

Original Paper

From the Vicissitude of Companion Pictorial to Probe Modern China's Modernization Process

Bi Zichen^{1*}

¹ Nanjing Broadcasting & Television Group Co., Ltd., Nanjing, China

* Bi Zichen, Nanjing Broadcasting & Television Group Co., Ltd., Nanjing, China

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Abstract

The period from 1926 to 1945 in China was a transition from the abolition of monarchy to the founding of New China. This era was marked by turbulence, including the "Golden Decade" of the Republic of China, the Anti-Japanese War and the breakdown of the Kuomintang-Communist cooperation. All sectors of Chinese society went through ups and downs during this period including newspapers and periodicals. Companion Pictorial, which was founded in 1926 and ceased in 1945, experienced these turbulence. Positioned as an urban publication, Companion Pictorial included multi-dimensional content and attracted a large number of advertisements. Studying the history of Companion Pictorial can be regarded as studying the history of modern China. This paper takes the vicissitude of Companion Pictorial from 1926 to 1945 as analysis object, attempting to explore the material and spiritual changes during modern China's modernization process.

Keywords

companion pictorial, modern China, advertisement, Shanghai

1. Introduction

In 1912, the Chinese monarchy was abolished, and the partial success of the Xinhai Revolution ushered in a new chapter for China. With the outbreak of capitalist economic crisis in 1927, China obtained a development period lasting about ten years until the outbreak of the all-out Anti-Japanese War in 1937. The social and political turbulence made the demand for information increase sharply. The political views of new intellectuals and the pent-up feelings of late Qing literati were all seeking outlets. Companion Pictorial was born in 1926, based in the modern city of Shanghai and radiating to the whole country and overseas, using pictorial forms to enlighten people. Though its editorial stance and values changed with times over the 20 years, the positioning of urban publications enabled Companion

Pictorial to attract a large number of advertisements, with a considerable scope and quantity. To a certain extent, studying history of Companion Pictorial is also studying modern China.

2. Method

This paper takes 174 issues of Companion Pictorial from 1926 to 1945 (including 2 special issues) as the research object. Using content analysis, this paper disassembles the content of the 174 issues including the forms of content presentation (text, pictures, advertisements, columns etc.), the positioning of the pictorial and the narrative style. Through the combination of diachronic and synchronic research, this paper summarizes the cultural factors contained in Companion Pictorial and explores the relationship between Companion Pictorial and modern China's modernization process.

3. Result

3.1 Shanghai's Peculiarity in Modern China

At the US Congress on September 19, 1951, General Wedemeyer first proposed the concept of Shanghai's "Golden Decade": The ten years from 1927 to 1937 were the Golden Decade in the modern history of China. With the victory of China's Northern Expedition in 1927 and the outbreak of the "Great Depression of the 1930s" in capitalism, this gave China a ten-year development gap. Until the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in 1937, China had developed various economic areas such as transportation, telecommunication and financial exchange.

Also, the invasion of foreign capital stimulated the development of China's national capital industry. Relying on the introduction of modern elements in the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai's industrialization, commercialization and modernization levels reached a historical peak. As well, the complex social situation pushed a group of rich businessmen and officials from Jiangsu and Zhejiang to take refuge in Shanghai with their assets. Xin Ping pointed out in *Discover History from Shanghai* that only about 20% of Shanghai's population were locals, while most were foreign immigrants. From 1927 to 1949, the urban population of Shanghai increased from 2.641 million to 5.455 million, with an average annual growth rate of 34.7%. Among them, from 1927 to 1937, the population of Shanghai increased from 2.641 million to 3.851 million. Shanghai's special historical and cultural background accelerated this city's modernization process.

Contrary to the prosperity of the city, the life of China's rural areas and middle and lower classes was not satisfactory. In article *A Microcosm to the Decline of Jiangnan Rural Areas* written by Xue Muqiao in *Rural China Before Liberation* in 1932, it is mentioned: Urban usury capital invaded the countryside through rural landlords...The invasion of urban industrial products was the biggest cause of rural poverty...The farmers' indignant emotions had filled the villages and the day of collapse was not far away. With the invasion of industrial products, the comprador behavior of capitalists and the high

government taxes further intensified the exploitation of farmers. Although Shanghai's urban culture has derived a variety of leisure activities: food, movies and fashion, catering to the consumption taste of Shanghai concession, there are still a large number of refugees, down-and-out late Qing literati and poor working people struggling to survive in the shadow of Shanghai's electricity and light. Shanghai's modern urban picture, which is neither Chinese nor foreign, neither traditional nor modern, just become a complex variant of alienation. And Companion Pictorial was born in this era and this special city.

