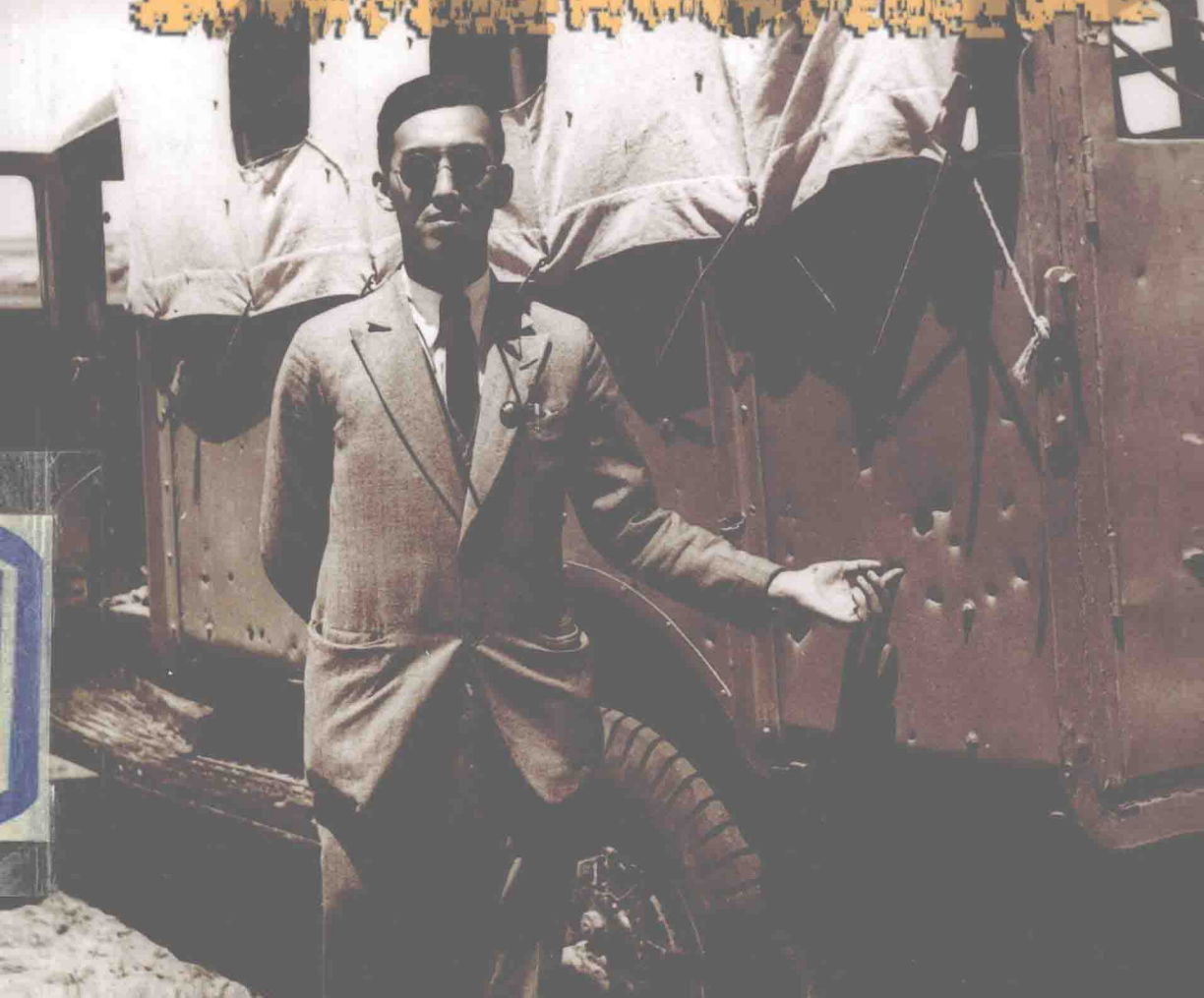


FILMING AS WAR CLOUDS LOOM IN 1937 — 6000KM WITH A CINECAMERA

Sun Mingjing
Translated by Sun Jianqiu



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— 6,000 km with a Cinecamera

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Professor Sun Mingjing



Sun Mingjing (孙明经) and Lü Jin'ai (吕锦瑗) in Chongqing

Lü Jin'ai was the recipient and preserver of Sun's 25 letters, whose vital contribution made this book possible. Lü Jin'ai later became his wife, mother of the translator.

