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# The Chinese Photobook: From The 1900s To The Present



## Synopsis

In the last decade there has been a major reappraisal of the role and status of the photobook within the history of photography. Newly revised histories of photography as recorded via the photobook have added enormously to our understanding of the medium's culture, particularly in places that are often marginalized, such as Latin America and Africa. However, until now, only a handful of Chinese books have made it onto historians' short lists. Yet China has a fascinating history of photobook publishing, and "The Chinese Photobook" will reveal for the first time the richness and diversity of this heritage. This volume is based on a collection compiled by Martin Parr and Beijing- and London-based Dutch photographer team WassinkLundgren. And while the collection was inspired initially by Parr's interest in propaganda books and in finding key works of socialist realist photography from the early days of the Communist Party and the Cultural Revolution era, the selection of books includes key volumes published as early as 1900, as well as contemporary volumes by emerging Chinese photographers. Each featured photobook offers a new perspective on the complicated history of China from the twentieth century onward. "The Chinese Photobook" embodies an unprecedented amount of research and scholarship in this area, and includes accompanying texts and individual title descriptions by Gu Zheng, Raymond Lum, Ruben Lundgren, Stephanie H. Tung and Gerry Badger.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An ambitious survey of China's rich and diverse history of photobooks represents a turning point in

narrowing the comprehension gap between East and West.--Maurice Berger"The New York Times, Lens" (07/30/2015)The photobook, the show proposes, offers a vernacular story of art, untold by academics and art historians.--Noelle Bodick"Art Info" (02/26/2015)

Martin Parr is a key figure in the world of photography, recognized as a brilliant satirist of contemporary life. He has published over seventy photobooks of his photographs, including *The Non-Conformists* (Aperture, 2013), *Black Country Stories* (2014), and *We Love Britain* (2014). His work is also in the collections of museums worldwide, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; and Tate Modern, London. Parr is a member of Magnum Photos. WassinkLundgren is a collaboration between Dutch photographers Thijs groot Wassink (1981) and Ruben Lundgren (1983), who live and work, respectively, in London and Beijing. Their works have been exhibited in museums worldwide and they are the recipients of numerous awards, including the China Academy Award in 2010 and the Prix du Livre at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2007 for their publication *Empty Bottles*. Their photography and film projects shift mundane, often unnoticeable, everyday occurrences into visually compelling and gently amusing observations of the world around us. Gu Zheng is a photographer, critic, historian, curator, and associate professor in the School of Journalism at Fudan University, Shanghai. He also serves as vice-director of that university's Research Center for Visual Culture. Raymond Lum recently retired as librarian for the Western Languages Collection at Harvard- Yenching Library, where he also served as Curator of Historic Photographs. He is currently the book review editor for the online scholarly journal *Trans-Asia Photography Review*. Stephanie H. Tung is a PhD candidate at Princeton University. Prior to her studies at Princeton, she worked as a translator and junior curator for the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing. She is currently based in Shanghai as a Fulbright Scholar. Gerry Badger is a critic, architect, curator, and photographer. His published books include *The Genius of Photography* (2007); *The Pleasures of Good Photographs* (2010); and *The Photobook: A History*, volumes I, II, III, coauthored with Martin Parr.

This is yet another terrific compilation of photos put together by Martin Parr. The photos are quite varied, many of them are fascinating, and they comprise a huge time span. As an aside, the book is VERY heavy.

Important book. Good service.

Easily the most ambitious of the Aperture photobook series: Japan, 2009; Latin America, 2011; Dutch, 2012, large in size (and weight) with 448 pages and a 1000 colored images from over two hundred and fifty photobooks. Though China might seem a long way from Western influences the country has absorbed these through colonial invasions in the early decades of the last century. Hong Kong, a British colony since 1843 gets a separate chapter (it includes Taiwan as well) which considers photobooks in both places from 1949 onwards. The foreign influence is notable in the books from 1900 to the late twenties with so many of them published in Shanghai in Chinese and English. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria and formation of the state of Manchukuo gets its own chapter because the Japanese published so many propaganda books praising life in their puppet State. Two key chapters look at photobooks published from 1945 and especially books covering the Cultural Revolution from 1966. There are some intriguing titles here: Medical workers serving the people, 1971; Chinese clouds, 1972; Railway bridges, 1973; Catalogue of tongue coating diagnoses in Chinese medicine, 1984; China traffic police, 1989; Road interchanges in Beijing, 1996 and of course plenty featuring the Great Leader Mao Zedong (was he the most photographed man on earth?). The last chapter provides a fitting conclusion by featuring twenty-eight photobooks about China but taken by foreign photographers and published outside the country. Each of the featured books has a technical caption (title, date, size, publisher et cetera and then an essay about the book's editorial, these are always quite fascinating to read because of the amount of detail. I thought the book's design by Kummer & Herrman is worth praising because it's so elegant and Verona printers Graphicom do their usual quality print run, using a three hundred screen, too. One of the pleasures of the book for me are seeing several spreads from each of the featured books and frequently quite large. I always thought Parr and Badger's photobook series for Phaidon were rather over-designed with too much white space which should have been filled with reproductions of photobook pages. A superb book to be added to anyone's slowly expanding photobook collection.

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