Journal of Management World **2025**, 1:428-444
DOI: 10.53935/jomw.v2024i4.711

Framing the Nation: Landscape Photography and Cultural Identity in the Young Companion

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Abstract. The Young Companion, a bilingual magazine established in Shanghai in 1926, significantly influenced early 20th-century Chinese culture. Recognized for diverse content including fashion and politics, it notably utilized landscape photography to bridge cultural gaps during a period of modernization and instability. This media not only portrayed China's geographical diversity but also acted as a unifying force, connecting fragmented populations through shared cultural roots. By using iconic landscapes as metaphors for resilience and unity, the magazine reinforced national identity through visual narratives. These images served as cultural archives and political tools that underscored the harmonious relationship between China's natural landscapes and its cultural heritage, aligning with concepts like Benedict Anderson's "imagined community." This interplay of media and cultural identity profoundly shaped Chinese public perceptions amid socio-political challenges.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Landscape photography, Modernization, National unity, The Young Companion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Young Companion (良友), established in 1926 in Shanghai, emerged as a prominent bilingual (Chinese and English) cultural medium in early 20th-century China. Renowned for its diverse content, including fashion, arts, politics, and photography, the magazine played a pivotal role in bridging cultural divides during an era of modernization and upheaval (Li, 2020). Its unique feature was its emphasis on landscape photography, which served as both a cultural archive and a political tool for fostering national identity (Zhang, 2015). In particular, the magazine's landscape photography became a cultural medium that showcased China's diverse geography and traditions. These visual representations acted as a unifying force, reminding its readers of their shared cultural roots amidst the nation's rapid transformations and instability (Li, 2020).

Landscape photography, especially during the early Republican period, transcended its artistic purpose to become a political and ideological tool. In *The Young Companion*, images of natural landmarks like Mount Huangshan and West Lake served as metaphors for resilience, unity, and cultural pride (Assmann, 2011). By capturing these sites, the magazine documented the nation's beauty while embedding these visual representations within a collective cultural framework. Landscape photography helped shape narratives of national identity by emphasizing the unity of the nation's people and geography. This visual strategy was particularly significant in light of Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the "imagined community," where shared cultural symbols like photographs helped unify fragmented populations. The portrayal of China's landscapes and local traditions in *The Young Companion* acted as visual proof of a strong, enduring nation despite the social and political challenges of the time (Zhang, 2015).

Visual media like *The Young Companion* leveraged photography to construct a cohesive national identity. By publishing photographs that celebrated the harmony between China's natural environment, architectural heritage, and cultural traditions, the magazine reinforced a shared sense of belonging and pride (Barthes, 1981). This interplay between media and cultural identity was critical in shaping public perception during a period of political fragmentation and modernization. By blending modern techniques with traditional aesthetics, *The Young Companion* created an accessible visual language that connected diverse regions and social classes. For instance, photographs of terraced fields or sacred temples not only documented China's geographical and cultural diversity but also served as symbols of unity and resilience (Li, 2020). This deliberate focus on visual narratives contributed significantly to the nation's collective memory (Assmann, 2011).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis, and Narrative Analysis to explore the visual and textual representations of landscape photography in *The Young Companion*. These three methods provide a comprehensive framework for systematically identifying patterns, extracting thematic elements, and interpreting the narratives embedded in the magazine's photographs. Together, they uncover how *The Young Companion* functioned as a cultural and ideological medium for constructing national identity.

Content Analysis, a systematic method for analyzing patterns in textual and visual data, provides the foundation for this research. Originating from Harold Lasswell's (1948) seminal work in media studies and further developed by Klaus Krippendorff (1980, 2018), Content Analysis enables researchers to examine both manifest content (explicit elements) and latent content (underlying meanings).

In this study, photographs from *The Young Companion* are categorized based on their visual components, such

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as subject matter, framing, and lighting, while textual captions are coded to identify recurring keywords and themes. Iconic natural landmarks, including Mount Huangshan and the Yangtze River, are analyzed for their frequency of appearance and the symbolic meanings associated with them. By quantifying these elements, Content Analysis reveals the magazine's deliberate editorial strategies for visually emphasizing cultural diversity and national pride. This approach is instrumental in identifying systematic patterns in the representation of China's geographical and cultural heritage (Krippendorff, 2018; Lasswell, 1948).

Thematic Analysis is used to identify recurring themes in the visual and textual content of *The Young Companion*. This method, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is particularly well-suited for qualitative research, allowing for a detailed exploration of how cultural and ideological meanings are conveyed.

In this study, themes such as "harmony between nature and humanity," "resilience and national pride," and "preservation of cultural heritage" are extracted and analyzed. By examining how photographs and their captions interact, Thematic Analysis uncovers the ideological messages embedded in the magazine's landscape photography. For instance, images of terraced fields and sacred temples illustrate the coexistence of tradition and modernity, emphasizing unity amidst diversity. This method offers a nuanced understanding of how *The Young Companion* connected local and national identities through a curated thematic framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014).

Narrative Analysis focuses on how *The Young Companion* constructed cohesive stories of national identity through its landscape photography. Drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur (1981) and Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008), this method examines the structural and symbolic dimensions of narratives to reveal how visual and textual elements create meaning. In this study, Narrative Analysis is applied to the sequencing of photographs and their placement within magazine issues, exploring how visual narratives of national revival and unity were constructed. Metaphors such as mountains representing resilience and rivers symbolizing continuity are interpreted within the socio-political context of early 20th-century China. This approach highlights *The Young Companion*'s ability to use its photographs as a visual medium for storytelling, weaving narratives that promoted national pride, cultural resilience, and modernization (Ricoeur, 1981; Riessman, 2008).

The integration of Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis, and Narrative Analysis provides a comprehensive framework for exploring *The Young Companion*. Content Analysis identifies systematic patterns in the representation of landscapes, while Thematic Analysis uncovers recurring cultural and ideological themes. Finally, Narrative Analysis reveals how these elements are woven into cohesive stories of national identity. Together, these methods illuminate the magazine's role in shaping a unified vision of China's cultural heritage and modern aspirations (Anderson, 1991; Krippendorff, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The cultural and ideological significance of *The Young Companion*'s landscape photography has been thoroughly examined through interdisciplinary frameworks, including cultural memory, semiotics, and media studies. The magazine's unique approach to visual storytelling positioned it as a cultural and ideological medium for shaping national identity during the transformative period of early 20th-century China. This section draws on key scholarly contributions to explore how *The Young Companion* curated its visual and textual content to forge connections between cultural heritage, national pride, and modern aspirations.

The Young Companion, established in 1926 in Shanghai, emerged as a prominent bilingual cultural medium that reflected the aspirations and anxieties of a nation undergoing rapid modernization. The magazine featured a wide range of content, including fashion, politics, and art, but it was its focus on landscape photography that set it apart as a cultural archive and political tool. Li (2020) highlights the magazine's role in bridging the cultural divide between tradition and modernity, portraying China as a nation rooted in its historical and cultural traditions while embracing modernization.

Zhang (2015) emphasizes that the magazine's photography served as a unifying force, reminding its readers of their shared cultural roots. By documenting iconic landscapes and local customs, *The Young Companion* constructed a visual narrative that celebrated China's geographical and cultural diversity. These representations acted as visual proof of an enduring national identity, even as the country faced political instability and social upheaval. The magazine's editorial decisions to include photographs of iconic landmarks such as Mount Huangshan and West Lake reinforced its ideological commitment to fostering national pride and unity. Additionally, *The Young Companion* acted as a cultural ambassador, presenting a modern yet distinctly Chinese identity to both domestic and international audiences. Its bilingual format further expanded its reach, allowing it to engage with a global readership while promoting a sense of cultural pride among its Chinese audience. This dual function—both as a cultural preservationist and a modernizer—makes the magazine a unique case study in the use of media for national identity formation (Li, 2020; Zhang, 2015).

