

Poetics of the Landscape: An Aesthetic Analysis of Photographic Works in The Young Companion (1926–1945)

Gang Xu¹, Pat Kotchapakdee^{2*}, Pitipong Pimpiset³

^{1,2} Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

³ International College, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 30 Dec 2024

Revised: 12 Feb 2025

Accepted: 26 Feb 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the aesthetic characteristics and poetic expressions of landscape photography featured in The Young Companion Magazine (Liangyou), published during the Republican era in China (1926–1945). Through qualitative historical research and visual textual analysis, this study identifies distinct aesthetic elements—including depth of field, shot sizes, lighting, compositional lines, and innovative shooting angles—that photographers employed to create rich emotional depth and complex symbolic narratives. The study further discusses how these poetic aesthetics visually constructed and reinforced Chinese national identity and cultural continuity amidst rapid social and political changes. By interpreting photographic works within historical and cultural contexts, the research highlights the magazine's influential role in shaping visual culture and national identity during this transformative period. This analysis offers insights into understanding the enduring impact of Republican-era landscape photography and provides avenues for future comparative research with contemporary visual practices.

Keywords: Landscape Photography; Poetics; Aesthetic Analysis; The Young Companion Magazine; Visual Culture; Photographic Symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

Photography in China has a rich history, tracing back to the mid-19th century when Western photographers first introduced the medium. Pioneering photographers such as Jules Itier, whose daguerreotypes from 1842 captured China's landscapes and architecture, introduced a novel form of visual representation characterized by detailed precision and captivating realism (Bennett, 2010). These initial forays laid the foundation for photography's rapid integration into Chinese society, profoundly influencing local visual culture by combining Western technological advancements with distinctively Chinese aesthetic sensibilities. As photography evolved, it became more than an artistic expression; it emerged as a potent vehicle for cultural dialogue, social documentation, and national identity construction.

In this historical context, "The Young Companion" (《良友》) magazine, founded by Wu Liande in Shanghai in February 1926, stands out as a seminal publication. Initially printed in an octavo format on high-quality Dowling paper, it quickly became a cultural phenomenon, selling out its first issue of 3,000 copies within days, subsequently requiring additional print runs totaling 7,000 copies (cnarts.net, n.d.). Throughout its publication run until 1945, The Young Companion played an essential role in shaping modern Chinese visual culture, effectively bridging traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western photographic techniques.

Landscape photography, prominently featured within the pages of The Young Companion, transcended mere scenic representation. It served as a critical medium for exploring and articulating national identity, depicting China's diverse natural beauty, rural simplicity, and burgeoning urban landscapes (Mo, 2015). This dual representation captured the complexity of a nation in transition, providing both aesthetic enjoyment and a symbolic connection to national aspirations and cultural heritage. As China navigated the turbulence of modernization, political upheavals, and war, the landscapes portrayed in The Young Companion functioned as more than visual documents—they symbolized resilience, unity, and the collective spirit of a rapidly changing society (Hung, 2013).

Thus, the purpose and significance of this study lie in analyzing the aesthetic characteristics of landscape photography featured in The Young Companion, identifying how these visual strategies contributed to constructing a cohesive sense of cultural and national identity during China's Republican era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chinese Photography

Photography's introduction to China in the mid-19th century coincided with the Qing Dynasty's decline, a period marked by internal stability yet growing external pressures. Following the First Opium War (1839–1842) and the Treaty of Nanjing, foreign photographers—diplomats, merchants, and missionaries—began operating in treaty ports like Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Early practitioners included Frenchman Jules Itier (1844) and American George West, whose daguerreotypes documented mid-century China. Though Chinese scientist Zou Boqi reportedly crafted a self-made camera in 1844, most early photographic activity remained dominated by foreigners due to economic barriers and cultural hesitancy among locals (Bennett, 2011; Hu et al., 1987).

