

Inga Walton

## *China: Grain to Pixel*

In May 2015, the Shanghai Centre of Photography (SCôP), the first institutional space in Shanghai dedicated to photography, was founded by photojournalist Liu Heung Shing, who also serves as the SCôP's Director. The touring exhibition *China: Grain to Pixel* was curated by Karen Smith for SCôP, where it premiered in 2015 under the slightly different title of *Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China*.<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition's host venue in Australia, Monash Gallery of Art (MGA), Melbourne, is a purpose-built exhibition venue and storage facility that opened in June 1990. Designed by the Austrian-born Australian architect Harry Seidler (1923–2006), it houses a nationally significant collection of Australian photography—over 2,400 works spanning the nineteenth century to contemporary practice. MGA is the only cultural institution in the country—regional, state, or national—whose collection is focused solely on Australian photographic works.<sup>2</sup>

Weng Naiqiang, *Red Guards in Tiananmen Square Gathered to See Chairman Mao, 1966*, archival inkjet print, 50 x 50 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



The Australian showing of *China: Grain to Pixel* (June 5–August 28, 2016) included a diverse selection of 139 works; a further seven were excised by Chinese authorities prior to being freighted. These works, Xiao Zhuang's



Jiang Shaowu, *Big Character Posters Created by Red Guards in Shenyang, Liaoning Province*, 1967, archival inkjet print, 50 x 74 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Left: Xiao Zhuang, *The Irrational Times 39, Nanjing*, 1966, archival inkjet print, 40 x 40 cm. Courtesy of 798 Photo Gallery, Beijing.



Right: Li Zhensheng, *A Group of PLA Soldiers in a Military Hospital Holding Copies of Quotations from Chairman Mao*, 1968, archival inkjet print, 35 x 35 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

*The Irrational Times 39, Nanjing*, Weng Naiqiang's *Red Guards in Tiananmen Gathered to See Chairman Mao* (both 1966), Jiang Shaowu's *Big Character Posters Created by Red Guards in Shenyang, Liaoning Province* (1967), Li Zhensheng's *A Group of PLA Soldiers in a Military Hospital Holding Copies of Quotations from Chairman Mao* (1968), Liu Heung Shing's *Taking Down Mao in Tiananmen Square* (1980), Lu Nan's *Mental Hospital, Heilongjiang* (1989), and an image from Han Lei's series *1986–2000 Earlier Black-and-White Photographs* entitled *Luochuan, Shaanxi province* (1989), still appeared in the exhibition catalogue published by MGA.

A vintage book about Tibet by the British civil engineer, diplomat, and photographer John Claude White (1853–1918) was also removed from the exhibition.<sup>3</sup> White served, rather unwillingly, as Deputy Commissioner of the Tibet Frontier Commission for the politically ill-fated British Expedition to Tibet in 1903–04, also known as the Younghusband Expedition, after Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband (1863–1942), who led the mission. White's deep personal interest in recording the topography, culture, and traditions of the North-East Himalayan frontier had developed during his time based in Darjeeling, and particularly after he was sent to Sikkim in 1888, where he remained for twenty years as the first resident Political Officer. During this time, White travelled extensively and left an extraordinary record of his time not only in Sikkim, but also his ventures into Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, until his retirement from the Foreign Service in 1908.

John Claude White developed a warm personal friendship with Sir Ugyen Wangchuck (1862–1926), later the first Druk Gyalpo (King) of Bhutan, whose coronation White photographed in 1907. White was also well respected by other religious and local leaders in the region.<sup>44</sup> Speaking to the Royal Geographical Society in 1909, Sir James Ronald Leslie Macdonald (1862–1927), the commander of the Tibet mission’s military escort, reported that,

... the Tibetan representatives asked us that we should prevent any of our officers and men from entering any of their sacred places. After consulting, Colonel Younghusband issued orders that all monasteries and temples were to be out of bounds. Then a message came from the monasteries and chief Lamas to say that Mr. White was expressly excluded from this restriction, as he was welcome to visit the monasteries any time, and they would be glad to see with him any officers for whom he vouched. While Younghusband and I were debarred from visiting any of these places, Mr. White was welcome.<sup>5</sup>

John Claude White, *Tibet*, 1903–04, platinum photo pasted into photo album, 37.5 x 26.5 x 5 cm. Private Collection.



As the only member of the Tibet expedition permitted to photograph the monasteries in Lhasa, White made the most of the privilege.<sup>6</sup> His photographs preserved invaluable images of the main gateway into Lhasa through the Chorten (shrine), the Fort of Khampa Dzong, the Chakpori (medical school), and many

other sites that no longer exist, either because of decay or as the result of systematic destruction carried out during China’s Cultural Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

White also documented the four Shapés, representatives of the absent Dalai Lama, who had fled to Mongolia during treaty negotiations with the British authorities.<sup>8</sup> Recalling a later visit to Tibet, in 1906, in the company of Sir Ugyen, White lamented,

... notwithstanding the vast expenditure of money, the heavy loss of life, and the many hardships endured by the Lhasa Mission of 1904, Tibet has again become an absolute closed country to all Englishmen. In addition, [the British] Government’s unfortunate subsequent policy has been the means of handing over the Tibetans, bound hand and foot, to the Chinese, and all Tibetan officials are now obliged by their virtual masters, the Chinese, to enforce the Chinese traditional policy of exclusion of all Europeans.<sup>9</sup>

White’s images of Tibetan religious and cultural sites, particularly the Potala (residence of the Dalai Lama), and their social life and customs prior to China’s asserting full sovereignty over Tibet is probably not something Chinese officials would want emphasized overseas. During his ten visits to Australia (1982–2015), the popularity of the current (14th) Dalai

Lama—H. H. Tenzin Gyatso—has only increased.<sup>10</sup> No images from White’s book appear in the MGA catalogue; nor is he mentioned in any of the introductory texts. Stephen Zagała, Senior Curator at MGA, explains, “The removal of the work about Tibet might suggest other things. There was a suggestion that Chinese authorities might have been sensitive to the July 4th anniversary of the Tian’anmen Square protests, too, but, once again, this is just speculation. No explanation was offered by the Chinese government concerning the works.”<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, these works were not considered particularly controversial or problematic when originally exhibited at SCôP; the reason for their removal by officials prior to leaving China is obscure. When asked about the circumstances surrounding this incident, Zagała commented, “As I understand it, some low-level bureaucrats or officers at Chinese customs contacted Shanghai Centre of Photography to inform them that the works would be removed. Customs officers must have some authority to limit the circulation of Chinese cultural objects beyond the border, and they decided to exercise that power.”<sup>12</sup> This decision, as I understand it from Zagała, led to some consternation on the part of the curatorial staff at SCôP, who were understandably concerned about the overall integrity of the exhibition.

