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# 广阔的现实主义道路

# INFINITE REALISM

20 世纪 20-80 年代摄影的人文实践  
HUMANISM IN CHINESE PHOTOGRAPHY FROM 1920S TO 1980S

## EXHIBITION GUIDE IN ENGLISH

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# Foreword

## Infinite Realism

### Humanism in Chinese Photography from 1920s to 1980s

Infinite Realism: Humanism in Chinese Photography from 1920s to 1980s looks onto the practice of photography as a creative measure in respect of the period. When it was firstly introduced to China in the mid-19th century, photography served as a tool to assist works of portraiture and visual documentation. It was not until the 1920s, photography started gradually becoming an artistic medium. Communism progressed drastically into political movements in China at the dire beginning of the 20th century. Consequentially, the proletarian revolutionary values brought various rifts to the Chinese art world. Thus, how to interact with reality became an inevitable task for the creatives and literates to render. In the context of such upheavals, photographers expanded the medium's capacity as well as its possibility by infusing humanist ideology into their artworks. Specifically, the camera is endowed with the agency to think, much like the human eye; it perceives both form and content. On the other hand, when an artist positions the camera lens onto society and documents the people and their space in their times, photography then takes on a proactive stance and interacts with real life, including the revolutionary movements. Furthermore, the

act of rediscovering the artistic and cultural qualities of photographs apart from their political signification was another facet of the humanistic practice in photography for its liberal values of individualism.

After World War I, realism started to revive in Europe and North America, becoming a conscious artistic language and a state of mind for artists. Beginning in the 1930s, socialist states reached consensus on the promotion and institutionalization of socialist realism. In the meanwhile, the definition of realism had been debated intensively by socialist states and western left-wingers in literary and art circles. Step by step, the term “realism” became ideologized, misused, and even stigmatized, so much so that the term had lost its original authenticity and was rejected by art creators. Socialist realism was popularized in China in the 1930s as the subjectivity of other types of realism was being questioned. Since then, realism has been a critical concept and method in Chinese literary and artistic practices. After the 1940s, socialist realism was advocated for more radically and later instrumentalized to promote nationalist dogma. Its rigidity constrained the development of realist art practices, methodology, and critique.

As socialist realism became chained to ideological principles, debates over the bounds of realism rose out of the creators’ resistance to conforming to the one and only ideology. Artists and literates also challenged its limitations as an act to reflect upon the narrow path they had embarked on. In 1956, Qin Zhao yang wrote in *Realism - The Broad Road*, “I think the shackles of dogmatism on literature and art are not specific to China, the issues being worldwide is what truly makes them difficult to overcome.” However, discussions on realism cannot separate themselves from ideology, therefore it is politically complicated to interrogate how the constraints of realism generated dogmatic, formulaic works of literature and art.

In 1963, the French literary critic Roger Garaudy published the book *D’un Réalisme Sans Rivages* (realism without borders). Therein, Garaudy commented on the tendency to evaluate realism limited by mechanical materialism, class theory, and

vulgar sociology. Garaudy pointed out that “a standard of great realism can be drawn from the work of Stendhal and Balzac, Courbet and Repin, Tolstoy and Martin du Gard, Gorky and Mayakovsky. But what do we do if the work of Kafka, Saint-John Perse, or Picasso does not meet these standards? Should they be excluded from realism, from art? Or, on the contrary, should the definition of realism be opened up and expanded, giving realism a new dimension by including these peculiar contemporary works, so that we can integrate all these new contributions with the legacy of the past?” Garaudy obviously concurred with the latter. The French writer Louis Aragon, who turned to socialist realism in the 1930s, expressed his support for Garaudy in the preface to his book *D'un Réalisme Sans Rivages*. He wrote “the fate of realism is not guaranteed once and for all, but rather depends on the re-evaluations of new facts”. In contrast to predefined, dogmatic realism, Aragon defended realism as a way to live and to create, as well as to perceive reality. Discarding everything that does not belong to the dogmatic sense of “reality” from the category of realism is to castrate it. Rather than limiting realism to realistic forms, we should let realism rise above the bland concept of authenticity and be free of all hindrance, then reconsider it as a wholesome artistic practice. In doing this, we will see its ability to encompass the unreduced diversity of aesthetic experiences.

*Infinite Realism: Humanism in Chinese Photography from 1920s to 1980s* presents the emergence of alternative realist practices in Chinese photography in the respected period. The works in this exhibition break free of the rule for realism to be realistic, and transcend the modernist dichotomy between art and reality, while refuting the simple equation between realism and reality. The photographs on view bring humanistic awareness into a dialogue between history and reality. The works express photographers' individual and penetrative gazes on reality as well as their interpretations. We wish to bring forward a broad perspective regarding all realist practices, where the agency of human beings as observers, recorders, documented and historical figures are always at the core of our discussion and manifestation.

# 2<sup>ND</sup> Floor

# Chapter 1

## **Socialist Realism and Realism**

**1950s–1960s**

After the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, socialist realism not only developed into a dominant concept of literature and approach of artistic creation but also took on a guiding significance as an ideological principle. This led to a substantial increase in the content of mechanism and vulgar sociology in the theoretical interpretation and practice of realism. In 1956, Qin Zhaoyang wrote in *Realism - The Broad Road*, "I think the shackles of dogmatism on literature and art are not unique in China, and the issues being worldwide is what truly makes them difficult to overcome." This essay demonstrated that the "worldwide" debate on realism, which took place between 1956 and 1958, also had a considerable impact on China. Debates over realism were closely linked to international politics, and the situation of each country also had an influence on the ideologies within the Communist Party of China. The "Great Debates" on realism in the 1950s allowed us to break through the impression of socialist realism as the absolute standard since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, and to see the other side of realism in Chinese literary and artistic practice: questioning

voices that emerged and clashing of different opinions.

This debate can also be seen as one of the possibilities unleashed by the implementation of the “Hundred Flowers Policies” (Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend) in 1956. During 1956 and the first half of 1957, the atmosphere in regard to politics, economics, and culture all seemed to be freed up at once. The emancipation of the mind and the social changes created a relatively relaxed environment for literary and artistic creations. Opposition to “dogmatism” was the main focus of the intellectual community during this period. There were divisions between different factions, and debates on the regulations of literature and art among the left-wing intellectuals. In response to the constraints of dogmatism, Qin Zhaoyang pointed out that “how vast the real life is, and what a rich source it could be. The vision, path, content, and style of realist literature can be as vast and rich as humans’ ability to perceive and depict reality artistically. What a generous environment the writers have to exercise their creativity! If there is any limitation on realist literature or writers, it is the extent to which the reality itself, art itself, and the writers’ talent will allow.” That is, the autonomous perception of human beings was considered the real driving force of realism. This was, in fact, a departure from the political objective of the time, which emphasized a strict uniformity of standards and sought to establish an “integrated” literary and art practice.

These debates and reflections on realism help us realize that it is necessary to go beyond the formal languages, restrictions of the subject matter, and modes of creation that were rigid and dogmatic in order to recognize genuine realism. Throughout the development of socialist literature and art since 1949, there have been not only constraints on artistic ideas by institutions and regulations but also conscious and unconscious attempts by creators and theorists to expand and overstep the boundaries of realism when they perceived a loosening. These attempts should also be seen as the evolution of realism in practices, and be included in our examination and discussion of the realist experiences.

The early days of the People's Republic were a period when the development of photojournalism became a priority, with a shift in subject matter from war to reflecting the life of construction and struggle during the transitional stage. Although socialist realism was clearly identified as the primary working method and path during this period, its contents and features always lacked proper practice-based theoretical interpretations, and thus needed further convincing. Theoretical issues, including the differentiations between realism and naturalism, realism and fabrications that were not in line with reality, directness and naturalism, and so forth, were ambiguous in terms of photographic practice and theory. Some theorists, who aspired to study photography, published essays on matters of realist photography. It became a point of contention whether to define realist photography through the perspective of formal features, class theories, or ideological tendencies. Considering some photographs' formulaic, conceptual, and naturalist tendencies, a number of articles emphasized the significance of typification. Some highlighted typification by opposing the naturalistic photography, while some evaluated typical figures by the criterion that specificity and universality have to be consistent. Realism and artistic typicality are both fundamental problems in cultural as well as day-to-day life, and they were discussed in greater depth than ever during this period. Criticism was made on the tendency in photographic practice that emphasized only the ideological aspect of artwork while neglecting the importance of artistic expression and technique, as well as the diversity of subject matter, genre, and style. Photography of landscape, still life, and portrait, once suspected, also came to blossom.

At the end of 1956, the China Photographers Association (formerly known as China Photography Association) was founded. In March 1957, the association launched *China Photography*, the first national photographic publication. And in December, it held the first national photographic art exhibition. In the autumn of 1960, the association formally established the Department of Photographic Theory Research, which edited and published *The Reference Materials for*



Photographic Work and Symposium on Photographic Art. They contained theoretical commentaries, debates over the classification of photographic art, discussions on the characteristics of photographic art, and reflections on photographic styles. Photographic theories relied on transplantations from abroad, particularly from the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Poland. Practitioners' discussions, debates, explorations, and collations on numerous theoretical issues of photography, the history of the medium, and commentaries on photographic works greatly expanded the understanding and practice of photography through various conferences and publications.