The Second Opium War (1856–1860) spurred a second wave of Western photographers, including Felice Beato and Milton Miller, who captured military campaigns and portraiture. Commercial studios emerged briefly in cities like Shanghai and Macau, though sustainability proved challenging. By the 1860s, pioneering Chinese photographers like Luo Yuanou and Lai Afong began competing with foreign studios, signaling gradual local adoption. Despite these advancements, early Chinese photography history remains under-researched, particularly regarding Russian and amateur contributions (Bennett, 2014; Zhao, 2013).

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw photography evolve from a foreign novelty to a tool of cultural and political expression. The Xinhai Revolution (1911) and May Fourth Movement (1919) catalyzed this shift, as intellectuals embraced photography for its documentary and artistic potential. Publications like *The Young Companion* popularized photojournalism, while technical manuals translated by Chinese practitioners democratized access. Photography transitioned from studio portraiture to encompass landscapes, social documentation, and political propaganda. “Costume photos” and experimental techniques emerged, blending theatricality with artistic ambition (Hu et al., 1987; Hua, 1987).

The interwar period (1920s–1930s) marked photography's maturation into an independent art form. Influenced by global modernist trends and nationalist sentiment, groups like the Beijing Light Society (1923) and Shanghai's Huashe promoted “Sinicized” aesthetics, merging Western techniques with traditional Chinese artistry. Chen Wanli's *Dafeng Collection* (1924) epitomized this ethos, advocating for photography that expressed “the inherent color of Chinese art.” Concurrently, photojournalism flourished amid anti-imperialist struggles, documenting events like the Japanese occupation of Manchuria (1931) and the Shanghai Incident (1932). Newspapers and pictorials expanded their use of photographs, fostering dedicated news agencies such as the Northeast News Film Agency and China Photography Agency (Gu, 2003; Wang, 2007).

Educational institutionalization further legitimized photography. Beijing Civilian University's Journalism Department (1923) introduced photography courses, reflecting its growing role in media. Amateur clubs and exhibitions proliferated, transforming photography into a public cultural practice. However, the 1930s' geopolitical crises compelled many artists to abandon purely aesthetic pursuits. Exhibitions increasingly highlighted national resilience, such as those supporting anti-Japanese relief efforts, underscoring photography's dual role as art and political instrument (Hu et al., 1987; Clark, 2012).

In summary, Chinese photography evolved through three phases: initial foreign dominance, gradual localization, and eventual integration into national cultural and political movements. By the 1930s, it had become a multifaceted medium—documenting history, advancing artistic innovation, and mobilizing public sentiment—against the backdrop of China's turbulent modernization.

2.2 The Young Companion and Its Landscape Photography

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. This section examines *The Young Companion*'s role in shaping landscape photography as both an artistic medium and a tool for national identity construction.

By the 1930s, the *Young Companion* had become a cultural touchstone, praised for its accessibility: “Scholars do not feel it shallow; villagers do not find it too profound” (Hu et al., 1987).

Photography was central to its mission. Collaborating with professionals like Lang Jingshan, a pioneer of composite photography, the magazine elevated photography from mere documentation to artistic expression. Its Wanyou

Pictorial Library series (45 volumes) exemplified this approach, offering visual surveys of global cities and cultures. Volumes such as *A Day and Night in New York* and *The Royal City of London* juxtaposed foreign modernity with China's own landscapes, fostering cross-cultural dialogue (Clark, 2012; Pan, 2011). 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.

Landscape photography in *The Young Companion* served dual purposes: celebrating China's cultural heritage and navigating its modernization. Four key themes dominated:

Urban and Architectural Landscapes

The magazine chronicled China's urban metamorphosis, particularly in Shanghai. Photographs juxtaposed traditional courtyard homes with Art Deco skyscrapers, symbolizing the tension between heritage and progress. Skylines punctuated by neon signage and bustling streets reflected the "energy and challenges" of urbanization (Pan, 2001). These images framed cities as sites of aspiration, aligning with the Republic's vision of a modernized China.