The landscape photography featured in *The Young Companion* went beyond aesthetic appeal to become a powerful tool for political and ideological messaging. Photographs of natural landmarks, such as Mount Huangshan, the Yangtze River, and the Three Gorges, were laden with cultural and historical symbolism. Assmann's (2011) cultural memory theory is particularly relevant here, as these images served as repositories of collective memory, connecting viewers to a shared sense of cultural continuity amidst rapid change. By curating

photographs that depicted iconic natural and cultural sites, *The Young Companion* used landscape photography to assert the resilience and unity of the Chinese nation. Barthes' (1981) semiotics provides a valuable framework for interpreting the symbolic meanings embedded in these photographs. For instance, mountains were frequently used to symbolize permanence and moral strength, while rivers, such as the Yangtze, represented continuity and interconnectivity. These visual metaphors reinforced the magazine's broader narrative of cultural and national revival, emphasizing that China's natural and cultural heritage could provide stability and pride during a time of uncertainty.

Anderson's (2006) concept of the "imagined community" further contextualizes the role of these photographs in fostering a collective national identity. Shared symbols, such as the misty peaks of Mount Huangshan or the serene waters of West Lake, helped unify fragmented populations by linking them to a common cultural and geographic narrative. Zhang (2015) argues that the magazine's visual strategy transformed these landmarks into cultural icons, reinforcing their significance as symbols of national pride and resilience.

The interplay between *The Young Companion*'s photography and its textual captions underscores the magazine's role in shaping cultural identity through visual media. By blending traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern photographic techniques, the magazine created a unique visual language that resonated across regional and social boundaries (Li, 2020). This approach connected China's diverse cultural traditions to a cohesive national framework, offering readers a vision of unity amidst diversity.

Barthes' (1981) analysis of the "punctum" in photography—the emotional resonance or symbolic detail that captures the viewer's attention—is particularly relevant here. In *The Young Companion*'s photography, the punctum often lies in the intricate details of the landscapes, such as the jagged peaks of Mount Huangshan or the reflective waters of Guilin's rivers. These images not only documented China's natural beauty but also evoked a sense of cultural and spiritual connection. Wells (2011) highlights the dual role of landscape photography as both a documentation of cultural heritage and a means of fostering unity, a duality that is evident in *The Young Companion*'s visual narratives.

The magazine's ability to juxtapose traditional and modern elements further contributed to its ideological impact. For instance, photographs of terraced fields and rural villages emphasized the harmony between humanity and nature, reflecting Daoist principles of balance and resilience. At the same time, images of urban landscapes showcased the coexistence of tradition and modernity, illustrating China's transformation without losing its cultural roots (Li, 2020; Wells, 2011).

Theoretical frameworks such as cultural memory, semiotics, and imagined communities provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing *The Young Companion*'s photography. Assmann's (2011) cultural memory theory conceptualizes photography as a medium that preserves and transmits cultural values across generations. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding the magazine's recurring focus on historical landmarks and cultural icons, which were presented as embodiments of national identity and resilience.

Barthes' (1977, 1981) semiotic theories further illuminate the symbolic construction of meaning in *The Young Companion*'s visual content. The magazine's use of metaphors—such as rivers symbolizing cultural flow or mountains representing stability—demonstrates its ability to communicate deeper ideological messages through imagery. These visual symbols reinforced a collective identity that linked the nation's past, present, and future.

Anderson's (2006) concept of imagined communities situates *The Young Companion* within the broader context of national identity formation. By curating visual and textual content that celebrated cultural diversity while emphasizing national unity, the magazine played a pivotal role in fostering a shared sense of belonging among its readers. Zhang (2015) argues that this strategy was particularly effective in bridging regional differences, creating a cohesive narrative that resonated with both urban and rural audiences.

The visual strategies employed by *The Young Companion* can be situated within a global context, drawing comparisons with other media platforms that used photography to construct narratives of national identity. Sullivan (2020) examines the role of landscape art in both Chinese and European contexts, highlighting shared themes of resilience, cultural continuity, and the interplay between tradition and modernity. These comparative perspectives underscore the universality of landscape imagery as a medium for fostering national pride. In the contemporary era, the legacy of *The Young Companion*'s visual storytelling continues to resonate. Gao and Zhang (2021) explore how symbolic elements in historical landscape photography inform modern visual culture, particularly in the context of digital media. Zheng (2020) highlights the role of social media in extending the reach of visual narratives, offering new opportunities for preserving cultural heritage and fostering national identity in a globalized world. The lessons from *The Young Companion*—particularly its ability to balance cultural preservation with modern innovation—remain relevant for contemporary visual culture.

4. THE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

4.1. Depiction of Local Customs

The photography in *The Young Companion* utilized local customs as a lens to frame the cultural diversity and unity of China. Events such as the Dragon Boat Festival, Chongyang Festival, and Tibetan Buddha Display Ceremony were not merely documented but depicted as visual symbols of cultural vitality and resilience. These festivals, deeply tied to specific geographic and cultural contexts, underscored the intimate relationship between

human activity and the natural environment. For instance, the Dragon Boat Festival's dynamic boat races, framed against the rivers of southern China, showcased the interconnection between cultural practices and the landscape that supported them. Similarly, the Chongyang Festival portrayed families ascending hills, symbolizing a cultural ethos rooted in respect for nature and communal participation. Such imagery offered readers a visual archive of traditional life that emphasized the unity and diversity of Chinese culture (Assmann, 2011;).

The inclusion of these events also highlighted the role of local customs in constructing a national identity during a time of political fragmentation. The Tibetan Buddha Display Ceremony, with its dramatic unfurling of thangkas across mountainsides, combined spiritual devotion with regional uniqueness, reinforcing the idea of a shared yet diverse cultural heritage. These depictions not only celebrated traditions but also elevated them as markers of cultural pride and continuity during a period of upheaval (Barthes, 1981;).

Table 1: Festivals and Folk Activities Depicted in The Young Companion.

Photographer	Festival/Folk Activity	Details
Huang Meisheng	Dragon Boat Festival	Depiction of dragon boat racing at Half-Song Park, capturing the festive atmosphere
Huang Ying)	Chongyang Festival	Vibrant scenes of residents climbing hills in Hong Kong to celebrate the festival
Lin Yueming	National Day Celebrations	Images of National Day commemorations, including Tiananmen decorative arch
Guan Ruiheng	National Day Celebrations	Busy streets in Macau during the Double Tenth Festival, showcasing community engagement
Zhang Guangyu	Buddha Display Ceremony	A Tibetan Buddhist ritual featuring large-scale Buddha thangkas
Hua Xi	Nine Emperor Gods Festival	Southern China processions showcasing intricate cultural rituals
Chen Bingde	Dragon Boat Racing	Representation of traditional longboat racing, emphasizing community sportsmanship

4.2. Local Architecture and Traditional Residences

The landscape photography in *The Young Companion* frequently turned to regional architectural styles as a means of portraying the cultural authenticity and diversity of China's built environment. Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou was presented as an iconic representation of Buddhist architecture, blending human ingenuity with the natural scenery of surrounding mountains and forests. Such images underscored the traditional Chinese philosophy of harmony between humans and nature, an ethos central to cultural identity. Similarly, the Fujian Tulou were depicted as architectural marvels of communal living, emphasizing the Hakka people's unique cultural and social practices. These earth buildings, with their fortified structures and intricate interiors, served as a visual testament to the resourcefulness and creativity of local communities (Anderson, 2006;).

Moreover, the classical gardens of China, such as the Jichang Garden in Wuxi, featured prominently in the magazine's photographic narratives. These spaces were captured with meticulous attention to detail, showcasing the interplay between natural elements and architectural precision. The use of water, rocks, and plants as integral components of garden design highlighted the symbolic and meditative qualities of Chinese landscape aesthetics. Such portrayals were not merely aesthetic but carried ideological significance, suggesting that the preservation of traditional architecture was vital for maintaining cultural identity amidst modernization (Assmann, 2011;).

Table 2: Architectural and Traditional Residences Featured in The Young Companion.