Initially, the option to have the John Claude White book hand delivered, and for MGA to print the missing photographic works in Australia, so that they might still be included, was considered. However, senior management at MGA ultimately decided against such a move given its potential to antagonize Chinese officialdom—the Gallery, as a municipal cultural facility, is administered by the City of Monash Council. As part of their deliberations, presumably MGA staff also had to consider the possibility of an adverse impact for the exhibition’s “program partners” (sponsors), the investment company Anxin Trust (who funded the catalogue) and the West Bund Development Group, both based in Shanghai. For his part, Zagała was perplexed by the rationale for removing these particular works. He remarked that, “The choices were a bit random and tokenistic. I mean, why censor the Tibetan story but not the story of the Catholic underground? I’m just drawing my own conclusion in suggesting that those images omitted suggest brutal or dystopian sentiments.”<sup>13</sup>



Of the photographic works removed, it is hard to understand why ostensibly “patriotic” images such as those by Xiao Zhuang, Weng Naiqiang, and Li Zhensheng would be of concern to the Chinese authorities. Lu Nan’s *Psychiatric Institution, Heilongjiang* (1989) depicts male and female patients pacing in a courtyard, many of them congregating around a purpose-made table with curved benches. One individual is lying on this central table in a passive posture, gazing upward. Apart from the sadness

Han Lei, *Luochuan, Shaanxi Province*, 1989, silver gelatin print, 22.5 x 15 cm. Courtesy of the artist and M97 Gallery, Shanghai.

Lu Nan, *Psychiatric Institution, Heilongjiang*, 1989, archival inkjet print, 30 x 44.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



of their predicament and the circumstances of such facilities in China, there is nothing blatantly ominous about the image—no guards or orderlies are present, and the subjects do not appear to be in any state of alarm. Han Lei's *Luochuan, Shaanxi Province* (1989) shows a man with a hat festooned with a spyglass, ribbons, and carnations, carrying a parasol. He meets the camera lens unflinchingly; he could be a local character, but more likely he is a regional circus or vaudeville performer, thus, on the surface, it does not seem to be a threatening image.

The title of the exhibition refers not to agrarian production (as in rice grain), although some viewers may have interpreted it thus, but to the texture of a photograph or negative produced using the manual process, pre-digital. As Karen Smith notes, “The richly subtle variations of the grain imbue black-and-white photographs with a timeless aesthetic beauty, one that is hard to reproduce or to emulate digitally, even with a zillion pixels. As technology becomes increasingly user friendly, in the face of an ever more pixelated future, the once ubiquitous material of photography, 135 and 120 film cartridges and the distinctive character from the grain are becoming lost to history and to the past.”<sup>14</sup> The speed at which digital technology has been embraced by the general public since the late 1990s, has led to the use of filmstock and the more arcane photography techniques such as wet/dry plate, albumen printing, Mordançage, pinhole, and photogravure being consigned to the realm of the specialist and the niche. This enthusiasm for the digital medium “has been experienced with particular speed and breadth in China, which leapfrogged almost entirely over analogue and into the digital age. This is also the period in which photography emerged in China as a fully-rounded form of expression.”<sup>15</sup>

The first part of the exhibition, “Early Photography in China (1890s–1920s),” consists of only five images displayed in a wall module at the entrance to the space. One is of the diplomat and statesman Guo Songtao (1818–91), taken in the 1870s. Guo Songtao was the first Qing dynasty minister to be stationed in a Western country, serving in both Britain and France (1877–79). The woodbury-type portrait is credited to Lock & Whitfield Studio, a firm that had premises in London and Brighton

until the mid-1890s. The other works were produced by intrepid foreigners who worked or lived in China for a period of years, including some well-known pioneers in the field. Their peregrinations throughout the country contributed immeasurably to the public's knowledge and understanding of China at the time, and we are deeply indebted to them for recording these marvelous images of a bygone age.



Lock & Whitfield Studio, *Portrait of Guo Songtao*, c. 1870s, woodbury type, 11.5 x 9.2 cm. Private Collection.



Felice Beato, *An Archway and Xili Pavilion in Front of Dagao Xuan Palace*, 1860, albumen photo on paper, 24 x 29.4 cm. Private Collection.



One of the first exponents of what would now be called photojournalism, the Italian photographer Felice Beato (1832–1909), produced *An Archway and Xili Pavilion in Front of Dagao Xuan Palace* (1860). *Monks in Hualin Temple* (1870s) is by the prolific Scottish photographer John Thomson (1837–1921). He traveled extensively throughout Asia and established a photography studio

John Thomson, *Monks in Hualin Temple*, c. 1870s, albumen photo on paper, 28.5 x 22 cm. Private Collection.

in Hong Kong in 1868. Thomson would author four books about his experiences in China, including the four-volume *Illustrations of China and Its People* (1873–74) and *Through China With a Camera* (1898). Thomas Child (1841–98) was employed in Peking as a gas engineer for the Imperial Maritime Customs from 1870 to 1889. A keen amateur photographer, he produced a series of over two hundred signed and dated full-plate images, principally of architecture and monuments. Child learned to speak Chinese

and documented the local populace and customs during his time there, including in *Portrait of a Chinese Man* (1880s).<sup>16</sup>

The French consul Auguste François (1857–1935) was posted to southern China between 1896 and 1904, first in Guangxi and then in Yunnan; he also visited Tibet. Known in China as Fang Su Ya, his diplomatic status and particular access allowed François to take thousands of photographs throughout his tenure, even shooting early moving image footage. His archive provides an extraordinary insight into Chinese society as the Qing dynasty was falling into decline; *Self Portrait* (1903) shows him toward the end of his term there.<sup>17</sup>

However brief in content, this initial display gives some indication of the early, and enthusiastic, engagement of Western photographers with the society and culture they experienced while living and working in China. It was perhaps not well displayed at MGA because of the very prominent blue wall module that dominated the entry space and provided the didactic introduction to the exhibition. This may have distracted some patrons, causing them to walk past the smaller cabinet to their right. Presumably, this was also the section of the exhibition where the John Claude White book would have been placed (had it been included). White's images could have provided something of a visual counterpoint to that of the consul François, who served in a different area of China, for a "competing" government, and in a different official capacity to White.