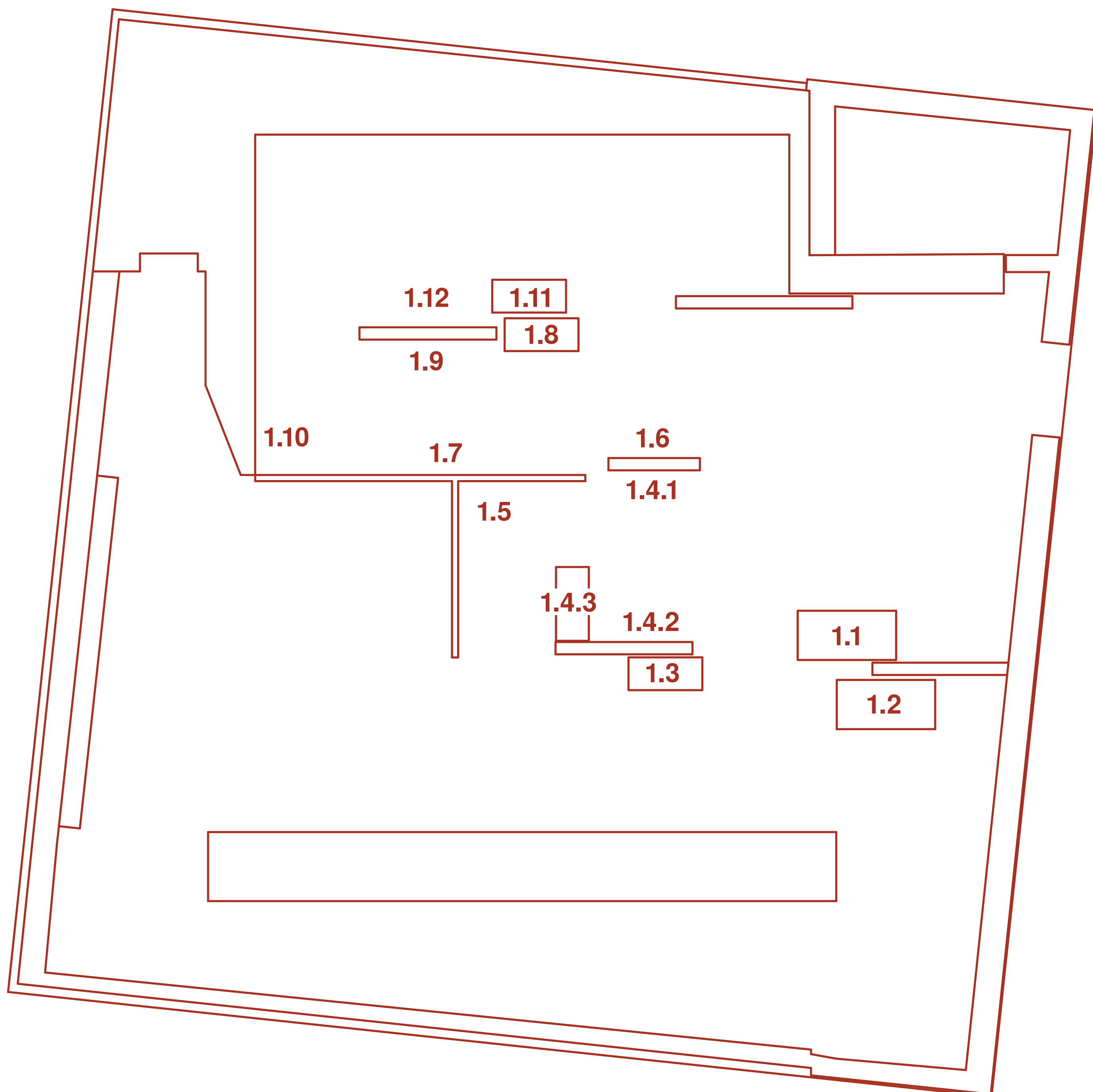
Photographers from the older generation, such as Zhang Yinquan, Zhuang Xueben, Ao Enhong, and Xue Zijiang, who excelled in portrait, landscape, still life, and flower photography as early as the 1920s and 1930s, took up jobs in the industry, and contributed their experience and artistic talents to the creation of new China's photography. Although the practice of Jin Shisheng, an explorer of the art of photography, was restricted due to objective conditions, as a delegate and one of the executive directors of the first congress of the association, his doubts and difficulties were taken into consideration to some extent. The art of photography, as a discipline of art, developed considerably during this period.

In the meanwhile, socialist construction became an important subject matter for photographers. Under this category, the works on industrial and agricultural subjects mostly featured people, which are the main body of the working force, demonstrating the struggle between humans and nature. Subjects such as the lives of ethnic minorities, the innocence of children, portraits, stages, sports, animals, still life, and landscapes also came into the arena in the art of photography,

In the early 1950s, socialist realism in the Soviet Union tended to become rigid and static. It was firmly opposed to and critical of Western modernist literature and art. As the subject matters and forms of photography were limited and disciplined, photographers went about breaking free of these boundaries through substantial practices. The underlying

significance of the combination of revolutionary realism and romanticism and nationalization, proposed in 1957, was to right the flaws of Soviet socialist realism. A large number of landscape photographs, with a touch of impression from Chinese paintings, emerged during this period, which can be described as a substantial practice of this trend of thought. Photographers such as Lu Shifu, Huang Xiang, Zhang Yinquan, Xue Zijiang, Chen Bo, Wu Yinxian, and Yuan Yiping chose the wondrous landscapes of the motherland as the subject of their multifarious masterpieces, some imposing, some finely delineated, some grand and magnificent, and some ethereal.

In the early 1960s, the “Hundred Flowers Policies” were still incorporated in the art community, which encouraged academic debates and diversified explorations. In 1962, a conference on literature and art was held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art, and formally proposed the “Eight Articles of Literature and Art”, advocating diversified creation of literature and art. This period also saw the emergence of smaller pieces featuring landscape, still life, and lyricism, in media such as ink, oil, wood engraving, and sculpture. They were emotionally gentle, hopeful, and enjoyable, while reaching a climax in the exploration of “pure” artistic language. At the same time, critiques on class theory and treatises on human nature were still present. Some artists used depictions of animals to express emotions residing in human beings. These developments were also reflected in photography, with the emergence of still life and lyrical pieces capturing animals.



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1960s, Printed in 2022, 29.4×15.4 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang

# 2<sup>ND</sup> Floor

## Chapter 2

### **The Mirage of Realism**

**1960s–1970s**

In 1971, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the publication of “May 7th Directives”, Long Live the Glorious “May 7th Directive” was published by PLA Pictorial Press. The book included 169 photographs, which were mostly selected from photos released from 1966 to 1971 by the official pictorial office. The majority of them were staged photography with set scenes. Following the creative principle of the model opera to give prominence to positive characters, heroic characters, and the main heroic character. These photos adopted a low-angle shot, highlighted the typical characters, and produced considerable models combining revolutionary realism with romantic realism. These masterly photographs started once again the trend of stage directing and mechanical imitations.

In 1971, the 9·13 incident brought a turning point for the Party to rebuild its authority over the narrative of revolutionary history. The photography department of Xinhua News Agency received the task to adjust an exhibition, whose original plan was to display 50 portraits of the country’s leader, showcasing the special Xinhua dyeing technique and printing meth-



od on the 21st National Day. The exhibition was replaced by “The National Photographic Art Exhibition Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao’s Talks at the Yan’An Forum on Literature and Art”, taking place on May 23rd, 1972 at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing. With 407 photographs, the National Photographic Art Exhibition reappeared in the public eye after a six-year hiatus. The exhibition included 84 portraits of the leader, giving prominence to his presence in major events from the Anti-Japanese War to 1972. The exhibition also included historical pictures from the Anti-Japanese War and the Wars of Liberation, as well as more recent works illustrating China’s accomplishments in industrial development, agriculture, education, culture and national defense after 1966. The exhibition attempted to elucidate, once again, the creative principle proposed in the Talks with visual language. It constructed a visual utopia of the Cultural Revolution, as the displayed photographs pursued a pure and spectacular style, in terms of content and techniques, divorced from everyday realities. Through pictorials and posters, these images spread widely and were internalized by most people as a visual experience of the era.

In 1974, landscape photography was featured and brought back to public attention in a photography exhibition titled “One of the South China Sea Islands – Xisha Archipelago” held by the National Art Museum of China. The term, feng-guang sheying, which translates to “landscape photography”, was created in the early 1950s. It has a spiritual connection with the previous literati art photography and emphasizes the photographer’s grasp, not worship, of the natural scenery. Although the subject was still to celebrate the nation and the national spirit, some photographers would use the opportunity “aesthetically” while doing their assignments and produced many awe-inspiring works.

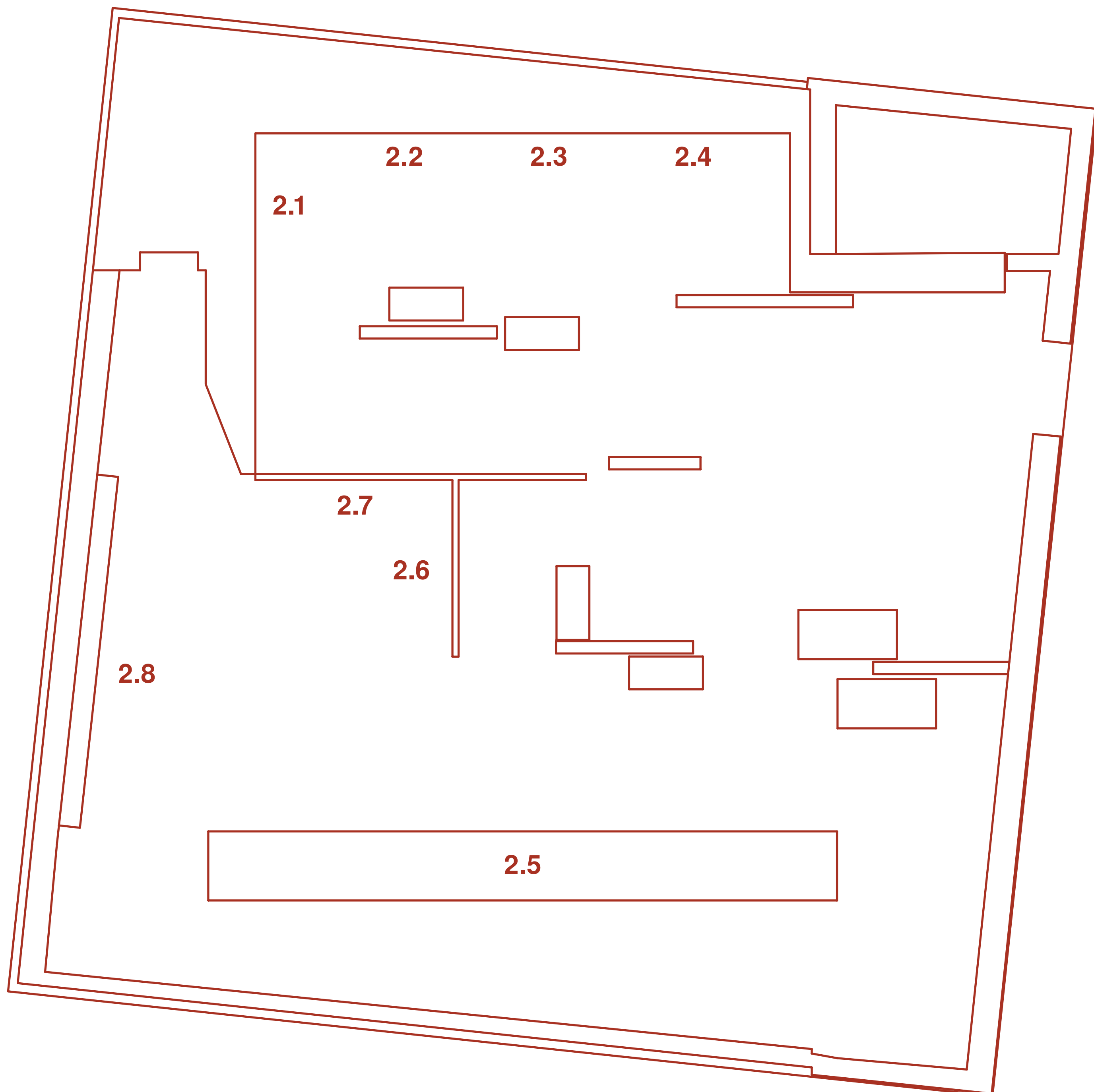
In the mid to late period of the Cultural Revolution, under the policy that supported the nation’s industrial development, the camera industry began to recover. From 1973 to 1975, camera factories were established or re-established across the country, and domestic camera production increased con-

sequently. At the same time, China's photosensitive material industry developed rapidly and was able to meet the market need for domestic photosensitive materials. This historical condition witnessed the further expansion of the community of Chinese photographers. When the Cultural Revolution was close to its end, cameras were no longer uncommon among high-income families (e.g., civil servants, intellectuals) in major cities, and photography salons among young urban intellectuals also began to emerge. At that time, people still focused on photographic techniques, and the scenes of their photography were mainly suburbs and parks.

