Further innovations arose in the wake of rationed equipment. For example, the technique of piecing together multiple shots (ghép) created a panoramic view without need of a wide-angle lens. Editors would later suture these shots, with the seams and repetition of foreground figures intact, as telling indicators of a makeshift but no less artful style of expediency.”²⁷⁰

Although she argues that this creative use of seemingly unusable tools by the impoverished is not unique to the socialist world—cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s “bricolage” is also an example—she still tries to interpret the phenomenon in a socialist context and perspective:

“...socialist ways of seeing in Vietnam responded to site-specific material conditions, even as its chief architects sought to appeal more broadly to sympathetic antiwar organizations worldwide and depended on Communist Bloc allies for support by importing technical equipment and exporting images. As my interviews with communist photographers reveal, veterans struggled to overcome conditions of scarcity and violence, typical of asymmetric warfare, in order to produce, reproduce, and circulate images. The photographs they made bear the traces of these fraught conditions of production and the demanding contexts of reproduction. As blemished documents, the photographs show

²⁷⁰ Phu, *Warring Visions*, 47

how imperfection is a defining characteristic of socialist ways of seeing in Vietnam, at least as socialism unfolded during the war years.”²⁷¹

Phu proposes an understanding of these practices in terms of the imperfection of manufactured objects, which is seen as the socialist photographer’s effort to transcend imperfect material conditions through personal endeavors to reach a utopian ideal of perfection by imagination.

Despite the absence of formal higher education among those who engaged in photography within the Jinchaji base area, their pursuits transcended mere technical application. These individuals demonstrated a keen interest in the underlying principles of natural science related to their craft, as well as a commitment to disseminating this knowledge widely. On April 25, 1943, Sha Fei founded the “Natural Science Committee of the Jinchaji Pictorial Press,” an initiative aimed at addressing the acute shortage of copper and advancing plate-making techniques crucial for the future production of pictorial magazines. This committee not only mirrored the structural and functional ethos of the “Association of Natural Science Circles in the Jinchaji Border Area,” established in June 1942, but also underscored a broader mobilization of scientific expertise in response to material constraints. The Natural Science Association, initiated by Cheng Fangwu (1897–1984) a year prior, exemplifies a concerted effort to pool regional scientific talents to navigate the exigencies posed by material scarcity. This association drew upon a diverse array of experts—from agriculturalists and medical doctors to radio specialists and mineral metallurgists. Noteworthy among them were international figures such as William Band (1906–1993), Michael Lindsay (1909–1994), Richard Frey (1920–2004), and Dwarkanath Kotnis (1910–1942), who

²⁷¹ Phu, *Warring Visions.*, 37-38

contributed their expertise towards aiding China during this tumultuous period. In these base areas, the association tackled immediate challenges such as drought, pestilence, injuries, diseases, and communication barriers, leveraging a considerable amount of local knowledge to devise innovative solutions. Crucially, while the primary objective of the Natural Science Association was to address urgent practical issues, it simultaneously emphasized the importance of science education in the base areas. This dual focus reveals a nuanced strategy of intertwining immediate problem-solving with long-term educational goals, reflecting a pragmatic yet forward-thinking approach to scientific engagement during wartime.

The scientific endeavors undertaken in the Jinchaji border region were not only a response to the May Fourth Movement's call for "Mr. Science" but also exemplified a broader willingness to harness interdisciplinary knowledge to address urgent issues. The archival photograph taken by Sha Fei at the inaugural meeting of the Natural Science Association in January 1943 (Figure 4.3) is particularly illuminating. It captures Chen Fengtong, president of the association, presiding over the symposium with the presence of Cheng Fangwu, the association's founder. Sha Fei's role as the event photographer, evidenced by multiple photographs from the meeting, suggests his comprehensive involvement. Chen Fengtong articulated the association's mission to mobilize natural scientists and practitioners across the border region to advance the natural sciences in support of the war effort and nation-building.²⁷² This initiative likely inspired Sha Fei to establish the "Natural Science Committee of the Jinchaji Pictorial Press." This committee, a photographic technical society, was aimed at innovating in the face of material shortages,

²⁷² "Ziran Kexue Yanjiuhui Dahui Taolun Tongguo Xiehui Jianzhang Gangling 自然科学研究会大会讨论通过协会简章纲领 [Natural Science Association Conference Discussion on Adopting the Association's Charter and Program]," *Jinchaji Daily Newspaper* 晋察冀日报, June 18, 1942.

particularly in plate-making supplies. It brought together experts in photographic plate making who had significant experience in lithography, stereotyping, and intaglio printing techniques. This confluence of expertise led to the development of an alternative plate-making method that utilized lead sheets, substituting the traditional copper plates.

The genesis and proliferation of design education in China played a crucial role in the formation of the Natural Science Committee in Jinchaji, which notably fostered innovations in printing plate technology. A key figure in this narrative is He Chongsheng, an alumnus of the National Art School in Beiping where he studied art before specializing in photographic plate making at the Beiping Huaiying Photo Printmaking and Plate Making School. This institution, established by Huang Huaiying—who also headed the patterns department at the National Art School and later served as the director of the Printing Bureau of the Ministry of Finance—was pivotal in advancing photo printmaking and plate making technologies. Huang Huaiying’s significant influence extended beyond technological innovation to include educational reforms. His contributions were integral to the department’s evolution into a design school that not only emphasized craftsmanship and aesthetics but also integrated a broad curriculum encompassing printing, dyeing, weaving, ceramics, architecture, metalworking, and woodworking. These disciplines mirrored those taught at the later Central Academy of Crafts and Arts, illustrating a continuity in design education that bridged the Republican period and the rise of Communist China. The organizational changes initiated by Lin Fengmian in August 1916 further underscored this educational evolution. His reworking of the “Organizational Outline of the National Art School in Beiping” delineated the academic durations for various artistic disciplines, reinforcing the structured approach to art education. According to art historian Yin

Shuangxi, the Department of Patterns was notably comprehensive, offering a range of majors that would form the core of future educational endeavors in the arts and crafts.²⁷³

The scant material on He Chongsheng's tenure at the base, coupled with Huang Huaiying's profound admiration and his instrumental role in introducing He to the pattern department of the National Art School in Beiping, hints at a possible alignment with Huang's educational ethos. On May 31, 1941, Huang articulated his vision in an article titled "How to Cultivate Good Talents in the Printing Industry," advocating for a model where technicians, minimally educated to higher primary school level, would benefit from specialized nightly classes and the freedom to engage in research and experimentation on Sundays. This environment, augmented by the presence of guiding instructors and a system of rewards and punishments ensuring job security, set a fertile ground for innovation.²⁷⁴ Within this framework, He Chongsheng pioneered the lead-sheet printing method in the resource-deprived Jinchaji base area and ingeniously modified a portable printing press to withstand the exigencies of Japanese Mopping-up campaigns. These adaptations not only underscore the practical ingenuity fostered by Huang's pedagogical strategies but also highlight the early incorporation of free experimentation and inventive substitution in Chinese design education—a foundational influence on He's later practices.

²⁷³ Yin Shuangxi 殷双喜, "Shiyong Yu Shenmei: Guoli Beiping Yizhuan de Tuanan Xueke 实用与审美: 国立北平艺专的图案学科 [Practicality and Aesthetics: The Pattern Design Department of the National Peiping Art School]," *Zhongguo Meishu Yanjiu* 中国美术研究, no. 1 (2017): 22–28.

²⁷⁴ Huang Huaiying 黄怀英, "Ru He Peizhi Yinshua Gongye de Liangshan Rencai 如何培植印刷工业的良善人材 [How to Cultivate Good Talents in the Printing Industry]," *Zaozhi Yinshua Jikan* 造纸印刷季刊, May 31, 1941.

The experiences of He Chongsheng and Huang Huaiying also suggest that scholars need to treat photography and the publication of albums and pictorial magazines as two different but closely related fields. In his study of the photographic curriculum at the Shanghai Academy of Art (Shanghai meishu zhuanke xuexiao 上海美术专科学校), Gu Zheng found that the school's admission advertisement in 1913 "distinguished between 'Western Photography' and 'Photographic Copperplate.'"²⁷⁵ Gu Zheng speculated, "Perhaps the former is the so-called 'advanced' art photography (called 'fine art photography' in the Republican era), while the latter is a printing and publishing practice that students can acquire to make a living afterward." Thirty years later, however, photography and photo printmaking became so closely related that it is impossible to differentiate between them as art and practice. As a result, artistic style and practical considerations have come together.

Simultaneously, the ideological and educational pursuits in the border areas, particularly through Cheng Fangwu's organization of the New Philosophical Society and the New Educational Research Society, with a focus on the "Dialectics of Nature," represent another facet of the broader intellectual and cultural ferment of the time. These initiatives not only provided a platform for theoretical exploration but also complemented the practical applications being developed in fields such as photography and printmaking, illustrating the dynamic interplay between philosophy, education, and practical science in shaping the intellectual landscape of wartime China.

²⁷⁵ Gu Zheng 顾铮, "Tamen Ruhe Jien Sheying —— Shanghai Meishu Zhuanke Xuexiao Yu Sheying 他们如何接纳摄影——上海美术专科学校与摄影 [How They Embraced Photography - Shanghai Academy of Art and Photography]," *Zhongguo Sheying* 中国摄影, no. 12 (2015): 62–67.

II. Composition Methods

Photographic training, particularly the aesthetic education component, was multifaceted with a pronounced emphasis on compositional techniques—a focus not merely technical but also deeply ideological. In contrast to traditional painting with its emphasis on layout, the emphasis on composition in modern art often implies an orderly relationship among different visual elements of the picture. The order may be a reflection of how we perceive the external world and its power relations. In the theory of traditional Chinese painting, composition is one of the key elements, but it does not play a decisive role. It was the brushwork and strokes that were highly regarded as aesthetic elements. Through the examination of instructional materials, such as Wu Yinxian's and Zheng Jinggang's textbooks and class notes, it becomes evident that the structuring of images is paramount. Interestingly, there was also an emphasis on image composition in many textbooks on modern art. Pan Tianshou, for example, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Regarding the Composition Issue* (*guanyu goutu wenti* 关于构图问题) in 1963 and 1964. Goutu, or composition, is an image's form and structure. In theories of traditional Chinese painting, Gu Kaizhi raised the concept of “laying out the outward appearance of things” (*zhichen bushi* 置陈布势) in the Eastern Jin Dynasty; during the period of the Southern Dynasties, painting critic Xie He defined the fifth in the six principles of Chinese paintings as “‘Division and Planning’ (*jingying weizhi* 经营位置) or placing and arrangement, corresponding to composition, space and depth.”²⁷⁶ Pan Tianshou used “Goutu (构图)” and “Buju (布局)” interchangeably. Specifically, he describes it with three pairs of opposing concepts: open and closed (*kaihe* 开合), void and solid (*xushi* 虚实), sparse and dense (*shumi* 疏密). Pan criticized the literati paintings of the Ming and Qing dynasties for focusing primarily on the handling of

²⁷⁶ Michael Dillon, *China: A Cultural and Historical Dictionary* (Routledge, 2013). 353

ink brushes rather than the compositions (*Gezhi* 格制) of the images. Thus, these compositions concentrate on the relationship between visual elements within the picture rather than just focusing on the brushwork details. Pan Tianshou's textbook on traditional Chinese painting and Wu Yinxian's book on photographs also incorporate Western geometric concepts, such as triangular design and parallel lines, as well as structural principles from traditional Chinese paintings. The integration of these diverse educational principles into the curricula of photographic training not only highlights a bridging of Eastern and Western art forms but also illustrates a shift in the pedagogical focus from mere technical proficiency to a more profound engagement with the ideological and cultural underpinnings of composition.

The compositional techniques of photographs and traditional Chinese paintings manifest distinct philosophical and practical approaches to visual representation. In photography, particularly under the constraints of wartime conditions, the composition is confined primarily to the act of framing. Photographers adjust their compositions by moving their cameras or altering the zoom on their lenses, thereby engaging in a process of discovery rather than creation. This necessity to reconcile the photographer's subjectivity with the objective realities of the external world presents a unique challenge, especially in hazardous environments where achieving both compelling content and form is markedly difficult.

In contrast, traditional Chinese paintings, especially landscapes, employ intricate compositions to articulate complex spatial relationships. These artworks are less constrained by the immediate reality and more by the painter's control over brush and color, allowing for a more fluid expression of both the tangible and the intangible. In this way, traditional art can delve into

layers of meaning and interpretation that photography, especially journalistic photography, typically does not attempt. Journalistic photography, in its pursuit of clarity and immediacy, often opts for simpler compositions that convey unambiguous messages. The essence of this approach is encapsulated in Zheng Jingkan's "Preliminary Photography," where he advises photographers to focus sharply on the subject, aiming for a representation that is "practical and clear" and immediately comprehensible to the viewer.²⁷⁷ This directive underlines a fundamental aspect of photographic training: the imperative for photographers to approach their art with preconceived notions about what they wish to communicate, thus prioritizing directness over complexity.

Photographic training, as described by Zheng, requires photographers to enter the field with clear, preconceived notions of what they wish to capture. This preparation ensures that the essential message of the photograph is conveyed succinctly, adhering to the principle that simplicity in composition enhances the viewer's ability to grasp the depicted scene or subject instantly. This philosophy reflects a pragmatic approach to visual storytelling in photography, contrasting sharply with the more interpretive and layered compositions characteristic of traditional Chinese painting. This divergence highlights the adaptive and situational nuances inherent in photographic practice, particularly in dynamic and unpredictable environments such as those encountered in wartime journalism.

