

History in Images

Pictures and Public Space
in Modern China



Edited by
Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh

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Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, editors

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ONE

Introduction

CHRISTIAN HENRIOT and WEN-HSIN YEH

Over the course of the nineteenth century, two important pieces of Western technology made their way into the Chinese world. The first was the camera. The second was the printing press. They traveled east following the activities of Western diplomatic, military, and religious missions. They also went east through the activities of Western businessmen. Over a span of more than a hundred years, these technologies, through several generations of designs and capacities, appeared first in regions around the Malacca Straits and Guangzhou, then in Shanghai, Tianjin, and finally inland cities including Beijing. Photo shops and printing facilities appeared in city after city. They produced images and reproduced texts in volume and with variety.

As technologies in use, the camera and the printing press initially retained their separate spheres in the nineteenth century. Macao was said to be a center of photography in the 1830s. In the 1850s, photo studios appeared on the Chinese mainland, apparently more in Guangzhou than in Shanghai. Neither Macao nor Guangzhou earned special distinction at this time for printing or publishing. On the contrary, when Ernest Major, in 1872, founded *Shenbao* (Shanghai daily), the first modern newspaper published on the Chinese mainland for a Chinese readership, the paper used an imported printing press to reproduce the text but printed no photographs.

As elements of social practice, the camera and the printing press were also at the center of different histories in Chinese lives. The modern printing press was a major piece of equipment to be housed in enterprises and organizations. The camera, by contrast, produced images that often appealed directly to individual consumers. In the middle of the nineteenth century, photographic practices readily gained followers among Manchu nobles at court as well as Chinese comprador merchants in the treaty ports.

Viceroy Qiyong, who negotiated the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing that concluded the first Opium War, is believed to be the first notable Chinese to have had his photo portrait taken; he did so in order to exchange the prints as gifts with European diplomats. Other Manchu imperial princes who handled foreign affairs also acquired a certain reputation for their interest in photography. After the Boxer debacle, Empress Dowager Cixi posed for photographs in court and allowed the distribution of their prints. Separately, in the merchant quarters in Shanghai, photography—along with the horse-drawn carriage and European-style cuisine—came to define a modern conception of entertainment culture.

While the use of the camera spurred the growth of photo studios and the formation of amateur clubs, the use of the printing press propelled the growth of a whole industry of communications. These latter practices included the businesses of printing, publishing, advertising, and journalism. In the 1890s, photographs were incorporated into the poster-calendars produced en masse by the British American Tobacco Company, and the two trajectories of photography and printing began to intersect. Color printing came late, as did color photography. Finally, in the early 1930s, Shanghai saw the publication, on a regular basis, of photographed images in print journals, at first in black and white as in the case of the *Shenghuo Weekly* and then in color as with the publication of *Liangyou* (The young companion). The camera and the printing press combined to produce a communications revolution in urban Chinese public space. This public space, with its affordable reproductions of images and texts, reached an unprecedented number of urban residents, including the youthful, the lower middle class, and the marginally literate.¹

This history is relevant for us to bear in mind, because a majority of images that moved around in the Republican public space were printed reproductions rather than prints in the original; also, they have significance within the context of the broader history of communications. The production and circulation of images and the framing of pictures in the public space were the works not only of photographers but also of editors, publishers, and others.

It was an intrinsic part of the urban experience in Republican Chinese cities for people in their everyday lives to come upon processed and reproduced images. These images abounded, whether embedded in posters, albums, periodicals, films, or other media. They served businesses and markets while also the state and the Guomindang party. They were evident everywhere, in churches, temples, schools, and meeting places for

¹ See Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843–1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), chap. 3, “Visual Politics and Shanghai Glamour.”

TWO

Wartime Shanghai Refugees: Chaos, Exclusion, and Indignity

Do Images Make up for the Absence of Memory?