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Sun Jianqiu (孙建秋)
University of International
Business & Economics
(UIBE)
June 10, 2006, Beijing

Preface

As early as 1930, the School of Sciences at the University of Nanking began to promote educational films. However the actual film-making process didn't begin until late in 1934. At that time, Professor Pan Chenghou and I were in charge of its planning and promotion, with Mr. Sun Mingjing, the author of this book, participating in the actual work as well.

As far as the shooting of educational films is concerned, institutions to train professionals in this field are not yet available in our country. However, based on the science courses he took in our school and the teaching experience he has gained over the past few years, Mr. Sun worked relentlessly on his films, preparing scripts, setting up lighting, creating plots, directing, photographing, editing, illustrating and adding captions. His contributions laid a solid foundation for educational film-making in our college.

In the course of shooting films and photos for this book, the author's trip to Suiyuan, a long expedition, merits a great deal of commemoration.

Apart from the journey being more than 10 thousand *li* [6,000 km], it was made on the eve of the Anti-Japanese War. The places he traveled to are either famous cultural cities, towns of strategic importance, or areas rich with the country's natural resources. They all have a close relationship to the future of our nation. At present, most of them are regretfully lost to the Japanese, so our compatriots need to enhance their vigilance, show their concern and make relevant studies as a serious anticipatory undertaking to ensure their recovery. To better share his experiences with

our fellow-countrymen, Mr. Sun uses easy-to-understand language to narrate his experiences, and illustrates the book with many valuable photographs he himself took.

This is a worthy effort. The author and I not only have a teacher-student relationship, but are also colleagues. Therefore, in an expression of gratitude for allowing me to read the book first, I was willing to write this preface for him.

Wei Xueren

July 7, 1939

Chongqing Office of the
School of Sciences,
University of Nanking

Translator's Note:

Mr. Wei Xueren was then the Dean of the School of Sciences. This is the preface he wrote for Mr. Sun Mingjing's *Filming as War Clouds Loom in 1937 — 6,000 km with a Cinecamera*. Due to the situation in those wartime years, the book failed to get published at that time.

Introduction

I was often assigned to visit many places to shoot films on geography, natural resources, industry and people's daily lives while I was working at the Educational Film Department of the School of Sciences at the University of Nanking. The purpose of my work was to promote the use of educational films. Ever since the outbreak of the Suidong conflict in 1936, my department wanted to send me to shoot some films in Northern China. The departure was delayed because I was busy with other urgent shooting tasks at that time.

By June of 1937, however, Sino-Japanese relations were turning from bad to worse; although things remained quiet on the surface and dealings were still carried on in a deceptive way, war was imminent and could break out with the slightest provocation. I knew that I could lose my chance to make the trip at any moment, so, putting everything else aside, I headed north. My trip covered Xuzhou, Donghai, Xinpu, Guanyun, the salt area north of the Huaihe River, as well as the sea-ports of Yanweigang and Lianyungang. I also went to the Chung Hsing Coal Mine at Zaozhuang and the old capital Beiping. There, I joined the "1937 Summer Inspection Delegation" traveling northwest to Suiyuan, passing through Jining, Guisui, Wuchuan, Baotou, and Wuyuan along the way.

Throughout the trip, I took pictures and recorded my observations. I arrived at Beiping at a time when transportation lines to the south via

the Beiping-Hankou line and the Tianjin-Pukou line had both already stopped, so I had to take a Ping-Sui train westbound to Datong, then through Taiyuan, Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, and Xuzhou, to return to Nanjing. The entire trip covered approximately over 10 thousand *li* or 6,000 km.

By the time I was returning home, the situation resulting from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident had become irremediable, and northbound trains carrying troops were seen passing by quite often as I headed south. Looking back, the places fresh with my footprints were either occupied by the Japanese, destroyed by bombing, or turned into chaotic warring states. It had become a hellish world, indeed. I couldn't help heaving a deep sigh at the thought of it. The train I took at Beiping turned out to be the last one before the city fell into the hands of the Japanese. If I had been delayed one more day, I would have been trapped there, and the photos and films that I had made would have suffered an unthinkable fate. I believe that most of the places that I have been to and the things that I have seen are of great concern to many insightful compatriots. The fact that I had the chance to witness and explore these very places at the time I did is amazing. I should have put separate notes into an article earlier to share with our fellow countrymen, as opposed to just reporting to my own department. I hope that by sharing my thoughts and experiences, others might become interested and do the same. However, as upon my return to Nanjing, the situation had worsened to the extent that there was no time for me to write. Fortunately, I have moved here to Chongqing with my department, and life has begun to settle down. Today is July 7, the first anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. On this sad occasion, I can't help recollecting things that happened in the recent past, although doing so only deepens the pain in my heart. Nevertheless, I have

reopened the letters I wrote to my friend, Lü Jin'ai, at that time, and arranged them into the following collection.