²⁷⁷ Zheng Jingkan 郑景康, "Sheying Chubu 摄影初步 [Preliminary Photography]," 1942, Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University

While the theoretical underpinnings of photographic composition might appear intricate, instructional resources have effectively simplified these concepts for broader accessibility. An illustrative example is found in the pamphlet *General Knowledge of Photojournalism* (新闻摄影常识), which distills composition into four fundamental guidelines: avoid centering the subject, refrain from positioning the horizon line in the middle, distribute space evenly, and maintain a forward gap in front of figures.²⁷⁸ These principles offer a structured approach to composition, providing clear, actionable advice that demystifies the process for novice photographers.

However, the pamphlet also cautions against rigid adherence to these rules, advocating for a dynamic engagement with composition, angle, line, and light to infuse images with vibrancy and life. This recommendation underscores the balance between foundational guidelines and the creative interpretation necessary for compelling photojournalism. The textbook further encourages students to draw inspiration from a variety of visual sources, including photographs and woodcuts, to enrich their understanding of compositional techniques. Yet, initial encounters with these principles often begin with straightforward, practical applications, as evidenced by the anecdote of a student from the Jizhong base. Liang Mingshuang's first significant lesson in photography came from Shi Shaohua, who emphasized the importance of leaving a proportional gap in front of a moving subject — in this case, a cow pulling a plow — to enhance the sense of

²⁷⁸ Luo Guangda, Published in May 1945 by the Political Department of the Jireliao Military Region, and printed by the Jinchaji Pictorial Press Branch. Printed by lithography, 300 copies in total. Luo Guangda 罗光达, "Xinwen Sheying Changshi 新闻摄影常识 [General Knowledge of Photojournalism]," in *Luo Guangda sheying zuopin · Lunwen xuanji* 罗光达摄影作品·论文选集 [*Luo Guangda's Photographic Works · Selected Essays*], ed. Futang 靳福堂 Jin (Shenyang: Liaoning Meishu Chubanshe, 1995), 126–34.

movement and direction in the image.²⁷⁹ The pedagogical emphasis on simplified compositional rules reflects a broader strategic approach within photojournalism training. This approach was increasingly valorized in the post-revolutionary period, becoming a hallmark of what was considered a revolutionary photographic paradigm. By instilling these foundational principles, instructors aimed to equip photographers with the tools necessary to capture reality effectively while also encouraging creative interpretations that resonate with the ideological and aesthetic values of the new era. This blend of simplicity and flexibility in teaching composition not only facilitated the practical training of photographers but also contributed to the development of a distinctly revolutionary style in Chinese photojournalism.

The prioritization of composition in aesthetic education, particularly in the context of 20th-century pictorials, is linked to practical considerations tied to the technological and cultural milieu of the era. Pictorials, as the dominant medium for image dissemination, were influenced by the prevailing quality of printing technology. This technological constraint often led to a preference for rich compositional variety over pictorial detail, as the former was less dependent on high-resolution print capabilities. Composition, therefore, emerged as a crucial metric for assessing the aesthetic value of works, especially in environments where print quality was compromised, such as the presses operated by local carpenters described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. These presses often produced images of markedly low quality, necessitating a focus on composition to transcend the limitations imposed by poor resolution.

²⁷⁹ Liang, “Zhanhuo Zhong de Sheying Xunlian Ban 战火中的摄影训练班 [Photography Training Classes in the Midst of War].”

Socialist publications, in particular, underscored the unity of form and content, advocating for compositions that mirrored the ideological content of the imagery. In the context of low-resolution magazines, effective composition offered a means to project visual diversity and richness, essential for engaging and influencing the viewer. Common motifs such as silhouettes of soldiers or the dynamic lines of troops navigating mountainous terrains not only adapted well to the medium's constraints but also visually reinforced the concept of solidarity among the masses and conveyed a sense of revolutionary zeal. These compositions utilized geometric shapes and arrangements to symbolize and express collective unity and strength. Moreover, in certain instances, the imperative to foreground human elements led to a deliberate sacrifice of other compositional aspects, such as perspective. An example of this can be seen in Figure 4.4, where the linear perspective of the trees is omitted in the publication to focus attention on the people in the foreground.²⁸⁰ This choice highlights a strategic use of composition to emphasize the narrative and thematic priorities of the image, aligning with the broader propagandistic goals of socialist realism.

The transformation in the accessibility of Chinese painting, driven by the advent of low-quality printing media, represents a significant cultural democratization. Previously, paintings were predominantly a luxury confined to the elite echelons of society—bureaucrats and the gentry. However, with the development of printing techniques, notably woodblock printing, these artworks became accessible to a broader audience, including the lower classes. This shift is crucial in understanding the evolution of visual consumption in Chinese society. Craig Clunas's analysis in *Chinese Painting and its Audience* highlights this pivotal change through the example

²⁸⁰ Figure 4.4 was found by the computer vision pipeline stated in chapter 1.

of *Master Gu's Painting Album* (顾氏画谱), published in 1608. This album, also known as *Album of Paintings by Famous Masters of Successive Dynasties* (历代名公画谱), compiled by Gu Bing, an obscure court painter of the Ming Dynasty, illustrates a transformative approach to traditional Chinese painting. Despite his lower social status, Gu Bing's work democratized the appreciation of art by reproducing the ink paintings of 106 masters in a more consumable woodblock print format. Clunas notes that this method simplified complex artistic expressions into a "simple and easily graspable formula," aligning closely with modern compositional techniques emphasized in photographic training and advocated by modern painters like Pan Tianshou.²⁸¹

Clunas suggests that the album aimed to convey the essential qualities of each master's style and subject matter,²⁸² but the limitations of woodblock printing often obscured the finer details of brushwork, instead foregrounding the composition and layout as the primary conveyors of artistic intent. This adaptation highlights how the medium of print influenced the emphasis on composition over detailed brushwork, making the artistic content more accessible and understandable to a wider audience. The continuity of this emphasis on composition from Gu Bing's era to modern photographic education reflects a longstanding appreciation for structured visual arrangement that transcends mediums and epochs. This historical lineage underscores the enduring relevance of composition in enhancing the aesthetic quality of visual works, a principle that has adapted to the constraints and opportunities of each new medium, including photography.

²⁸¹ Clunas, *Chinese Painting and Its Audiences*, 74

²⁸² Clunas, *Chinese Painting and Its Audiences*, 29

The urgency of developing a swift and effective training regimen for photographers was propelled by the necessity to equip students with the skills to produce immediately publishable photographs. In this context, the adoption of abstraction—a pivotal strategy in modernist visual arts—served as a critical methodological approach. This abstraction did not merely pertain to the aesthetic form but was deeply intertwined with the technicalities of photographic machinery and the perceptual experiences of the viewer. The emphasis on composition thus emerged not only as a practical focus but also as an ideological tool within the framework of socialist cultural policies, which prioritized “organization and processing” as foundational principles.

The democratization of aesthetics through the camera represented a significant shift, where the technology itself became a formative influence on aesthetic norms and practices. This process of aesthetic equalization is not isolated; it reciprocally reshapes the understanding and application of aesthetics, embedding it within the everyday cognitive processing of visual information. The emphasis on composition in photography under socialist regimes can be seen as part of a broader abstract logic that redefines cognitive perceptions of reality. Unlike in traditional art history, where composition involves an interplay of various elements within an artwork to create harmony or convey a narrative, in photography, composition is often discussed in terms of geometric logic—how shapes, lines, and forms align within the frame to guide the viewer’s perception and interpretation.

This focus on geometric composition aligns with the increasing influence of scientism in modern China, where scientific approaches and methodologies began to permeate various aspects of culture and society, including the arts. The use of composition in photography, therefore, became

a means to infuse a scientific rigor into artistic creation, paralleling the contemporary shifts towards empirical and rational modes of thinking. Additionally, the incorporation of maps in pictorial magazines to illustrate changing battle dynamics during wartime further exemplifies this blend of artistic and scientific visualizations, emphasizing a structured, analytical approach to both art and information dissemination.

The contrast between the simplicity or complexity of photographic compositions and the elaborate narrative structures often found in religious paintings highlights the diverse roles composition plays across different artistic genres. In photography, particularly within the context of rapid training and publication needs, the simplicity of composition often serves the practical purpose of clear and effective communication, whereas in religious and historical art, complex compositions provide depth and narrative richness. This dichotomy underscores the adaptive nature of composition as a concept and practice, reflecting its evolution in response to technological advancements, cultural shifts, and ideological imperatives.

III. Investigation and Research Methods

In the milieu of wartime China, the praxis of “investigation and research” (*diaocha yanjiu* 调查研究) was pivotal in photojournalistic training workshops. These sessions went beyond elementary photographic techniques, nurturing an advanced comprehension of the medium’s specificity. This education was crucial, as without it, the neophyte photographers’ grasp might have remained confined to mere portraiture or landscape photography, lacking an awareness of the medium’s potential for immediacy, comprehensiveness, and authenticity. Shi Shaohua’s treatise, *A Study of the Method of Collecting Materials for Photojournalism*

(新闻摄影收集材料方法的研究), published on October 10, 1945, articulates this shift from a mere empirical inductive method, which typically demands a thorough examination of all facets of an event prior to drawing conclusions.

His methodological diverges from mere empiricism, which advocates for an inductive approach requiring thorough examination of all elements tied to an event before formulating any conclusions. According to Shi, proper research necessitates the formulation of a detailed shooting plan, involving consultations with the general office or other pertinent military departments, participation in meetings, and engagement with editorial content in Party newspapers to align with the ideological directions of the Party.²⁸³ Such preparatory steps were not just procedural but were instrumental in fostering social connections within the military and discerning the interests of the masses, thus promoting a sense of collective subjectivity through photojournalism.

Furthermore, the linguistic choices in Shi's pamphlet reflect the pervasive influence of Marxism across military education during the war. He delineates three fundamental principles of shooting: Exemplary, Central, and Characteristic, mirroring Ai Siqi's Marxist dialectical framework of identifying "The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of the Contradiction." This alignment not only reinforced the doctrinal consistency expected of wartime journalists but also imbued their photographic practice with a deeper ideological purpose, positioning

²⁸³ Shi Shaohua 石少华, "Xinwen Sheying Shouji Cailiao Fangfa de Yanjiu —— Xinwen Sheying Cankao Ziliao Zhi Er 新闻摄影收集材料方法的研究——新闻摄影参考资料之二 [A Study of the Method of Collecting Materials for Photojournalism — The Second Reference Material for News Photography]," ed. Qixian 赵启贤 (penname 亦一) Zhao, October 10, 1945, Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial.

photojournalism as a critical tool for mass mobilization and ideological reinforcement. Thus, the training of photojournalists was deeply intertwined with the broader strategic objectives of propaganda and mass engagement, highlighting the dual function of photography as both an artistic and a political tool within the context of Chinese socialist frameworks.

The investigative and research-oriented approach to photojournalism during wartime China was emblematic of a broader historical movement that valorized images as vehicles of empirical and informative evidence. Tong Lam's scholarship elucidates this interest, identifying an early twentieth-century Chinese fascination with "the social fact as a new source of truth."²⁸⁴ Lam articulates that while traditional investigations often hinged on field research and direct observations, the period marked a shift towards quantifying social realities into numerical data, underscoring a novel empirical pursuit. In the context of the Chinese Communist Party's use of photography, this methodological inclination was not merely about recording the visible but was deeply embedded in the transmission of information through photographic communication, effectively utilizing images as instrumental tools within the political machinery of the CCP.

Photography's role in this framework was dual: it served both as a medium of direct empirical evidence and as a crucial component in military communication strategies. This dual functionality is well documented, both in official records of the photographic departments and in more personal narratives, such as the diaries of photographers engaged in military service. For instance, the diary of Gu Di, a notable figure in this realm, reveals insights from 1944 where Shi Shaohua emphasized the strategic importance of visual media, advising that "the Pictorial Press

²⁸⁴ Lam, *A Passion for Facts*. 2

should develop greatly and strengthen the ties with the photographic cadres of the military divisions.”²⁸⁵ Shi’s advice underscores the imperative to not only enhance photographic operations but also to ensure effective communication and liaison work within the military context. Such directives highlight the integral role of photography in disseminating ideological narratives and fortifying military cohesion, positioning photojournalism as both a methodological approach and a tactical tool in the broader schema of CCP’s governance and information management strategies.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War, the role of photography was markedly integrative, serving as an auxiliary instrument to bolster other political and cultural sectors. Zheng Jingkang’s 1942 treatise, *Preliminary Photography* (*Sheying chubu* 摄影初步), elucidates this notion, positioning photography not merely as a standalone artistic endeavor but as a pivotal supportive tool. Zheng notes, “In addition to professional photographers collecting materials for various records in response to various needs, photography can also complement and support the development of the work of other departments, and serve as a reference.”²⁸⁶ This perspective underscores the necessity of embedding photography within a broader investigatory and collaborative framework. Zheng’s assertion that “No investigation, no right to speak” highlights the imperative for photographers to engage in thorough research and investigation, ensuring that their work is substantively informed and contextually relevant.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, Zheng advocates for increased communication between photographers and other cultural and artistic sectors,

²⁸⁵ Diary of Gu Di on December 14, 1944; Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁸⁶ Zheng, “Sheying Chubu 摄影初步 [Preliminary Photography].”

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

emphasizing the interconnectedness and mutual enrichment of diverse artistic disciplines.²⁸⁸ This approach not only enhances the aesthetic dimensions of photography but also integrates it more deeply into the fabric of cultural and political operations.

The educational strategies employed by the CCP in training photographers also mirrored these utilitarian and integrative approaches. The pedagogical focus was not solely on developing technical proficiency but also on fostering a robust sense of community and allegiance to the political cause among photographers, particularly those from peasant backgrounds. Yang Guozhi's reflections from a 1947 experience sharing conference illuminate this aspect vividly. He discusses the transformative impact of photography on his connections with the local community and the military, illustrating how the medium served as a bridge, reducing feelings of isolation among photographers and enhancing their integration into the collective socio-political framework.