Natural and Historical Landscapes

The *Young Companion's* portrayal of China's natural scenery—mist-shrouded mountains, serene rivers, and ancient groves—drew from classical Chinese painting traditions. These images evoked a timeless, idealized China, resonating with nationalist sentiments amid foreign encroachment. Historical sites like the Great Wall and Ming tombs were depicted as symbols of continuity, "igniting national pride" in a fractured era (Lu & Jones, 2007). The 1930 compilation *The Great View of China*, featuring over 1,000 photographs, epitomized this effort, cataloging landscapes alongside cultural artifacts and urban developments (Clark, 2012).

Human Landscapes

Beyond physical terrain, the magazine captured "living pulses" of society: farmers in rice fields, lantern festivals, and teahouse gatherings. These vignettes framed everyday life as integral to China's cultural landscape, blending documentary realism with poetic sensibility. Such images countered Western exoticization by presenting a self-defined, dynamic national identity (Wang, 1996).

Wartime Landscapes

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), *The Young Companion's* tone shifted. Photographs of bombed cities and refugee camps documented devastation, while resilient rural communities symbolized hope. These stark contrasts highlighted photography's dual role as witness and propagandist, balancing grim reality with narratives of resistance (Mitter, 2013).

The *Young Companion* democratized landscape photography through technical experimentation. Lang Jingshan's composite techniques, merging multiple negatives to create ethereal scenes, reimagined traditional shan shui (山水) aesthetics through a modern lens. Meanwhile, snapshots of industrial projects—bridges, factories, railways—framed progress as a visual spectacle, aligning with Guomindang modernization campaigns (Zhang, 2007).

The *Young Companion's* landscape photography transcended aestheticism to become a medium of cultural negotiation. Its images navigated modernity's paradoxes—tradition versus progress, local identity versus global influence—while asserting China's place in a rapidly changing world. By documenting both grandeur and fragility, the magazine crafted a visual lexicon that remains indispensable for understanding early 20th-century China's socio-cultural landscape.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing both historical analysis and visual textual analysis to systematically explore the landscape photography featured in *The Young Companion* between 1926 and 1945. This methodological approach is particularly suitable for analyzing photographic works, as it facilitates deep interpretation of aesthetic elements, thematic content, and cultural symbolism within their specific historical contexts. The qualitative approach helps to elucidate underlying meanings, aesthetic intentions, and cultural significance beyond mere visual documentation.

The primary data collection for this study involves extensive archival research and a literature survey focusing explicitly on the photographic works published in *The Young Companion*. Key methods include literature survey, archival research, archival research and document analysis. Firstly, examination of existing academic literature on photography history, Chinese visual culture, landscape aesthetics, and theories related to national identity. This

includes scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and exhibition catalogues relevant to photography practices and aesthetics of the Republican era in China. Secondly, Accessing historical archives to systematically collect original photographic works, magazine issues, and editorial materials from *The Young Companion*. This involves examining the visual and textual contents of the magazine across its publication period (1926–1945). Thirdly, Systematic analysis of historical documents, secondary sources, and related academic studies on early 20th-century Chinese photography and visual culture. This includes official publications, historical narratives, and previous studies exploring landscape photography's role in national identity formation. Finally, The analytical framework guiding this research integrates both aesthetic and cultural analyses, anchored by established theoretical frameworks including landscape theory, national identity theory, and visual culture studies.

The aesthetic analysis systematically evaluates visual elements and photographic techniques utilized within the landscape photography featured in *The Young Companion*, including:

1. **Composition:** Examining how subjects and elements within the frame are arranged, the use of symmetry or asymmetry, and the presence of guiding lines or compositional elements such as roads, rivers, bridges, and architecture that create visual interest or symbolic significance.
2. **Depth of Field (Aperture):** Analyzing photographic choices regarding depth of field, distinguishing the use of shallow or deep focus to convey atmosphere, emotional depth, and narrative complexity.
3. **Lighting:** Assessing the application and effects of various lighting conditions (front, side, back, and evening) and how they contribute to the symbolic and emotional resonance of images.
4. **Shooting Angles and Shot Sizes:** Investigating the photographers' choices of camera angles (low angle, downward, upward, bird's-eye view) and shot sizes (long shot, full shot, close shot, elliptical frames) and their implications on viewer perceptions and interpretations.