CHRISTIAN HENRIOT

Introduction

Photography figures prominently among the visual sources that have enriched the range of materials used by historians over the last decade. Born with the industrial age, photography rapidly evolved from a practice geared toward individual portraiture or landscape by photo studios or skilled amateurs to a major mode of communication in its own right. An early association with the press magnified the role of photography. By the turn of the twentieth century, photography was rapidly displacing the previous modes of illustration in periodicals.¹ Yet the growing impact of photography was also related to its use on the battlefield. War, and especially World War I, gave a major impetus to the rise of photography as the primary medium to report “reality” from the front lines back home. Armies set up photographic services to cover their ongoing conflicts. Individual periodicals would also send reporter-photographers into the field, to be joined soon by press agencies specializing in providing photographs of major events all over the planet. Used for propaganda to boost morale as much as for information, photographs thus became a central element of the emerging mass media.²

¹ Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, “Du dessin de presse à la photographie (1878–1914): Histoire d’une mutation technique et culturelle,” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 39 (January–March 1992): 10.

² Therese Blondet-Bisch, “Aperçu historique de la pratique photographique durant la Grande guerre,” *Historiens et Geographes* 89, no. 364 (1998): 249–251; Laurent Veray, “Montrer la guerre: La photographie et le cinématographe,” *Guerre Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 43, no. 171 (1993): 111–121.

THREE

Sha Fei, the *Jin-Cha-Ji Pictorial*, and the Documentary Style of Chinese Wartime Photojournalism

SHANA J. BROWN

Since the creation of photographic technology, photographers have wrangled with the question of documentary accuracy. The slippage between photography's capture of extreme detail, which suggests unaltered mimesis, and the medium's potential for staging or alteration in development has contributed to numerous and ongoing debates regarding its degree of reliability relative to other forms of representation.¹ Although by the twentieth century, realism had become the dominant discourse for photography's practitioners in many parts of the world, assessments of its documentary accuracy can change over time and with different cultural and political contexts.² Unique discursive formations frame our expect-

¹ Many theorists have contributed to this debate. In the context of this chapter, my perspective has been shaped by Jennifer Green-Lewis's discussion in *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997) regarding nineteenth-century debates between supporters of photography as a tool for scientific, empirical representation and its critics, who mistrusted the potential for dissemblance. In the past decade, digital processing has made the manipulation of photographic images virtually unavoidable, but I would argue that a historical aspiration to mimesis still colors our views of photography. Certainly, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) remains relevant, in which Barthes comments that "photography's Referent is not the same as the referent of other forms of representation. . . . Painting can feign reality without having seen it. . . . In photography I can never deny that the thing has been there" (76).

² In "The Curse of the Photograph: Atjeh, 1901" (in *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009], 57–78), James Siegel raises intriguing issues related to how local practice could produce distinctly different ideas of what documentary photographs should look like. For example, he introduces the intriguing case of the first Javanese photographer, Kassian Céphas, who was hired by Dutch authorities to photograph local monuments and dignitaries but whose style, although acknowledged as realistic, appeared stiff and inartistic.

FOUR

China, a Man in the Guise of an Upright Female: Photography, the Art of the Hands, and Mei Lanfang's 1930 Visit to the United States

CATHERINE YEH

When Mei Lanfang, the male Peking opera *dan* actor playing female roles, performed in the United States in 1930, all accounts claim that he was eventually able to bridge the cultural divide and performed to great acclaim before American audiences. Whereas his success hinged on a variety of factors, the most important one was his ability to communicate without a common language with his American audiences through an art form with which they were utterly unfamiliar. American viewers loved the art of the hands. They included theater critics, dramatists, actors, and members of high society, as well as ordinary theatergoers.¹

Mei's success was anything but to be expected. English-language tour guides and popular books on China described Peking opera as being performed in a "naïve style" and only worth a visit because of the "magnificent silk costumes of the actors."² With the infighting among warlords and the North-South divide in the 1910s and 1920s amply reported, the general stature of China in most Western minds as a place of cultural sophistication, moral rectitude, and civility was at its lowest.³ And now a man playing women was about to turn the tide. The pressures on his tour were immense.

¹ For studies on Mei Lanfang's U.S. visit, see Mark Cosdon, "Introducing Occidentals to an Exotic Art: Mei Lanfang in New York," *Asian Theater Journal* 12, no. 1 (1995): 175–189; Joshua Goldstein, "Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of Peking Opera, 1912–1930," *Positions* 7, no. 2 (1999): 377–420.