In the spring of 1973, the Cultural Division of the State Council established the National Photographic Art Exhibition Office. Managed by Xinhua News Agency, the main tasks of this temporary office included organizing the annual National Photographic Art Exhibitions and training grassroots photographers, professional or amateur. This new office was not a restoration of the China Photography Society that existed before the Cultural Revolution, but a "purified" institution, aiming at putting into practice the cultural policy guided by Mao Zedong Thought. As for the practice of photography, the focus was on increasing mass participation, especially cultivating the working class's interest in photography. After the National Photographic Art Exhibition Office was established in Beijing, other provinces followed suit. The provincial revolutionary committees either added the name "Photographic Art Office" to existing propaganda departments or news photo agencies to connect with the Photography Department of Xinhua News Agency and the National Photographic Art Exhibition Office, or set up new local institutions to take charge of the production and distribution of photographs. In the process of restructuring local institutions, the primary "Mass Culture Centers" were included in the national photography network for the first time.

In the process of promoting the annual exhibitions, the National Photographic Art Exhibition Office organized touring exhibitions through local photographic art exhibition offices, arranged advanced photographers from across the country

to visit national exhibitions in Beijing, and offered photography training and lectures, which formed a nationwide linkage. In 1974, Chinese Photography also resumed publication after an eight-year break. This official exhibit publication platform brought together professional and amateur photographers from all over the country, including worker-peasant-soldier photographers. The annual National Photographic Art Exhibitions have provided a comprehensive display of the socialist production and construction accomplishments, including military (military training, military-civilian connection, militia morale), ideological education (studying socialist theory, anti-capitalism and anti-revisionism, criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius, the National People's Congress meetings), industry (steelmaking, oil drilling, mining, railway, weaving machines in factories and other infrastructure), agriculture (cultivating wasteland, harvest, animal husbandry, fishery), culture (model opera, rural performance, revolutionary dance drama, mass art), sport (climbing the Mount Everest, the National Games of China, dance, polo), natural scenery, and figurines, among other topics. Guided by socialist realism, these photographs not only inherited the superb photographic skills in the early days of the Cultural Revolution, but also showcased the working sites of all trades and professions, the natural scenery across the country, and the spiritual outlook of the big socialist family. Among the numerous photographers participating in the National Photographic Art Exhibitions each year, many were from the masses. Together, they demonstrated that the language of realism, which was highly purified at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, became a popular creative paradigm during this time.



**2.1-1 Chen Bo, *Goldfish***

1959, Printed in 2022, 50.3×42.3 cm  
 Courtesy of Chen Xiaoli

**2.1-2 Wu Yinxian, *Hibiscus***

1977, Printed in 2022, 30.48×40.64 cm  
 Courtesy of Wu Wei

**2.1-3 Peng Kuang, *Orchid Cactus***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 40.5×50 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.1-4 Xue Zijiang, *A Quick Trip to Jiangling Through the Rapids***

1957, Gelatin Silver Print, 29×37.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.2-1 Lang Qi, *Primary School in a Mountain Village***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 50.5×41.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.2-2 Song Shijing, *Heaven Lake Waves***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 50×39.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.2-3 Qian Qun, *Lights on Wujiang River***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 49.5×33.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.2-4 Fan Huichen, *Daqing Crude Oil Flowing in All Directions***

1970s, Chromogenic Print, 40.5×30.3 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.3-1 Liu Jie, *Rice Fragrance in the Village***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 50.5×40 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.3-1 Liu Jie, *Rice Fragrance in the Village***

1977, Chromogenic Print, 50.5×40 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

- 2.3-2 Wang Ping, *The Flag is Redder Today***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 49.5×38.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.3-3 Wei Dezhong, *Fighters at Taihang***  
1975, Chromogenic Print, 40×50 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.3-4 Wang Xiebai, *Herdsmen Criticizing the Gang of Four***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 50×40.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.4-1 Huang Daoming, *Car Passing Erlang Mountain***  
1977, Gelatin Silver Print, 43×51 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.4-2 Zhu Lihe, *Wickerwork of the Production Team***  
1977, Gelatin Silver Print, 40×50 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.4-3 Shi Shaohua, *Panda***  
1975, Chromogenic Print, 50.5×38 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.4-4 Wang Yin, *Tang Tri-Color Glazed Ceramics Camel***  
1975, Chromogenic Print, 37×50.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-1 Yuan Shande, *Rush Harvesting and Rush Planting, Vying for High Yield***  
1977, Gelatin Silver Print, 36×46.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-2 Jia Chaozheng, *Full Load, Full Speed***  
1977, Gelatin Silver Print, 39.5×49 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-3 You Yungu, *Dazhai People Fight with Nature***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 40.5×49.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-4 Xia Yonglie, *Night Battle***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 40×48 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-5 Zhou Chunyan, *Returning from Night School in the Countryside***  
1975, Chromogenic Print, 37.5×49 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-6 Zhou Wannian, *On the Long March***  
1975, Chromogenic Print, 39.5×46.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-7 Wu Zuzheng, *Log Driving***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 39.5×50 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-8 Lang Qi, *Doctors Who Came in the Snow***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 39.5×50.6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.5-9 Zhang YunLei, *The Magnificent Three Gorges of the Yangtze River***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 40×50 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.6-1 Li Jilu, *Untitled***  
1970s, Chromogenic Print, 40.5×51 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

- 2.6-2 Zhu Tianmin, *Untitled***  
1970s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12×15 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.6-3 Zhu Tianmin, *Photographer Huang Shaofen***  
1974, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.2×20.4 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.6-4 Jin Shisheng, *Xiao Chuanjiu was Making A Sculpture for Luxun Tomb Park***  
1956, Printed in 2022, 34.4×34.7 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 2.6-5 Zheng Jinggang, *Stage Photo of Uncle Vanya No.6***  
1950s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5×14.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.6-6 Xu Qi, *Ashima***  
1950, Gelatin Silver Print, 23.5×30 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 2.7-1 Guo Song, *Fish Season***  
1975, Gelatin Silver Print, Document, 20×25 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.7-2 Guo Song, *Fish Season***  
1975, Gelatin Silver Print, 50×33.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.7-3 Guo Song, *Fish Season***  
1975, Gelatin Silver Print, Negative Print in 1970s, 29.7×21cm, 7×6cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.8-1 Yuan Yiping, *The East Is Red***  
1961, Chromogenic Print, 25.5×20.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.8-2 Shi Shaohua, *Stills of the Dance Drama“ The White Haired Girl”***  
1969, Print in 2022, 38.7×30 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.8-3 Da Hai, *Company Commander***  
1967, Chromogenic Print, 23.2×29.2 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.8-4 Da Hai, *Sentinel of the South China Sea***  
1970, Print in 2022, 23.8×32.8 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.8-5 Jiang Guoliang, *Bugle in the Morning***  
1977, Chromogenic Print, 40×50 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.8-6 The New Photography Editorial Department, *New Photography***  
1968, Document, 18.3×25.7 cm
- 2.8-7 Da Hai, *Immortal Cave in Lushan***  
1961, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5×17.4 cm
- 2.8-8 Yuan Yiping, *Letter from Yuan Yiping to Dong Qi and Guo Zhiquan, including Negatives***  
April 8, 1978, Document, 26×36 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.8-9 Yuan Yiping, *On the Creation of Landscape Photography***  
Year Unknown, Document, 19×27 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

# 1<sup>ST</sup> Floor

## Chapter 1

### **Flowers under the Roof of Realism**

**1920s–1930s**

When realism was introduced to the literary and art circles in China as “realistic style” at the beginning of the 20th century, proponents of the May Fourth New Culture Movement saw it as an artistic movement with a scientific spirit. Affiliated with naturalism and idealism, realism in the 1920s and 1930s highlighted the free will of human beings, opposed mechanism, and emphasized the artists’ subjectivity through nuances. It was also during this period that categories of visual arts based on Western humanities gradually took shape in China, at the cost of traditional art approaches subsiding to “science” as the primary criteria for works of art. The literati spirit and creative spontaneity, traditionally associated with Chinese artists, debilitated as the art industry was becoming standardized. In the meanwhile, art in China was undergoing a reshuffle of theories, methods, values and traditions. A number of amateur photographers, who were originally intellectual elites, became the main advocates for rethinking the value and concepts of photography. They formed groups and societies, conducted independent researches, held regular meetings, published works and exhibited their photographs.

They sought to differentiate their practice, in terms of form and technique, from the posed portraits and images produced by photo studios. Under their influence, photography became one of the means of personal expression and leisure.