At that time, we kept going to the troops to collect materials, especially during the battles, and they were afraid that we would add to their problems by going to collect materials, so they always discouraged us from participating in the battles beforehand. Even if we sometimes joined them, they didn't seem to welcome us. At that time, some people called our photography unit a "photo studio", thinking that we were only taking pictures of people's heads. Despite such difficulties, we were not discouraged at that time. In terms of their lack of understanding and knowledge, we often took the initiative to explain to

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

them, but more importantly, we made more efforts to do our work and correct their perception of this work with actual results.²⁸⁹

As can be seen from this, Yang Guozhi pointed out that photography work in the troops encountered various difficulties: for example, when the photographer did not understand the political and military situation, he or she would not be able to photograph the battle effectively, and could even hamper military operations. Secondly, both the soldiers and the local people had a fixed understanding of photography, equating it simply with portrait photography taken in photo studios. Thirdly, many cadres of troops at that time still could not pay attention to photography work, and even “proposed ‘abolishing photography work’ at the field political work conference.”²⁹⁰ Therefore, these difficulties required photography students to pay attention to the task of investigation and research, and to participate and cooperate with the work of their subjects only when they fully understood what they were doing. Historically, this sense of cooperation has led photographers to establish themselves as auxiliary figures in the Communist Party’s cultural and artistic system, deeply engaged in revolutionary work.

The investigative approach emphasized communication with troops’ cadres and leaders, which did not necessarily undermine the power of literary artists. Failure to make such communication

²⁸⁹ Sha Fei 沙飞 et al., “1947 Nian 1 Yue Sheying Gongzuo Zhe Jingyan Jiaoliu Hui Jilu 1947 年 1 月摄影工作者经验交流会记录 [Record of the Photographers’ Experience Exchange Meeting in January 1947],” ed. Lian 刘廉 Liu, January 3, 1947, Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

²⁹⁰ Sha Fei 沙飞 et al., “1947 Nian 12 Yue Yezhanjun Sheying Gongzuo Huiyi Jilu 1947 年 12 月野战军摄影工作会议记录 [Record of the Field Army Photography Work Meeting in December 1947],” ed. Qixian 赵启贤 Zhao, December 10, 1947, Papers of Sha fei, 1933-2011 沙飞档案, hyl00030. Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Library, Harvard University.

could also stifle journalism and thus discourage the motivation of the artists. For example, in 1938, the Leftist League called for the organization of “anti-war literary working groups,” which they called “pen troops,” to report front-line war news and mobilize war propaganda. Members of the Anti-War Literary Working Group included Bian Zhilin, He Qifang, and Sha Ting. Jiang Tao points out that the Anti-War Literary Working Group writers often felt like transients. Although they were among the troops, they did not understand the war situation and political trends, so they always felt like bystanders and could not participate in the war. “We were two animals fed by the 120th Division,” said Sha Ting, “because we had no specific tasks nor knowledge of the enemy’s situation, so we ate, drank, slept and marched haphazardly every day.” Even though He Qifang once volunteered to leave the commanding office and go to the political department to do propaganda work, “the results were not satisfactory.”²⁹¹

Then how far did this investigation and research need to go? Shi Shaohua provided guidance in his pamphlet titled “Methods of Collecting Materials for Photojournalism”: First, the photographer should try to collect materials as comprehensively as possible, depending on the assignment. In this textbook, Shi Shaohua listed in detail the specifics of what the photographer should know in each of four scenarios: battle reports, production reports, interviews with heroic and exemplary figures, and conference reports. A successful photographer should capture the characteristics of the events and demonstrate the contradictions and characteristics of their core figures. In order to collect these materials, the photographer must get in touch with the central

²⁹¹ Jiang Tao 姜涛, “Dongtai de ‘Huakuang’ Yu Lishi de Guangying —— Yi Kangzhan Chuqi Bian Zhilin de ‘Zhandidi Baogao’ Wei Zhongxin 动态的 ‘画框’ 与历史的光影——以抗战初期卞之琳的 ‘战地报告’ 为中心 [The Dynamic ‘Picture Frame’ and the Light and Shadow of History — Centered on Bian Zhilin’s ‘Wartime Reports’ from the Early Period of the Anti-Japanese War],” *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, no. 5 (2019): 7.

figure who led the event, which in the army means in particular “the staff organ and the department with which the central work of a certain period is most closely connected.” Secondly, the photographer needs to write a “synopsis of the photo report” after completing the collection of materials. This synopsis should be resubmitted to the responsible leader for review in order to correct and supplement the photographic outline, and so the person responsible can fully comprehend the photographer’s work. Lastly, when it comes to the actual shooting, the photographer often still needs “a person who is familiar with the local situation and is more interested in photography” as his or her “guide and assistant”. At all stages of a photo story, the photographer requires close communication and liaison with military and political departments. The photographers’ involvement in this activity provides them with the opportunity to establish a more personal and interpersonal connection with the military and political branches.

As part of the photography training course, trainees are made aware that their photographic practice can impact the soldier and society in a positive way. Hearing about the experiences of photographers is one of the learning components of the Photography Training Course.

Photographer Yang Guozhi shared his experience during one session about how he would proactively use his photographic outcomes to gain the understanding and recognition of soldiers:

For example, when we participated in a battle and photographed some material, we seized the opportunity to organize and print this part of the material as soon as possible and sent it to the troops as part of a mobile mini-exhibition. In vivid and concrete pictures, they could see our soldiers’ heroic deeds in battle, the wretched condition of the enemy when they were defeated, and the number of weapons we captured. We not only

let the soldiers know what kind of victories we had won, but we also raised their fighting spirits and encouraged them to fight. Eventually, after doing this for a while, the soldiers began to understand us photographers and no longer saw us as a photo studio. After we went to the company and participated in the battle with them, the attitude toward us also completely changed over, and we got a lot of assistance with our photography work.²⁹²

Photographer Shi Shaohua emphasized the instrumental role of photography in disseminating situational awareness within the military hierarchy, particularly regarding the remote areas of the Jizhong Binhai District. His photographs, accompanied by detailed reports, served as direct conduits of information, allowing military leaders to maintain a strategic overview of less accessible regions.²⁹³ This function of photography as a reporting tool underscores its vital role in the operational dynamics of the military, facilitating a continuous flow of information from the periphery to the central command structures.

This integrative role of photography was further emphasized in the training programs designed for wartime photojournalists. The acknowledgment that successful photographic work was contingent upon the cooperation of both troops and local civilians highlights the collaborative nature of wartime photography. During periods of intense conflict, such as the “Great Mopping-up,” the photographers’ reliance on local communities and military units was not just a logistical necessity but a strategic imperative. In this context, Liang Mingshuang notes the challenges faced during the fourth photography training course in 1942, a time when the Japanese army

²⁹² Sha et al., “1947 Nian 1 Yue Sheying Gongzuo Zhe Jingyan Jiaoliu Hui Jilu 1947 年 1 月摄影工作者经验交流会记录 [Record of the Photographers’ Experience Exchange Meeting in January 1947].”

²⁹³ Ibid.

intensified its efforts against the Jizhong base area with a formidable concentration of 50,000 troops. In response, photographers were strategically embedded within various farming families, highlighting the integration of military and civilian spheres in the collective resistance.

That is, according to the instructions of the superiors to recognize the land owners as adoptive parents; and have the adoptive mother change our names and have one character adopt their family members of the same generation. We were also taken to relatives' homes several miles away by some adoptive parents, to identify them as their own relatives, so that someone could come out to rescue the village after it was surrounded. Comrade Shi Shaohua lived in the house of the late village chief Zhang Shuangou, so he called his old mother as his adoptive mother. I was assigned to Zhang Zhenjiang's family and honored this old couple as my adoptive parents. During our time at the adoptive-mother's house, we carried water, swept the yard, and worked in the field. We also became very close to each other. We learned to speak the dialect of Anping right away. In accordance with local peasant customs, we also changed into civilian clothes and wrapped ram's belly handkerchiefs around our heads. The enemy can easily detect the white marks left by soldiers with hats on their foreheads. Furthermore, we worked in the fields and wore calluses on both hands. All these measures were taken to help us become crop-dusters as soon as possible, so that we could confuse the enemy during anti-'Mopping-Up' campaigns.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Liang, "Zhanhuo Zhong de Sheying Xunlian Ban 战火中的摄影训练班 [Photography Training Classes in the Midst of War]."

The military incursions by the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War inadvertently facilitated the CCP penetration into the tightly-knit fabric of rural society. Typically, the traditional networks within these communities were resistant to external influences, characterized by rigid and enduring social structures. However, the existential threat posed by the conflict opened a precarious gateway for revolutionary ideologies to take root.

Historical analyses, such as those by Prasenjit Duara, reveal that the early 20th century was marked by a complex interplay of political forces that challenged the construction of a unified collective identity, particularly in the hinterlands of the North China Plain. Duara specifically notes that the overreach and exploitative practices of state power during this period eroded the foundational cultural connections that had historically sustained these communities.²⁹⁵ The push towards modernization often disparaged and destabilized local cultural traditions, leading to a disengagement of local elites who were traditionally the custodians of village welfare. In their absence, local strongmen exploited the ensuing power vacuum, often acting as predatory intermediaries rather than community stewards. This erosion of traditional safeguards and the rise of coercive local figures exacerbated the villagers' disillusionment with the capabilities of a central authority, thereby increasing their receptiveness to alternative governance models. In this context, the photography training programs and the embedded photographers served as more than just documentarians of conflict; they became agents of ideological dissemination and community engagement, effectively capturing and communicating the transformative impact of the war on traditional rural life and the emerging revolutionary consciousness. This strategic use of visual documentation helped to solidify the CCP's presence and influence in regions

²⁹⁵ Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*.

previously governed by insular and impermeable social structures, marking a significant shift in the political and cultural landscape of rural North China.

While the CCP adeptly used nationalist rhetoric and class-based revolutionary discourse to mobilize the peasantry, the inherent personal concerns of rural individuals—such as familial attachments, existential uncertainties, and the fear of mortality—persisted as significant barriers to their broader engagement. Historian Qi Xiaolin illuminates these personal anxieties often deterred peasants from fully committing to the revolutionary cause or military participation.²⁹⁶ In addressing the political vacuum and the individualistic tendencies that conflicted with collective revolutionary goals, the CCP's strategy involved more than just ideological persuasion; it required an empathetic and psychologically nuanced approach to community engagement. This perspective aligns with Nicole Elizabeth Barnes' analysis of the role of emotional labor in fostering community bonds. In her study of female healthcare workers in wartime Chongqing, Barnes highlights the critical importance of building emotional relationships as a foundational element of social cohesion and national solidarity. She suggests that understanding the formation of a national community during tumultuous times necessitates a focus on interpersonal relationships as a primary axis, with the relationship to the state being secondary.²⁹⁷

In this light, the CCP's strategy for overcoming the political vacuum and aligning individual interests with collective goals involved a significant component of emotional engagement and psychological understanding. The party's emphasis on "investigation and research" was not only a methodological approach for gathering information but also a critical tool for building empathy

²⁹⁶ Qi, *Dang bing.*, 445

²⁹⁷ Barnes, *Intimate Communities.* 5

and trust. By deploying photographers and other cultural workers into the heart of these communities, the CCP was able to document, understand, and ultimately address the specific needs and fears of the peasants. These efforts likely involved not only capturing the economic and social conditions through photography but also engaging in dialogues and building relationships that helped bridge the gap between the party's objectives and the peasants' personal concerns.

Within the context of Chinese photojournalism, the intertwined dynamics of investigation, research, and the photographic medium itself have played critical roles in the modernization of Chinese culture. This modernization has notably blurred the traditional boundaries between the subjects who create and the objects depicted in realist art, challenging the clear demarcation once observed in classical realism. The emergent practice in photojournalism thus posits a complex nexus among knowledge, creativity, and politics—a trifecta that is difficult to harmonize but essential for the institutionalization of culture. The assumption of truth in knowledge relies heavily on the authenticity and reliability of observation and recognition, underpinned by a foundational trust in the methodologies employed to gain such experiences. However, when this trust is compromised, whether in the accuracy of observation, the integrity of creative expression, or the political motivations behind the dissemination of information, the effectiveness of knowledge, creativity, and politics as transformative forces within society diminishes. Conversely, reinforcing the reliability of each of these components enhances their collective strength, contributing to the cultural institutionalization process.

The scarcity of resources in the CCP's base areas, compounded by the existential threats of military engagements, necessitated an adaptive and innovative approach from those involved in photojournalism training programs. It was within this milieu of constrained resources and persistent threats that the photographers learned to navigate and adapt creatively to their environments. Their practical engagements—through the very act of creating and reflecting on their circumstances—enabled them to respond dynamically to external changes. This adaptability was not merely a survival tactic but a transformative process that imbued the photographers with a deepened understanding of their work's social impact. As crises waned, the social energy catalyzed through their creative endeavors, coupled with their reconnection to historical narratives, fostered a profound comprehension among these photographers of the collective nature of their production and practice. This realization underscores the essential relationship between individual creative acts and broader social transformations, revealing how the personal and communal, the historical and the immediate, are intricately linked in the process of “worlding” or actively shaping one's environment. This holistic understanding not only facilitated the photographers' integration into the fabric of revolutionary culture but also solidified their role in the broader narrative of cultural and political resistance.