3.2 Relationship between Companion Pictorial and Modern China

In February 1926, Wu Liande founded Companion Pictorial in Shanghai. Companion Pictorial was positioned at the middle and upper classes who had the energy and money for symbolic consumption. This position was not only related to its fashionable and modern content but also because the copperplate printing technology's growing in the 1920s which was more expensive than lithography. Initially, Companion Pictorial was priced at one dime and increased to two dimes from the 4th issue, and then increased to four dimes from the 49th issue. At that time, one dime could buy five catties of flour or ten eggs. Therefore, the relatively high price of Companion Pictorial determined that its audience was the middle and upper classes with high payment ability for entertainment.

As well, Companion Pictorial was born in an era when Shanghai had a strong desire to explore the modernity. During the publication period, Companion Pictorial continuously declared its social responsibility "to work hard on the people's education in a commercial way". Companion Pictorial expected to complete the role of enlightening people and promote the modernity of citizens, like most Chinese newspapers and periodicals at that time, however in visual forms like photos, paintings and advertisements. The truth is that Companion Pictorial embodied somewhat, but in a slow journey that evolved gradually. Companion Pictorial's specific content varies according to its editor-in-chief.

Table 1. List of Editors-in-Chief and Their Tenure of Companion Pictorial

NAME	ISSUE	YEARS
Wu Liande	1~4	1926.2~1926.5
Zhou Shoujuan	5~12	1926.6~1927.2
Liang Desuo	13~78	1927.3~1933.7
Ma Guoliang	79~138	1933.8~1938.6
Zhang Yuanheng	139~172	1939.2~1945.10

Companion Pictorial's first editor-in-chief was Wu Liande. After returning from the United States, Wu Liande's ideas did not immediately achieve modern transformation, so the first 12 issues edited by Zhou Shoujuan and Wu Liande was limited to love stories with traditional Chinese folk fiction style. After March 1927, Liang Desuo took over Companion Pictorial. Since Liang Desuo had learned

painting since childhood and was good at photography and art, he boldly reformed Companion Pictorial and changed Companion Pictorial to the style of a large-scale pictorial. In 1922, Ma Guoliang, as a writer and painter, took over Companion Pictorial. He had made many friends with Lu Xun, Ba Jin and others famous writers and promoted the development of Companion Pictorial in literature which emerged its political tendency. In February 1939, Zhang Yuanheng, highly accomplished in photography, took over Companion Pictorial and promoted wartime photography and folk custom photography.

In the beginning, Companion Pictorial tried its best to avoid grand topics in political field in order to maintain a stable style. At that time Companion Pictorial just focused on urban life topics such as literature, art, movies and sports

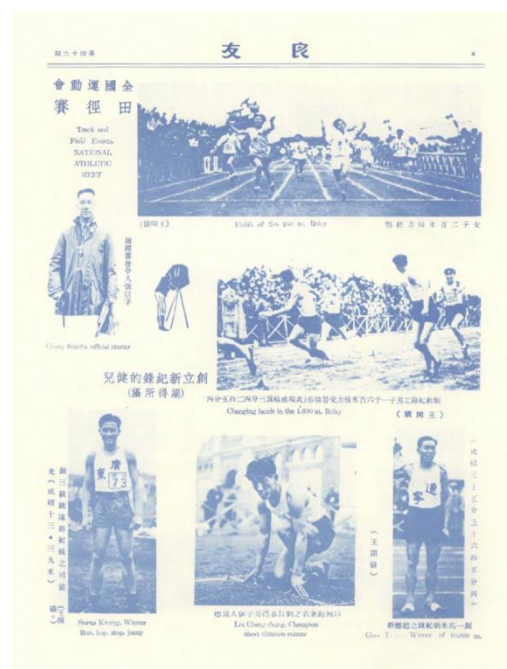


Figure 1. Athletics Sports Meeting on Companion Pictorial (46th issue)

However in the middle and late 1920s, under the impact of the political landscape, Companion Pictorial increased its patriotic feelings and changed the proportion between leisure topics and political topics which made Companion Pictorial experience several suspension crises. In the early 1930s, changes appeared in the column settings of Companion Pictorial and new columns such as “Current Affairs Review” and “Monthly Miscellaneous Talks” were added, directly commenting on current affairs.