The exhibition continues with "New China Photography (1930s–1960s)," spanning the transitional period whereby photography was an activity practised almost exclusively by Westerners in China, with their cumbersome and expensive equipment, to a time when the process was adopted by the Chinese themselves for their own purposes. The Chinese went from being "tourists" in their own country as the passive subjects of the curious Western gaze and clients of foreign-run photographic studios to active participants using a technology that allowed them to begin to define their own world view. As photography historian Xu Jianing has observed, "the opening of photo studios was an important step for photography in China, allowing Chinese to see this Western technology, and making photography consumable in daily life. Like other new inventions from the industrial revolution that were embraced, photography soon became a known and accepted part of Chinese social life."<sup>18</sup> Improvements in both the relative size and cost of photographic equipment and a simpler development process led to photography becoming a fad among China's gentry, an opportunity afforded by this contact with Western culture and its various scientific developments.<sup>19</sup>

Included in this section was a cabinet containing five unmounted works, including two images by Zhuang Xueben taken from a folio and with calligraphic annotations: the striking profile portrait *The Head Dress of Tu Woman in Minhe* and *Crossing the River by Bull Boat* (both 1937). A copy of the hand-coloured book *The Grandeur of the Gorges* (1926) was opened to



Left: Zhuang Xueben, *The Headdress of a Tu Woman in Minhe*, 1937, silver gelatin print, 14.6 x 11.4 cm. Courtesy of Zhuang Wenjun.

Right: Wu Yinxian, *Mao Talking to Cadres of the 120 Division in Front of Yan'an Caves*, 1942, silver gelatin print, 23 x 17 cm. Private Collection.

the plate Hung-Chuan, *Red Boats: The Life-boats of the Yangtze*. It is one of six books of photographs of China published by the Scottish businessman and photography enthusiast Donald Mennie (1875/1876–1944), but this was his most famous, and it led to his being proposed for membership as a member of the Royal Geographic Society.<sup>20</sup> Wu Yinxian (1900–94) was active in both the photographic world and the emerging Chinese film industry. He is represented here by a 1939 image of the Canadian physician Dr. Norman Bethune (1890–1939) operating in a field hospital and the casual *Mao Talking to Cadres of the 120 Division in Front of Yan'an caves* (1942), which shows a man, not the later idealized cult figure.

Dr. Bethune, who died of septicemia, a bacterial blood poisoning, in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), left his Kodak camera to his colleague Situ Chuan (1912–50), popularly known as Sha Fei (flying sand). Sha Fei created an important photographic document of the Eighth Route Army, of which he and Bethune were members, which was used for propaganda purposes by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Almost a decade after the death of his mentor, Sha Fei was hospitalized in 1948 at Bethune Hospital in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, suffering from tuberculosis. In 1949, in a delusional state, he killed a Japanese surgeon involved in his treatment and was subsequently executed in March 1950. Two of Sha Fei's images are included, *Meal Break for the Performance Team* (c. 1938–40), an aerial view of a propaganda troupe in a courtyard preparing to eat, and *Three Girls* (1935–36), showing young Communist enlistees in their uniforms against a rural backdrop.<sup>21</sup>

The influence of Mao Zedong's series of speeches at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in May 1942 paved the way for photography in China as a powerful visual code that would predominantly serve the political imperatives and direction of the CCP. As an ideological tool, photography provided an efficient and evocative means for delivering Party information and promoting conformity, particularly the idea that "literature and art are subordinate to politics." This section of the exhibition accounted for four of the works removed by Chinese officials, including the colour photograph *Red Guards Streamed Into Tiananmen Square During Inspection*



Sha Fei, *Three Girls*, 1935–36, archival inkjet print, 20 x 29.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



by Chairman Mao (1966) by Weng Naiqiang. Weng Naiqiang was one of the few Chinese photographers who had access to Kodachrome and Ektachrome transparency film during the Cultural Revolution, which he photographed extensively. Curator Karen Smith describes the work as “exhilarating, in part due to the brilliant primary tones

(unpolluted bright blue sky above and a million China-red books being waved at eye level) of the slide film he used. Visually, the mix of pure energy and celebratory optimism is transfixing.”<sup>22</sup>

Concerted efforts by the CCP to regulate China’s cultural and artistic output to serve political goals is evident in the remaining work by Li Zhensheng that was included in the exhibition, *A Propaganda Team Performs for Laborers in the Countryside* (1973). This work has similarities to Yin Fukang’s colourized giclée print *Chinese Actors Including Male Star Zhao Dan Sing for the Workers of the Shanghai Shipyard* (1960) in terms of expressing Mao’s edict that art should appeal, or should be seen to appeal, to the peasants. In 1950, Yin Fukang was assigned to the Shanghai People’s Fine Arts Press as an editor of photography-related publications, where he worked until his retirement in 1979. This photograph of well-known actors of the period would have received widespread circulation within China. Zhao Dan (1915–80), seen second from the right in a pale trench coat, was a popular actor during the first “golden age” of Chinese cinema in the 1930s.

Zhao Dan made his screen debut in *Spring Sorrows* (*Li Pingqian*, 1933), and went on to appear in some forty films, including *Crossroads* (*Shen Xiling*, 1937), and as the titular character in *Lin Zexu* (*Zheng Junli*, 1959). Zhao Dan’s prominent status as one of Chinese cinema’s leading male stars of stage and screen made him a target of the competing political forces that convulsed the country for the next forty years. The dreadful mistreatment he suffered led to the curtailment of his otherwise stellar career and periodic imprisonment. In 1939, Zhao Dan was arrested by the Nationalist warlord Sheng Shicai (1897–1970) while travelling with a “patriotic” drama troupe to China’s northwestern border province of Xinjiang, whereupon he was tortured and incarcerated from 1940 to 1945.

Following his release, Zhao Dan starred in *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Sun Yu*, 1950), based on the true story of a nineteenth-century beggar in Shandong who amasses enough money to open a charity school. Popular with the public, it nonetheless raised the ire of Mao, who criticized the film in an article published in *Renmin Ribao* (*People’s Daily*) in May, 1951 as “spreading feudal culture.”<sup>23</sup> In *Red Crag* (*Shui Hua*, 1965), Zhao Dan played a Communist prisoner, Xu Yunfeng, incarcerated by the Nationalists. This echo of Zhao Dan’s personal experience was not enough to overcome the prolonged suspicion of factions within the Communist Party. Despite



Li Zhensheng, *A Propaganda Team Performs for Laborers in the Countryside*, 1973, archival inkjet print, 30 x 44.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Yin Fukang, *Chinese Actors Including Male Star Zhao Dan Sing for the Workers of the Shanghai Shipyard*, 1960, archival inkjet print, 50 x 67.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

being admitted as a member of the Party in 1957, Zhao Dan was denied any further film roles after 1965 by the state-controlled Film Bureau.