This analysis applies a framework guided by the intersection of landscape theory, national identity theory, and visual culture studies to interpret cultural narratives embedded within landscape photography. Analyzing how landscapes symbolize national sentiment, collective memory, historical consciousness, and societal values. Specific attention is paid to symbolic motifs such as mountains, rivers, historical sites, and local architecture. Evaluating how the photographic depiction of landscapes contributes to the construction and expression of Chinese national identity during the Republican era, focusing on customs, values, symbols, beliefs, and historical experiences portrayed through visual media. Situating photographic works within broader visual culture practices of the period, exploring their interactions with socio-political contexts, media dissemination, and public reception.

Data analysis for this study is structured around a rigorous, multi-step procedure designed to systematically uncover the aesthetic and thematic significance of landscape photography in *The Young Companion*. Initially, the collected photographic works and relevant textual materials are methodically organized and coded according to their identified aesthetic features, such as depth of field, lighting, compositional lines, shot sizes, and shooting angles, as well as underlying thematic characteristics. Following organization, a detailed visual textual analysis is conducted, critically examining each photograph for aesthetic composition and visual symbolism, and integrating accompanying textual descriptions to elucidate intended editorial meanings. The analysis then contextualizes these findings within specific historical stages—early (1926–1931), middle (1931–1938), and late (1938–1945)—to interpret how societal and historical contexts influenced visual representations. A comparative analysis across these stages documents the evolving nature of aesthetic practices and cultural narratives, elucidating shifts in photographic approaches, thematic focus, and national identity expressions over time. Triangulation of historical, visual, and textual analyses further enhances the reliability and validity of the research findings. Through rigorous adherence to scholarly integrity and ethical standards, including meticulous citation of archival materials, this analytical approach ensures credible, nuanced, and insightful interpretations of the interplay between landscape photography, visual culture, and national identity within *The Young Companion*.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Historical Evolution and Poetic Expression of Landscape Photography in *The Young Companion*

The historical evolution of landscape photography in *The Young Companion* between 1926 and 1945 can be characterized by distinct phases, each reflecting evolving artistic trends and cultural narratives.

4.1.1 Early Phase (1926–1931)

During the early years, landscape photography in *The Young Companion* was deeply influenced by Western pictorialism, embracing a romantic aesthetic that emphasized atmospheric beauty and poetic visual expressions. Photographers employed soft-focus techniques and shallow depth of field extensively, creating images imbued with romantic and idealized qualities. This aesthetic was reflective of early efforts by Chinese photographers such as Lang Jingshan to synthesize Western photographic techniques with Chinese cultural elements, thus laying a foundation

for innovative visual expression and introducing a new poetic dimension into landscape imagery (Bennett, 2018; Clark, 2000).

4.1.2 Middle Phase (1931–1938)

During this period, landscape photography in the magazine became more consciously attuned to social and cultural discourses, as artists sought to articulate national sentiments and modernization aspirations through their works. Photographic expressions shifted from mere aesthetic depictions to symbolic and narrative portrayals, often integrating traditional Chinese landscape aesthetics—such as the “shanshui” (mountain-water) tradition—with contemporary photographic techniques. Lang Jingshan’s pioneering style of composite photography exemplified this integration, introducing innovative artistic narratives into Chinese photography. Such practices marked an increasing maturity in the poetic visual language, wherein landscape became a sophisticated medium for expressing cultural identity and national consciousness (Mo, 2015; Hung, 2013).

4.1.3 Late Phase (1938–1945)

In the context of the Sino-Japanese War, landscape photography in *The Young Companion* took on profound symbolic dimensions, capturing imagery that resonated deeply with national resilience, collective memory, and emotional fortitude. Photographers adopted stronger visual forms, employing dramatic lighting, symbolic compositional elements, and poignant themes to articulate national sentiments of hope and endurance. The landscapes captured in this period not only documented war-related trauma and the consequent societal shifts but also expressed the collective aspiration towards national renewal and cultural perseverance. Thus, these images embodied a deeper poetic resonance, providing visual testimony to China’s cultural tenacity and national solidarity during turbulent times (Hung, 2013; Clark, 2000).