Photographe	Architectural Subject	Details
Unknown	Lingyin Temple	A famous Buddhist temple in Hangzhou, Zhejiang
Zh	Huaqing Pool	A historic site showcasing Tang Dynasty leisure architecture
Liang Desuo	University Library	A modern educational building
Zhao Cheng	uan Mountain Pagoda	Tall Buddhist structure in Beijing
Huang Ying	Surmer Residence	Historical landmark
Lin Jianzhi	Bird's-eye viewBasin Features	rural traditional buildings
Zheng Qiaoquan	Jichang Garden in Wuxi	A classical Chinese garden
Huang Weiqing	Canglang Pavilion in Suzhou	pavilion showcasing regional elegance
Liang Desuo	Tiger Hill Pagoda in Suzhou	Ancient pg Pisa's Leaning Tower

4.3. Daily Life and Social Harmony

Daily life in both urban and rural settings was a recurring theme in *The Young Companion*'s photography. The portrayal of rural farmers working in terraced fields, women weaving cloth in courtyard homes, and fishermen casting nets into serene rivers offered a romanticized vision of social harmony and continuity. These images emphasized the intimate connection between traditional livelihoods and the natural world, celebrating resilience and adaptability in the face of changing times (Barthes, 1981).



Figure 1: Field. The Young Companion, No.12, January 15, 1927, p. 5.

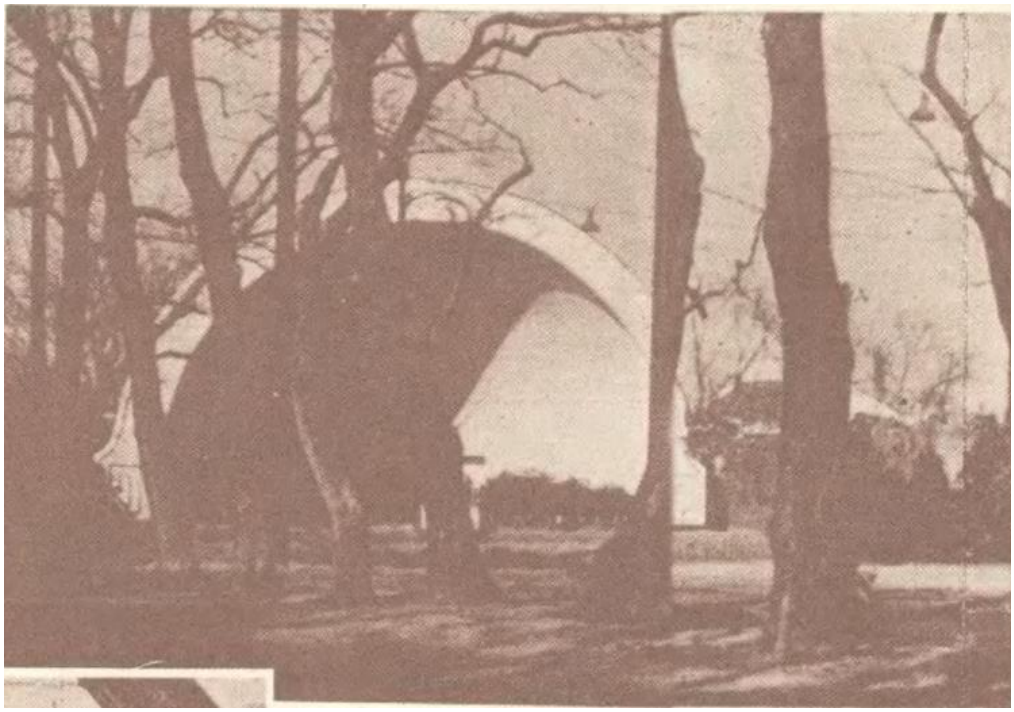


Figure 2: Lu Shifu, Curves and Lines: Rural and Urban. From the "Black and White Photography Society Exhibition" by Lu Shifu and Chen Chuanlin. The Young Companion, No. 78, p. 20.

Urban scenes, such as bustling street markets and tea houses, captured the dynamic energy of cities while juxtaposing modern developments with enduring traditions. For instance, photographs of street vendors alongside bicycles and emerging automobiles illustrated the coexistence of old and new in the urban landscape. These depictions suggested that even as China modernized, its cultural roots remained integral to everyday life. By representing both rural and urban experiences, the magazine fostered a holistic understanding of Chinese society, uniting disparate lifestyles under a shared cultural framework (Anderson, 2006).

4.4. Natural Landscapes and Scenery

The natural landscapes captured in *The Young Companion* were imbued with cultural and historical significance, reinforcing notions of national identity through iconic sites like Mount Huangshan and the Three Gorges. Mount Huangshan, with its misty peaks and ancient pines, was often depicted as an embodiment of resilience and endurance. These images echoed the aesthetics of classical Chinese ink paintings, suggesting a continuity between traditional art forms and modern photography (Barthes, 1981).

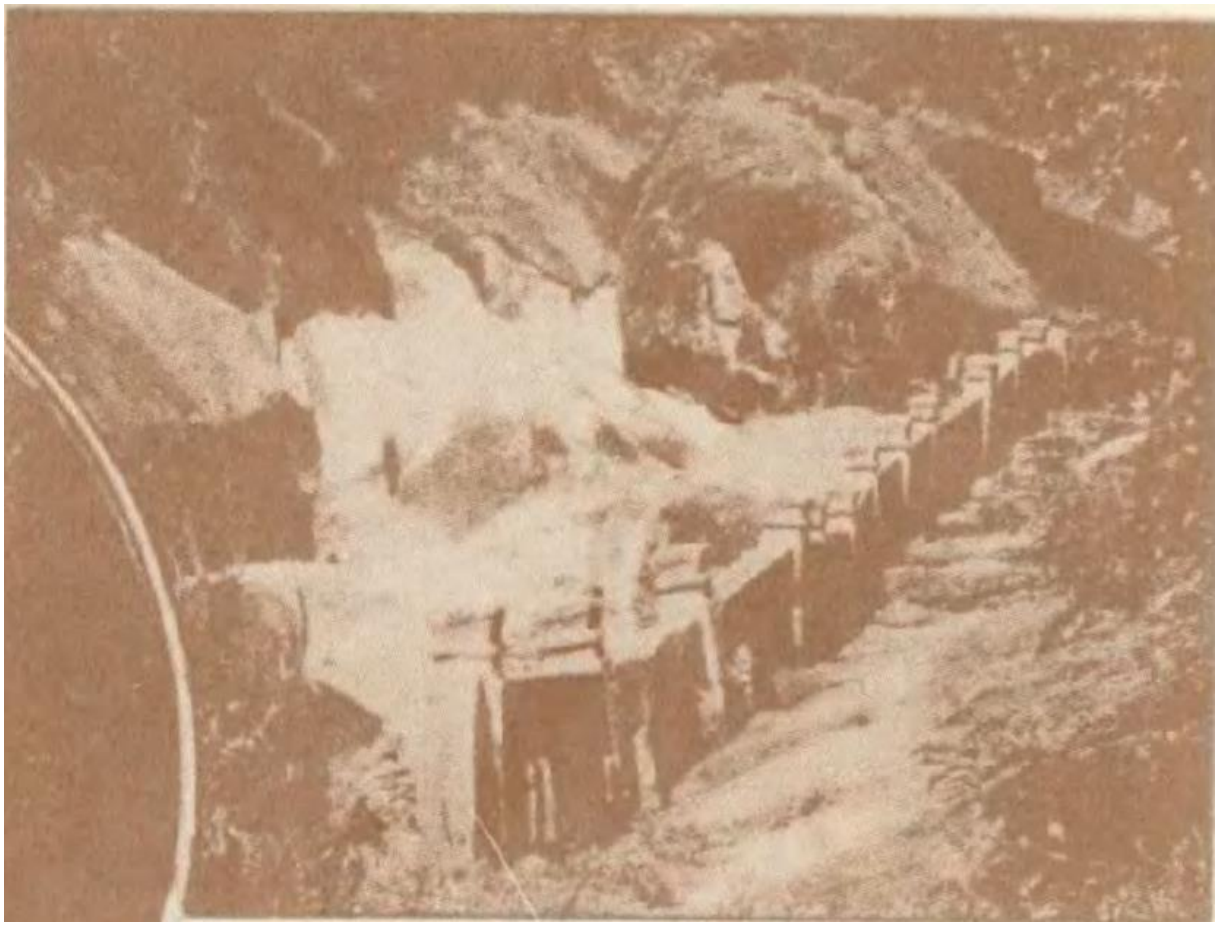


Figure 3: Funo Wu, Huanglongtan, Scenery of Mount Huangshan. The Young Companion, No. 61, September 1931, p. 33.