Madame Mao (Jiang Qing, 1914–91), Mao’s fourth wife, was a former actress who used the professional name Lan Ping. Jiang Qing used her status within the so-called “Gang of Four” during the Cultural Revolution to exact revenge for perceived slights she had faced from major figures in the film industry in the pre-war Shanghai of the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> Zhao Dan was one of those former colleagues whom Jiang Qing elected to persecute: he was incarcerated once again from 1967 to 1973. As Inmate 139, he was interrogated as a “traitor” who had abandoned the Communists for the Nationalists during his previous incarceration, and was compelled to write countless “confessions.”<sup>25</sup>

His career was obstructed by the Party for the last fifteen years of his life, and two days before he died of cancer, Zhao Dan belatedly fired back at his oppressors. In an article published in *Renmin Ribao*, October 8, 1980, entitled “Rigid Control Ruins Art and Literature,” Zhao Dan gave vent to his frustration.<sup>26</sup> From bitter personal experience, he opined that, “The

arts are the artists' own business; the arts would have no hope whatsoever and would perish if the party regulated them too specifically."<sup>27</sup> As Yingjin Zhang has observed, "for Zhao Dan, the posthumous attribution to him of the image of a fighter for freedom and democracy in the arts only testifies to their conspicuous absence during his life"<sup>28</sup>

Mao abhorred traditional Chinese (Peking) opera, which he viewed as a "courtly" art form that was feudalistic, bourgeois, and excluded the masses. As a response, the Party sanctioned new "revolutionary" or "model operas," expressive of the people's struggles against both foreign and class enemies. Jiang Qing served as head of the Film Section of the CCP's Propaganda Department in the 1950s. As part of Jiang Qing's reforms of Chinese culture, she instigated the "Eight Model Operas," or Plays (*yangban xi*), which consisted of five operas, two ballets, and one cantata approved by the Party. Zhang Yaxin is best known for photographing the original Eight Model Operas, and several subsequent approved productions, between 1969 and 1976. His meticulously produced still images were widely distributed and used across a variety of media, creating new aesthetic standards in China. As journalist Chengcheng Jiang has asserted, "The photographs would become some of the most iconic and recognized pictures in modern Chinese history, defining a visual style that dominated China for years, and continues to exert a powerful influence to this day. It has been said that Zhang Yaxin's image of a gun-toting female revolutionary in front of a socialist flag exemplified beauty in China for a generation."<sup>29</sup>

Two images, *A scene from "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy"* (1971) showing four leaping dancers seemingly suspended in mid-air above the stage, and the contorted figure of *A Ballet Dancer Performs "The White Haired Girl"* (1974), give some idea of the quest for perfection and obsessive detail Jiang Qing directed toward her pet project. "Naturally, the camera angle helps; carefully chosen angles that were in keeping with Yan'an forum directives, conjoined with those of a new slogan coined for expressing the Cultural Revolution as 'red, lofty, shining'—politically correct, heroic, uplifting," Smith surmises. Zhang Yaxin's works, she feels, "capture what is adjudged to be genuine impassioned vigour. What else would lead the dancers to such heights?"<sup>30</sup> In an atmosphere of intense political maneuvering, paranoia, and strict conformity to the prevailing views, artists may well have been fearful of doing anything that might displease Jiang Qing, or that could be perceived as non-revolutionary. Perhaps that might engender in the performers a somewhat heightened sense of purpose? When asked by Chengcheng Jiang if he actually liked the Model Operas he'd spent so many years documenting, Zhang Yaxin's response was blunt, "No, I did not. It was a political task given by my superior—I had no choice."<sup>31</sup>

The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 introduced the policies of Deng Xiaoping (1904–97), who had outmanoeuvred Mao's designated successor Hua Guofeng (1921–2008) for the leadership. This political transition is delineated in the exhibition as "Change and Social Experience (1978–2000)." The indications of Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "opening and reform" are



Zhang Yaxin, *A Ballet Dancer Performs The White Haired Girl*, 1974, archival inkjet print, 80 x 89 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Liu Heung Shing, *Beijing Long Distance Telegraph Station*, 1980, silver gelatin print, 31 x 45 cm. Private Collection.



conveyed within several works by the Director of the Shanghai Centre of Photography, Liu Heung Shing. Removed from the Australian version of the exhibition, *Taking Down Mao, Tiananmen Square, Beijing* (1980) shows one of the

Liu Heung Shing, *Taking Down Mao, Tiananmen Square, Beijing*, 1980, silver gelatin print, 16 x 23 cm. Private Collection.

massive standardized portraits of Chairman Mao resting on blocks at the bottom of scaffolding, as six onlookers ponder his demotion. Other Western influences strike an incongruous note in Liu Heung Shing's images such as *Beijing Long Distance Telegraph Station* (1980), where the phone units are in the shape of the American cartoon characters Snoopy (created by Charles M. Schultz) and Disney's Mickey Mouse. Local audiences react with bemused smiles to the boisterous yellow feathered character Big Bird looming over them in *Big Bird From the US Children's Television Program "Sesame Street"* (1981).<sup>32</sup>

There is a palpable shift in emphasis toward personal narratives and works that reflect upon human experience, shedding the overtly political agenda of previous decades. A younger generation of artists has chosen to employ documentary-style photographs to investigate social issues that would have been unacceptable or taboo subjects in previous decades. Lu Nan gravitates to those marginalized groups within Chinese society whose plight is largely unseen: the mentally ill, drug addicts, prisoners, and Tibetan peasants. He embarked on a lengthy project to document some of China's estimated twelve million Catholics in the series *On the Road: The Catholic Faith in China* (1992–98). Catholic communities in China, who have faced a renewed state persecution since 1951 in the wake of the Korean War, continue to have their options for worship heavily regulated.

Liu Heung Shing, *Big Bird From the US Children's Television Program "Sesame Street," Beijing, 1981*, silver gelatin print, 31 x 45 cm. Private Collection.

Many “underground” believers in China reject the official Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). They worship clandestinely, because they recognize the authority of the Holy See and the primacy of the Roman Pope in governing doctrinal matters. *Saying Mass, Shaanxi* (1992) gives an idea of the furtive nature of many of these meetings, with the faithful and their priest crammed into a small room with a makeshift altar, their faces illuminated by candles. *Teenager Carrying Holy Image, Shaanxi* (1992) shows a figure walking down a mountainous rural path who is supporting a large framed image of Christ in the devotional guise of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Sacratissimi Cordis Iesu*). So big is the picture that we see only the bottom half of the legs and upturned fingers of the person bearing it, evoking religious imagery that depicts Christ carrying the cross-beam on the way to Calvary.