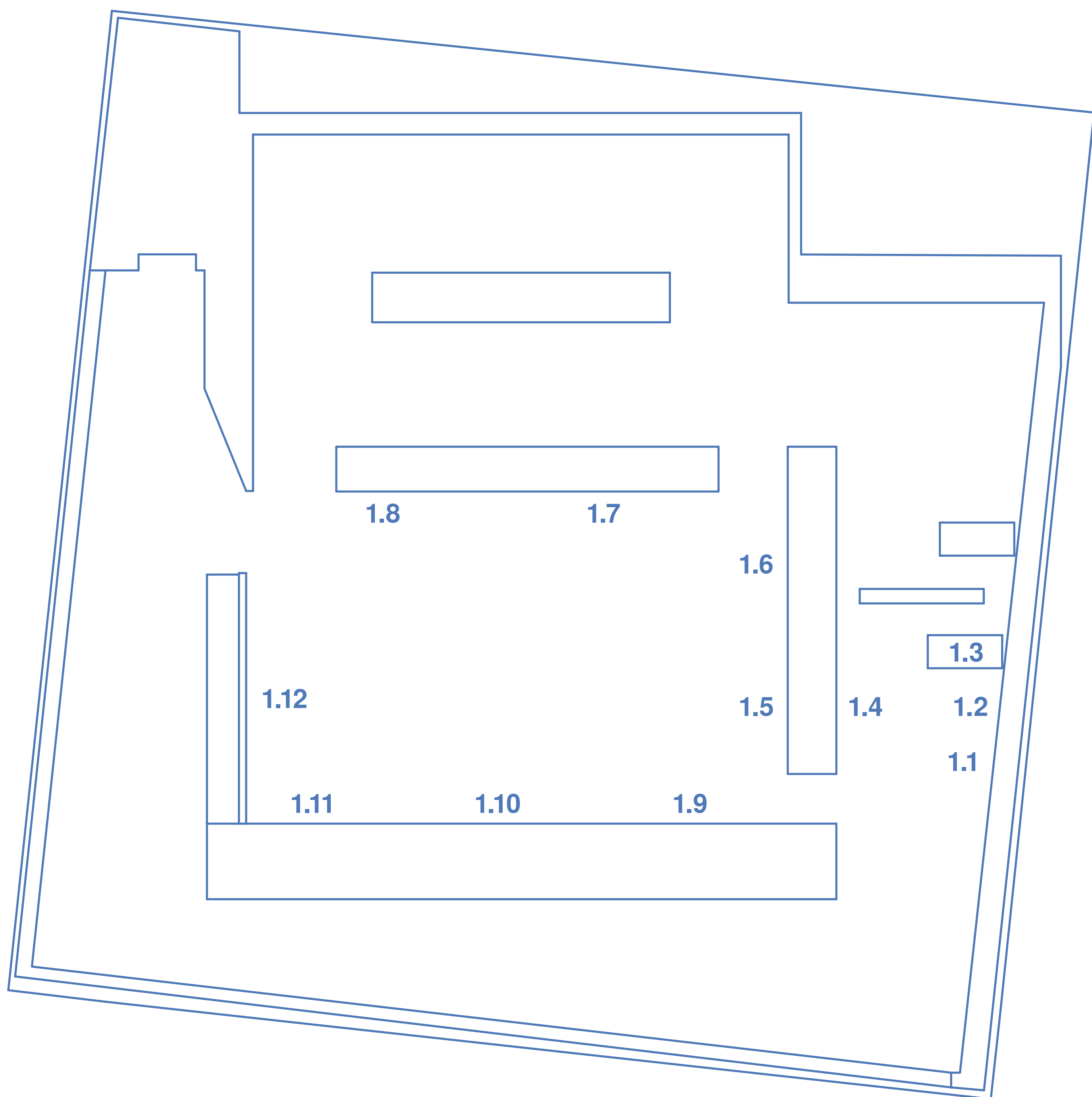
As an avocation, photography reconciled the ongoing aesthetic conflict over the incompatibility between science and art in the earlier years of the Republic of China decades, encouraging individuals to be in the presence of mother nature and observe the mundane. The dynamic of looking in the discourse of photography changed from the photographer passively taking in what lies in front of the camera to them actively manipulating the camera with their own interests at heart. Through photography, intellectuals of the Republic Era were able to cultivate artistic tastes, just like the literati of earlier times who frolicked with ink while painting and let their mind roam free with nature. The amateur photographs usually borrowed the existing motifs in paintings. In fact, *Pictorialism* is regarded as the beginning of artistic explorations of photography in the Republic era.

As a new genre of photography, pictorialism grafts selected elements from existing Chinese and Western paintings onto photographs, while tapping into the unique characteristics of the medium to capture and reproduce light and shadow. These explorations in visual language suggested that photography, rooted in modernism in art, had started to develop autonomously. Although the pictorial photographs seemed to stay independent of current events, the photographers were actively involved in the discussion and production of art in the public sphere through exhibitions, professional publications, mass media and boost of photo studios following behind. Thus, the aesthetic interests of the elites were then extensively and repeatedly transmitted and reinforced into the art of photography through practitioners and enthusiasts among the public. In this regard, creators of pictorialism pursued art for both its intrinsic value and the instrumental value of transforming society and the self, becoming practitioners of Cai Yuanpei's ideology of aesthetics which integrates modernism with pragmatism.



The artistic exploration of photography during this period led the photographers to extend their horizons from urban and suburban to borderlands. The sense of reality in the images is constructed through individual perceptions, experiences and emotions, showing a rich detail during the Republic Era where the past met the present and the East infused with the West. The photographers were not as hasty as the tourists, nor were they eager to create based on outbursts of inspiration after contemplation. Instead, they captured accidents, coincidences and serendipitous encounters in the continuum of daily life, recorded growth and subtle changes in nature, or depicted the ideal life to which ordinary individuals aspired. This slow-paced, immersive photographic process turned life into art and artistic experience into the expression of quotidian sentiments, which seemed to be in sharp contrast to the clamor of political revolutions.

As a photographic creative concept, pictorialism and its appreciating life-as-art notion embody the tensions between modernism and pragmatism. However, its appeal lacks significance, thus the signified elements in pictorialism practices are absent in the respect of reality. Beliefs in individual values and creative freedom suffered a moral dilemma when the collectivist ideology encouraged the shift of perspective from morality towards social responsibility, amidst the growing need for art to take on more public duties such as mobilizing the people to save the nation from the mire. Coincidentally, Avant Garde positioned itself within the mass, and it happened to correspond to the changing value of artistic practices in the context of World War II.



**1.1-1 Jin Shisheng, *Untitled***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 23.6×18.2 cm  
 Courtesy of Qing Lan

**1.1-2 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 5.3×7.2 cm  
 Courtesy of Jin Youming

**1.1-3 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 5.3×7.2 cm  
 Courtesy of Jin Youming

**1.1-4 Jin Shisheng, *Untitled***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.5×18.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Qing Lan

**1.2-1 Zhang Jingtian, *Still Life***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 20×26.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Chen Wei

**1.2-2 Zhang Jingtian, *Still Life***

1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 20×26.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Chen Wei

**1.3-1 China Photography Publishing House, *China Photography***

1946-1949, Document, 13.4×18.4 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**1.3-2 Eastman Kodak Company, *The Kodak Magazine***

1937, Document, 13.2×19 cm

**1.3-3 Shanghai Yichang Photographic Material Store, *A Photographic Letter to Beginner Photographers***

First Published in 1937 and Reprinted in 1946, Document, 12.8×18.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

- 1.3-4 Original by Rob Goodshall, Compiled by Gan Naiguang, *An Outline of Fine Art Photography***  
1931, Document, 15.4×21.1 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.3-5 Black&White Photographic Society, *Black & White Pictorialist***  
1936-1937, Document, 19.2×26 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.3-6 China Photographic Publishing House, *Bannong's View on Photography***  
2000, Document, 24.7×26.1 cm
- 1.3-7 Guanlong Photographic Material Store, *Flying Eagle***  
September, 1936, Document, 19×26.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.3-8 Guanlong Photographic Material Store, *Flying Eagle***  
1936-1937, Document, 19×26.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.4-1 Wu Zhongxing, *Pagoda in the Moon***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 21.5×30 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.4-2 Liu Bannong, *Flowers and the Tower***  
1920s, Gelatin Silver Print, 9.5×10.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.5-1 Zhuang Xueben, *The Big Head Monk "Ha Xiang"***  
1939, Printed in 2022, 24.8×19.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-2 Zhuang Xueben, *Noble Woman in Costume***  
1935, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-3 Zhuang Xueben, *Yao Women Headdress***  
1953, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-4 Zhuang Xueben, *Yao Women Headdress***  
1952, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-5 Zhuang Xueben, *Jiarong Girl in Li County***  
1935, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-6 Zhuang Xueben, *Tibetan Opera Actor***  
1939, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-7 Zhuang Xueben, *Elderly Tibetan Man***  
1934, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-8 Zhuang Xueben, *Monkey***  
1939, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-9 Zhuang Xueben, *Qiang Woman***  
1935, Printed in 2022, 10×10 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuang Jun
- 1.5-10 Jin Shisheng, *Live Like Artists***  
1935, Printed in 2022, 20×19 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua

- 1.5-11 Jin Shisheng, *Potrait in Portrait***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 25×24 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.5-12 Jin Shisheng, *Facing the Mirror***  
1942, Printed in 2022, 19×13 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.6-1 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24×21 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.6-2 Zhang Yinquan, *Self Portrait***  
Year Unknown, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.9×19.1 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.6-3 Xu Youhui, *Hope***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5×13 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.6-4 Liu Xucang, *Portrait of Sally***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.5×17 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.7-1 Wu Zhongxing, *Grazing Returns***  
1926, Gelatin Silver Print, 10×6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.7-2 Sha Fei, *Return in the Evening***  
1935-1937, Printed in 2022, 9.2×7 cm
- 1.7-3 Luo Bonian, *Returned with a Full Load***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 17×17 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.7-4 Jin Shisheng, *Guanyin Statues at Pingshantang***  
1934, Printed in 2022, 18.3×27.3 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.7-5 Jin Shisheng, *Beijing Yonghe Lama Temple 4***  
1936, Printed in 2022, 18.7×20.2 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.7-6 Shao Du, *Stone Bridge over the Tang River***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 28.5×22.9 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.7-7 Shao Du, *Transplant Rice Seedlings***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 23.7×30 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.7-8 Zhang Jingtian, *Shepherd Boy and Cow***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24×31.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.7-9 Zhang Jingtian, *Pine Trees and Wind***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.5×29.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.7-10 Huang Lin, *Pretty Shadows by the Lake***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10.5×14.6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.7-11 Sha Fei, *Waiting for Fish in Rippling Water (Fishermen Life on the Nan'ao Island)***  
1935-1936, Printed in 2022, 9×6.7 cm

- 1.7-12 Shao Du, *Fly a Kite at Songtai Mountain***  
1929, Printed in 2022, 18.7×15 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.8-1 Luo Bonian, *After Dusk***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 18.8×25.8 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.8-2 Wei Shou Zhong, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 9.5×10.6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.8-3 Jin Shisheng, *Outside the Window of the Shanghai-Hangzhou Line***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 28.8×19.6 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.9-1 Zhang Jingtian, *Cat and Still Life***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 19×24.5cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-2 Zhang Jingtian, *Black Cat***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.5×32.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-3 Zhang Jingtian, *Hide and Seek***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.5×30 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-4 Xu Youhui, *Snail***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5×17.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.9-5 Zhang Jingtian, *A Difficult Road***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 19×24.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.9-6 Shao Du, *Eagle's Gaze***  
1936, Printed in 2022, 19×26 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.9-7 Zhang Jingtian, *Owl***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 17×20.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-8 Zhang Jingtian, *Green Foxtail***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15×11 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-9 Zhang Jingtian, *Luxuriant Bamboo Forest***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 11.5×16 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.9-10 Zhang Jingtian, *Cicada and Shadow***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15×20 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.10-1 Liu Guangcheng, *Lotus***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.5×15 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.10-2 Zhang Yinquan, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.5×21.5 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.10-3 Zhang Jingtian, *Still Life***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.5×32 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei

- 1.10-4 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 20.7×29 cm×3 pieces  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.10-5 Wu Zhongxing, *Autumn***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10×6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.10-6 Author Unknow, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 8.9×5.7 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.10-7 Author Unknow, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 8.5×6.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.10-8 Zhang Jingtian, *A Bottle and Flowers***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 22×27 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.10-9 Jin Shisheng, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.8×10.4 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.10-10 Zhang Jingtian, *Flowers in the Mirror***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 22.5×29.5 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.11-1 Du Zhizhong, *Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.1×11.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.11-2 Lang Jingshan, *A Towering Tree***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 22.5×31 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Wei
- 1.11-3 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 18.7×18.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.11-4 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 18.7×18.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.11-5 Luo Bonian, *Spring Landscape***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.8×19.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.11-6 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 28.3×19.7 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.11-7 Jin Shisheng, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 19×10 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.11-8 Luo Bonian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 15×15 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Youming
- 1.11-9 Jiang Bingnan, *Under the Porch***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.5×9.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.11-10 Jin Shisheng, *Still Life at Home***  
1933, Printed in 2022, 14.2×10.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua

- 1.11-11 Shao Du, *Citizens Taking Photos in the Suburbs***  
1933, Printed in 2022, 14×18 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.11-12 Zhang Jingtian, *Untitled***  
1930s, Gelatin Silver Print, 30×23.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-1 Fang Dazeng, *He Bei I***  
1935, Printed in 2022, 30×20 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Shen
- 1.12-2 Fang Dazeng, *He Bei III***  
1937, Printed in 2022, 24×22 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Shen
- 1.12-3 Shao Du, *Bombed Temple***  
1938, Printed in 2022, 15.3×19.5 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.12-4 Shao Du, *The Japanese Aircrafts Came on Fuqian Street in Wenzhou and People Fled for Shelter***  
1938, Printed in 2022, 28.6×22.5 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.12-5 Shao Du, *Cleaning up Destroyed Buildings***  
1938, Printed in 2022, 18.5×23.5 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.12-6 Shao Du, *The Stone Pagoda of Qianfo Temple***  
1930s, Printed in 2022, 23.5×29.5 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 1.12-7 Jin Shisheng, *The Japanese Army Bombarded Shanghai***  
1937, Printed in 2022, 48.3×29.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.12-8 Fang Dazeng, *Untitled***  
Year Unknown, Printed in 2022, 30×22 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Shen
- 1.12-9 Fang Dazeng, *Frontline***  
1930, Printed in 2022, 22×30 cm  
Courtesy of Chen Shen
- 1.12-10 Shao Du, *Flames on the Evening Streets Bombarded by the Japanese Army***  
1938, Printed in 2022, 13.3×17.3 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang

# 1<sup>ST</sup> Floor

## Chapter 2

### **Multiple Facets of Wartime Realism**

1930s–1940s

Perception of realism entered a new stage in the 1930s. In 1938, in the magazine *Literature and Art Front* edited by Mao Dun, Li Nanzhuo, a young art enthusiast from Hunan, published a series of articles including *Broad Realism* and *Broader Realism*, calling for openness and inclusivity in realism. He wrote: “We need not hold on to an ‘-ism’; as long as one is a writer, he must be a realist in a broad sense, regardless of his or others’ reluctance to admit it. If we must have an ‘-ism,’ let it be ‘realism’ in the broadest sense!”; “classical, romantic, realistic, symbolic, seen from a vertical perspective, compose a history of literature and art; taken together in a horizontal perspective, they might constitute a holistic approach to representing reality in its entirety.” In the early days of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, the proposal of broad realism saw humanism and consciousness of the self as embodiment of reality, thus expanded the realm of what was considered realistic.

The war deepened artists’ commitment to realism and their humanities consciousness, while allowing realism to grow

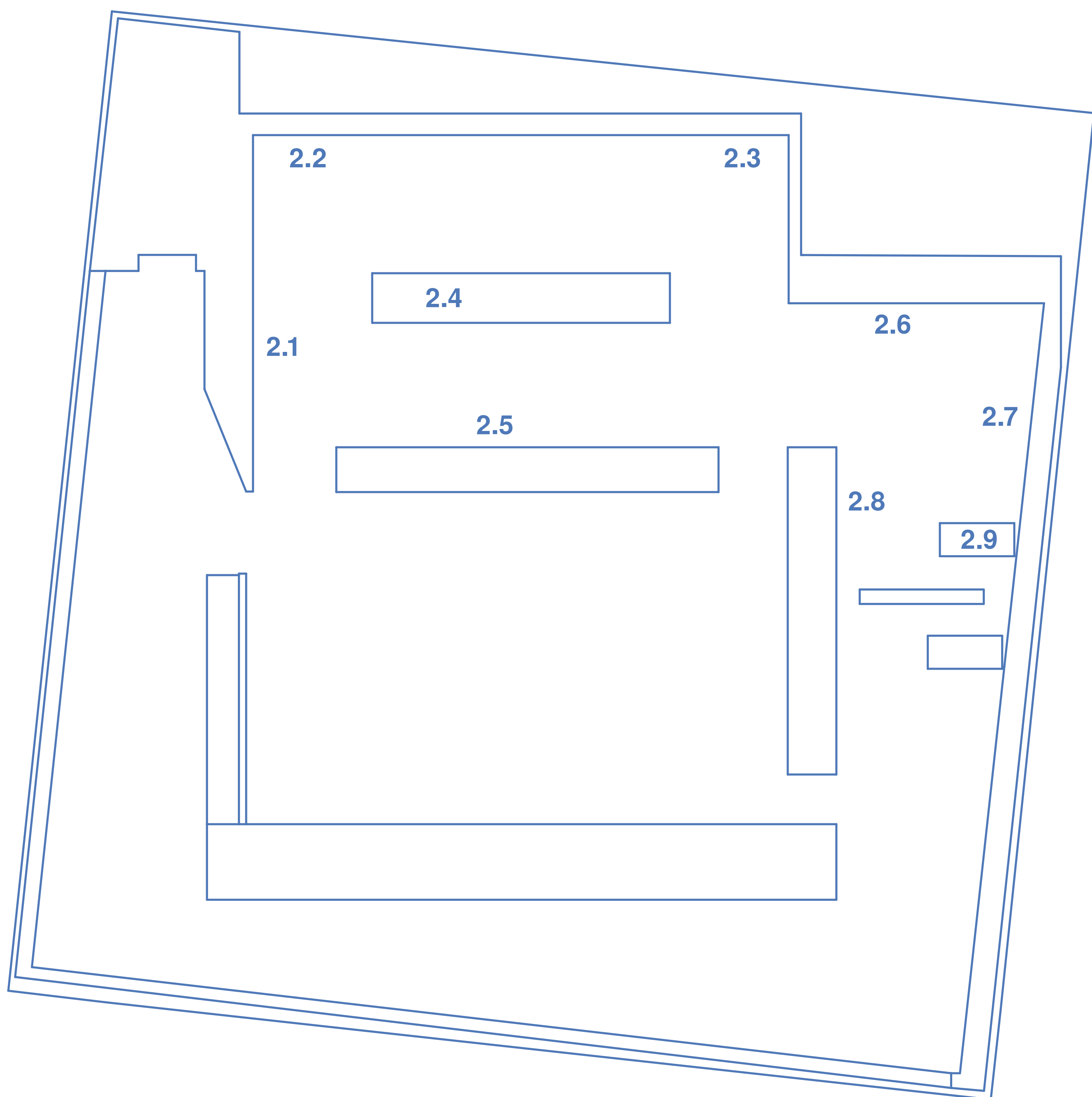


into a powerful belief and the mainstream collective stance in literary and artistic creations. The life-and-death crisis of the Chinese nation, the uncertainty of the nation's future, and the social revolutions deeply intertwined with each other, further inspired young left-wing artists and intellectuals to shift from merely recording the reality of life to proactively participating in the change-makings. At the same time, artists took the initiative to record and express their wartime encounters, whether they stayed put or were in the diaspora. Different life choices and experiences determined the stances and focuses, in which the artists observed and intervened in the wars and revolutions. Qian Liqun divided the literature of this period into "nation(people)-oriented/class-oriented" and "individual-oriented/humanity-oriented." Practices of wartime photography shared similarities, and the two sorts of orientations were not completely antithetical, nor could the artists' intentions and motivations be summarized based on the ideologies associated with their geographical locations.

Since the collective consciousness was forced into place by crisis, once imminent dangers were lifted, conflicts would soon emerge between individual freedom of expression and the supremacy of national, ethnic, and collective interests. In other words, the war prompted artists to engage directly and deeply with politics, but mobilization was not the only subject of realism during the wars. Wartime realism is neither a re-production of war, nor did it represent subjects in a formulaic manner based on preconceptions. In this section, photography practices of the 1940s are examined in a relatively dynamic social space, thus presenting multiple facets of wartime realism. Individual photographers' perceptions, cognitive fields, and sensibilities at different times gave a variety of shapes to society and people in the midst of great changes.

Political demands raised by "Talks at Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942 greatly challenged the existing art concepts. In a perspective using politics as an intermediary, the society was now empowered with historical immediacy rather than passively waiting to be recorded by the camera.

Artists were expected to present the texture of life and society, closely in accordance with political logic, in a constant flux of cognition, propulsion, alternation and adjustment, while attending to the psychological changes of their fellow men. While the revolutionary art apparatus kept functioning, efforts of professional photographers to pursue their authenticity and originality did not disappear completely. Outside the mechanism of collectivized photographic production, revolutionaries poeticized everyday life in harsh environments and presented another aspect of wartime reality in their amateur photography. Moreover, a number of outliers, drifting outside the revolutionary context or isolated due to their locations, turned their lenses to precious moments among family, friends and neighbors in their respective refuges, preserving life and free will in their interactions with people and nature.



**2.1-1 Xu Xiaobing, *Light of Dawn (Taihang)***

1943, Printed in 2022, 50.5×33.5 cm

**2.1-2 Xu Xiaobing, *Sentry (Outpost in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region)***

Year Unknown, Printed in 2022, 51×61 cm

**2.1-3 Wu Yinxian, *Nanniwan***

1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 11.3×12.1 cm

Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.1-4 Sha Fei, *Defend our Motherland, Defend our Hometown***