The dual objectives of propagating ideological content through aesthetic forms and engaging in rigorous investigation and research represent two inherently conflicting impulses within the realm of socialist photography, particularly as practiced in the CCP's base areas and later throughout the People's Republic of China (PRC). The aesthetic principle of composition, which aims to educate and influence public perception through carefully curated visual narratives, inherently serves a propagandistic function. It seeks to reinforce and disseminate established

political ideologies through visually appealing and emotionally resonant images. Conversely, the essence of investigation and research within photojournalism is fundamentally rooted in a critical approach. This methodology prioritizes the questioning of established narratives and the pursuit of a broader, more nuanced understanding of subjects, often revealing complexities or contradictions that official narratives might seek to suppress. This approach is driven by a commitment to uncovering truth through extensive and in-depth exploration, which can sometimes lead to findings that challenge official or popular opinion.

The interplay and often the tension between these two methodologies—each responding differently to the evolving political demands of the times—have led to significant contradictions within the practice of socialist photography. During the formative years of the PRC, this tension was particularly palpable as photographers navigated their roles within the shifting political landscape. The state's emphasis on using photography as a tool for ideological consolidation and propaganda often clashed with the photojournalistic impulse to explore and document reality in all its complexity. This conflict between the aesthetic and investigatory dimensions of photography not only shaped the visual culture of the early PRC but also sowed the seeds for deeper contradictions in later political events involving photography. As photographers gained official status and political authority, the pressures to conform to the party line while also striving to maintain a semblance of journalistic integrity led to an increasingly fraught relationship with the state. The resulting contradictions reflected broader tensions within the PRC's political and cultural spheres, highlighting the complex interplay between art, ideology, and power in shaping the nation's visual narrative.

To elucidate the complexities of CCP-led peasant photojournalism, it is essential to engage with theories concerning the representation of subaltern groups within realist frameworks. Marston Anderson's critique of Republican-era literature sheds light on a similar dynamic within photojournalism, where critical realism—whether in literature or photography—can inadvertently perpetuate the power imbalances it aims to dismantle. Anderson highlights how such depictions, even when crafted with transformative intentions, can still reinforce the hierarchical divides between those who create (the lettered, the voiced, the narrating) and those who are depicted (the illiterate, the voiceless, the narrated).²⁹⁸ In the context of CCP photojournalism, this dynamic is further complicated by the integration of modern bureaucratic systems and the adoption of photographic technology. These tools, which could be seen as extensions of state power and elite control, were paradoxically employed to empower peasant photographers, allowing them a platform to represent their own experiences. My research explores how the technologized gaze of the camera and the structures of modern bureaucracy provided the subaltern—often marginalized in terms of class, education, and political agency—with the means to articulate their perspectives.

This phenomenon of rapid educational transformation, where peasants learned to wield the camera to document their realities, represents a significant shift in the modes of representation. It allowed those traditionally positioned as objects within narratives to emerge as subjects capable of shaping their own visual stories. This shift not only challenged the conventional roles assigned by social and political hierarchies but also reshaped the landscape of photojournalism itself. By facilitating a way for subaltern groups to depict their lives, CCP photojournalism contributed to a

²⁹⁸ Marston Anderson, "2. The Morality of Form: Lu Xun and the Modern Chinese Short Story," in *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee (University of California Press, 1985), 32–53, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520334564-004>.

broadier democratization of representation, albeit within the confines and objectives of the socialist state. Thus, the study of CCP photojournalism unveils a complex interplay between empowerment and control, where the camera serves both as a tool for state surveillance and propaganda, and paradoxically, as a medium for personal expression and self-representation by peasant photographers. This dual capacity of photography underscores the nuanced ways in which power, art, and technology intersect in the crafting of visual narratives within political regimes.

Coda

In the shadows of a nascent People's Republic of China, where the wounds of war were still healing, the legacies of wartime photojournalism intertwined with the imperatives of socialist realism. As the temporal boundary of 1949 faded into history, continuities in personnel and practices emerged, notably between the Jinchaji Pictorial Press and the newly established Xinhua News Agency. This era marked not just a change in governance but a profound transformation in the production of visual propaganda. Former army-commissioned artists and photojournalists, once tasked with documenting the brutalities and bravery of war, found themselves navigating the complexities of the CCP's evolving cultural policies.

Amidst this transitional epoch, on May 25, 1948, the Jinchaji Pictorial Press merged with the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu People's Pictorial Press in the serene setting of Pingshan Country, Hebei Province. This union gave birth to the North China Pictorial Press (*huabei huabao she* 华北画报社), signaling the end of the independent identity of the Jinchaji Pictorial Press but heralding a new chapter in the dissemination of visual culture across North China. Yet, the transition to peacetime brought its own set of challenges. The discipline, thrift, and organizational methods that had been honed during the war years were repurposed for peacetime objectives, maintaining the continuity of the CCP's visual narrative. The persistence of wartime practices in resource management and the ethic of frugality highlighted these virtues' enduring relevance in the face of ongoing material scarcity, even as the state aspired towards material abundance and technological advancement.

In the midst of these institutional narratives, the personal story of Sha Fei, the founding photojournalist of the Jinchaji Pictorial Press, unfolded tragically. Haunted by the traumas of war, Sha Fei's life spiraled into darkness. After surviving several "Mopping-Up" military operations by the Japanese army, his mental health deteriorated, exacerbated by the loss of close comrades such as Zhao Lie (1920–1943) during such operations. His struggle culminated in a harrowing incident at a China-Japan Friendship Hospital in Shijiazhuang, where, overwhelmed by psychological scars, he fatally shot his Japanese physician, Tsuzawa Kachi (津沢勝, ?–1949), on December 15, 1949. The subsequent trial saw Sha Fei sentenced to death, executed on March 4, 1950, at the young age of 38. Just after his passing, the April 15, 1950, issue of the internal publication *Photographic Web*, featured on its cover a photo taken by Sha Fei of a basketball dunk at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University sports meeting. However, the cover did not credit Sha Fei as the photographer. His name was later expunged from historical records, buried under the weight of political and personal turmoil until his rehabilitation in 1986.

Following Sha Fei's death, a significant reorganization occurred within the media apparatus of the early PRC, reflecting both the consolidation of state power and the strategic redirection of wartime journalistic resources toward peacetime propaganda efforts. On March 20, 1950, key personnel such as Shi Shaohua, Song Beiheng (1923-1995), and Gu Ruilan (1927-2018) were transferred to the newly established News Photography Bureau (*xinwen sheying ju* 新闻摄影局). This transfer also involved relocating copies of extensive photographic archives from the North China Pictorial to the Bureau, a move that centralized and enhanced the new nation's capacity to

document and narrate its history through visual evidence.²⁹⁹ Notable figures like Miao Yizheng, Zhu Yizhi, Wu Qun, and Li Yuyin were appointed to positions at the People's Fine Arts Publishing House (*renminbi meishu chubanshe* 人民美术出版社) and the North China Pictorial Press, respectively. This redistribution culminated on September 1, 1950, when all personnel, along with their equipment and photographic archives, were officially transferred to the General Political Department of the Military Commission.³⁰⁰ This marked the dissolution of the North China Pictorial and the formal establishment of the People's Liberation Army Pictorial at the same location, indicating a significant shift towards militarized control of photographic resources.

The creation of the News Photography Bureau on March 25, 1950, under the leadership of Bureau Chief Sa Kongliao (1907-1988), signified the establishment of the first governmental photographic organization in the new China. That afternoon, Sa Kongliao, convened a meeting to organize departments including the People's Pictorial editorial office, News Photography Division, Photography Research Office, and Art Research Office. Former leaders from regional pictorial presses were reassigned to spearhead this new endeavor. Zhu Dan from the Northeast Pictorial Press was appointed Secretary-General of the bureau, overseeing the *People's Pictorial*,

²⁹⁹ Si Sushi 司苏实, Wang Yan 王雁, Gu Di 顾棣, and Gu Xiaodi 顾小棣, *Liushiwu nian de dajuan: Gu Di zhu «Zhongguo hongse sheying shilu» Jingjin songshu xiangguan ziliao huibian* 六十五年的答卷: 顾棣著《中国红色摄影史录》京津送书相关资料汇编 [Sixty-Five Years of Answers: Compilation of Materials Related to the Distribution of "The Historical Record of Red Photography in China" by Gu Di in Beijing and Tianjin], ed. Sushi 司苏实 Si (Taiyuan: [Publisher not identified], 2010). 117

³⁰⁰ Gu and Wang, "Jinchaji Huabao de Dansheng Yu Fazhan 《晋察冀画报》的诞生与发展 [The Birth and Development of Jinchaji Pictorial]."

while Shi Shaohua took on the role of Deputy Secretary-General and head of the News Photography Division, responsible for news photojournalism and photographic research.

This development marked a crucial phase in the institutionalization of photojournalism, integrating the dynamic fields of art and photography into the bureaucratic frameworks of the new state. The reorganization reached a pivotal moment in 1952 when the central government decided to dissolve the News Photography Bureau due to the expanding needs of domestic and international news dissemination. The *People's Pictorial* was incorporated into the People's Fine Arts Publishing House (later transferred to the Foreign Languages Bureau), while the News Photography Division and journalist's sections were merged into Xinhua News Agency, establishing its News Photography Department on April 1, 1952. This integration facilitated Xinhua's dual function of disseminating both text and image-based news, significantly enhancing the narrative capacity of the state's official media channels. Through these strategic realignments, the early PRC not only navigated the complexities of transforming wartime journalistic practices into a peacetime framework but also laid the foundational structures for a centralized, militarized, and highly controlled media landscape that would shape the visual culture of socialist China.

Finally, this dissertation does not merely recount the history of photojournalism but also critically engages with contemporary digital methodologies, including advanced computer vision techniques, to reevaluate and reinterpret archival materials. Through a pioneering application of digital humanities methodologies, which I term "digital historical forensics," the study peels back layers of historical image circulation, revealing how photographs were manipulated,

repurposed, and disseminated across different fronts. This approach not only aids in tracing the lineage and transformations of images but also illuminates the contextual nuances that traditional historiographical methods might overlook. Moreover, it enriches our understanding of the past and enhances the theoretical frameworks through which we view the interaction between technology and visual culture. This comprehensive study contributes to a redefined understanding of Chinese photojournalism, portraying it as a dynamic field shaped by intense political, social, and technological changes. It highlights the enduring impact of visual media on collective memory and identity formation, offering insights into the potent interplay of imagery and ideology that continues to resonate in contemporary visual culture.

Appendix: Figures



Figure 0.1: Gu Di, Jinchaji Pictorial series, 1950

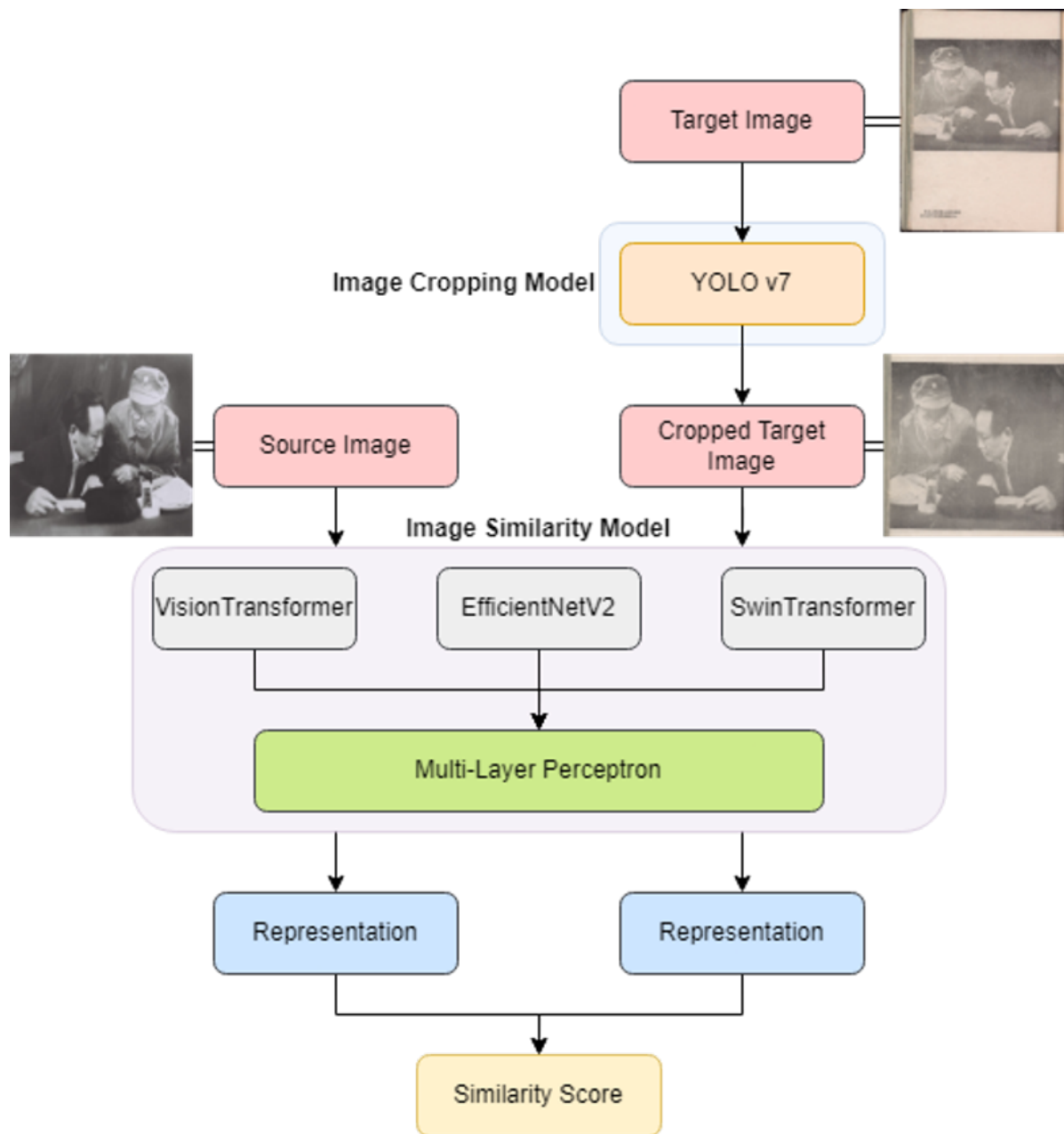


Figure 1.1: Diagram of the proposed computer vision pipeline for image retrieval.