Lu Nan, *Teenager Carrying Holy Image, Shaanxi, 1992*, archival inkjet print, 60 x 41.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Portraits of workers have remained a popular subject for contemporary photographers, but there has been a shift away from the deliberately “heroic” and “selfless” overtones that characterized such idealized propaganda images produced during the Maoist era. The trope of the anonymous “model worker” toiling away toward the national good, as seen earlier in the exhibition in the works of Wang Shilong, *Workers in Henan Province Making Steel From Scrap Metal During the Great Leap Forward* (1958) and *Peasants Following the Example of the Great Red Flag Canal* (1974), has been replaced by the self-aware subject. Song Chao grew up around mines in Shandong and worked for a mining company (1997–2001)

before changing careers. *Coal Miners #05* and *Coal Miners #08* (both 2002) depict working men with a certain swagger. Posing with their helmets on and chests bared, one strikes a “*what’s up?*” posture like a hip-hop star, the other has the cord for his battery-generated safety light between his teeth like a centrefold with a rose stem. As Smith contends, “They are real people, doing a job that is dirty, tough and dangerous given the extraordinary number of deaths that occur each year, yet, they retain their dignity and a sense of humour. The empathy channeled through the photographs has a direct correlation with Song Chao’s personal experience in the mines; he doesn’t need to show a disaster to humanize these men or heroics to command respect.”<sup>33</sup>



Gentler images evoke a certain nostalgia, like those by Lu Yuanmin, who captures quiet moments of contemplation and the beats of every day lives in localities. *Elderly Man Puts On His Best Suit for the Photo Shoot* (1993) is a study of a dignified older gentleman as he regards his appearance in the wardrobe mirror and adjusts his tie.

Wang Shilong, *Workers in Henan Province Making Steel From Scrap Metal During the Great Leap Forward*, 1958, archival inkjet print, 30 x 30 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Tacked to the adjacent wall, we see part of a poster depicting a local beauty in a bathing suit rendered in the style popularized by the Peruvian painter Joaquin Alberto Vargas (1896–1982).

In another image taken in Shanghai, *Four Neighbours Playing Mahjong* (1996-97), the ambient light in the apartment casts strange reflections on the wall. The viewer is drawn to wisps of smoke from one elderly lady’s cigarette and the apparently deserted birdcage over the kitchen sink—the players are too absorbed in their game to acknowledge Lu Yuanmin’s presence.



Li Lang has documented the Yi minority people who live near Mount Liangshan on the border between Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. His otherwise pleasant photographs of Yi posing in a forest setting wearing traditional dress, *Yi People No. 74, Sichuan* and *Yi People, No. 61, Sichuan* (both 2001), are subverted by the backdrops. Spray-painted sheets of “Westernized” interpretations of Chinese landscapes—kitsch temples in water

Song Chao, *Coal Miners #08*, 2002, silver gelatin print, 50 x 40 cm. Courtesy of the artist and M97 Gallery, Shanghai.

settings with bamboo and blossoms—serve to emphasize the disconnect between the actual lives of the people in these small communities and the staged versions of China’s “idyllic” past. These are not a people preoccupied with change and modernization, but the eviscerations wrought by the

Lu Yuanmin, *Elderly Man Puts On His Best Suit for the Photo Shoot*, 1993, archival inkjet print, 20 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Li Lang, *Yi People No. 74, Sichuan*, 2001, inkjet print, 118 x 112 cm. Courtesy of the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu.



Cultural Revolution, coupled with the dramatic pace of social and cultural change in China through the reform era, which have left many without an anchor to the recent past that might help them navigate the stresses of the modern age.

Further delineations within the exhibition come in the form of smaller groupings of works deemed to be expressive of certain themes. “Passage Through Life (1990s–present)” looks at the subject of life experience in China and the stages within people’s lives. This is at its most literal in Hai Bo’s *They* series, which focuses on group portraits. The thematic contrast is made between “then”—represented by a black and white photograph from an earlier period—and “now”—a colour portrait of the same people in the present. *They Series No. 6* (1999) shows a group of sixteen young women, presumably a school photo, taken in 1973. Hai Bo reunites the classmates in the same positions and the same rows nearly thirty years later.



Hai Bo, *They Series No. 6*, 1999, digital colour print, 45 x 60 cm. Private Collection.

The uniformity of their earlier dark smocks and long plaits has given way to women of individuality, self-expression, and life experience.

Wang Qingsong's *Follow You* (2013) shows a room full of exhausted students, heads bowed, and ostensibly asleep at their desks behind piles of textbooks. The only figure in the hall sitting upright wears a wig, glasses, and fake beard; he is hooked up to IV fluids from a stand in front of his desk, but the study process has clearly "aged" him. Scrawled across the walls of the enormous room in which they are grouped are the slogans "Progress everyday?," "Education is crucial," "Study well," and "For sustained development." Wang Qingsong's complex tableau points to the enormous pressure placed on students in China to excel.



Wang Qingsong, *Follow You*, 2013, archival inkjet print, 90 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

The section "Digital and Artistic Experiments (1990s–present)" highlights those contemporary artists whose diverse and creative attitude to the photographic medium serves as a means by which they interpret and express their vision of Chinese art and culture. Han Lei's lenticular work, *Angle of Incidence No. 1* (2014), proved popular with the two school groups visiting MGA the same day as I did. The cool and refined image of a marble statue depicting a youth drifting in and out of a bright alpine vista preoccupied many in the teenage audience. Positioned to the left of Han Lei's work, Maleonn's triptych *Journey to the West* (2008) contains a self-portrait in the first panel. Maleonn's background directing short films and his passion for collecting unusual items are brought to bear as he presides over a fantasy river scene assemblage consisting of statuary, taxidermy, miniaturized grottos and temples, skulls, masks, and faded papers, all illuminated by a tangled cluster of bulbs under a canopy of tulle. Birdhead (Ji Weiyu and Song Tao) are more direct in their approach to the urban environment. Their



Maleonn, *Journey to the West*, 2008, archival inkjet print, 135 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



gelatin silver print *Today 2014–04* (2014) presents a surveillance camera as its narrative focus, with the ubiquity of many cameras silently observing daily life prompting the duo to peer back at “big brother.”