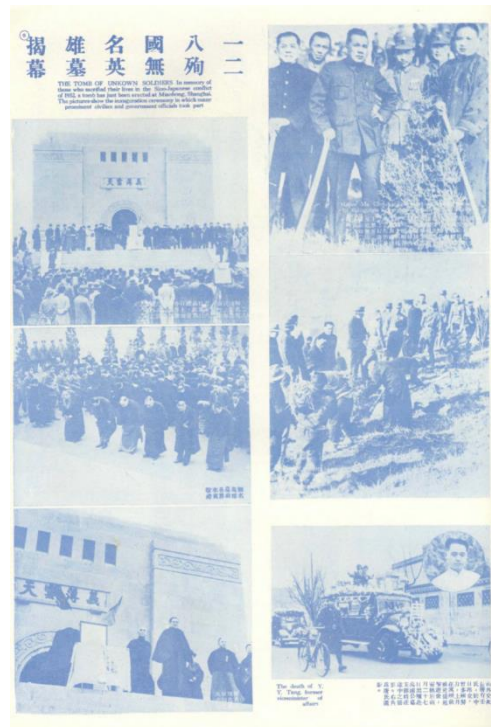


Figure 2. Political Content on Companion Pictorial (114th issue)

From love stories to a modern leisure newspaper, and then to highlight political topics, this vicissitude not only reflected the style changes of Companion Pictorial but also reflected the evolution of civic spirit represented by Shanghai during modern China's modernization process. This evolution has gone through the impact of Western culture, the collapse of Chinese traditional culture and the reconstruction of national spirit.

3.3 Peculiarity of Companion Pictorial

According to statistics from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Utilities, the regular billboards in public spaces of Shanghai approached 4,000 square meters from 1932 to 1934, indicating the prosperity of Shanghai's advertising industry at that time. Advertisements can construct symbolic meanings through symbolization, a meaning system about social status and social consensus. Companion Pictorial also presented commercial advertisements to Shanghai citizens through forms of images, texts and layouts.

As recalled by Ma Guoliang, Companion Pictorial had attached great importance to advertisements since its founding. Due to its wide circulation (extending west to Jiangsu, Zhejiang; radiating north to Northeast China, Beijing, and Tianjin; expanding south to the Pearl River Delta; and spreading to Singapore and Southeast Asia with overseas Chinese), and monthly releases which were more effective and influential than daily ones, many merchants placed advertisements in Companion Pictorial at that

time. Meanwhile, the categories of advertisements in Companion Pictorial changed with historical stages. For example, after 1938 (Issue 138), medical advertisements saw a significant growth and ranked first among all categories, reflecting the situation after the outbreak of the All-China Anti-Japanese War was so turbulent as to influence advertising trends.



Figure 3-4. Medical Advertisements on Companion Pictorial (162th 171th issue)

Meanwhile, Companion Pictorial's advertisements also exhibited typical Shanghai characteristics. Owing to the long-term coexistence of three groups in Shanghai—concession, urban area and rural area, Companion Pictorial shows some images which are funny, ironic but full of modern Chinese characteristics. Urban citizens were keen on imitating Western behavior and aesthetic orientations, so Companion Pictorial featured numerous depictions of foreign Fashion such as cabarets and dance halls. The lives of rural and lower-class citizens, like their food, clothing, shelter, transportation and livelihood, were presented as contrast to upper-class life which further strengthen the fragmentation of modern China. There's an interesting instance found in the course of research. The covers of Companion Pictorial have obviously changed over times: from classical Chinese women with typical Chinese clothes and hairstyles, to the combination of West and China in Issue 27, and finally to complete western costume like western dresses and curly hair in Issue 84.



Figure 5-6. Description of Western Lifestyle on Companion Pictorial (18th issue)



Figure 7-8. Covers of Companion Pictorial (12th and 156th issue)

4. Discussion

The birth of a medium will reshape the production mode of knowledge, communication scope and interpretation of power. With the popularization of modern printing technology, modern newspapers and periodicals in China undertook the educational role of shaping national spirit and enlightening the public, making the research as a key to Chinese history.

Existing research on Chinese historical media mainly focuses on major newspapers like Shun Pao and News Daily (China) which are valued for their long publication history, comprehensive news coverage and wide readership. Another group of scholars has focused on supplementary issues or tabloids with leisure attributes. However, Companion Pictorial stays at an intermediate position between major newspapers and tabloids: it possesses the social consciousness of major newspapers while retaining the leisure and entertainment features of tabloids.

Regarding research on Companion Pictorial, apart from Professor Wu Guozhong's research which systematically focuses on its flux, most studies only discuss its partial characteristics like analysis of painters and writers who appeared on Companion Pictorial. However, Companion Pictorial covers a wide range reflecting modern China and contains an abundance of historical advertising materials, making it unique among relevant historical records. An concrete and diachronic analysis basing on Companion Pictorial's advertisements will be meaningful for international community to understand the changes in modern China, and its spiritual disintegration and reconstruction.

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