² Charles Ewart Darwent, *Shanghai: A Handbook for Travellers and Residents to the Chief Objects of Interest in and around the Foreign Settlements and Native City* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1904), 20.

³ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 2001), 140–145.

FIVE

The Sound of Images: Peddlers' Calls and Tunes in Republican Peking

FENG YI

Introduction

Street peddlers were a common feature of city life in China well into the twentieth century. The presence of these small-scale, often single-good merchants can be traced back to earlier centuries. That they survived until after World War II reflects in part the state of economic development in China where recent immigrants were prepared to take up the meanest or lowest-paid jobs to make a living. Peddlers were not necessarily the worst off in terms of occupation, although they certainly belonged to the lower rungs of urban society. Their resilience is also a testimony to their intrinsic usefulness and the demand for their services. In the late Qing, they certainly met the needs of women who could hardly walk far away from their homes. Male immigrants with crowded living quarters could rely on peddlers for their daily food. More generally, all residents could avoid the trouble of going out to shop for goods and carry them back home. Quite obviously, there was a market niche for peddlers in the city.

In Peking, thousands of peddlers roamed the streets and more particularly the *hutong* 胡同, where most of the population lived. They offered their goods or services to the residents day and night, ceaselessly. In order to entice customers from their walled houses and courtyards, peddlers made vocal sounds, sometimes in elaborate form, or, more interestingly, used musical instruments. This was their way of announcing their presence and advertising the good(s) or service(s) on offer. As they each used a distinctive "call" or instrument, residents would immediately know what goods or services were available at their doorstep. Moreover, such calls and music would change throughout the year. Whereas some goods were peddled all year through, others were seasonal. Sounds and calls

Never-Ending Controversies: The Case of *Chun jiang yi hen* and Occupation-Era Chinese Filmmaking

PAUL G. PICKOWICZ

Completed in late 1944, *Chun jiang yi hen* 春江遺恨 (Remorse in Shanghai) is perhaps the most controversial Chinese movie ever made. Yet one looks high and low in the scholarly literature for a sustained discussion of this extraordinarily interesting work. There are many fleeting references to *Chun jiang yi hen*, almost all of which hint at controversy—controversy that surrounds all films made in occupied China during the 1937–1945 war years. With the exception of Poshek Fu, scholars of Chinese cinema (including myself) have not written much about occupation-era cinema. Yet it seems unreasonable simply to ignore this period. Either the films of the occupation years are part of Chinese film history or they are not. Scholars should not avoid controversy. Everyone should take a stand. My own view is that those who are interested in the entire hundred-year history of Chinese filmmaking should have informed opinions about the movies made under conditions of occupation and the legacies of those films during the postwar era.

The various brief references to *Chun jiang yi hen* raise more questions than they answer. Jay Leyda writes a few lines about *Chun jiang yi hen*, Zhang Yingjin and Xiao Zhiwei make a passing reference to it, and Poshek Fu devotes a few useful paragraphs to it, though he makes it clear he was not able to see the film.¹ Virtually all these brief accounts contain factual errors. Some blurb writers express great passion. Cheng Jihua, taking

¹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), 146–147; Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, annotated ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 195, 228; and Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 126–129.

SEVEN

“The Enemy Is Coming”: The 28 January 1932 Attack on Shanghai in Chinese Cinema

ANNE KERLAN

On the morning of 28 January 1932, Japanese troops launched an attack on Shanghai.¹ The direct cause of the “Shanghai War” was the deadly incidents that had occurred at the Sanyou factory between Japanese and Chinese and the anti-Japanese protests that followed. Japan took the pretext of the need to protect its population to concentrate military forces around Shanghai. The real cause, however, was the Japanese military’s determination to expand its influence into Shanghai after the September 1931 invasion of Manchuria. On 27 January, Japan issued an ultimatum to the Shanghai Municipal Government, asking for monetary compensation for property loss and the end of all anti-Japanese protest. In the afternoon of the following day, the municipal government accepted all Japanese demands. Yet that very night, the Japanese army launched an aerial bombing of Zhabei, one of the most densely populated parts of the crowded city and one of its main industrial hubs.² To the army’s great surprise, however, and contrary to widely held views of the technological disadvantage of the Chinese army, Chinese troops, with the full support of Shanghai residents, offered a staunch resistance.³ In a battle that lasted thirty-three days, the Japanese brought in massive reinforcement and unleashed increasing firepower and destruction. In May 1932, the Chinese

¹ This paper was first written for the symposium “Cultural Memories and Culture in Transition” held at Vilnius University’s Center for Asian Studies in May 2006. I would like to thank Qin Shao for her close reading of the paper while I was rewriting it; her advice was very helpful.