Hong Lei was one of the first Chinese artists to experiment with the digital technology of the earliest versions of Photoshop, evidenced in his deft subversion of a traditional art form with the witty triptych *I Dreamt That Aliens Landed on a Zhejiang Scroll Painting* (2005). Just as Hong Lei would draw directly onto his negatives in some works, his experiments with digital image making became a process by which he integrated new creative devices into his personal exploration of Chinese artistic traditions and practices. Other artists delve directly into the photographic past in order to resurrect some of the more antiquated and labour intensive techniques. Documentary photographer Luo Dan’s work, for example, takes him on lengthy journeys across China to photograph small communities of people whose unassuming lives serve to illustrate how little these regions have changed for hundreds of years.

Birdhead, *Today 2014–04*, 2014, gelatin silver print, black python leather, black walnut, and cotton cloth frame, 83 x 103 x 8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Shanghart Gallery, Shanghai.



For *Simple Song*, his third major series, Luo Dan travelled deep into the remote mountain areas of the Nu River in Yunnan and used wet-plate negatives (the collodion process) to give the six prints included here an

“antique” look. Di Jinjun shares this interest in the material aspects of photography and also employs the collodion process to link his portrait series *Youth* (2008–10) to images created a hundred years ago. Since 2009, Zhang Dali has been exploring cyanotypes on rice paper, as seen with *Square* (2014), from his *World’s Shadows* series. Geng Jianyi’s engagement with the materials of photography takes its inspiration from Dada-like automatic drawing, in which the photograph “draws” itself over time as the chemically altered paper is exposed to light outside of the darkroom. He also uses chemical developer to draw directly onto photographic paper in the darkroom, creating unique and innovative abstract monochrome works.<sup>34</sup>



The last of the exhibition’s exploratory sub-groups, “The Contemporary Aesthetic (1990s–present),” presented works that were considered to align with an artistic approach that is distinctively Chinese in its outlook; that is, those works underscored by an emphasis on traditional and contemporary culture, philosophy, literature, and Eastern (esoteric) ways of seeing. Not surprisingly, landscape works and still life predominated. The

Top: Hong Lei, *I Dreamt That Aliens Landed on a Zhejiang Scroll Painting*, 2005, giclee print, hand tinted, 25 x 12.5 cm each. Courtesy of the artist and M97 Gallery, Shanghai.

Left: Luo Dan, *Simple Song No. 48, Ni Haoye and Her Daughter Hu Xuefen, Latudi Village*, 2012, pigment print on fiber paper, 30 x 21 cm. Courtesy of the artist and M97 Gallery, Shanghai.

floral compositions by Jiang Zhi that make up the series *Love Letters* are photographed while being consumed by fire. There is something decidedly vengeful about punishing the hapless flowers, as if they represent some unspecified romantic failure—*Love Letters No. 9* (2014) is one such pyre of disappointment.

Lin Ran uses an almost obsolete large-format tripod camera with its oversize negatives to capture intense detail within untouched tracts of

Zhang Dali, *Square*, 2014, cyanotype on rice paper, 67 x 131.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Geng Jianyi, *Landscape Sketch*, 1999, handmade drawing on photo paper, 25.5 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Shanghart Gallery, Shanghai.



Di Jinjun, *Student*, 2012, wet plate collodion black glass, 30.4 x 25.4 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



land and water—mammoth objects like *Chrysanthemum Stone* (2012) seem to exist independent of the passing of time. As Karen Smith describes it, “each scene is captured, solidly, enduringly, with an air of immutability and without a single person present to confront eternity with mortality.”<sup>35</sup> The landscape works of Taca were directly inspired by the eleventh-to-seventh-century-BC anthology *Book of Odes*, the oldest

existing collection of Chinese poetry. Comprising 305 works, the book traditionally is said to have been compiled by Confucius. Taca planned out a route of sites mentioned in the book, which he then visited, producing 108 photographs. His series *Odes* forms a direct visual connection with this most revered text and its allegorical expression, thus anchoring the literary world to the physical one.

An attempt to reconcile another aspect of China’s contested past prompted Kan Xuan to set out on a quest around the countryside to document all



Jiang Zhi, *Love Letters No. 9*, 2014, archival inkjet print, 180 x 135 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Lin Ran, *Chrysanthemum Stone*, 2012, platinum palladium silk, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

remaining traces of the tombs of the Emperors (2013–14). That she did so using an iPhone added a touch of the intrepid to her endeavour. Some of the resulting images—*Millet Mounds* (2012), for example—were later

Kan Xuan, *Millet Mounds*,  
2012, archival inkjet print, 50 x  
50 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



enhanced to dramatic effect to convey the aura and character of the sites as Kan Xuan experienced them, allowing the viewer to partake in these remote sites with her. Humour infuses the work of Yao Lu whose *High Pavilion in Cool Summer* (2013) appropriates the style of a Song dynasty painting with its elegant pavilions and decorative mountains, but uses digital technology to spoil the view. Green dust netting used to contain construction materials and rubbish has been added, Christo-like, to reflect the reality of urban expansion. A similar theme is present in Yang Yongliang's *Snow City No. 3* (2009), where the graceful arc of a mountain passage is marred by construction cranes. Liu Zheng documents the encroachment of the built environment and the resulting pressure on the surrounding landscape occasioned by the demands of metropolitan life. His *New Landscape* works (2015) show the unfortunate alterations wrought by the pace of change.

Following these relatively serene landscape and muted architectonic works, the conclusion of *China: Grain to Pixel*, bracketed as “The New World (2000–present),” is brash and exuberant. This finale presents the work of contemporary artists who have embraced both the diverse multiple media platforms the digital realm offers and the opportunities afforded by China's cautious but evolving engagement with sociopolitical, economic, and cultural ideas that have become steadily more Westernized. Used for the catalogue cover image, the striking *Miss Wan Studies Hard* (2011) by Chen Man sees the titular figure streaking past the Gate of Heavenly Peace on a bicycle. Wearing a tiny skirt and with a Christian Dior quilted handbag slung over her shoulder, Miss Wan is nearly dwarfed by the tower of books precariously balanced on the back of her bike. These are tied in place with white packaging ribbon from the Dior boutique, indicating the powerful influence of consumerism, magazine advertising, and designer trappings

now prevalent in China. The image implies that it is not the slog toward academic excellence that will get you noticed, or necessarily lead to success, but the brands you're seen wearing.