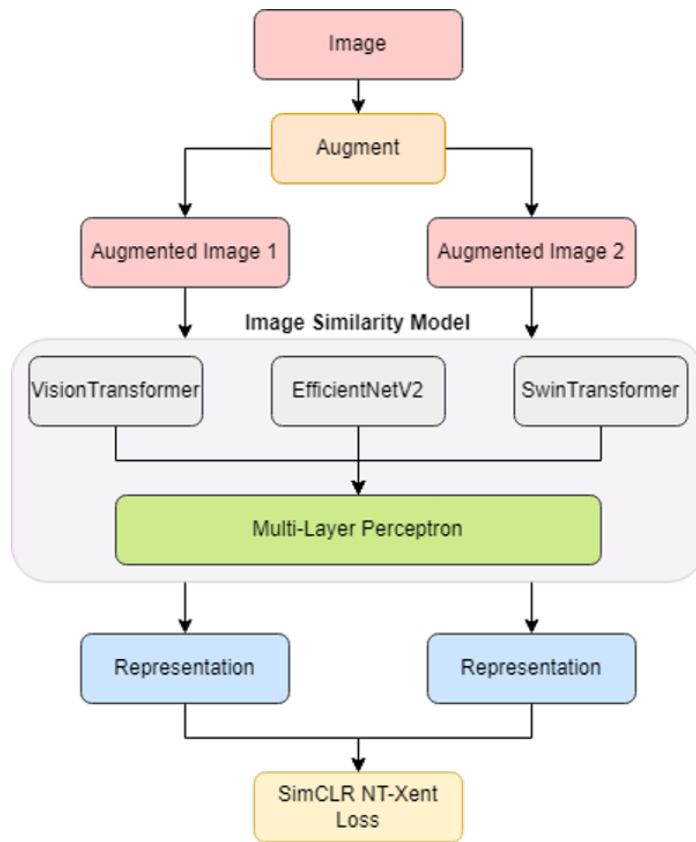


Figure 1.2: Training diagram for the proposed deep representation model.

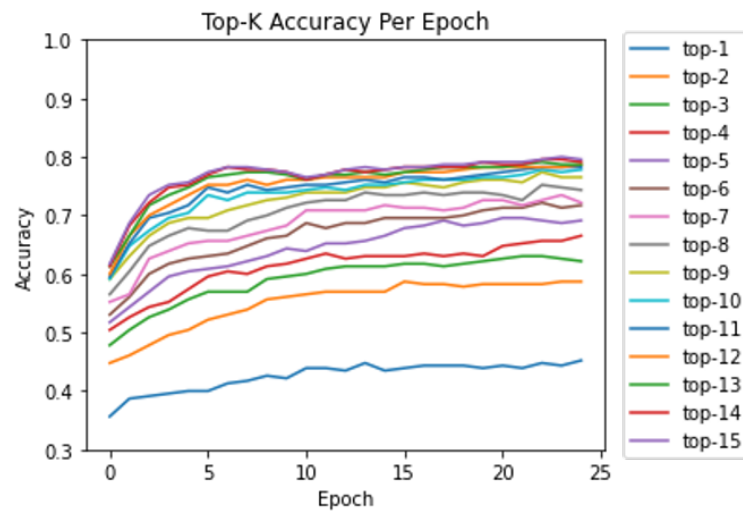


Figure 1.3: Top-K evaluation accuracy per training epoch



Figure 1.4: Jinchaji Pictorial, Issue 04, page 015; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial



Figure 1.5: Futuyu in Laiyuan County, Hebei Province, photographer: Sha Fei; Provided by Papers of Sha Fei, Harvard-Yenching Library of Harvard College Library, Harvard University

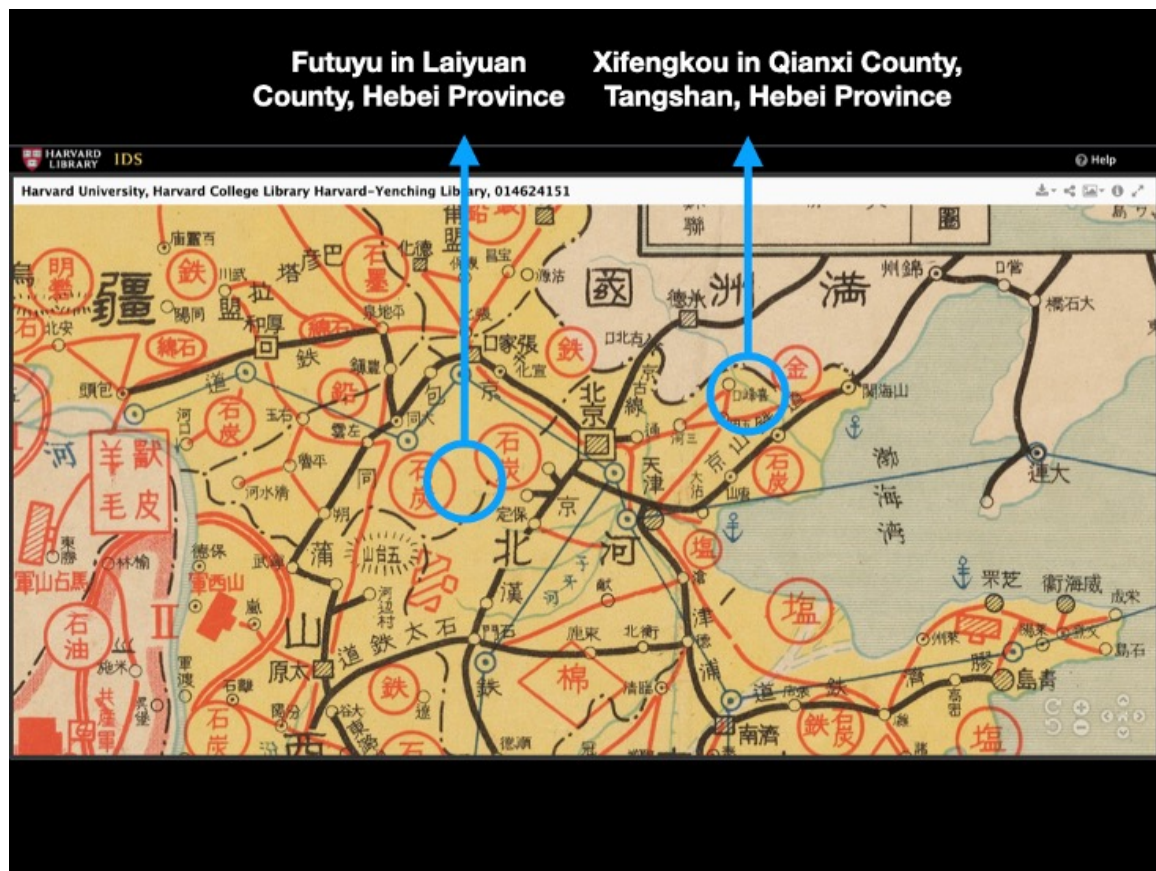


Figure 1.6: “The Anti-Japanese War Zone and Resource Transportation Network in China (支那抗日戰區及資源交通網要圖),” Yellow Region is Japanese-Army occupied area, Notes illustrated by authors; Provided by Harvard University “Shina kōnichi senku oyobi shigen kōtsūmō yōzu.” 1941. Tōkyō]: Tōyō Kyōkai Chōsabu. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990146241510203941/catalog>).



Figure 1.7: photographer: Sha Fei; Provided by Papers of Sha Fei, Harvard-Yenching Library of Harvard College Library, Harvard University



Figure 1.8: Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, People's War, page 25-26; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial



Figure 1.9: local peasant Liu Hanxing's enlistment in the army, photographer: Sha Fei; Provided by Papers of Sha Fei, Harvard-Yenching Library of Harvard College Library, Harvard University



Figure 1.10: *Jinchaji Pictorial Current News Special*, published on March 20, 1942, page 4; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial.

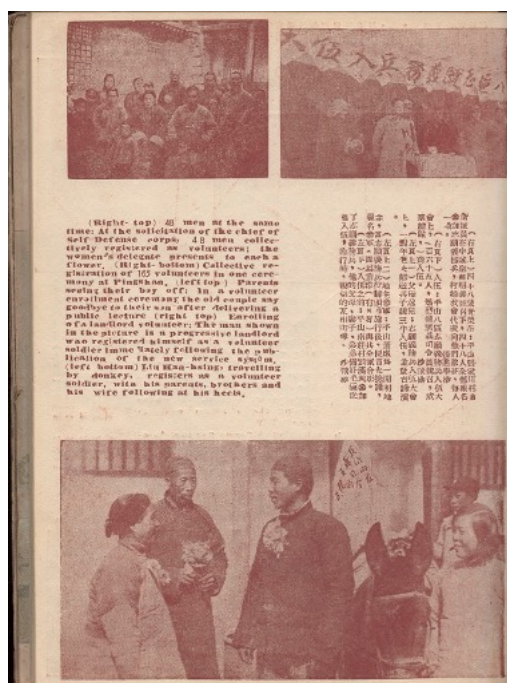


Figure 1.11: *Jinchaji Pictorial*, issue 01, page 048; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial

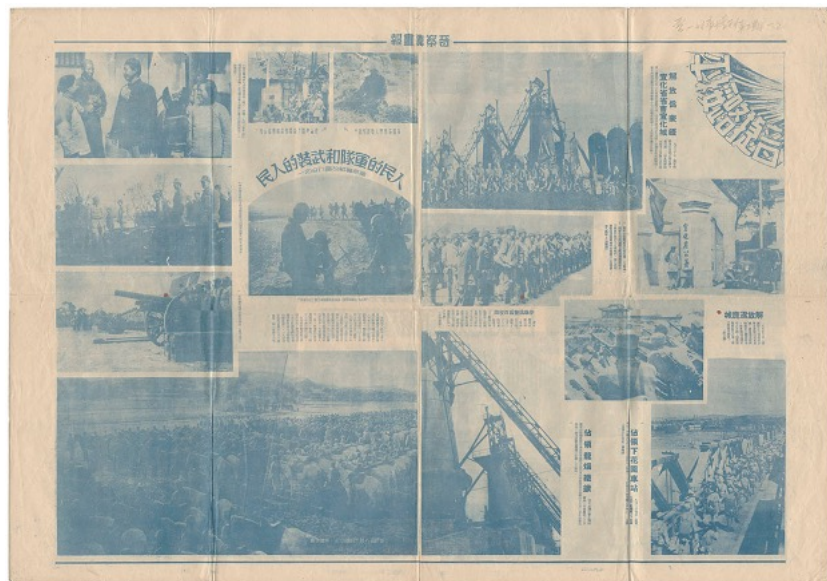


Figure 1.12: *Jinchaji Pictorial Supplementary*, issue 03, page 02; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial.



Figure 1.13: Jinchaji Pictorial Series I, *The Eighth Route Army and the Folks*, page 24; Courtesy of Zhimin Shi and Institute of Jinchaji Pictorial.



Figure 2.1: Sha Fei, unknown location, Autumn 1943



Figure 2.2: Jinchaji Pictorial Series II, *Accusation from Jinchaji*, March 1946, with the caption, "Can these rotten cloths be worn?"



Figure 2.3: Meng Zhenjiang, Xinzhuang, 1944.5



Figure 2.4: Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, *People's War*, July 1946



Figure 2.5: *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 6, August 1944



Figure 2.6: Yuan Kezhong, *Linbao*, 1943



Figure 2.7: Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, *People's War*, July 1946



Figure 2.8: Ye Manzhi, Shenxian Mountain, 1943



Figure 2.9: *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 5, March 1944

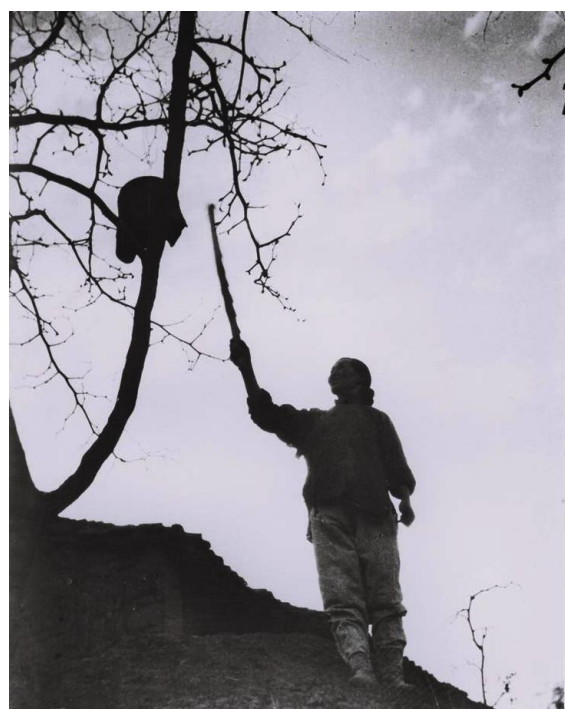


Figure 2.10: Jiang Bo, Pingshan, 1942; *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 6, August 1944



Figure 2.11: Wang Yang, Hebei, 1944.3.8



Figure 2.12: Jinchaji Pictorial Supplementary, Issue 2, 1944.3.8



Figure 2.13: Sha Fei, unknown location, 1938; Jinchaji Pictorial Series III *Democratic Jinchaji*, May 1946



Figure 2.14: Sha Fei, 1940.3.8, Hebei; Jinchaji Pictorial Series III *Democratic Jinchaji*, May 1946