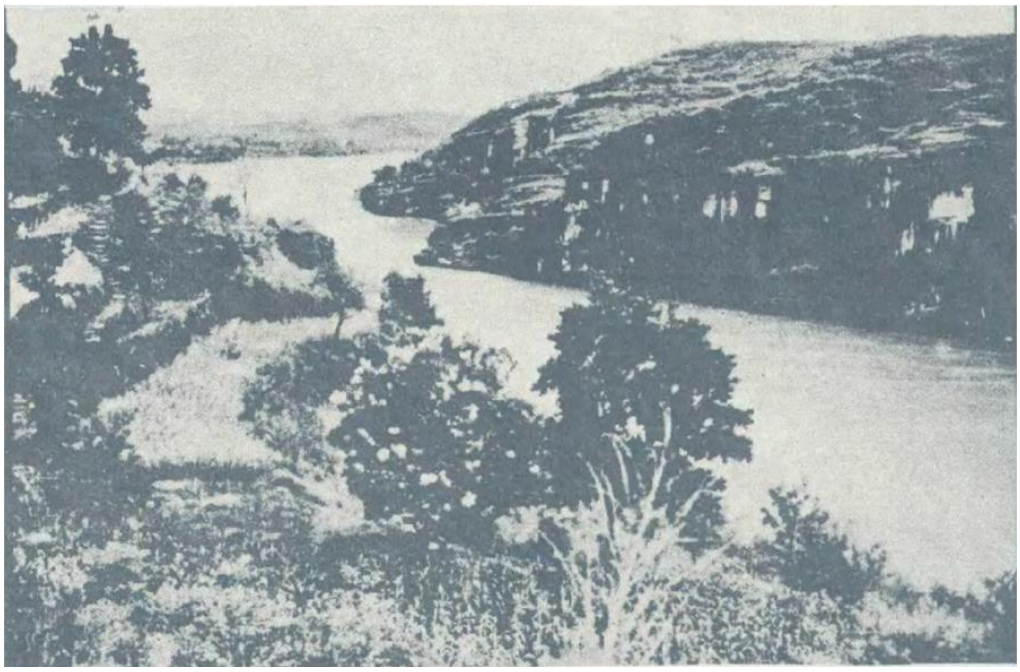


Figure 4: Zhang Yuanheng, Dengying Gorge, the Second Section of Xiling Gorge, from Yichang to Chongqing. The Young Companion, No. 139, February 1939, p. 32.

Similarly, the Three Gorges region was presented as a symbol of the nation's strength and grandeur. The dramatic cliffs and flowing waters of Wu Gorge and Qutang Gorge were framed as metaphors for collective resilience, reflecting the magazine's broader narrative of cultural and geographical unity. Beyond iconic landmarks, lesser-known natural features such as the Fuchun River and Mount Emei were also celebrated for their serene beauty and spiritual resonance, inviting viewers to reflect on the timeless connection between nature and culture. These depictions not only elevated the landscapes themselves but also positioned them as integral components of China's cultural identity (Assmann, 2011).

5. THE VALUES EMBEDDED IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

5.1. Harmony Between Nature and Humanity

The landscape photography featured in *The Young Companion* reflects traditional Chinese cultural values, particularly the concept of "天人合一" (unity of heaven and humanity). This philosophy emphasizes a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment, portraying nature as not merely a backdrop but a central figure in the nation's identity. For instance, images of Mount Huangshan, with its ethereal mist and jagged peaks, echo classical Chinese aesthetics found in ink paintings and poetry. These depictions reinforce the spiritual connection between the viewer and the natural world, presenting landscapes as sites of tranquility and moral introspection (Assmann, 2011). Guilin's rivers, often photographed in moments of serene reflection, provide another example. The interplay of water and light evokes themes of balance and renewal, resonating with Daoist ideals of harmony between opposites (Barthes, 1977). Such visual elements in *The Young Companion* illustrate how the magazine framed landscapes as embodiments of both cultural and spiritual continuity during a period of rapid modernization.

Table 3: Representative Local Scenery and Natural Landscapes in The Young Companion.

Photographer	Local Scenery/Natural Landscape	Details
Zhang Zhenhou	Fuchun River after Rain)	A serene river scene highlighted by post-rain tranquility
	Yanziling's Fishing Terrace	A historical landmark showcasing cultural reverence for the land
	Qililongkou	A captivating section of the river known for its stunning views
Mei zhang	Mount Huangshan Views	Captures the iconic misty peaks of Mount Huangshan
Unknown	Three Pothe Moon	One of Hangzhou's most celebrated scenic spots on West Lake
Unknown	Jade Bridge	Summer Represents historical architecture blending with natural beauty
Huang Ying)	Yangtze River Sky	iction of China's longest river
Liangyou Group	Guilin Scenery	Iconic kas from the Guilin region
	Fubo Mountain	Scenic mountain in Gring cultural landmarks
Guo Zhijie	Snow Scene on Mount Emei	A serene depiction of Mount Emei ket of snow
Zhang Yuanheng)	Qutang Gorge	The spectacular canyon scenery constitutes the beautiful scenery of Chongqing
	Wu Gorge	Scenic mist-covered cliffs showcasing

5.2. Patriotism and National Pride

The landscapes featured in *The Young Companion* were also instrumental in evoking patriotic sentiments. Iconic landmarks, such as the Yangtze River and the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, were repeatedly depicted as symbols of national unity and pride. The Yangtze River, often photographed from panoramic angles, symbolizes the geographical and cultural lifeline of China. By capturing its vastness and grandeur, the magazine instilled a sense of shared ownership and collective identity, reinforcing the idea of the river as a metaphor for the unbroken flow of Chinese civilization (Anderson, 1991). Similarly, the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum was frequently portrayed as a site of reverence and revolutionary pride, emphasizing the sacrifices made to shape modern China. These images connected audiences to the values of resilience and progress, encouraging them to draw strength from these landmarks as visual embodiments of national achievement and unity during periods of political and social upheaval (Assmann, 2011).