Chen Man communicates the pace of social and cultural change in contemporary China in generational terms; the model of “Miss Wan” is Wan Baobao, the granddaughter of Wan Li (1916–2015), who instituted the economic policy of the “household-responsibility system,” first adopted in 1979, and he later served as Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (1988–93). This work was originally exhibited as part of the Dior “Miss Lady” exhibition in Beijing (2011); the artist participated in another Dior-themed exhibition in Paris in 2013. Chen Man is closely associated with the fashion industry; her website chronicles her work for several designer brands and international fashion magazines, including those titles for whose cover the artist has posed. Prior to her graduation, the striking cover images Chen Man produced for the Shanghai-based fashion magazine *Vision* brought her considerable attention, including the November 2003 issue, included here as *Vision-Sex Flower 1* (2003).<sup>36</sup>

Yang Yongliang, *Snow City No. 3*, 2009, ultra giclee print, 200 x 64 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Australian audiences may have been quite surprised to see a black-and-white image (2013) of actress Audrey Hepburn (1929–93) in the exhibition. Less familiar to them perhaps would be the one next to it (2009) of the Taiwanese pop singer Teresa Teng (Teng Li-Chun, 1953–95). Teresa Teng’s multi-lingual recordings contributed to her huge popularity in Asian regions, and her early tragic death from an asthma attack only added to her fame. She was accorded state honours at her funeral in Taiwan, attended by the then-President Lee Teng-hui. The works are actually by Zhang Wei, from his *Artificial Theatre* series, whereby he uses images of film and performance stars, political figures, and other “heroes” (Che Guevara, Lei Feng, Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King, Jr., among others) as the basis for digital reconstruction.<sup>37</sup> He reassembles the faces of these well-known identities using multiple facial features derived from portraits he took in 2007 of ordinary individuals in China. Thus, at a casual glance the portraits resemble the more famous person, but on closer inspection there is something amiss.

Chen Man, *Miss Wan Studies Hard*, 2011, archival inkjet print, 50 x 74 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Zhang Wei, *Audrey Hepburn*, 2013, giclee print, 60 x 48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Zhang Wei's works explore the tension between personal identity—a contested area in China during previous decades—and the influence exerted by mass media, advertising, social media, and peer pressure upon an individual's sense of self. The cult of celebrity, or cult of personality in the case of Mao and other world leaders, can also have an impact on an individual's self-worth and behaviour. By skilfully combining the random

features of unknown subjects to conform to the likeness of someone famous, Zhang Wei questions how much time we spend invested in the lives and concerns of public figures we don't know. In merging the two, Zhang Wei breaches the visual gap between the ordinary person and the acclaimed entity and ponders to what extent our interest in these people is a projection of our own unfulfilled needs and aspirations.<sup>38</sup> More recently, Zhang Wei applied this concept using European figure paintings in the *Artificial Theatre—Profile Portraits of Unknown Women* (2012) series, including the two included in this exhibition based on paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci (1452–1519), *Lady With An Ermine* [probably Cecilia Gallerani] (1483–90) and the (reversed) portrait *Ginevra de' Benci* (c. 1480).

The seemingly indistinguishable space between art and fashion, and photography's pivotal role in both, is evident in a number of works in this closing section of *China: Grain to Pixel* that look more like high-fashion campaigns or magazine editorials. Feng Hai, like Chen Man, was part of a small group of students invited to participate in the first master's program in photography at Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts, taught by staff from Griffith University in South East Queensland. Feng Hai's extravagant work *Searching for Divinity* (2010), with its riot of horse-headed figures clad in traditional Chinese courtly dress surrounding twin deities, is based on the ancient Chinese mythological text *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan Hai Jing*).

Next to Feng Hai's piece is the work of multimedia artist and art director Chi Lei (Chili) whose career also traverses many aspects of popular culture. His background in the music industry and fashion magazine production is evident in the works *Outside Six Realms of Existence, No. 1* (2012) and *I Forgot Who You Are* (2013). The latter work, with its sneering title, depicts a beautiful woman intent on self-mutilation. Dressed as if to go out clubbing, she is already missing both arms below the elbow, replaced with prosthetic apparatus, and seems determined to do further injury to herself. Surrounded by discarded high-heel shoes and wearing multiple designer watches, she appears to embody the extreme narcissism and self-obsession that can result in conditions such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), for which the fashion industry and its seductive, unrealistic advertising is often blamed, and which is further amplified by the corrosive influence of social media.



According to Liu Heung Shing, the aim of *China: Grain to Pixel* is “to show how photography has evolved in China in tandem with the world and as technology advanced.”<sup>39</sup> An exhibition of considerable ambition mounted by a new institution, it could not expect to be as comprehensive in content as its time frame is long, over 150 years.

Zhang Wei, *Artificial Theatre—Portraits of Unknown Women*, 2012, giclee print, 60 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

In the context of China, photography was introduced as a practice of foreigners and soon became a political tool of the CCP, access to which was strictly controlled and rigorously vetted by the state. This self-made cultural vacuum, and the artistic inhibition it fostered, was incredibly difficult to transcend. As curator Karen Smith points out, “the subjects that had been sanctioned to photograph and those photographs so very widely disseminated under Mao as China’s national norm, was an idea of reality that was subsequently hard to shake off or to dispel. A visual code that was part of the nation’s DNA, affecting everything that was visual coming out of China, but including thoughts, words, actions and interactions.”<sup>40</sup>



Feng Hai, *Searching for Divinity*, 2010, archival inkjet print, 50 x 120 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Photography is often described as the most democratic of mediums since it is easily accessible, expedient, has the potential to confer great meaning, and can be practised by many—although few would characterize their efforts as art. A population that has been collectively deprived, for so long, of a means of expression will naturally seek to find the most direct means of reestablishing



Chi Lei, *Outside Six Realms of Existence No. 1*, 2012, archival inkjet print, 80 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

that expression and attempting to reorient itself within the contemporary context. *China: Grain to Pixel* represents a highly credible effort on the part of the Shanghai Centre of Photography to present a narrative of the history of the photographic medium in China and to engage with the wider contemporary dialogue as to what a meaningful expression of Chinese identity might look like today.



For the Australian audience, the exhibition provided a particularly broad survey of photographic practice in China and introduced the work of some of its leading figures to those who may not have had the opportunity to see such output before, particularly so for students. The circumstances of the removal of eight items scheduled to be shown at MGA, however, is a timely reminder that a medium so visceral and easily embraced by international audiences still prompts an unreasonable level of defensiveness and mistrust in some quarters.