Figure 2.15: Sha Fei, Unknown location, Unknown date



Figure 2.16: Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, *People's War*, July 1946



Figure 2.17: Jinchaji Pictorial Illustrated, Issue 7, April 1947



Figure 2.18: Jinchaji Pictorial, Issue 11, October 1947



Figure 2.19: Jinchaji Pictorial Current News Special, March 1942

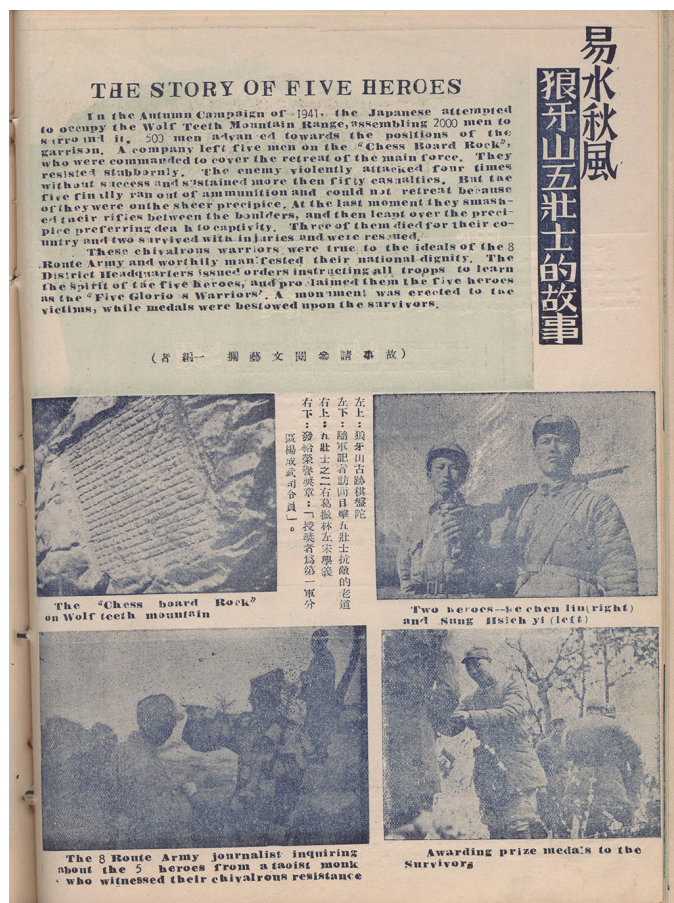


Figure 2.20: Jinchaji Pictorial, Issue 1, July 1942



Figure 2.21: Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV, *People's War*, July 1946



Figure 2.22: Sha Fei, Pingshan, Hebei Province, 1942



Figure 2.23: Jinchaji Pictorial Current News Special, March 1942

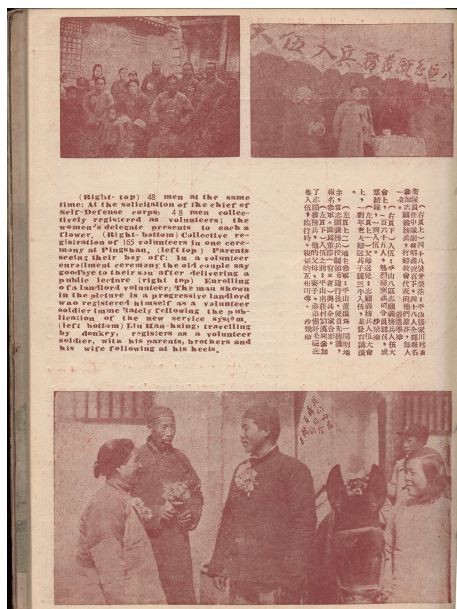


Figure 2.24: Jinchaji Pictorial, Issue 1, July 1942

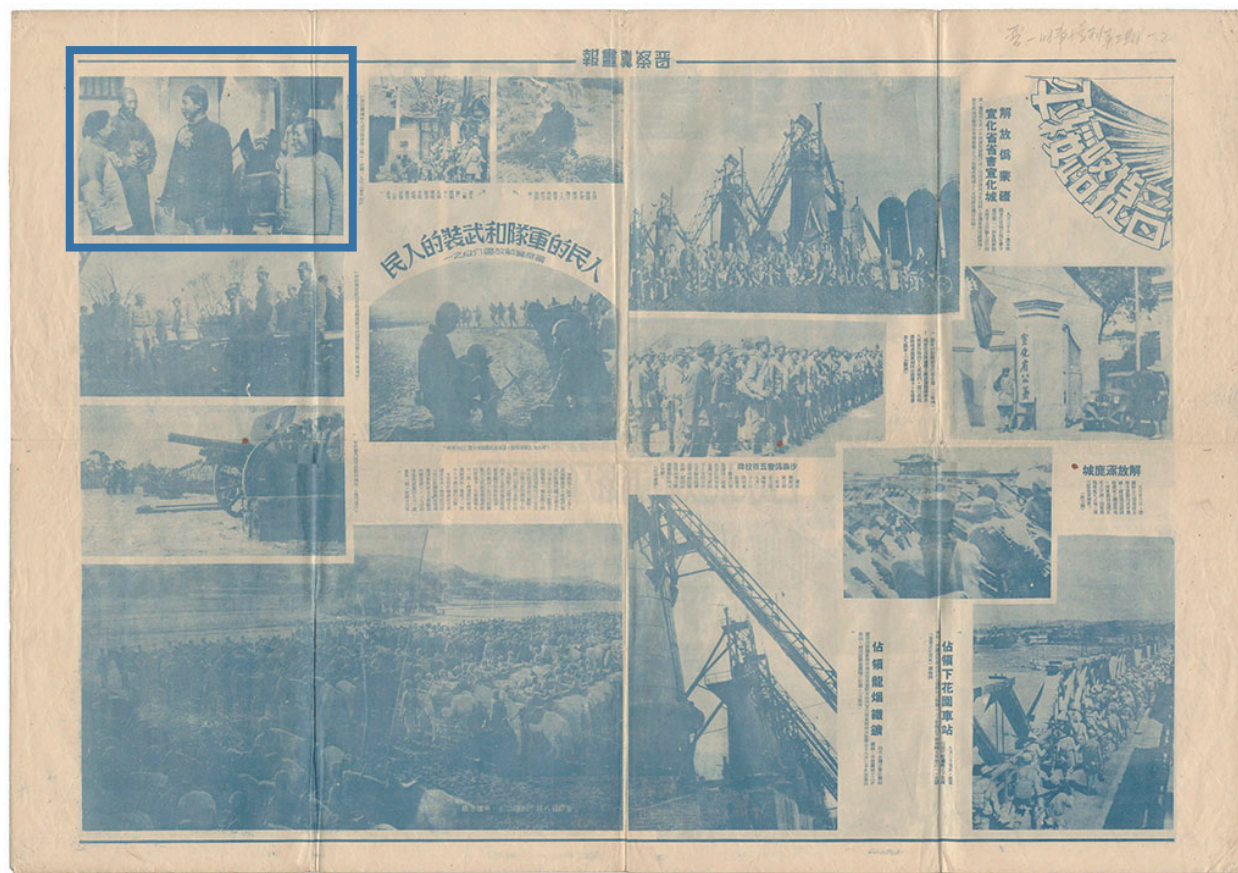


Figure 2.25: *Jinchaji Pictorial Supplement*, Issue 3, September 15, 1945



Figure 2.26: *Jinchaji Pictorial Series I The Eighth Route Army and the Common People*, March 1946



Figure 2.29: *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 7, November 1944



Figure 2.30: *Jinchaji Pictorial Series III Democratic Jinchaji*, May 1946



Figure 2.31: Cover of the Jinchaji Pictorial Series IV *People's War*. July 1946, and Jinchaji Pictorial Series I *The Eighth Route Army and the Folks*. March 1946

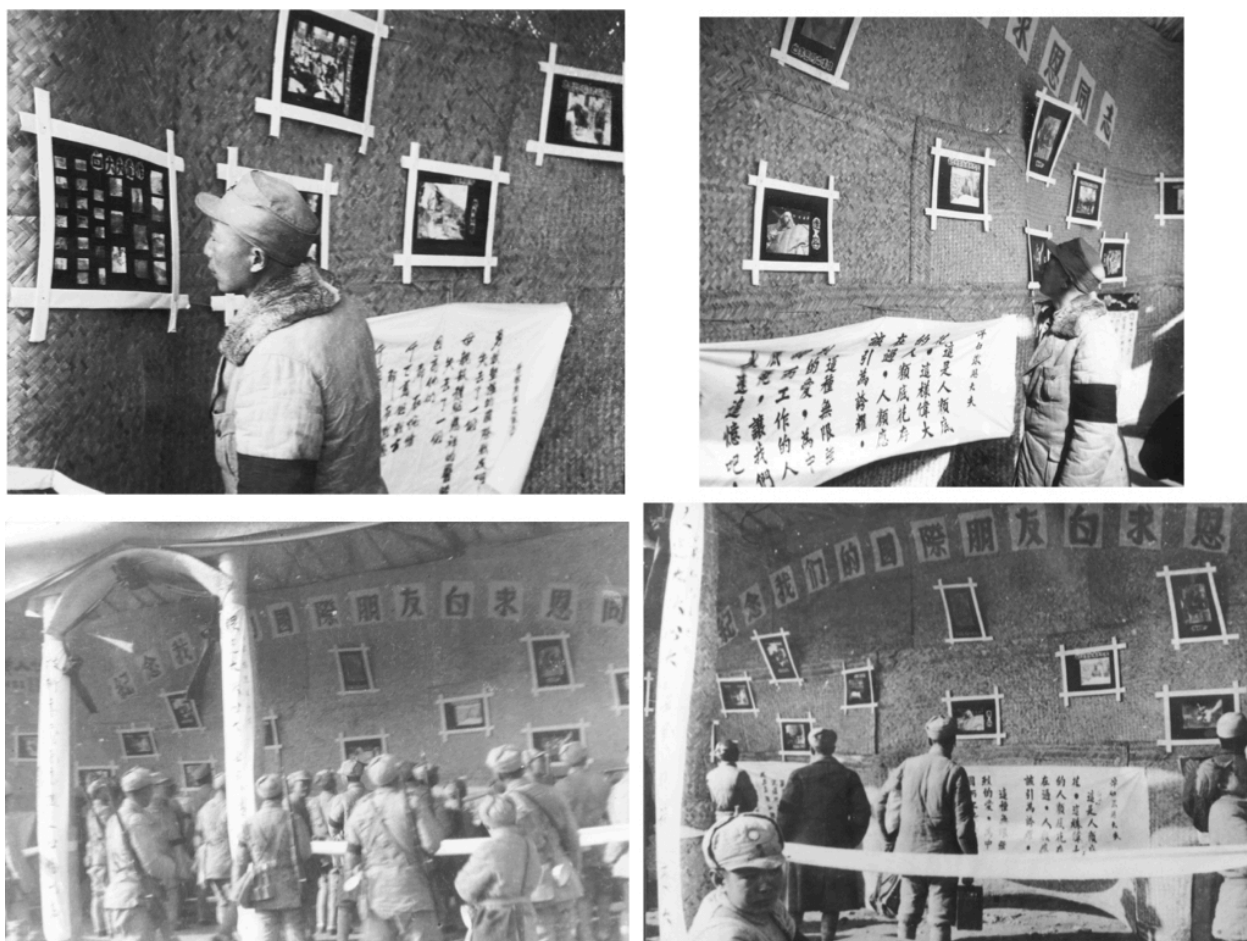


Figure 3.1: Sha Fei, “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune,” November 1940



Figure 3.2: Sha Fei, “Second Jinchaji Border Region Art Festival,” July 1941



Figure 3.3: Sha Fei, “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune,” November 1940. Colored frames are identified photographs. Same color indicates same photograph.



Figure 3.4: Sha Fei, “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune,” November 1940. A handwritten eulogy to Bethune on white cloth.



Figure 3.5: Sha Fei, “Memorial of Our International Friend Norman Bethune,” November 1940. General Nie Rongzhen viewing Bethune’s own 28 pieces of photographic works.