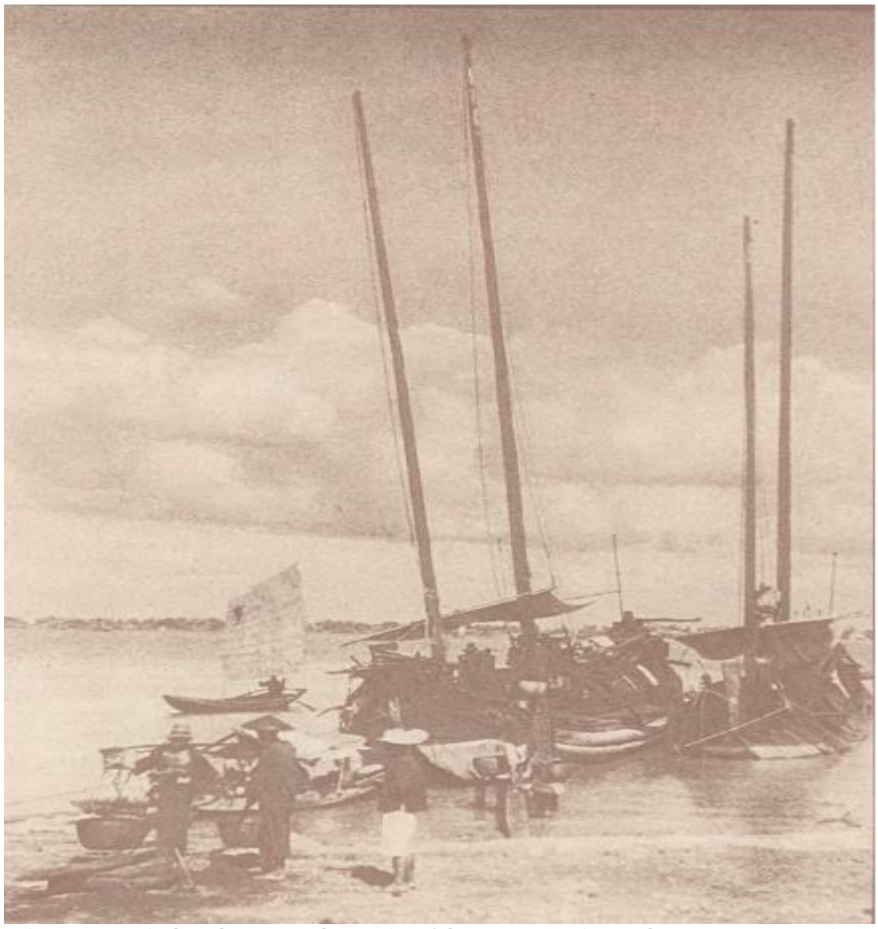


Figure 5: Wei Shouzhong, By the Banks of the Yangtze River. The Young Companion, 8th Anniversary Special Issue, 1933–1934, p. 10.



Figure 6: Unknown Author, Fudu Chongqing: Natural Scenery of Chongqing City Viewed from the South Bank of the Yangtze River. The Young Companion, No. 162, October 1941, p. 27.

5.3. Education and Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Another core value embedded in the magazine's landscape photography is the preservation of cultural heritage. *The Young Companion* showcased ancient temples such as Lingyin Temple and iconic sites like the Tiger Hill Pagoda to educate audiences on the significance of these cultural treasures. These images functioned as a visual archive, documenting the richness of China's architectural and natural heritage while advocating for their preservation (Barthes, 1977). For example, photographs of Lingyin Temple emphasized its intricate design and spiritual ambiance, blending religious significance with cultural pride. By doing so, the magazine encouraged its readers to value these landmarks not only as aesthetic objects but also as historical and cultural legacies worth

safeguarding for future generations (Anderson, 1991). Through this lens, *The Young Companion* positioned itself as a cultural custodian, fostering an appreciation for the interconnectedness of history, geography, and national identity.

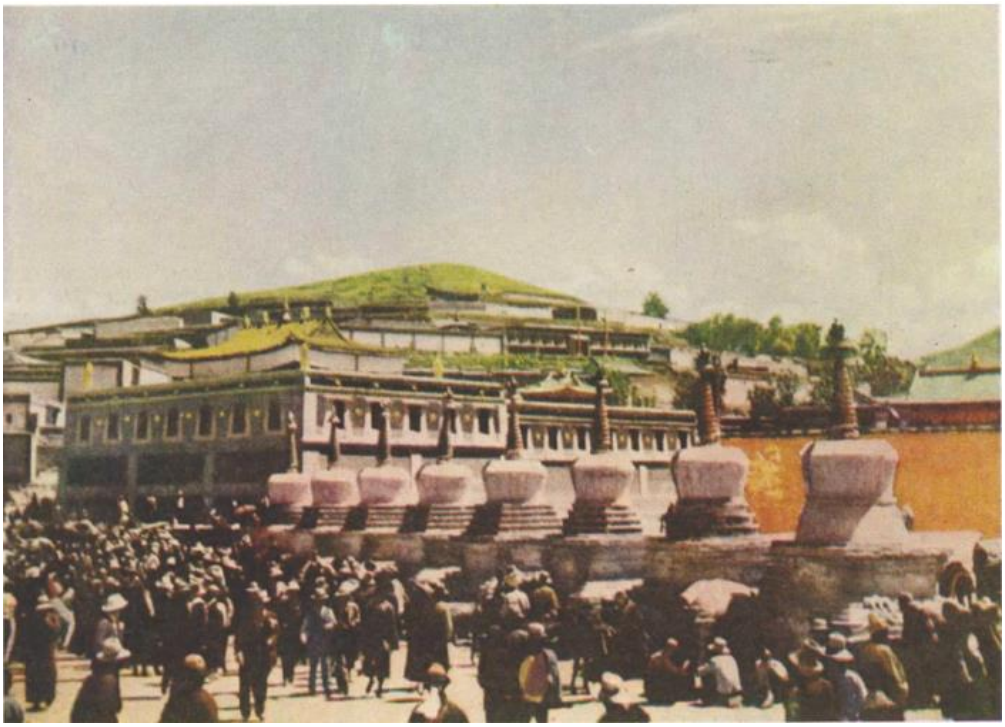


Figure 7: Zhang Yuanheng, The Open Market in Front of the Taer Lamasery: Sun-Buddha Ceremony at Taer Monastery (Color Photograph). The Young Companion, No. 146, September 1939, p. 22.

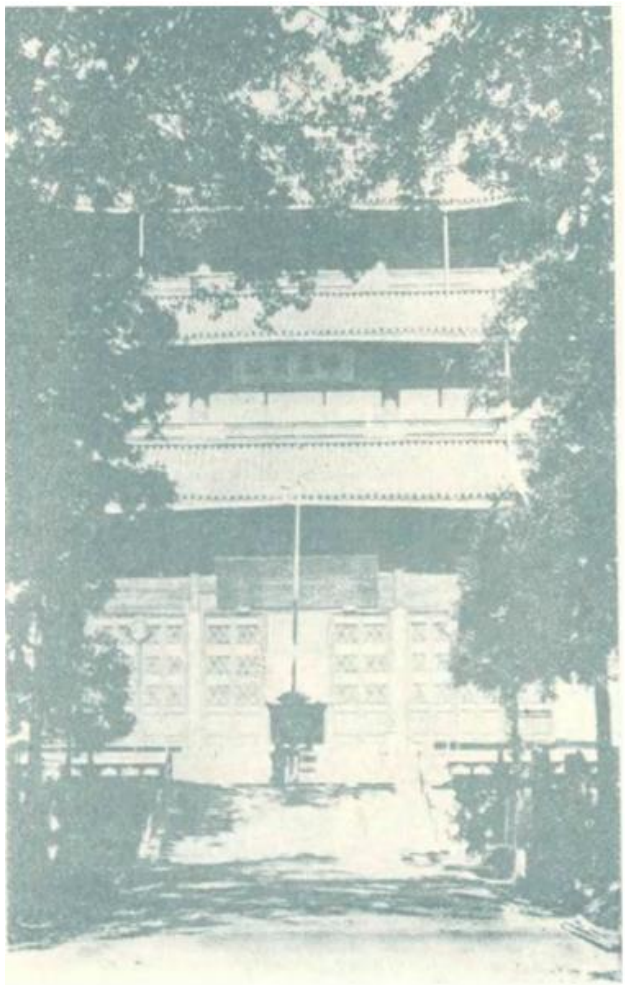


Figure 8: Unknown Author, Lingyin Temple: Scenery of Hangzhou. The Young Companion, No. 1, February 15, 1926, p. 13.

5.4. Social Responsibility and Collective Consciousness

The Young Companion used landscape photography to encourage a sense of collective responsibility and shared stewardship over the nation's natural and cultural landscapes. Agricultural imagery, such as scenes of terraced fields and rural villages, highlighted the interconnectedness between human activity and the environment. These images symbolized the resilience of local communities, suggesting that the survival and prosperity of the nation depended on the sustainable relationship between people and the land. For instance, depictions of farmers laboring in terraced rice fields visually affirmed the values of hard work and unity, presenting rural life as both a cultural and moral foundation of the nation (Assmann, 2011). The emphasis on shared responsibility extended to the magazine's portrayal of lesser-known natural landmarks, which were framed as treasures of regional pride and collective heritage. Such visual narratives sought to inspire readers to participate actively in preserving both the environment and the cultural identity embedded within it (Barthes, 1977). By doing so, the magazine presented the preservation of landscapes as a national duty, reinforcing the idea that the land and its people are intrinsically linked in their shared journey toward progress and continuity.