² Donald A. Jordan, *China’s Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 46–47.

³ Jordan, *China’s Trial by Fire*, 47.

Two Stars on the Silver Screen: The Metafilm as Chinese Modern

KRISTINE HARRIS

W. J. T. Mitchell, in his book *Picture Theory*, suggests that metapictures function to “explain what pictures are—to stage, as it were, the ‘self-knowledge’ of pictures,” much the way “‘idols, fetishes, and magic mirrors . . . seem not only to have a presence, but a ‘life’ of their own, talking and looking back at us.”¹ In 1931 Shanghai, the newly established Lianhua Film Company produced a motion picture, *Two Stars on the Silver Screen* (*Yinhan shuangxing* 銀漢雙星), that did just this. As a movie about the making of movies, *Two Stars* told the story of a talented young singer, Li Yueying, who was “discovered” and elevated to stardom by the fictional “Yinhan Film Company.” *Two Stars* not only presents the actress’s performances for stage and screen, and the surrounding backstage dramas, but also self-reflexively includes the process of filming and promotion.

Two Stars might be considered part of a genre of fictional and filmic representations of the movie world circulating through cinemas and print media globally during the 1920s and 1930s. Chinese film companies made numerous pictures about Shanghai’s film industry, including *The Female Movie Star* (*Dianying nümingxing* 電影女明星; Tianyi; 1926), *The Emotional Actress* (*Duoqing de nüling* 多情的女伶; Mingxing; 1926), *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* (*Yinmu yanshi* 銀幕艷史; Mingxing; 1931), and *A Female Star* (*Yige nümingxing* 一個女明星; Tianyi; 1933), to name just a

I wish to thank Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, along with Jin Jiang, Anne Kerlan, Sheldon Lu, Barbara Mittler, Oliver Moore, Robert Polito, William Schaefer, Gillian Rose, and Catherine Yeh, for their many stimulating and helpful comments on an early presentation of this research in 2007 and subsequent drafts.

¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 57.

NINE

Alternative History, Alternative Memory: Cinematic Representation of the Three Gorges in the Shadow of the Dam

SHELDON H. LU

This chapter presents a selective analysis of several films: *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (also called *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse*; *Xiao Caifeng* 小裁縫; 2002; dir. Dai Sijie 戴思杰), *In Expectation* (also called *Rainclouds over Wushan*; *Wushan yunyu* 巫山雲雨; 1996; dir. Zhang Ming 章明), *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*; 2006; dir. Jia Zhangke 賈樟柯), and the documentary *Dong* 東 (2006; dir. Jia Zhangke). What is common to all these films is the pending submergence of life under water at the completion of the Three Gorges Dam project. Villages, towns, cities, and historic relics will all be wiped out in the relentless flood of modernization. Together, these films explore the last moments of life before the disappearance and burial of memories, lives, and history. The Three Gorges Dam has had a huge impact on citizens along the Yangzi River and has caused massive migration within China. These films bear testimony to the collective consequence of China's decision to flood traces of its own history and memory, and they compel us to rethink the dilemma and dialectics of enlightenment.

A central argument of mine is that these films amount to "memory-in-the-making" or "history-in-the-making" in regard to the fate of the people living in the Three Gorges area. Because the construction of the Three Gorges Dam is a state-sponsored project of the highest level, voices of opposition to this megaproject have been silenced or ignored in China. There is an official verdict or official history about the potential benefits of the Three Gorges Dam to the Chinese nation. Contemporaneous with the construction of the dam, these films and their makers rush in to offer

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