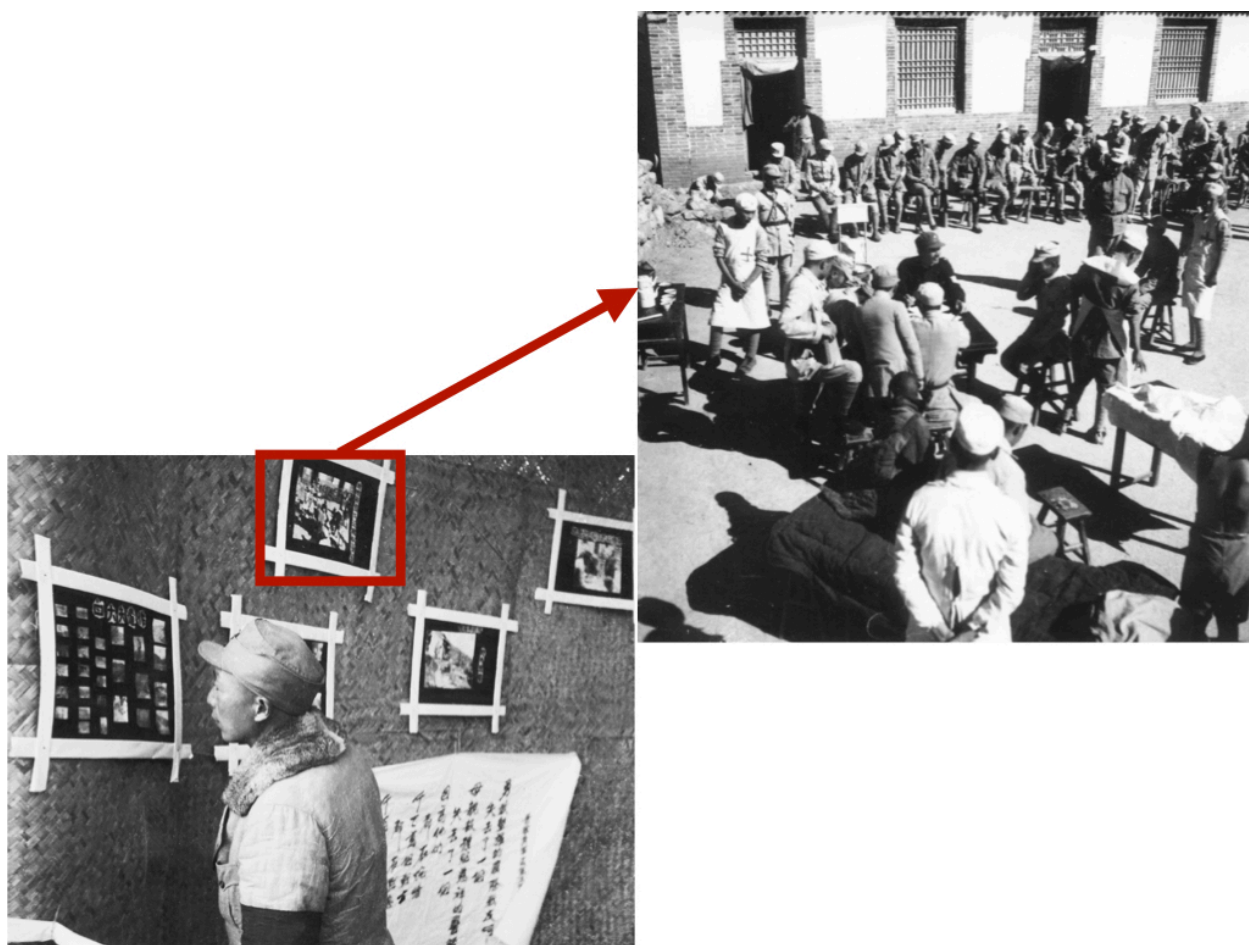


Figure 3.6: Photographed by either Sha Fei or Wu Yinxian, Dr. Norman Bethune transports the wounded from the Matianling battle to the rear hospital of the Health Department of the Jinchaji Military Region in Tang County, November 1939.

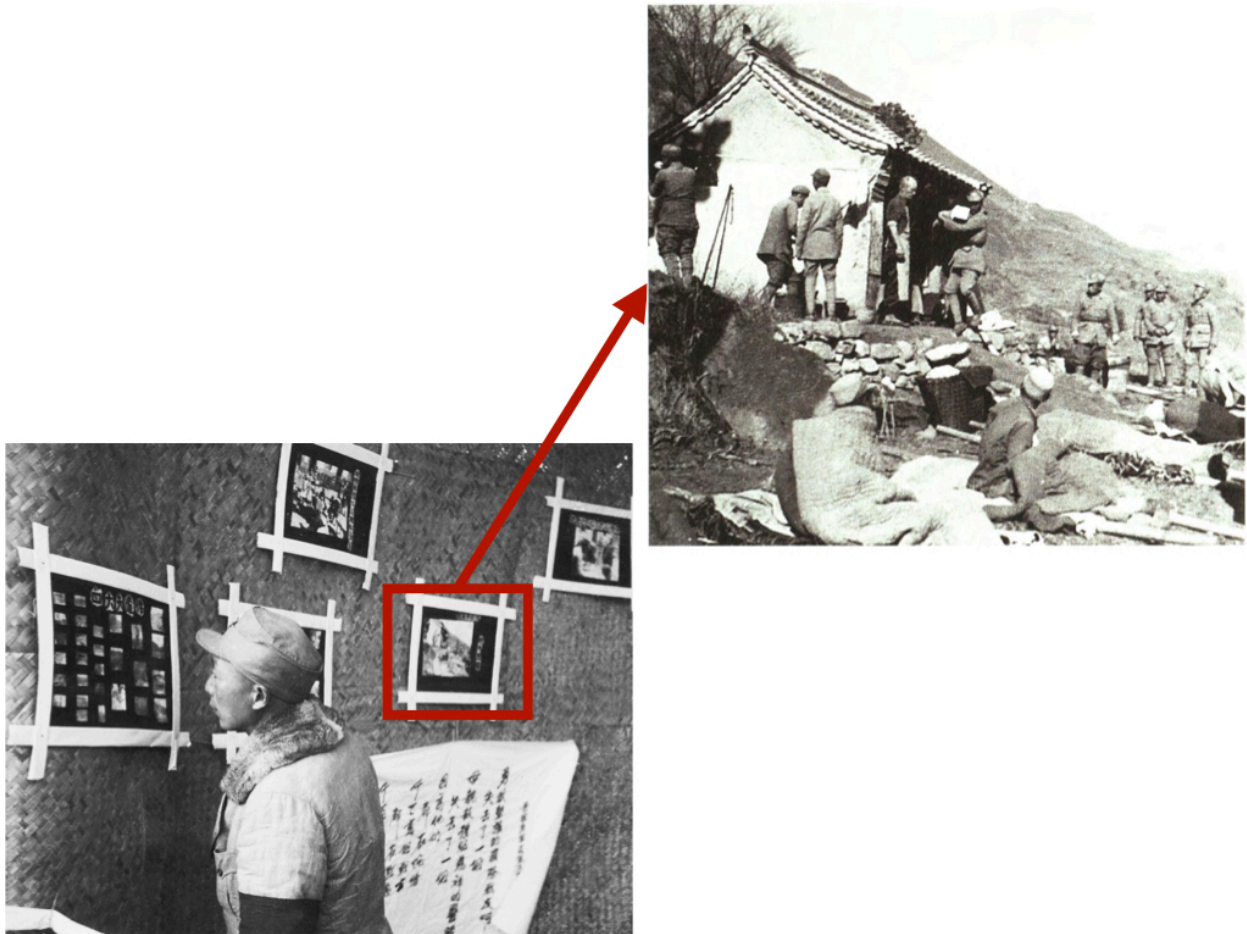


Figure 3.7: Photographed by either Luo Guangda or Wu Yinxian on October 24, 1939, at Sunjiazhuang, Laishui, Hebei. A stretcher team has just brought down wounded soldiers of the Eighth Route Army from the frontline to a medical station near the battle, waiting for treatment by Dr. Norman Bethune. The battle was ongoing, and Dr. Bethune insisted on completing the surgeries before evacuating.



Figure 3.8: Norman Bethune in a winter military outfit, seated against a snowy backdrop, in a photograph taken by Sha Fei in 1938. Originally worn by Japanese pilots, the attire was later provided to Bethune by the Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army. This image was used as the central portrait at Bethune's funeral.

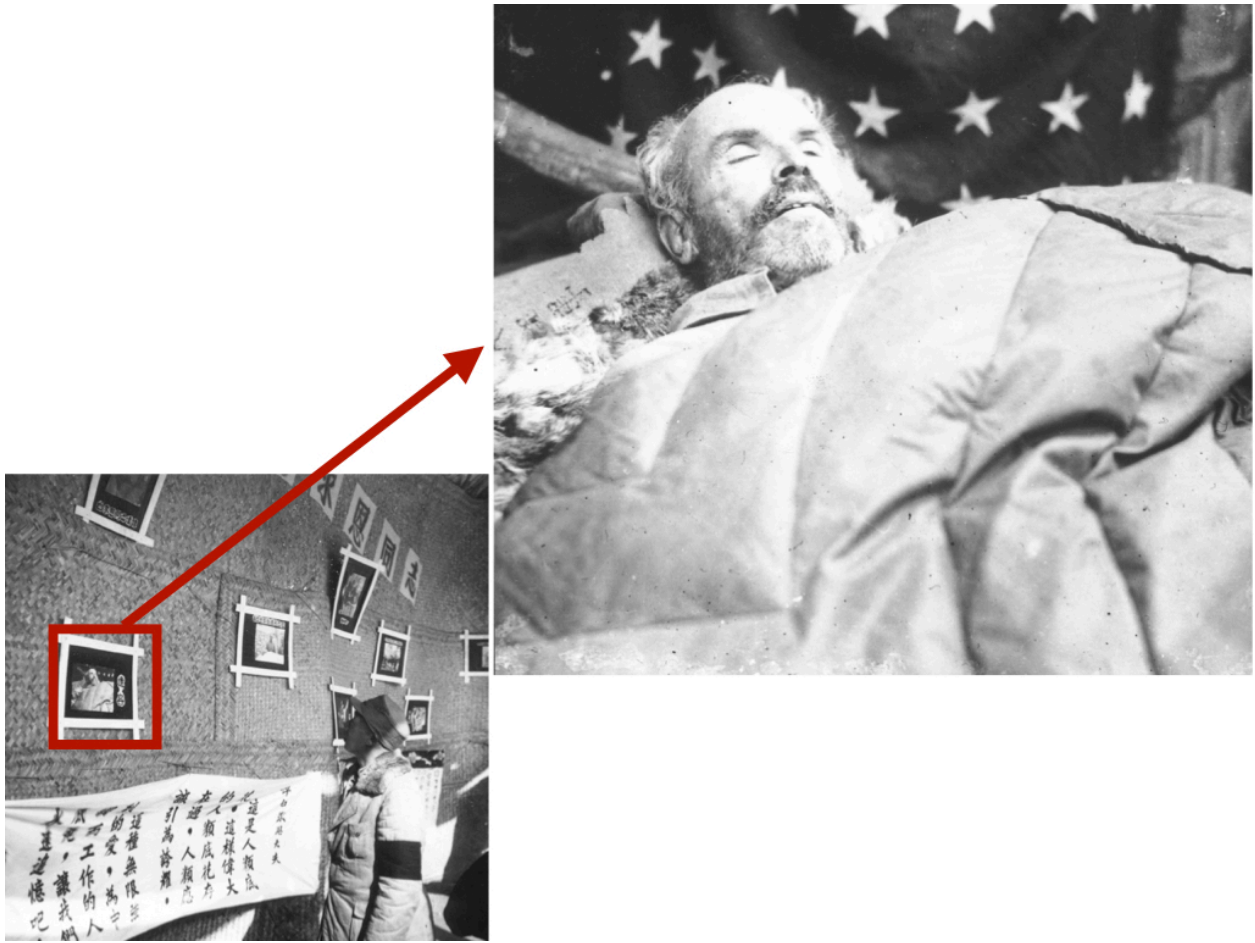


Figure 3.9: Sha Fei, a photograph from November 1939 showing Dr. Norman Bethune in repose after his death, November 1939

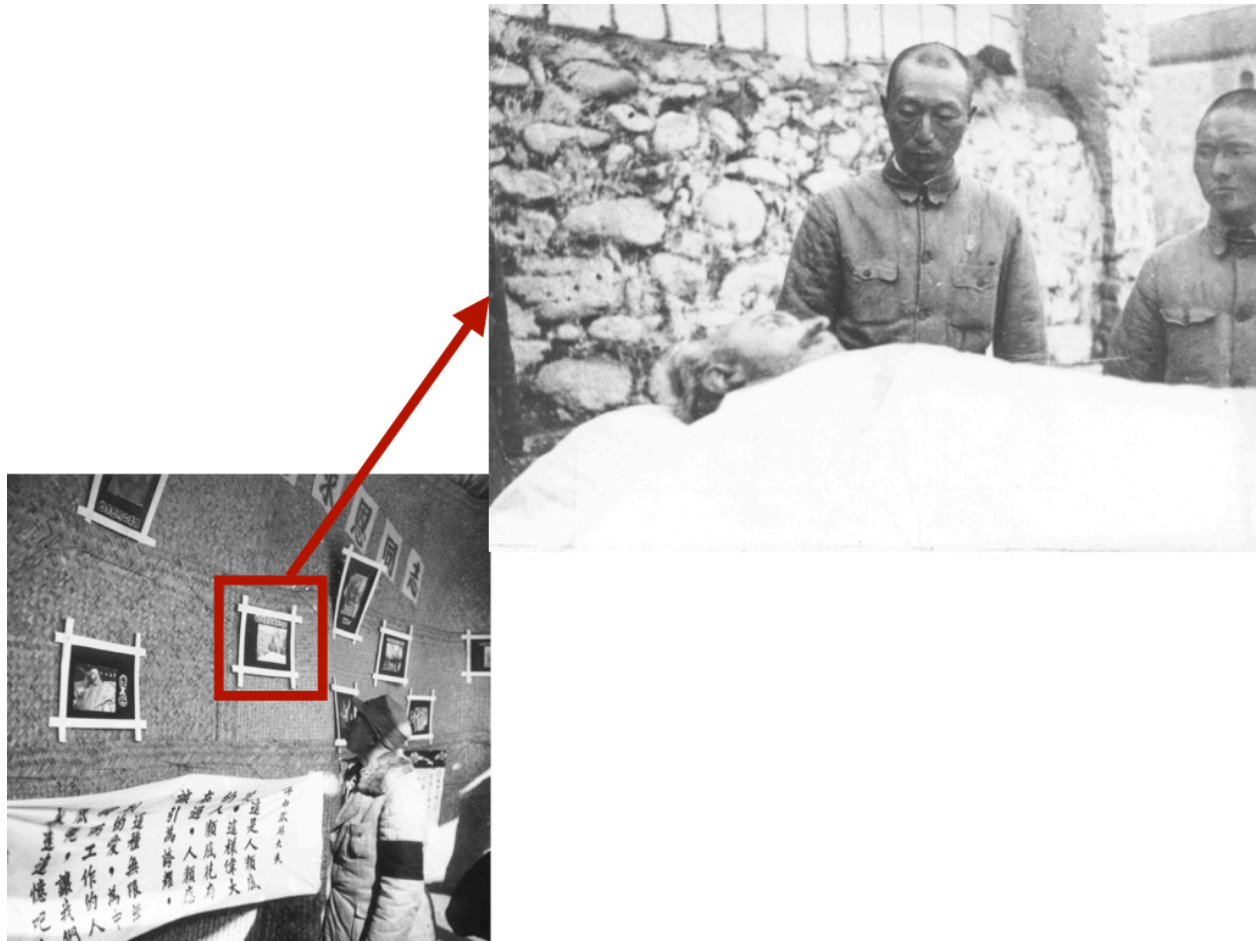


Figure 3.10: Sha Fei, Photograph of Nie Rongzhen paying homage to Bethune's remains, November 1939.