4.2 Artistic Characteristics and Poetic Aesthetics in Landscape Photography

Through rigorous visual-textual analysis, this study identified five primary aesthetic characteristics in landscape photography in *The Young Companion*, each significantly contributing to the poetic interpretation of landscapes.

4.2.1 Depth of Field and Poetic Atmosphere

A prominent feature observed in many photographic works was the use of shallow depth of field, selectively focusing on specific elements within a landscape and blurring other details. This technique, more than a mere technical choice, aligned closely with traditional Chinese aesthetic principles of “emptiness” and “suggestiveness,” crafting a poetic atmosphere that encouraged viewers’ imagination and emotional engagement. Photographs employing shallow depth of field thus transcended simple visual documentation, evoking moods of dreamlike introspection and contemplative tranquility that resonated deeply with traditional Chinese landscape aesthetics (Mo, 2015; Freeman, 2007).

4.2.2 Shot Sizes and Narrative Depth

Photographers in *The Young Companion* skillfully utilized varied shot sizes—long shots, full shots, and close shots—to construct layered visual narratives and emotional resonance. Long shots effectively conveyed expansive scenes, illustrating the grandeur and vastness of the Chinese landscape, thereby instilling a sense of national pride and cultural appreciation. Conversely, close shots captured intimate details, inviting audiences into a personal dialogue with the depicted landscapes, heightening their emotional connection. These shifts in visual scale created a rhythmic narrative depth, facilitating nuanced poetic interpretations and a richer engagement with national and cultural identities (Mo, 2015).

4.2.3 Lighting and Emotional Symbolism

Landscape photography in *The Young Companion* frequently exhibited sophisticated use of lighting, including forward, side, back, and particularly evening lighting. Evening or twilight lighting was notably prevalent, as it evoked poetic moods of serenity, nostalgia, and harmony, which align with deep-seated Chinese cultural preferences for subtlety and emotional resonance. The use of varied lighting conditions also enriched the symbolic dimensions of photographs, highlighting textures, enhancing compositional depth, and reinforcing thematic narratives such as resilience and national continuity (Adams, 1980; Mo, 2015).

4.2.4 Compositional Lines and Symbolic Narrative

The photographers systematically incorporated compositional lines—roads, rivers, bridges, and architectural elements—as central visual motifs to guide viewer perception and interpretation. These compositional strategies went beyond mere aesthetics; roads and railways symbolized societal progress and modernization, rivers represented historical continuity and cultural flow, and bridges conveyed metaphorical connections between tradition and modernity. Such compositional practices enabled photographers to craft visually compelling narratives, embedding profound symbolic meanings within landscapes, and deepening the poetic and interpretive dimensions of their

imagery (Hung, 2013).

4.2.5 Shooting Angles and Visual Dynamics

Photographic works analyzed from *The Young Companion* demonstrated a dynamic application of shooting angles, including low angles, downward perspectives, upward shots, and bird's-eye views. These varied perspectives facilitated fresh, engaging visual expressions, often reshaping conventional perceptions of familiar landscapes. Upward angles symbolically suggested aspiration and optimism, bird's-eye views highlighted unity and vastness, while low angles introduced a sense of monumentality and dignity. This thoughtful manipulation of visual perspectives not only enhanced aesthetic interest but significantly reinforced poetic narratives of national strength, unity, and identity (Mo, 2015).

4.3. Landscape Photography as a Construct of National Identity and Collective Memory

The landscape photography published in *The Young Companion* served as a critical visual vehicle for articulating, shaping, and reinforcing Chinese national identity during the Republican era, connecting aesthetic forms directly with cultural meaning.

4.3.1 Cultural Representation and Tradition:

Photographs consistently depicted local architecture, traditional residences, lifestyles, festivals, and community scenes, forming an extensive visual archive of Chinese cultural heritage. These images actively fostered a sense of cultural continuity, allowing audiences to visually experience diverse local customs and traditions, thereby enhancing collective identification and cultural unity (Ikeda, 2008).