Sun Mingjing

July 7, 1938

Chongqing

Translators' Note:

This is the foreword Sun Mingjing wrote a year after his filming trip.

Foreword

“On the morning of July 27, 1937, it was said that General Song Zheyuan had left Beiping for Baoding during the night. All of the city gates of Beiping were closed, except the Xizhimen Gate, which was opened only every two hours, each time for a very short while, and the gate was only opened halfway. It was evident that the situation was becoming increasingly grave. I knew that I should not wait there any longer, so I decided to take the train on the Ping-Sui railway to return to Datong. I hastened to take back from the studio the photos and films I had sent to be developed. Upon arriving in Datong, I heard that my train was the last one from Beiping. I really can't express my feelings over seizing the last opportunity to see Beiping, and that I made a narrow escape from the city.”

—*Excerpt from Sun Mingjing's 25th letter, dated July 30, 1937*

My father Sun Mingjing was born 1911 in Nanking. He later became a trailblazer in the production of documentary and educational films in China, starting at the University of Nanking (金陵大学). Hoping to record the landscapes and lives of the people of Northern and Western China before the Japanese invaders got there, he went on a film-shooting trip in June 1937, at the age of 26. After making documentaries in many provinces and cities, he arrived in Beiping at the end of June, in time to join the Summer Northwest Inspection Delegation, and continued his trip. Altogether, he covered 6,000 km, taking 813 photos and recording 2,000 feet of film. As the war broke out and his university moved to the inland

area of Sichuan Province in November 1937, most of the areas where he had shot his films soon fell to the invaders. He wanted people to see the photos and to learn the actual situation in the frontline areas. With deep pain in his heart, he put together the photos and his journals on the trip (in the form of 25 letters to his fiancée), together with 10 drawings of the war situation. And he gave each letter a couplet as title to sum up the content. But during the war years he could not manage to publish the collection, and his drawings were lost. All the photos were unfortunately burned in the turmoil of the “cultural revolution” (1966-1976). Luckily the negatives miraculously survived. The Chinese version of this book was finally published in 2004 with 142 photos, 57 years after he shot them and eight years after his death. He and his wife never got a chance to see the book in their lifetime, still less use the films and photos for educational purposes.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of China’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945), as his daughter, I decided to have his letters translated so that they could be shared with the people of the whole world. I have re-edited the letters, and added notes and another 45 of his photos, to promote a better understanding of this young patriot, to let the reader see what he saw and how he saw it, and learn what happened to him and his wife after this trip. Perhaps it is necessary to remember that my father recorded what he saw as a patriot, a scientist and a humanitarian. These multiple perspectives guided him to shoot a very wide range of pictures. His photos reflect the Chinese people’s way of life and their preparations for war, battlefield reports, unique personages, communal weddings, the lives of flood victims, precious relics and beautiful landscapes. As lots of changes have taken place since then, with historical sites altered or demolished, these photos have become more precious.

Included in this book are 187 photos, 25 letters, three songs and two

poems he composed, and 10 stories of people and places, which I either heard from him or looked up from references. As the photos on his last stop in July at Datong (the Yungang Grottoes) were lost, I used alternative photos, also taken by him in February of the same year, 1937, which he mentions in Letter 14. It is a pity that many photos of Beiping are still nowhere to be found. But we have not lost hope.

Most of the simple captions under the photos have been translated from my father's notes on the transparent negative envelopes. The longer captions and translator's notes and stories were written by me. I also provided the musical scores for the three popular melodies, for which my father composed alternative lyrics inspired by his experiences. Years later, he would still sing these songs, allowing me to pass them on to the readers.

Most people know that Sun Mingjing was diligent and made notes on what he had been doing, but few people know that this book is actually composed of love letters to his fiancée. Perhaps the reader needs to appreciate the scientist, patriot and humanitarian on one level, and the courting young man on the other. He was trying to do several jobs at the same time. He also seemed to be addressing the public and the private individual at the same time. For the same reason, some photographs are filled with personal interest, and some letters are adorned with poetry and songs.

Most photos in this book were provided by my brother Sun Jiansan (孙建三), while some family photos were provided by myself.

Sun Jianqiu
June 20, 2006
Beijing

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