6. THE SYMBOLISM OF LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE YOUNG COMPANION

6.1. Mountains and Rivers as National Icons

Mountains and rivers, as central motifs in *The Young Companion*, were deeply intertwined with Chinese cultural traditions and served as enduring national icons. Mountains, such as Mount Tai (泰山) and Huangshan (黄山), symbolized resilience, strength, and moral integrity. Historically regarded as sacred spaces, these mountains carried significant spiritual and philosophical connotations. In Confucianism, mountains were symbols of permanence and stability, while in Daoism, they represented a connection between the earthly and divine realms. Photographs of Huangshan often mirrored classical Chinese ink paintings, featuring jagged cliffs shrouded in ethereal mist, evoking notions of timelessness and transcendence. Similarly, rivers, such as the Yangtze River (长江), functioned as metaphors for continuity and interconnectivity. The Yangtze, often photographed with a sweeping grandeur, highlighted its role as a unifier of the Chinese landscape and its people. These depictions align with Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the "imagined community," as they link disparate regions into a shared cultural and geographic narrative. Such representations not only emphasized the geographic vastness of China but also underscored the nation's resilience amidst modernization. In terms of semiotic analysis, Barthes (1977) argues that visual elements, like mountains and rivers, are imbued with cultural codes that carry deeper ideological meanings. The photographs of mountains and rivers in *The Young Companion* can be seen as "mythologies" that communicated an idealized vision of Chinese identity, blending traditional aesthetics with modern photographic techniques.

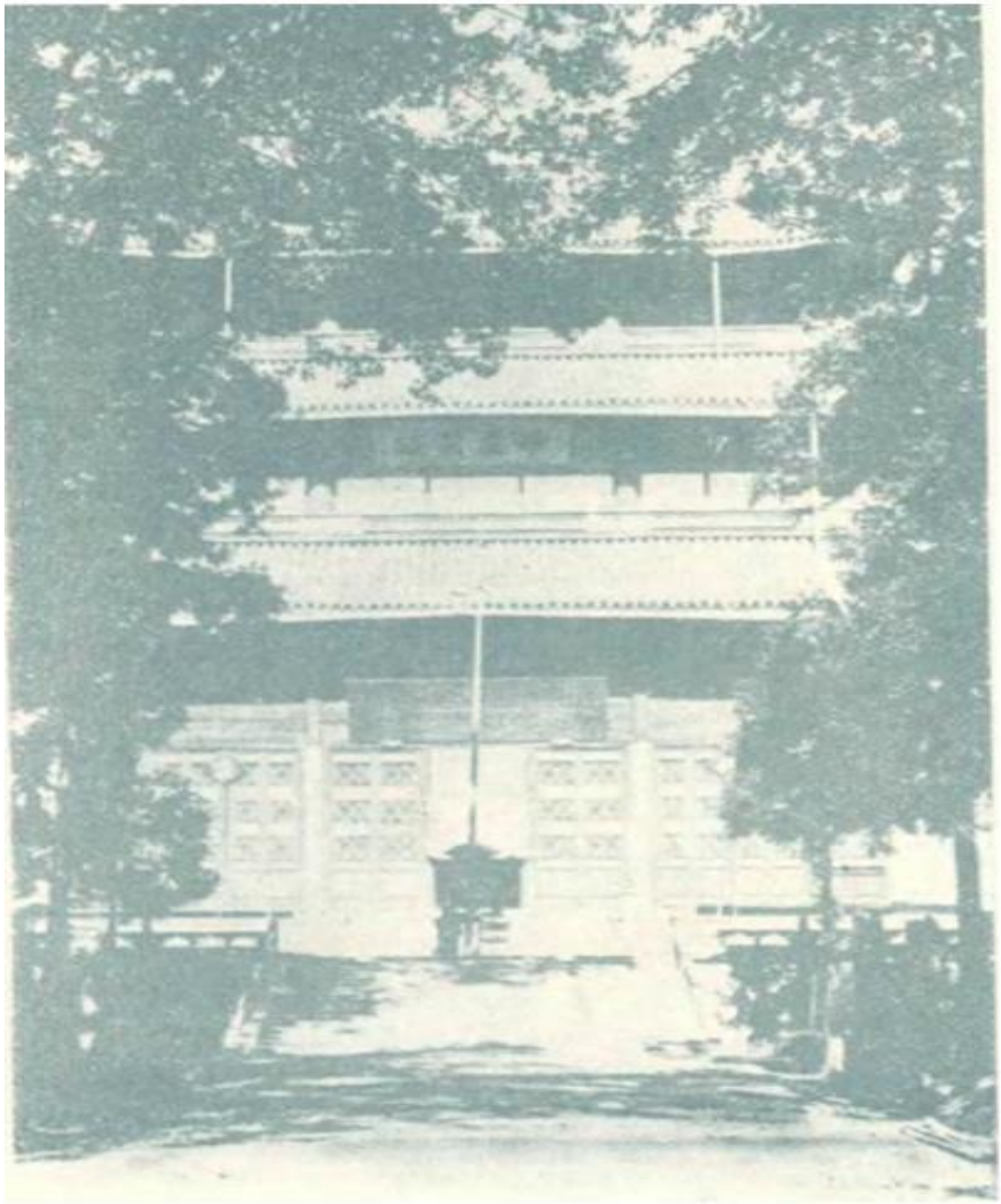


Figure 9: Liang De, Famous Scenery of Mount Tai: The Peak of the Eastern Sacred Mountain. The Young Companion, No. 10, November 15, 1926, p. 6.



Figure 10: Liang De, Famous Scenery of Mount Tai: Shuihao Stream and River. The Young Companion, No. 10, November 15, 1926, p. 6.

6.2. Historical Sites and Collective Memory

Historical landmarks featured in *The Young Companion* played a vital role in preserving and reinforcing collective memory. Lingyin Temple (灵隐寺) in Hangzhou was frequently depicted within its natural surroundings, emphasizing the harmony between spiritual practices and environmental beauty. Such representations resonated with cultural memory theory (Assmann, 2011), which views cultural artifacts as repositories of shared history and identity. By showcasing these sacred spaces, the magazine linked contemporary audiences to a historical legacy that upheld values of unity, spirituality, and cultural pride. The Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum (中山陵), another frequently featured site, became a symbol of revolutionary ideals and national progress. Its architectural symmetry and monumental scale highlighted both modernity and tradition, serving as a focal point for patriotic sentiment. According to Zheng (2020), the depiction of such sites in visual media like *The Young Companion* was crucial in constructing narratives of modern Chinese identity during a period of rapid change. The mausoleum embodied a collective commitment to revolution and unity, offering a visual representation of a nation striving to reconcile its historical past with its modern aspirations. Furthermore, Barthes' semiotics can also be applied here to decode the visual symbols of these sites. For example, the framing of Lingyin Temple amidst lush vegetation suggests an emphasis on the coexistence of tradition and nature, while the grandeur of Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum reflects ideals

of modernity and patriotism.