Early 1940s, Printed in 2022, 29.3×19.4 cm

**2.1-5 Liu Feng, *The Three Martyrs' Tower of Wolfram and Hart Mountain under Construction in the Twilight***

1942, Printed in 2022, 14.5×10.7 cm

Courtesy of Liu Lanlan

**2.1-6 Li Feng, *Cutting off the Enemy's Supply Lines***

1944, Gelatin Silver Print, 61×45 cm

Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

**2.1-7 Sha Fei, *Battle on Ancient Great Wall***

1938-1939, Printed in 2022, 29.3×20.8 cm

**2.1-8 Shi Shaohua, *Mongolian Delegates to the People's Congress of Chahar Province***

1945, Printed in 2022, 29.3×22.2 cm

Courtesy of Shi Zhimin

**2.1-9 Zhang Aiping, *Self-defense War in Central China***

1943, Printed in 2022, 39.5×26 cm

Courtesy of Shi Zhimin

- 2.1-10 Li Feng, *Heavy Cavalry in Practice***  
1947, Printed in 2022, 39.3×28.5 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.2-1 Zhang Aiping, *Goldfish***  
1946, Printed in 2022, 24.3×15.7 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.2-2 Zhang Aiping, *Epiphyllum***  
1946, Printed in 2022, 39.3×29 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.2-3 Zhang Aiping, *Play by the River***  
1942, Printed in 2022, 29.2×21.4 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.2-4 Zhang Aiping, *Self-portrait of Zhang Aiping and Li Youlan***  
1944, Printed in 2022, 29.2×40.2 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.2-5 Author Unknown, *History of Flowers***  
1945, Chromogenic Print, Hand Colouring, 22×29.9 cm, 29.5×22.5 cm  
Courtesy of Qing Lan
- 2.3-1 Ye Liuru, *Untitled***  
1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 35.2×27.7 cm  
Courtesy of Qing Lan
- 2.3-2 Ye Liuru, *Untitled***  
1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 27.2×35 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.3-3 Ye Liuru, *Untitled***  
1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 23.3×29.7 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.3-4 Ye Liuru, *Swimming in***  
1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 29.2×23.8 cm  
Courtesy of Qing Lan
- 2.3-5 Ye Liuru, *Net***  
1940s, Gelatin Silver Print, 29.2×22 cm  
Courtesy of Qing Lan
- 2.3-6 Xue Zijiang, *Returning after the Rain***  
1948, Gelatin Silver Print, 27×36 cm  
Courtesy of Hou Bingzhi
- 2.3-7 Xue Zijiang, *Mellow and Clean***  
1948, Gelatin Silver Print, 37.5×29 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.4 Shi Shaohua, *The Coast of Bohai Sea (Series)***  
October 1994, Document, 400×28 cm
- 2.5-1 Shao Du, *Child I***  
1945, Printed in 2022, 24.2×31.2 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-2 Shao Du, *Child III***  
1945, Printed in 2022, 24.2×31.2 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-3 Shao Du, *Child II***  
1945, Printed in 2022, 24.2×31.2 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang

- 2.5-4 Shao Du, *Jump***  
1943, Printed in 2022, 13.5×25 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-5 Shao Du, *Woman with a Camera***  
1948, Printed in 2022, 18.8×21.7 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-6 Shao Du, *Homecoming During Wind and Snow***  
1942, Printed in 2022, 29.2×23.3 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-7 Shao Du, *The Entrance of Yongqiang Village***  
1943, Printed in 2022, 20×10 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-8 Shao Du, *Visiting Waterfall at Longqiu***  
1945, Printed in 2022, 18×22.9 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-9 Shao Du, *Haitan Mountain***  
1940s, Printed in 2022, 14.3×16.3 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.5-10 Jin Shisheng, *Wilderness***  
1945, Printed in 2022, 39.4×27.3 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 2.5-11 Shi Shaohua, *Summer Fishing***  
1943, Printed in 2022, 39.3×26.7 cm  
Courtesy of Shi Zhimin
- 2.5-12 Wu Yinbo, *Untitled***  
1949, Gelatin Silver Print, 28×35 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.6-1 Shao Du, *Playing Games by the Ou River***  
1950s, Printed in 2022, 29.3×23.4 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.6-2 Shao Du, *The Mountains are Happy to Welcome the Sunrise***  
1954, Printed in 2022, 15×10 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.6-3 Shao Du, *Deep Mountains and Empty Valleys with Few Bird Sounds***  
1953, Printed in 2022, 24.3×19.3 cm  
Courtesy of Shao Dalang
- 2.7-1 Huang Xiang, *Egret***  
1954, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.3×30.3 cm  
Courtesy of Hou Bingzhi
- 2.7-2 Wu Zhongxing, *Untitled***  
1950s, Gelatin Silver Print, 8.5×6 cm×4 pieces  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.7-3 Wu Zhongxing, *Light of Flowers and Shadow of Hoof***  
1950s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10×6.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 2.8-1 Zhuang Xueben, *Korean Girl***  
1952, Printed in 2022, 24.5×18.3 cm  
Courtesy of Zhuangjun
- 2.8-2 Qi Guanshan, *Against Landlord***  
1950, Gelatin Silver Print, 21.1×19.3 cm  
Courtesy of Hou Bingzhi

- 2.9-1** Shanghai Culture Publishing House, *Masterpieces Photography Appreciation*  
1956, Document, 18.2×14.3 cm
- 2.9-2** Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, *Anthology of Photographic Art*  
1957, Document, 20.5×26 cm
- 2.9-3** People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, People's Book, Liberation Army Daily and China Artists Association Shanghai Branch, *Photographic Art Exhibition*  
1955, Document, 11×18.5 cm
- 2.9-4** Ao Enhong, *Goldfish*  
1954, Propaganda Poster, 53.7×38.6 cm
- 2.9-5** Ao Enhong, *Oilseed Rape Flower*  
1954, Propaganda Poster, 53.7×38.6 cm

# 3<sup>RD</sup> Floor

## Realism and People in the Reality

1970s–1980s

Literary and artistic creations in China reached an unprecedented level of activity at the turn from the 1970s to 1980s, yet some of the photographic practices that emerged during this period could be dated back to the mid-1970s. In 1979, the April Photo Society, an unofficial photographer group that grew out of youth gatherings, organized the first *Nature, Society and Man* exhibition, which featured the folk life in a variety of forms. Vivid and lively, this exhibition became one of the landmark events of the period. Most members of the April Photo Society were among the hundreds of photographers, more amateurs than professionals, who captured the Tian'anmen Incident on April 5th, 1976. Not only did they witness and document the actions on Tian'anmen Square, they also participated in this self-organized mass movement, using the actions and sounds of pressing the shutter to build up momentum, spread news, and mobilize people. They captured the most precious moments in the event, expressing their positions and stances via images. In January 1979, these photographers, who were gathered by the April 5th Movement, compiled and published the photos

in a book called *People's Mourning*, which reveals people's power in fighting for their right to express themselves. Their authenticity and emotional tensions brought new opportunities to the art of photography, and this movement became the prelude to a new era of Chinese photography.

The first exhibition of *Nature, Society, and Man* featured 280 photographs by 51 photographers. The photographs packed the Orchid Room of Zhongshan Park in Beijing, and even blocked the windows of the room. Among them are still life, landscapes, portraits of ordinary people and scenes; they captured the beauty of nature and conveyed human feelings and emotions, which were in stark contrast to photography from the Cultural Revolution period dominated by portraits of heroes and leaders and images for political propaganda. Inspired by *People, Years, Life*, a memoir published in the 1960s by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, Wang Zhiping, one of the founders of the April Photo Society, believed that the title *Nature, Society, and Man* conveyed the exhibition's focus on self-expression and humanity, where the beauty of photography resides in the rhythm of nature, in the reality of society, and in the sentiments of people, instead of the 'major themes' or 'the mind of those in power'.

The April Photo Society coincided with the enlightenment movement that was emerging among the intellectual, literary, and artistic circles at the time. Art exhibitions organized by unofficial groups during this period mostly featured landscapes, still life, portraits of ordinary people, and images that respect and emphasize personal emotions and expressions, showcasing unconventional styles and visual language, and pursuing artistic qualities. These exhibitions attracted numerous viewers and caused a commotion in Chinese society, which for decades had only seen artworks conveying political themes. The cultural events also signified a return of humanism to society. In the form of traveling exhibitions, the works of the April Photo Society resonated with audiences all around the country. In the 1980s, young people were eager to form photography groups all over China, with as many as a hundred in Beijing alone.



In addition to the photography of the 1980s that prioritized form and lyricism while staying away from political messages, another counterpoint to propaganda photography under rigid policies was the exploration of documentary photography, which addresses the medium's function in the society. Closely tied to China's modernization, documentary photography served as a mirror for individuals to perceive and reflect upon the society, history and life, with an emphasis on artistic independence.

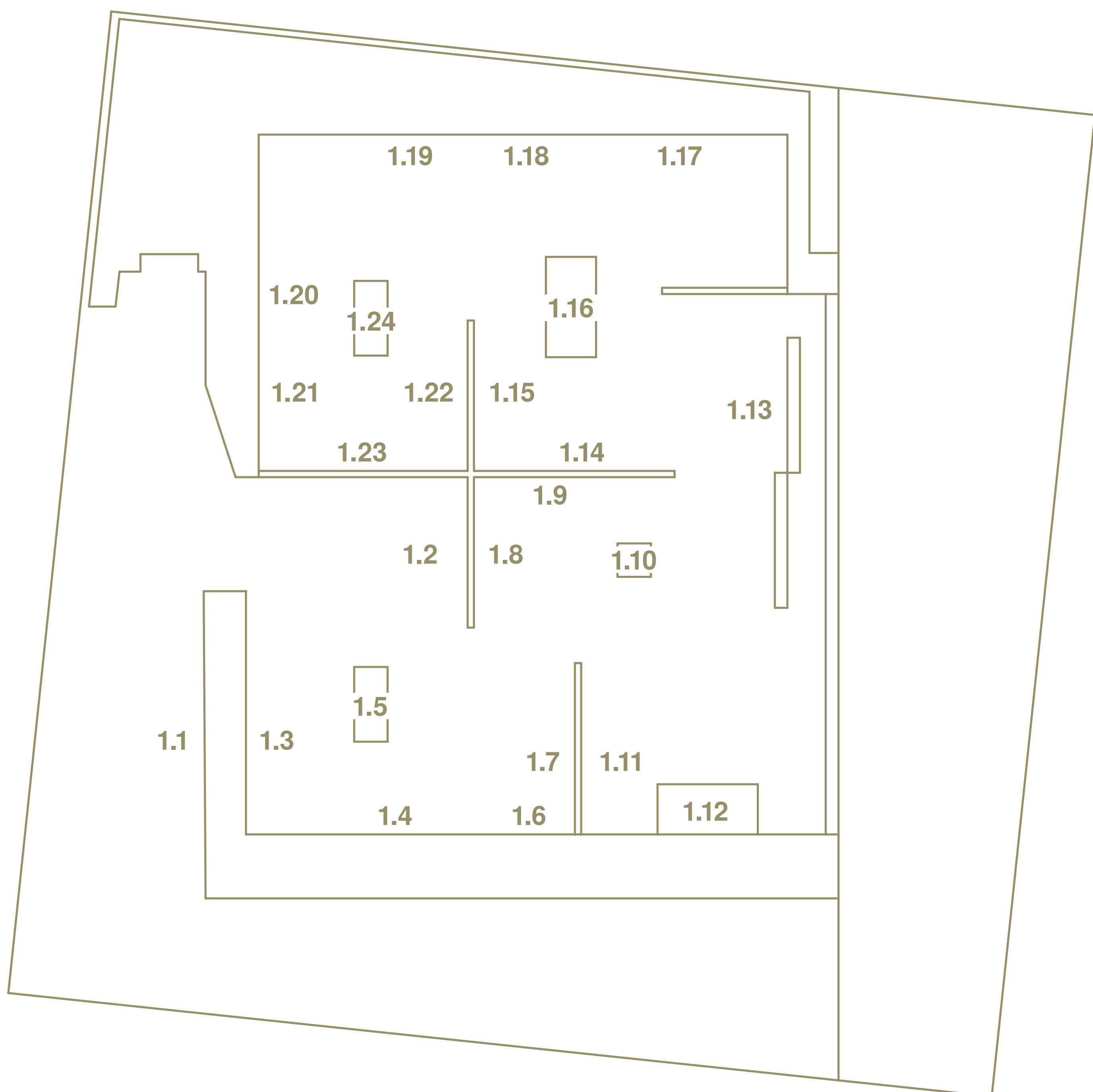
Wu Guanzhong was the first artist to raise the need for discussions on forms and language of art in the New Era. He published three articles consecutively, expounding his view that formal and abstract beauty as well as formative art were inseparable from the beauty of the human body. Although the discussions centered around the form of art, Wu took formal elements of formal beauty, abstraction, color and decoration one step further as fundamental indicators of creative freedom and emancipation of ideas, bringing the topic to the forefront of expression and practice. This inclination manifested itself in photography as a rising interest in form; it was not only evident in the preferences of the April Photo Society, but it also became a dominant trend in the entire photography community in China. Young photographers of this period were enthusiastic about abstraction and subtleties. Along with the pursuit of form, the renewal of concept was also brought to the agenda. Photographers filled their minds with philosophical theories in the cultural frenzy that swept the country in the early and mid-1980s. Their works emphasized what was known as modern visual expressions: large white space compressing a symbolic object, abstract arrangements accentuating the texture of lines, or decorative blocks deliberately creating imagery of alienation. The documentary quality of photography was then despised as a hindrance to artistic imagination. The reportage was replaced by assertions of modernity, and a considerable amount of writing at the time addressed the structural problem of homogeneity in visual arts, searching for an artistic breakthrough. Photography steered itself closer to the art of painting with a chaotic undertone for artistic contention.