#### Notes

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1. September 6–November 30, 2015. A further iteration was exhibited at the China Cultural Center in Brussels as *China: Grain to Pixel, 1980 to Today* (August 23–September 18, 2016), <http://www.cccbrussels.be/>. The author of several books, Liu Heung Shing (also referred to as HS Liu) was described in 1983 in *Newsweek* magazine as “The Henri Cartier Bresson of China.” Liu Heung Shing shared the Pulitzer Prize (1992) with his colleagues at Associated Press in the category of “Spot News Photography” for images relating to the collapse of the Soviet Union.
2. The City of Monash, a local government area in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne, was established in December 1994 as the result of the State Government of Victoria’s amalgamating of various local councils. The City of Monash Collection was formerly the Waverley City Gallery Collection and originally broad in scope, including textiles, prints, photographs, and paintings. An acquisition committee was established in 1980 to assess and develop the collection, and in 1984 a sub-collection was established to focus on Australian photography. Subsequently, the sub-collection became the strength of gallery and the decision was made to specialize in that field.
3. The disputed volume was probably White’s *Tibet and Lhasa: Photographs by J. C. White*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Johnston and Hoffmann, 1908).
4. Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Himalayas: Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim: A Photographic Record by John Claude White, 1883–1908* (Easthampton: Antique Collectors’ Club, 2005), 26–27.
5. *Ibid.*, 116.
6. *The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Photography Vol. 2*, ed. John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1496.
7. Meyer and Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Himalayas: Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim: A Photographic Record by John Claude White, 1883–1908*, 110, 121.
8. *Ibid.*, 115.
9. John Claude White, *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887–1908* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 200. White also contributed articles about the region to *National Geographic*, *Asiatic Review*, *Journal of the East India Association*, and *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*.
10. For an account of the Dalai Lama’s national visits to date, see [www.dalailamaaustralia.org/pages/?ParentPageID=2&PageID=28/](http://www.dalailamaaustralia.org/pages/?ParentPageID=2&PageID=28/). There is also an Australian Tibet Council; see [www.atc.org.au/](http://www.atc.org.au/).
11. Author in conversation with Stephen Zagala at MGA, August 25, 2016, and subsequent e-mail exchange between Zagala and the author, August 29, 2016, concerning the circumstances of these omissions.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," in Ying Jiang, ed., *China: Grain to Pixel* (Shanghai and Melbourne: Shanghai Centre of Photography and Monash Gallery of Art, 2016), 25.
15. Ibid.
16. Other works by Child form part of the Stephan Loewentheil Historical Photography of China Collection and were exhibited as *Qing Dynasty Peking: Thomas Child's Photographs* (2016) at the Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York (September 23–October 25, 2016). See Eve M. Kahn, "A Photographic Record of 19th-Century China," *New York Times*, September 23, 2016, C22, and online as "Call Him an Early Adopter: Thomas Child a 19th Century Photographer in China," [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/arts/design/call-him-an-early-adopter-thomas-child-a-19th-century-photographer-in-china.html?\\_r=0/](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/arts/design/call-him-an-early-adopter-thomas-child-a-19th-century-photographer-in-china.html?_r=0/).
17. See the Auguste François Association's website, <http://augfrancois.chez-alice.fr/>.
18. Xu Jianing, "Photography in China Pre-1949," in Ying Jiang, ed., *China: Grain to Pixel*, 42.
19. Ibid.
20. Donald Mennie, *The Grandeur of the Gorges: Fifty Photographic Studies, With Descriptive Notes, of China's Great Waterway, the Yangtze Kiang, Including Twelve Hand-coloured Prints* (Shanghai: A. S. Watson and Co. and Kelly and Walsh Ltd., 1926). Mennie employed the wet-plate process, which was, even at that time, somewhat obsolete. He printed his work in photogravure and often employed hand-colouring, as seen with this volume, containing fifty photogravure plates, twelve of them coloured. The overall impression of the work is consciously "antiquarian," evoking China's "romantic" past, right down to the silk brocade pictorial binding. The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra has a large collection of Mennie's works and holds edition 858 of 1000 copies of this volume. See <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=149891/> and [http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Search.cfm?CREIRN=33451&ORDER\\_SELECT=1&VIEW\\_SELECT=4/](http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Search.cfm?CREIRN=33451&ORDER_SELECT=1&VIEW_SELECT=4/).
21. The first American exhibition of his works, *Art, Documentary, and Propaganda in Wartime China: The Photography of Sha Fei*, curated by Eliza Ho, was shown at the Urban Arts Space, Ohio State University, Columbus (January 19–March 27, 2010).
22. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," 28–29.
23. *The Chinese Cinema Book*, eds., Song Hwee and Julian Ward (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 88.
24. Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132–33.
25. Yingjin Zhang, "Zhao Dan: Spectrality of Martyrdom and Stardom," in Mary Farquhar and Yingjin Zhang, eds., *Chinese Film Stars*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 89.
26. Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*, 159–60.
27. Yingjin Zhang, "Zhao Dan: Spectrality of Martyrdom and Stardom," 93.
28. Ibid., 94.
29. An exhibition of Zhang Yaxin's works, *Zhang Yaxin: Model Opera*, was held at Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver, Canada (June 14–July 26, 2013). Jiang Chengcheng, "Zhang Yaxin: Photographing Chairman Mao's Model Operas," *Time*, June 17, 2013, <http://time.com/3800320/zhang-yaxin-photographing-chairman-maos-model-operas/>.
30. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," 32.
31. Jiang Chengcheng, "Zhang Yaxin: Photographing Chairman Mao's Model Operas."
32. A Chinese co-production of *Sesame Street*, called *Zhima Jie*, was created in 1998 and broadcast in Mandarin. Filmed in Shanghai, it ran until 2001, totalling 130 thirty-minute episodes. The series returned in 2010 as *Zhima Jie: Da Niao Kan Shijie* (*Sesame Street: Big Bird Looks at the World*).
33. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," 32.
34. Leah Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC, and New York: National Gallery of Art and Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), 40–41, 482. Geng Jianyi is possibly inspired by the German painter Christian Schad (1894–1982). A member of the anti-establishment Dada art movement, Schad developed his own version of the "photogram." He called these abstract and unpredictable experiments with cameraless images "immaterial collages," later to be dubbed Schadographs by his colleague Tristan Tzara (1896–1963).
35. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," 33.
36. For more on Chen Man, see <http://www.chenmaner.com/>.
37. See more of the *Artificial Theatre* series at [www.zhangwei-art.com/works/index/](http://www.zhangwei-art.com/works/index/).
38. See also James Estrin, "Elvis, Madonna and Mao: Exploring Identity in China," *New York Times*, June 23, 2016, <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/elvis-madonna-and-mao-exploring-identity-in-china/>.
39. Liu Heung Shing, "Forward," in Ying Jiang, ed., *China: Grain to Pixel*, 15.
40. Karen Smith, "Grain to Pixel: A Story of Photography in China," 29.