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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.

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Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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