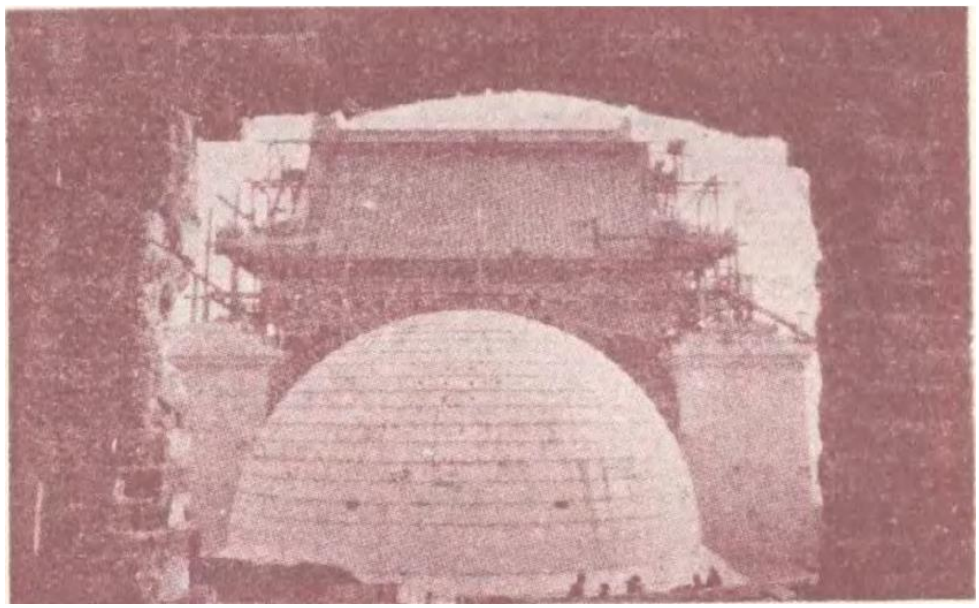


Figure 11: Pan Jianwei, The Rear View of Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum: In Memory of Sun Zhongshan. The Young Companion, No. 33, December 1928, p. 19.

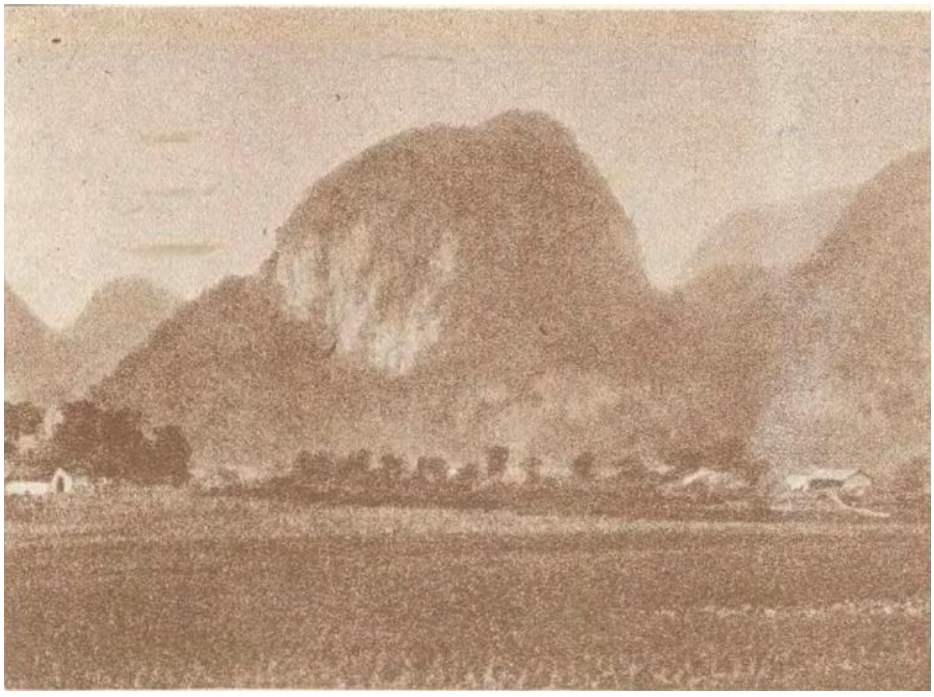


Figure 12: The Young Companion Photography Team, Guilin Scenery: The Finest Under Heaven. The Young Companion, No. 77, p. 26.

6.3. Land as a Symbol of Survival and Renewal

The agricultural and rural landscapes depicted in *The Young Companion* symbolized the endurance and renewal of the Chinese spirit. Photographs of terraced fields in southern China and Guilin's karst landscapes emphasized the ingenuity and perseverance of rural communities. These images resonated with a broader narrative of survival, presenting the land not only as a source of material sustenance but also as a cornerstone of cultural heritage. The portrayal of agricultural landscapes aligns with Daoist principles of harmony and cyclical renewal. The terraced fields, carved into the mountains over generations, visually embodied themes of resilience and adaptability. These depictions reflect Barthes' (1977) notion of how visual narratives encode cultural myths, as they reinforced the idea that rural China was the moral and cultural backbone of the nation. Additionally, Jan Assmann's (2011) concept of cultural memory provides insight into these representations. The magazine's emphasis on rural life and landscapes preserved the historical continuity of agrarian traditions, offering a stabilizing vision amidst the uncertainty of modernization. By celebrating the connection between people and the land, these images underscored the role of agriculture in shaping both national identity and collective resilience.

6.4. Regional Icons and Cultural Diversity

One of the defining features of *The Young Companion* was its celebration of regional diversity, which was depicted through iconic landmarks and cultural practices. Guilin's karst formations, for instance, became synonymous with southern China's poetic and artistic traditions. These limestone peaks, often framed by tranquil rivers, symbolized the harmonious interplay between nature and culture. Similarly, the Jiangnan water towns, with their distinct white-walled, black-tiled architecture, highlighted the cultural sophistication of the Yangtze Delta region. This emphasis on regional diversity aligns with Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of the "imagined community." By presenting regional landmarks as part of a cohesive national identity, *The Young Companion* bridged geographic and cultural differences, fostering a sense of unity within diversity. Stuart Hall's (1996) theories of cultural identity further elucidate how these depictions construct a collective identity that celebrates both local distinctiveness and national coherence. Through its lens, *The Young Companion* presented China's regional landscapes and cultural practices as interconnected components of a broader narrative. This approach reinforced the idea that the diversity of China's geography and culture was a source of strength, not division.

The landscapes in *The Young Companion* reflect a blend of traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern photographic practices. By combining Assmann's cultural memory theory, Barthes' semiotics, and Anderson's imagined communities, these images transcend mere visual documentation to construct a narrative of unity, resilience, and pride. They served as a visual medium for fostering national identity during a critical period of social and political transformation.

Table 4: Symbols Represented in Landscape Photography of The Young Companion.

Symbol	Example(s)	Cultural Significance
Mountains and Rivers	Huashan, Lushan, Mount Huangshan, Hengshan, Fuchun River, Qutang Gorge, Wu Gorge	Represent resilience, endurance, and the spiritual harmony of nature in traditional Chinese culture.
Historical Sites	Yanziling's Fishing Terrace, Lingyin Temple, West Lake	Serve as tangible links to the past, preserving collective memory and national heritage.
Land and Agriculture	Rice fields, terraced landscapes, rural villages	Symbolize survival, hope, and the continuity of life, reflecting the importance of the land to China's identity.
Architectural Landmarks	Lingyin Temple, Jade Bridge (Summer Palace), Ancient tombs	ancient pagodas Reflect the integration of human creativity with natural landscapes, emphasizing cultural sophistication.
Seasonal and Natural Elements	Snow-covered Mount Emei, autumn foliage, misty rivers	Embody the cyclical rhythms of nature, aligning with traditional Chinese philosophies of harmony and balance.
Festivals and Folk Activities	Dragon boat races during Duanwu Festival, temple fairs	Highlight the vibrancy of local culture and foster a sense of unity through shared traditions.
Regional Icons	Guilin's karst formations, Moganshan	Showcase regional diversity and unique cultural attributes, contributing to the richness of national identity.
Collective Memory of War	Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, revolutionary martyr memorials,Post war scenes	Evoke a shared sense of history, sacrifice, and patriotism during times of national struggle.

7. SPIRITUAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BELIEFS IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

7.1. Reverence for Nature and the Concept of "江山"

In *The Young Companion*, the depiction of mountains and rivers highlights their dual role as symbols of natural beauty and profound cultural meaning. The term "江山" (rivers and mountains) not only refers to the physical geography of the nation but also serves as a metaphor for national identity and cultural continuity. Landscape photography in *The Young Companion* elevated sites such as Huangshan and the Fuchun River to iconic status, reinforcing their significance as embodiments of China's resilience and unity (Gao & Zhang, 2021). Huangshan's misty peaks, frequently featured in the magazine, echo traditional Chinese landscape painting, blending aesthetic appeal with philosophical depth. These photographs evoke the Daoist ideal of harmony between humanity and nature (Sullivan, 2020). Similarly, the tranquil views of the Fuchun River symbolize the interconnection between culture and geography, underscoring the importance of natural landscapes as a unifying force for national identity (Assmann, 2011).