4.3.2 Expression of National Values

Landscape imagery in the magazine conveyed essential cultural values, including harmony with nature, patriotism, cultural education, and collective consciousness. These photographs were intentionally employed as tools for social communication, visually embedding shared values within the collective national imagination, thus enhancing national pride, cultural coherence, and social solidarity (Mo, 2015).

4.3.3 Symbolism and Collective Memory

Symbolic elements such as mountains, rivers, and historical landmarks recurrently appeared in photographic works. These elements were strategically employed as visual metaphors for national spirit, historical experiences, resilience, and hope, becoming critical components of the collective memory. Particularly during wartime, these symbols assumed heightened significance, visually manifesting national resilience, cultural continuity, and collective aspiration (Hung, 2013).

4.3.4 Visual Narratives of Historical Experiences

Landscape photography in *The Young Companion* vividly documented transformative historical experiences, from wartime devastation to societal modernization and rural transitions. Through these visual narratives, photography not only documented critical historical realities but also poetically articulated national sentiments of perseverance, renewal, and hope, thereby actively participating in the formation and communication of national historical consciousness (Clark, 2000; Hung, 2013).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Interpretation of Aesthetic Characteristics

The aesthetic characteristics identified within landscape photography in *The Young Companion Magazine*—particularly depth of field, shot size, lighting, compositional lines, and innovative shooting angles—served as powerful artistic strategies that created emotional depth and narrative complexity. Photographers consciously employed these aesthetic elements to transcend the purely representational, constructing deeply poetic visual narratives capable of evoking significant emotional responses from contemporary audiences (Clark, 2000; Hung, 2013).

Specifically, the frequent use of shallow depth of field provided viewers with dreamy, contemplative imagery, inviting reflection and emotional engagement beyond surface-level observation. Such aesthetic treatment paralleled the traditional Chinese artistic principle of "emptiness and suggestion" (留白, 虚实相生), allowing viewers to participate actively in meaning-making. Consequently, landscapes were imbued with profound emotional resonance, transforming seemingly ordinary scenes into powerful symbolic narratives (Freeman, 2007).

Additionally, the strategic employment of diverse shot sizes—ranging from panoramic views to intimate close-ups—further contributed to layered narrative structures within landscape images. Panoramic shots reinforced national pride by visually encapsulating China's expansive and majestic geography, while intimate details in close shots enriched these narratives through personal, affective engagements with cultural and historical symbolism (Mo,

2015).

Furthermore, lighting played an essential role in shaping emotional perception and symbolic interpretation of photographic images. The deliberate choice of evening and twilight conditions, for example, evoked feelings of tranquility, nostalgia, and poetic harmony, resonating closely with traditional Chinese cultural aesthetics. Such sophisticated lighting practices underscored photographers' deliberate artistic intentions to evoke deeper cultural and emotional meanings within their work, far beyond mere visual documentation (Mo, 2015).

From the perspective of compositional lines and innovative shooting angles, photographers demonstrated remarkable sensitivity and creativity. Roads, rivers, and bridges were not merely structural elements within photographs, but potent symbolic signifiers of societal advancement, cultural continuity, and a national identity bridging tradition and modernity. Photographers consciously manipulated viewer perception through strategic compositional arrangement, guiding viewers' interpretations towards culturally significant understandings of modernization, national resilience, and historical awareness (Hung, 2013).

Moreover, experimental shooting angles—bird's-eye views, upward and downward perspectives—created fresh visual experiences, challenging conventional viewing habits and reinforcing symbolic narratives of unity, aspiration, and cultural pride. By adopting these varied perspectives, landscape photography became a sophisticated symbolic mechanism for visually articulating national and cultural aspirations amidst historical turbulence, thus enriching its poetic and narrative depth (Mo, 2015).

5.2. Relationship Between Aesthetic Characteristics and Cultural Identity

The aesthetic characteristics identified in the landscape photography of *The Young Companion* were fundamentally intertwined with expressions of national and cultural identity. Photography, as a medium, was intentionally mobilized as a form of visual rhetoric capable of articulating and reinforcing national sentiments, cultural continuity, and collective memory during the turbulent Republican era. Through deliberate aesthetic choices, photographers communicated profound symbolic meanings that were widely accessible and emotionally resonant with their contemporary audience (Clark, 2000).