Apart from new talents, many middle-aged and senior photographers who were forced to suspend their creative activities during the Cultural Revolution also picked up their cameras again. From 1981 to the end of October 1989, Beijing alone saw 60 solo or group exhibitions featuring photographers of different generations. Those photographers were the most senior ones who have been active since the 1930s. Amateur photography also developed rapidly. Influenced by the literary movement at the time of seeking roots and reconstructing a Chinese identity, droves of young photographers and amateur photographers revisited the Yellow Mountain and former revolutionary bases and areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in southwestern and northwestern China, producing a large number of images of landscape and local customs. This infatuation continued for many years. Discussions of “a purified language” among the art world in the late 1980s also permeated the photography world. Some photographers returned to the exploration of photography’s ontology.

Developing thoroughly in the 1980s, photography demonstrated its possibilities and characteristics as a modern medium. Towards the end of the decade, when photography became more and more institutionalized, formal explorations of photography gradually entered a state of hollowness and rigidity that would eventually merge with the slick reality.

Photography also witnessed how the mainstream position and power discourse of socialist realism underwent challenges and reconstruction in the 1980s. Its theoretical impetus stemmed from the breaking of political shackles, overcompensation, and a rebellion against the theory of reflection. Ideology no longer served as the sole criterion of authenticity, and universal archetypes and grand narratives of socialist realism were dismantled. However, the basic principles of artistic creation persisted. Artists still sought profound relations among subjects, the environment and historical development, with a shift to the pursuit of detailed and subjective truth, capturing life’s particularities to convey individual emotions and experiences, and highlighting their own reflections and understandings of fate, human nature and genuineness

through details. Realism is no longer limited to a static manner of depiction, but becomes a narrative action. As a creative approach and perspective, realism has become a personalized path for artists to observe China under transformation.



**1.1-1 Ren Shulin, *Classroom of Beijing No. 171 Middle School***

1985, Printed in 2010, 61.7×87.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Inter Gallery

**1.1-2 Ren Shulin, *Beijing General Administration Swimming Pool***

1985, Printed in 2010, 61.7×87.5 cm  
 Courtesy of Inter Gallery

**1.2-1 Jin Shisheng, *Xiang Yang Park***

1970s, Printed in 2022, 19.3×29 cm  
 Courtesy of Jin Hua

**1.2-2 Shi Zhimin, *Nearly 40 Degrees Below Zero at the Beilahong River Water Conservancy Site***

Late Winter of 1976, 35.5×28 cm

**1.2-3 Shi Zhimin, *The Wounded Eagle***

1976, 28.5×22.5 cm

**1.3-1 Jin Shisheng, *Shanghai***

1970s, Printed in 2022, 39.3×25.2 cm  
 Courtesy of Jin Hua

**1.3-2 Wang Zhiping, *Home***

1977-1978, Printed in 2022, 14.2×12 cm  
 Courtesy of Wen Danqing

**1.3-3 Wang Zhiping, *The Age of Decline***

1977-1978, Printed in 2022, 14.7×22 cm  
 Courtesy of Wen Danqing

**1.3-4 Shi Zhimin, *Old Summer Palace***

1974, Gelatin Silver Print, 27×22 cm

- 1.3-5 Jin Shisheng, *Chairs***  
1970s, Printed in 2022, 34.2×22.2 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.3-6 Li Tian, *Self Deprecating***  
Year Unknown, Printed in 2022, 14.6×11.9 cm  
Courtesy of Wen Danqing
- 1.3-7 Shi Zhimin, *Footprints***  
1975, Printed in 2022, 29.2×41 cm
- 1.3-8 Xu Zhuo, *The Transformation of the Goddess 2***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.2×19.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.3-9 Zhao Jiexuan, *Mist***  
*Whether we're strangers, the image also misted in our vision? Carefully avoid, your eyes, and the clarity of the stream, will reflect the old shadow of youth.*  
Year Unknown, Printed in 2022, 14.8×10.5 cm  
Courtesy of Wen Danqing
- 1.3-10 Wang Zhiping, *Family***  
1977-1978, Printed in 2022, 14.1×14.3 cm  
Courtesy of Wen Danqing
- 1.3-11 Shi Zhimin, *Unable to Restrain the Frost***  
1975, Printed in 2022, 24.4×16.7 cm
- 1.3-12 Wen Danqing, *A Good Year***  
1980, Printed in 2022, 14.3×22.2 cm
- 1.4-1 Zhao Jiexuan, *Silent Winter***  
1976-1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 39.4×27.5 cm  
Courtesy of Wen Danqing
- 1.4-2 Jin Bohong, *Grassland***  
1976-1986, Chromogenic Print, 33.5×22 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.4-3 Lv Xiaozhong, *Shoes of the God of the River***  
1978, Gelatin Silver Print, 16.3×11.2 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.4-4 Xu Zhuo, *SOS***  
1980, Gelatin Silver Print, 14×11.7 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.4-5 Li Guohua, *Post Office***  
1976-1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 26×24.5 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.4-6 Wang Xiang, *Gaze***  
1976-1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.3×10.5 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.5-1 Bei Dao's Poems, *Poems***  
1981, Document, 9.5×13 cm×7 pieces  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.5-2 Gu Cheng's Poems, *Poems***  
1981, Document, 18.5×13 cm×6 pieces  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.5-3 Wang Miao, *Poems Picked up from the Wild***  
1980-1981, Printed in 2022, 13 pieces

- 1.5-4 Wang Miao, *Lecture Recording in Liaoning Province Youth Creation Class***  
May, 1983, Document, 11×7 cm
- 1.6-1 Wang Yan, *Times***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 18.7×13 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.6-2 Wang Miao, *Cold and Hot***  
1974, Gelatin Silver Print, 28.7×21.7 cm
- 1.6-3 Wang Miao, *Inside and Outside the Cage***  
1974, Gelatin Silver Print, 26.4×19.8 cm
- 1.6-4 Ling Fei, *Only Thoughts Flow***  
1980, Gelatin Silver Print, 27.5×21 cm
- 1.7 Li Xiaobin, *Change in China Series***  
1978-1982, Printed in 2022, 39.3×25.8 cm×6 pieces
- 1.8 Li Xiaobin, *Change in China Series***  
1978-1982, Printed in 2022, 19.7×31.2 cm, 39.5×25.2 cm, 39.2×26.8 cm
- 1.9-1 Bao Kun, *Reading1***  
1987, Printed in 2022, 18.2×24.8 cm
- 1.9-2 Bao Kun, *Reading 2***  
1987, Printed in 2022, 15.9×24.4 cm
- 1.9-3 Bao Kun, *Untitled***  
1980, Gelatin Silver Print, 40.5×50.4 cm
- 1.9-4 Li Xiaobin, *Change in China Series***  
1978-1982, Printed in 2022, 29.3×43.8 cm
- 1.10 Shi Zhimin, *The Enemy of Beauty***  
1976, Chromogenic Print, 18.6×13 cm
- 1.11-1 Wu Yinxian, *The Great Hall of the People***  
1981, Printed in 2022, 32×32 cm  
Courtesy of Wu Wei
- 1.11-2 Chen Fuli, Huang Yongyu, *Duck Knows First when River Becomes Cold in Autumn***  
1979-1983, Printed in 2022, 39×30 cm  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.11-3 Ling Fei, *Dawn after Snow***  
1981, Gelatin Silver Print, 20×11 cm
- 1.12-1 Zhai Chunlai, *Untitled***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 20.8×8.9 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-2 Zhai Chunlai, *Untitled***  
1983, Gelatin Silver Print, 9.8×15 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

- 1.12-3 Zhai Chunlai, *Endeavour***  
1984, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.6×10.8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-4 Zhai Chunlai, *Untitled***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15×7 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-5 Zhai Chunlai, *Untitled***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.2×7.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-6 Zhai Chunlai, *Untitled***  
Autumn of 1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.3×8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-7 Zhai Chunlai, *Can't Feel the Chill***  
Autumn and Winter of 1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.8×8.3 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-8 Wu Wenhao, *Playing with Pearls***  
1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 20.3×15.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-9 Li Tiansheng, *Motherland:Mother***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 25.6×11.3 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-10 Zheng Jun, *A Painting Within a Painting***  
1984, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.2×20.6cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-11 Huang Cheng, *Untitled***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10×21.7cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-12 Wang Zhiting, *A Walk in the Rain***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 11.9×22.8cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-13 Xu Yingzhe, *Life***  
1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.2×17.8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-14 Wang Yuejin, *The Grasshopper***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10.5×13 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-15 Deng Wei, *In the Tepid Fountain Wavelets***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 12.2×19.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-16 Author Unknown, *Untitled***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 10.8×25.3 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-17 Author Unknown, *Untitled***  
1983, Gelatin Silver Print, 10.2×15.3cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-18 Ma Yuhuan, *Misunderstanding***  
1980s, Chromogenic Print, 12.7×17.8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-19 Mao Zhanping, *Net***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 15×20.6 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng

- 1.12-20 Dang Quanli, *Chirp in the Wind***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14×7.8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.12-21 Zhang Li, *Wild Grass***  
Summer of 1983, Gelatin Silver Print, 22.9×11.7 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.13-1 Jin Shisheng, *Old Shanghai TV Station***  
Early 1980s, Printed in 2022, 39.3×24.4 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-2 Jin Shisheng, *Red Cord***  
1992, Printed in 2022, 39.9×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-3 Jin Shisheng, *Still Life***  
1990s, Printed in 2022, 43.8×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-4 Jin Shisheng, *Kitchen***  
1990s, Printed in 2022, 43.5×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-5 Jin Shisheng, *Reflection***  
Early 1990s, Printed in 2022, 44×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-6 Jin Shisheng, *Kettle***  
1980s, Printed in 2022, 29×44.5 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-7 Jin Shisheng, *Window***  
1980s, Printed in 2022, 44×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-8 Jin Shisheng, *Impressionism***  
1990s, Printed in 2022, 44×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.13-9 Jin Shisheng, *Electric Wire***  
1990s, Printed in 2022, 44×29 cm  
Courtesy of Jin Hua
- 1.14 Gu Zheng, *Shanghai Sketch***  
1986-1990, Printed in 2022, 32.5×47.5 cm, 33×48.5 cm, 32.5×48.5 cm, 33.5×48.5 cm
- 1.15-1 Chen Baosheng, *Bloodline***  
Year Unknown, 49.3×36.5 cm
- 1.15-2 Chen Baosheng, *Gallop***  
1980-1989, Gelatin Silver Print, 60.9×46.3 cm  
Courtesy of Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
- 1.16-1 Wang Zhiwen, *The World of Others***  
1986, Chromogenic Print, 43×27 cm
- 1.16-2 Author Unknown, *The Use of Light Ratios in Portraits***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 5.5×7.8 cm×4 pieces  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-3 Shen Xun, *Another Morning***  
1985, Gelatin Silver Print, 24.6×12 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng



- 1.16-4 Yang Qun, *Foot and Axle***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 28.8×17.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-5 Author Unknown, *Time Changes***  
1985, Document, 73×26.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-6 Zhu Weiping, *Contest***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 25×15 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-7 Dai Zenghe, *Love on the other Side of the Mountain***  
1983, Gelatin Silver Print, 15.7×25.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-8 Hei Ming, *Rice is Steel***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 20.4×14 cm×2 pieces  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-9 Yu Bangyan, *Hers***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 20.9×14.8 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.16-10 Ma Mingjun, *Eating Water without Forgetting the Well-Driller***  
1980s, Chromogenic Print, 33×38.5 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.17-1 Li Shaotong, *Fengxiang, Shaanxi***  
1980, Printed in 2022, 21.2×13.9 cm
- 1.17-2 Hu Wugong, *A Mountain Village Lovers from Gelao***  
1982, Printed in 2022, 29.3×19.2 cm
- 1.17-3 Pan Ke, *The End of the Century: Friends in Spring***  
1980s, Printed in 2022, 29.3×20.2 cm
- 1.17-4 Hu Wugong, *Wearing Bell-Bottoms and Dancing at Disco Became the Hallmarks of Youth-led Fashion***  
1981, Printed in 2022, 39.3×26.3 cm
- 1.17-5 Li Shengli, *Little Grass***  
1980s, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.2×21.2 cm  
Courtesy of Zhai Linfeng
- 1.17-6 Hou Dengke, *Harvest***  
1986, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.9×21.2 cm  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.17-7 Hou Dengke, *A View from Afar***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 14×21.5 cm  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.17-8 Hou Dengke, *Catching the Fair***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.8×21.3 cm  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.17-9 Hou Dengke, *First Snow in the Countryside***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 14.1×21.2 cm  
Courtesy of Wang Miao
- 1.18-1 Shi Baoxiu, *Military Platform at Baoji East Station, 21th Army Soldiers About to Depart for Sino—Vietnames Battlefield***  
1984, Printed in 2022, 29.4×19.5 cm

- 1.18-2 Li Shengli, *Several Old People Sunbathing Under the Old Courtyard Wall***  
1985, Printed in 2022, 29.3×21.4 cm
- 1.18-3 Pan Ke, *The End of the Century: Spring is Coming***  
1985, Printed in 2022, 29.4×23.3 cm
- 1.18-4 Hu Wugong, *Groom***  
1985, Printed in 2022, 29.3×19.4 cm
- 1.19-1 Shi Baoxiu, *The Yan'an People***  
1986, Printed in 2022, 29.3×19.4 cm
- 1.19-2 Shi Baoxiu, *Baoji Railway Gymnasium Hosts May Day Singing Competition***  
1986, Printed in 2022, 24.3×16.4 cm
- 1.19-3 Jiao Jingquan, *Mountain Road***  
1988, Printed in 2022, 29×29 cm
- 1.19-4 Bai Tao, *Famen Temple, Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province***  
1988, Printed in 2022, 39.4×24.4 cm
- 1.19-5 Pan Ke, *The End of the Century: Farmers Who are Working on Spring Ploughing in Jianling Mausoleum of Tang Dynasty***  
1988, Printed in 2022, 29.3×21.4 cm
- 1.20-1 Shi Baoxiu, *Visit the Parental Home***  
1989, Printed in 2022, 29.3×19.4 cm
- 1.20-2 Jiao Jingquan, *Three Praying Grannies***  
1989, Printed in 2022, 39.4×25.7 cm
- 1.20-3 Pan Ke, *The End of the Century: The Last Day of 1989***  
1989, Printed in 2022, 24.2×35.2 cm
- 1.21 An Ge, *Liwan Park***  
1976, Gelatin Silver Print, 50.5×34 cm  
Courtesy of Cai Tao
- 1.22-1 Ling Fei, *Evolutionary History***  
1980, Gelatin Silver Print, 37.5×27.5 cm
- 1.22-2 Ling Fei, *Nature, Society, People***  
1982, Gelatin Silver Print, 61×30 cm
- 1.23 Wang Youshen, *Washing·My Friends***  
1989, Gelatin Silver Print, Water  
26×15.4 cm, 26.5×17.6 cm  
19.7×27.3 cm, 26×22.2 cm  
18.5×24.7 cm, 29.3×24.7 cm
- 1.24 “Our Words - The Student Photography Association of the Central Academy of Fine Arts Selected Works” Original Newspaper**  
1987, Newspaper, 39×27cm  
Courtesy of Wang Youshen

# Artists

An Ge	Huang Xiang	Lü Xiaozhong
Ao Enhong	Huang Yongyu	Luo Bonian
Bai Tao	Jia Chaozheng	Ma Mingjun
Bao Kun	Jiang Bingnan	Ma Yuhuan
Bei Dao	Jiang Guoliang	Mao Zhanping
Bi Jianfeng	Jiao Jingquan	Meng Zhaorui
Shen Xun	Jin Bohong	Pan Ke
Chen Baosheng	Jin Shisheng	Peng Kuang
Chen Bo	Lang Qi	Qi Guanshan
Chen Fuli	Lang Jingshan	Qian Qun
Chen Shuxia	Li Feng	Ren Shulin
Da Hai	Li Guohua	Sha Fei
Dai Zenghe	Li Jilu	Shao Du
Dang Quanli	Li Ming	Shao Jiaye
Deng Wei	Li Shaotong	Shi Baoxiu
Du Zhizhong	Li Shengli	Shi Shaohua
Fan Huichen	Li Tian	Shi Zhimin
Fang Dazeng	Li Xiaobin	Song Shijing
Gu Cheng	Li Tiansheng	Sun Zhenjie
Gu Zheng	Liang Zude	Wang Hu
Guo Song	Ling Fei	Wang JinFu
Hei Ming	Liu Bannong	Wang Junhua
Hong Hao	Liu Feng	Wang Miao
Hou Dengke	Liu Guangcheng	Wang Ping
Hu Wugong	Liu Jie	Wang Ruihua
Huang Cheng	Liu Qinghe	Wang Xiang
Huang Daoming	Liu Xucang	Wang Xiebai
Huang Lin	Lu Shifu	Wang Yan

Wang Yin	Xu Xiaobing	Zhang Jingtian
Wang Youshen	Xu Yingzhe	Zhang Li
Wang Yuejin	Xu Youhui	Zhang Yinquan
Wang Zhiwen	Xu Qi	Zhang Yunlei
Wang Zhiting	Xu Zhuo	Zhao Jiexuan
Wang Zhiping	Xue Zijiang	Zheng Jingkang
Wei Dezhong	Yang Qun	Zheng Jun
Wei Shouzhong	Ye Liuru	Zhou Chunyan
Wen Danqing	You Yungu	Zhou Wannian
Wu Wenhao	Yu Bangyan	Zhu Lihe
Wu Yinbo	Yuan Shande	Zhu Tianmin
Wu Yinxian	Yuan Yiping	Zhu Weiping
Wu Zhongxing	Zhai Chunlai	Zhuang Xueben
Wu Zuzheng	Zhang Aiping	
Xia Yonglie	Zhang Baoan	

The list of artists appears in alphabetical order.

# Curators' Bio

**Carol Yinghua LU** is an art historian and a curator. She received her Ph.D degree in art history from the University of Melbourne in 2020. She is the director of Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum. She was the artistic director and senior curator of OCAT, Shenzhen (2012-2015), guest curator at Museion, Bolzano (2013) and the China researcher for Asia Art Archive (2005-2007). She was a recipient of the ARIAH (Association of Research Institute in Art History) East Asia Fellowship (2017), Yishu Awards for Critical Writing and Curating on Contemporary Chinese Art (2016) and visiting fellow in the Asia-Pacific Fellowship Program at the Tate Research Centre (2013). She was the co-artistic director of Gwangju Biennale and the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2012).

She has acted as a jury member for Hyundai Blue Prize Art + Tech (2022, 2021), Tokyo Contemporary Art Award (2022-2019), The Choi Foundation Prize for Contemporary Art (2022, 2021), Gallery Weekend Beijing Prize for Best Exhibition (2022, 2020-2017), Han Nefkens Foundation – Loop Barcelona Video Art Award Production (2021, 2020), abC Art Book Award (2021), Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative (2019), Hugo Boss Asia (2019), International Award for Art Criticism (2014), the Future Generation Art Prize (2012), and the Golden Lion Award at Venice Biennale (2011).

**ZHOU Dengyan** is an art historian with a research focus on photography in China. She holds a Ph.D in Art History from Binghamton University. She is the editor of Images of China 20th Century Chinese Photographers - Shi Shaohua (2019) and The National Photographic Art Exhibition Office: Reminiscences and Documentary Materials 1972–1978 (2015). Her recent studies have been published in Literature & Art Studies, Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art, Chinese Journal of Art Studies, Contemporary Cinema, Trans Asia Photography Review, photographies and OSMOS. She is currently teaching at Beijing Film Academy.

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Qing Lan	Three Shadows Photography Art Centre
Qi Yan	Yuezhong Museum of Historical Images
Rong Rong	China Image Gallery
Shao Dalang	Inter Gallery
Tang Dongping	
Wang Yiqiang	

# INFINITE REALISM

Humanism in Chinese Photography from 1920s to 1980s

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**Curators:** Carol Yinghua Lu, Zhou Dengyan  
**Text & Exhibition Design:** Liu Ding  
**Graphic Design:** luomantic  
**Exhibition Installation:** Fang Yongfa

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