Table 5: Mountains in Landscape Photography of The Young Companion.

Category	Mountain
Five Great Mountains (五岳)	Mount Taishan, Mount Hua, Mount Heng, Mount Heng, Mount Song
Religious ashram	Mount Wutai, Mount Putuo, Mount Emei, Mount Zhongnan, Mount Guanyin, Qingcheng Mountain, Mount Yandang, Mount Putuo
Classic themes in historical allusions and art	Wushan Mountain, Minshan Mountain, Lishan Mountain, Meishan Mountain, Himalaya Mountain, Wuzhi Mountain, Huaguo Mountain, Lushan Mountain, Lishan Mountain, Langya Mountain, Laoshan Mountain, Huashan Mountain, Wushan Mountain, Tianmu Mountain, Luojia Mountain, Yuelu Mountain, Mount Huangshan Mountain, Lingyun Mountain, Hulu Mountain, Gushan Mountain, Jinyun Mountain, Bijia

Mountain, Butterfly Mountain, Mogan Mountain, Mianshan Mountain, Wangshou Mountain, Luofu Mountain, Fubo Mountain, Yunlong Mountain, Jinshan Mountain, Tongjun Mountain, Cangshan Mountain, Zijin Mountain, Jingshan Mountain, Jizu Mountain, Yuquan Mountain, Danxia Mountain

7.2. Religious and Ancestral Worship

Religious landmarks depicted in *The Young Companion* functioned as spiritual anchors in a time of social and political upheaval. Sacred sites like Lingyin Temple, the Ming Tombs, and Confucius's tomb were often portrayed against dramatic natural backdrops, emphasizing the integration of human and spiritual realms. These images celebrated the enduring significance of religious and ancestral worship as central to Chinese cultural identity (Liang, 2015). For example, photographs of Lingyin Temple highlight its historical importance as a Buddhist sanctuary while showcasing its architectural harmony with the surrounding natural environment (Wells, 2011). The Ming Tombs, with their solemn stone carvings and expansive landscapes, serve as symbols of cultural resilience, connecting viewers to a shared historical and spiritual heritage (Barthes, 1977).

7.3. Seasonal and Moral Symbolism

Seasonal changes depicted in *The Young Companion* reflect the cyclical rhythms of nature, resonating with Chinese cultural values of balance, renewal, and perseverance. Photographs of snow-covered Mount Emei, spring blossoms along the Fuchun River, and autumn leaves on West Lake serve as metaphors for resilience and transformation (Anderson, 2006). These images connect the beauty of natural landscapes to moral and cultural ideals, reinforcing the connection between the natural world and human experience (Sullivan, 2020). Mount Emei, depicted under a blanket of snow, symbolizes purity and endurance, while the Fuchun River in spring captures the vitality of renewal and growth (Liang, 2015). Through these seasonal landscapes, the magazine aligned natural beauty with moral and philosophical principles, fostering a deeper sense of connection to the land and its cultural significance (Wells, 2011).



Figure 13: Unknown Author, A Distant View of the Snow Mountains (Daxue Mountain): Mount Emei in the Changing Clouds and Mist. The Young Companion, No. 148, November 1939, p. 33.

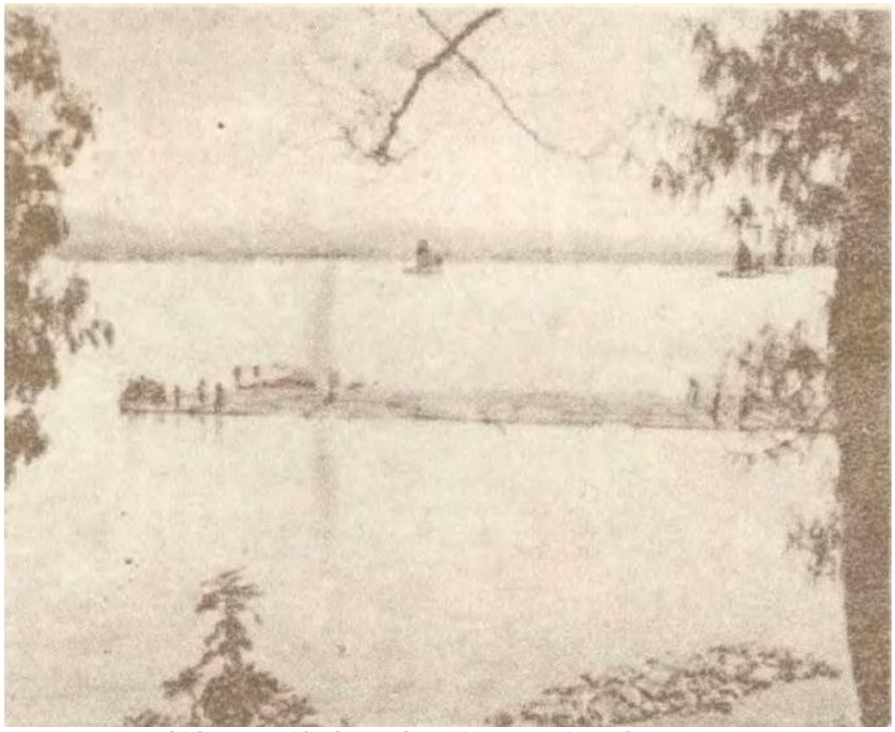


Figure 14: Jin Shisheng, Beside the Fuchun River in Spring. The Young Companion, No. 136, April 1938, p. 28.

8. CONCLUSION

The landscape photography featured in *The Young Companion* represents more than a mere visual record; it serves as a profound archive of China's cultural diversity and national unity during the early 20th century. By capturing images of natural landscapes, regional customs, and architectural sites, the magazine curated a visual narrative that celebrated the interplay between tradition and modernity. Through meticulous framing and thematic choices, the photographs documented the nation's landscapes as both aesthetic treasures and cultural symbols. These visuals underscored the role of nature in bridging the gap between local traditions and emerging national consciousness, offering readers a sense of stability during a time of rapid modernization and social upheaval. The photography not only presented regional and local identities but also celebrated the universality of the cultural elements that unite the Chinese people. By emphasizing harmony with nature, resilience, and cultural continuity, *The Young Companion* created a visual repository that reinforced the evolving concept of national identity (Assmann, 2011).

The theoretical implications of *The Young Companion*'s photography lie in its contribution to the understanding of visual culture as a vehicle for national identity construction. Grounded in cultural memory theory (Assmann, 2011), the photographs can be seen as visual repositories of collective memory, preserving the continuity of traditions while bridging them with modern aspirations. The magazine's use of semiotic principles (Barthes, 1981) decoded the symbolic significance embedded in its compositions, where mountains, rivers, and historical landmarks conveyed deeper ideological and cultural meanings. Moreover, the magazine serves as a case study for media's cultural and ideological influence, aligning with Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of the "imagined community." Through its carefully curated images, *The Young Companion* helped construct a collective vision of a unified, modern China. It underscores the role of visual media in crafting narratives that connect individual identities to a broader national framework.

The lessons from *The Young Companion* resonate in the age of digital media, where visual culture continues to play a pivotal role in shaping national identities. In contemporary contexts, platforms like social media extend the reach of visual storytelling, making the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage more accessible. However, the challenges of maintaining authenticity and depth in digital representations mirror the concerns of early 20th-century media. The legacy of *The Young Companion* highlights the enduring importance of careful curation and contextualization of visual content to preserve cultural identity. Its emphasis on the interplay between local diversity and national unity provides valuable insights for integrating heritage into modern narratives. As digital culture evolves, the methodologies employed by *The Young Companion*—rooted in cultural and ideological symbolism—serve as a timeless framework for preserving and constructing identities in a globalized world.

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