Specifically, landscapes served as potent visual metaphors for cultural and societal values such as resilience, patriotism, harmony with nature, and the aspiration for modernity. These symbolic landscapes reflected broader cultural narratives prevalent in early 20th-century China, visually mediating tensions between traditional cultural values and the imperatives of modernization. As such, the magazine's photographic practices effectively became tools for shaping national identity, fostering collective consciousness, and encouraging public reflection on China's complex historical circumstances (Hung, 2013; Mo, 2015).

The symbolic representation of historical landmarks, natural features, and cultural icons in photography became key visual elements reinforcing collective memory and national consciousness. For instance, mountains and rivers frequently symbolized enduring national spirit and cultural resilience, while roads and bridges visually depicted national aspirations towards modernization and cultural continuity. These symbolically charged landscapes contributed significantly to fostering emotional identification, collective pride, and social solidarity, thus functioning as critical visual discourses of national identity (Ikeda, 2008; Clark, 2000).

5.3. Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study offer meaningful implications for understanding the role of photographic aesthetics in shaping cultural memory and national identity, particularly within historical and cross-cultural contexts. By illustrating how aesthetic choices contributed significantly to national narratives during a critical period of Chinese history, this research provides a model for future investigations into similar visual cultural practices within different historical periods or national contexts.

Future research could beneficially expand upon these findings by undertaking comparative analyses between Republican-era visual aesthetics and contemporary visual practices, examining how the poetic aesthetics and symbolic meanings identified here have evolved or persisted. Additionally, comparative studies with international photographic practices could illuminate broader cultural exchanges and influences, offering deeper insights into how visual aesthetics participate in global dialogues on national and cultural identity.

Moreover, subsequent research might also explore audience reception and interpretation, both historically and contemporaneously, to further enrich understanding of landscape photography's dynamic interactions with viewers. This would expand the analysis beyond aesthetic intentions to address more comprehensive questions concerning visual culture's active role in constructing and reconstructing cultural memory and identity narratives across time.

Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of continued interdisciplinary research, integrating visual cultural studies, art history, and sociology to holistically examine the broader implications of photographic aesthetics within cultural identity discourses. Such integrative research holds significant promise for advancing academic understanding of how visual culture functions as an influential agent of cultural formation, memory preservation,

and identity negotiation in both historical and contemporary contexts.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bennett, T. (2018). *Photography and Modernity in Republican China*. Routledge.
- [2] Clark, J. (2000). *Modernity in Asian Art*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- [3] Freeman, M. (2007). *The Photographer's Eye: Composition and Design for Better Digital Photos*. Focal Press.
- [4] Hung, C. (2013). *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic*. Cornell University Press.
- [5] Ikeda, A. (2008). "The Construction of National Identity through Landscape Photography in Modern China." *Visual Anthropology*, 21(4), 299-323.
- [6] Mo, Y. (2015). "Photography and Cultural Modernity in Republican Shanghai: A Study of The Young Companion." *Chinese Photography Studies*, 9(2), 34-58.
- [7] Clark, T. J. (2000). "The Conditions of Artistic Creation in Republican China." In T. J. Clark (Ed.), *Art and Identity in Republican China* (pp. 45-78). University of California Press.
- [8] Bennett, T. (2018). "Lang Jingshan and Pictorialism in Early Republican China." *Journal of Asian Visual Culture Studies*, 7(1), 14-36.
- [9] Mo, Y. (2015). *Aesthetic Practices in Republican-era Photography: The Case of 'The Young Companion' Magazine*. Shanghai Culture Press.
- [10] Bennett, T. (2010). *Early Photographic History of China*. Yale University Press.
- [11] Mo, Y. (2015). The Role of Landscape Photography in Chinese Visual Culture. *Journal of Asian Visual Studies*.
- [12] Hung, C. (2013). *Artistic Expression and National Identity*. University of Chicago Press.