Figure 3.11: Sha Fei, 1938. Dr. Norman Bethune performing surgery in the model ward at Songyankou, Wutai, Shanxi. Pictured to his left is Ye Qingshan, the Minister of Health for the Jinchaji Military Region."

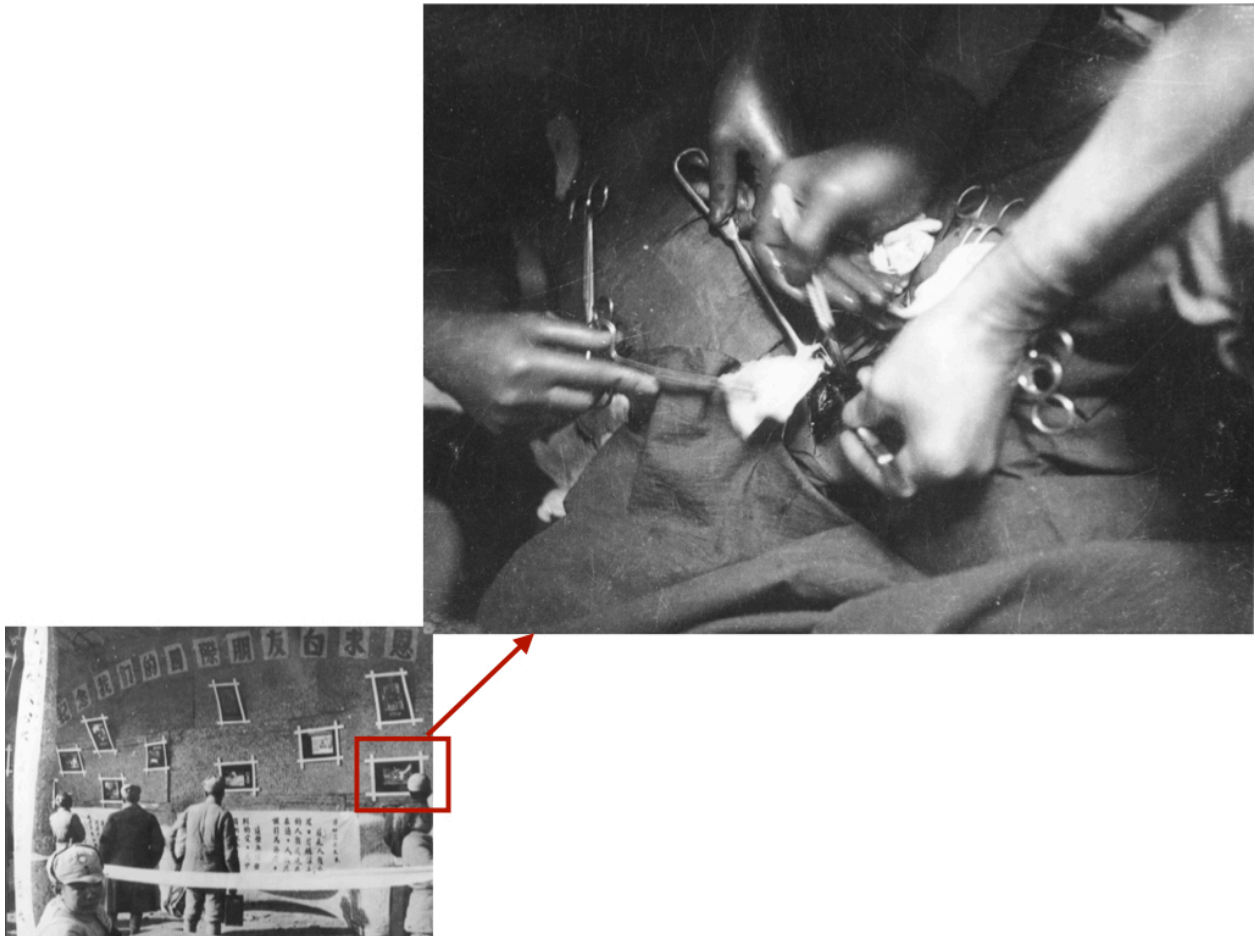


Figure 3.12: Surgery, claimed to be shot by Sha Fei in 1944.



Figure 3.13: *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 8, April 30, 1945



Figure 3.14: Sha Fei, 1944, Rescue of American pilots. Two injured pilots recuperating at the Heping Hospital.



Figure 3.15: 1937, Mao Zedong in Yan'an

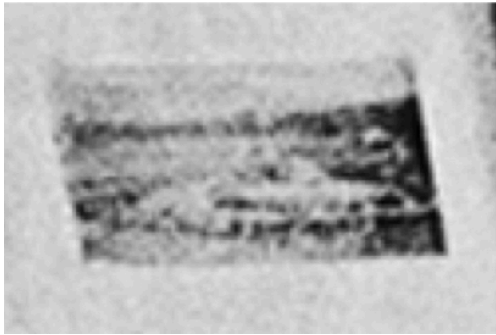


Figure 3.16: Sha Fei, The completion of Norman Bethune's tomb in Tang County. The Eighth Route Army and local residents hold a solemn memorial ceremony in front of the tomb.

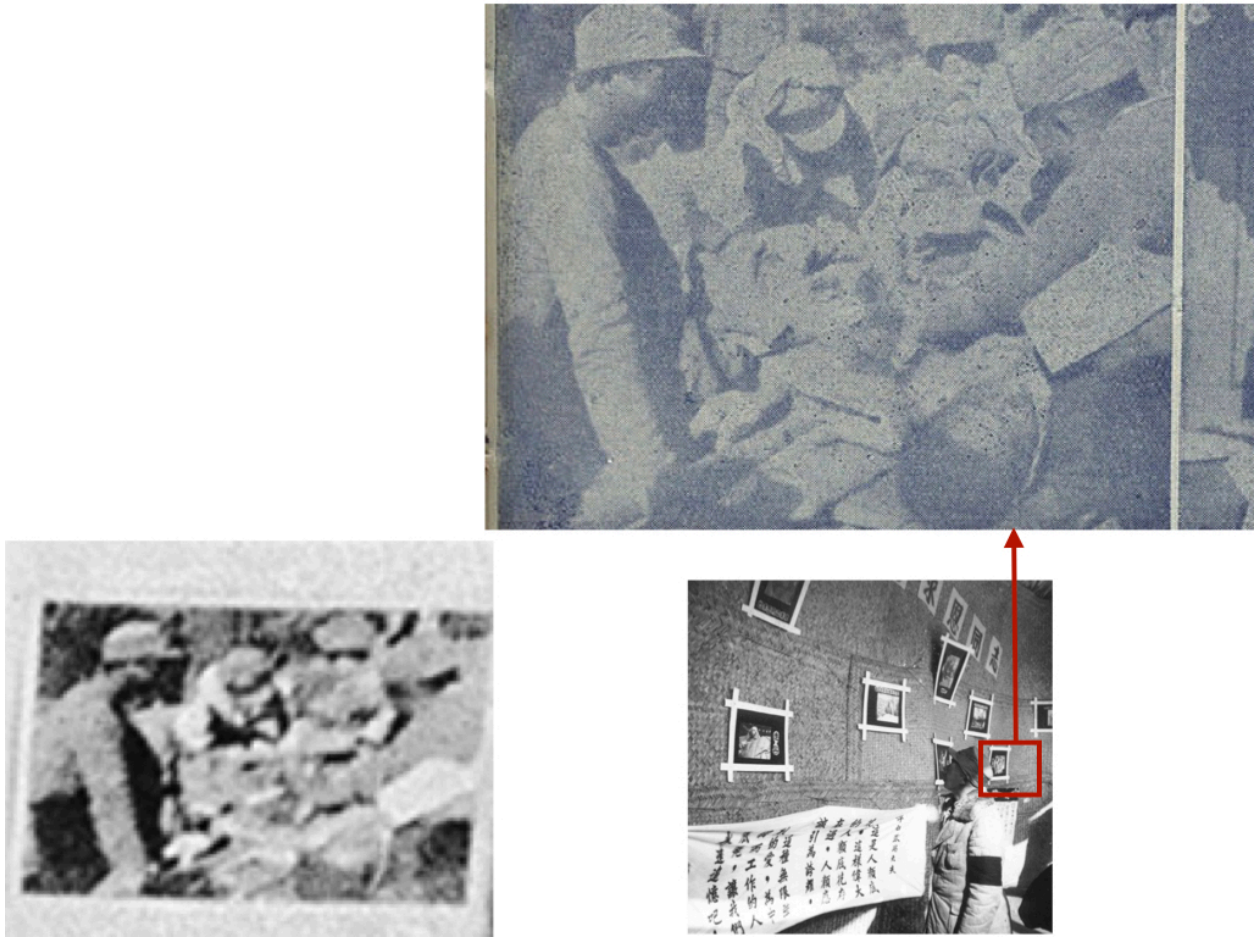


Figure 3.17: Wu Yinxian captures a moment of emergency blood transfusion for a wounded soldier, date unknown, published in *Jinchaji Pictorial*, Issue 1, July 7, 1942.



Figure 3.18: Sha Fei, "Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival," July 1941, red frames are identified photographs.



Figure 3.19: Sha Fei, "Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival," July 1941, red frames are identified photographs.



Figure 3.20: Intensive Training: Alley Combat, claimed to be shot by Sha Fei in 1943



Figure 3.21: “Clearing the Remnants,” photographed by Shi Shaohua in 1941. The image depicts two soldiers manning a machine gun.



Figure 3.22: Sha Fei, Women Practicing Grenade Throwing, March 8, 1940.



Figure 3.23: 1938, Activities of the Third Column on the Daqing River, photographed by Shi Shaohua.



Figure 3.24: Galloping, photographed by Lü Zhengcao, unknown date.



Figure 3.25: Sha Fei, Eighth Route Army Machine Gun Position at Jingxing Coal Mine, August 1940



Figure 3.26: Sha Fei, Eighth Route Army Destroys the New Mine Smokehouse at Jingxing Coal Mine, August 1940.

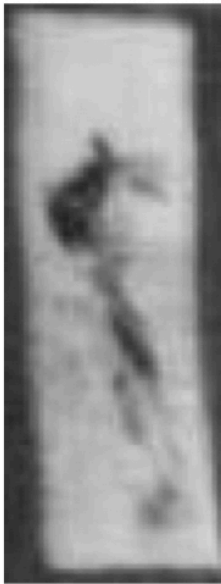


Figure 3.27: Photograph by Yang Guozhi from the Hundred Regiments Offensive, 1940. It shows Commander Li Yongsheng from the Second Battalion during the battle in Laiyuan Sanjia Village.

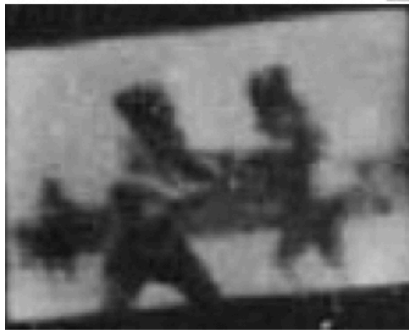


Figure 3.28: Sha Fei, Fencing Competition held at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University, 1939.



Figure 3.29: Youth Day Commemoration in Pingshan, Hebei, photographed by Luo Guangda in May 1941.



Figure 3.30: Photograph showing captured Japanese Type 92 rifles, supposedly displayed during the Eastern Front Victory Celebration at Northern Yue Mountain in 1943.



Figure 3.31: The Border Region People's Opposition to the Anti-Communist Civil War, photographed by Zhou Yuwen in April 1941



Figure 3.32: Sha Fei, “Second Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region Art Festival,” July 1941. Wooden shelves have been moved.



Figure 4.1: Pull, pluck and sing. The recreational life of the Jinchaji Pictorial Press. From left: Bai Liansheng, Li Tu and Gu Di. Photo by Song Beiheng in Fangli, Hebei Province in May 1945.



Figure 4.2: During the First Senate of the Jinchaji Border Region, Association of Natural Science Circles held a conference. Chen Fengtong, a botanist and director of agriculture and forestry in the border area, speaks. The person behind is Cheng Fouwu, President of North China United University and President of the Border District Senate. January 1943, taken by Sha Fei



Figure 4.3: Huabei Military Region photographic training team takes a darkroom technique class. Shi Shaohua (front right) watches trainees dispensing chemicals. Unknown photographer taken in Beibaozhuang, Pingshan, in July 1948



開展合作事業

合作社在分散的敵後農村環境中，是改善農民生活、調劑邊區經濟、對敵經濟鬥爭，減少奸商操縱的最好辦法。如有名的張瑞合作社則更把經濟的業務與組織羣衆生產、救濟災民，發動羣衆對敵鬥爭、教育敵佔區羣衆等工作統統結合起來，成為敵後抗日根據地合作運動發展的方向。(上圖)運輸(下圖)婦紡。

Figure 4.4: Hu Bingtang, "The Cooperative's Cart Transport Team," 1942; *Jinchaji Pictorial Series III: Democratic Jinchaji*, May 1946

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