

IMAGES OF COMMON PEOPLE IN CHINA

中国百姓生活的影像

朱宪民 · ZHU XIANMIN



中国摄影出版社
China Photographic Publishing House

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PEOPLE IN CHINA

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一个人和一条河

陈小波

我认为自己只是一个忠实的黄河记录者，只是一个特殊行业的劳动者。
我最庆幸这一生能从事最喜欢的工作，庆幸自己选择了一个可以一生拍摄的题材。
用一生来拍摄黄河不证明我比其他摄影家强到哪里，只是这是我有能力把握的题材，是我擅长的题材。
我愿意为此抛弃一切世俗的享乐，付出一生的精力。
我坚信我拍的黄河 100 年之后能体现它的价值。

——朱宪民

27 年前，朱宪民从吉林调到中国摄影家协会，被分在展览部负责国际事务。家属没来，他一个人住在办公室。
那些夜晚，朱宪民翻出一本本国外的画册读了起来。

这是一个饥肠辘辘的中国摄影者的饕餮大餐！

亨利·卡蒂埃·布勒松——摄影原来和生活贴得那样紧！摄影原来可以“整日在街头寻找，随时准备记录生活的点点滴滴，将活生生的生活完全记录下来”。

1932—1936 年，美国农庄管理处的三十名摄影师——他们齐刷刷地将镜头对准公路上的那些难民，那些受挫折、被遗忘和得不到援助的家庭。

尤金·史密斯——他的丝毫都不做作的人道主义纪实照片感动了懂照片和不懂照片的人，他的影像看不出技术性的语言，只有感情上的语言。

摄影原来应该是这样的模样！

朱宪民几乎要叫出声来：“搞了近 20 年摄影，原来我走的全是弯路全是死胡同啊”！

但是朱宪民在 1966 年拍摄的《城市应届毕业生到农村参加军事化劳动锻炼》、《农村小学的劳动课》、《临

江林业局毛泽东思想宣传队到林场演出》等，虽然画面全是摆拍，选择的却是最普通的人的状态。从这一点可以看出朱宪民已经是那一代摄影者中有些“先知先觉”味道的摄影师了。

李媚曾评论说：“在中国当代摄影史中，在这个年龄段的摄影家中，少有像朱宪民这样，在1970年代初期就在有意无意之间关注百姓日常生活，以朴素、自然、忠实于生活的态度记录平民百姓生活的。他的特殊之处在于他早于他的同代人，本能地为表达自己情感深处关注和倾心的人们而按动快门。他的特殊之处还在于，他是这个年龄段的摄影家中具有平民姿态并强烈表达了这种姿态的摄影家。”

朱宪民幸好在这个时候看到了布勒松。这是上苍对朱宪民的安排。布勒松是摄影的一道没有人可以绕行的门槛。“今天有所谓基础摄影ABC的话，那高级摄影就是HCB（布勒松全名缩写字母）。”（厄恩斯特·哈斯）

1979年的那些夜晚，在布勒松、美国农庄管理处的摄影师——尤金·史密斯那里找到慰藉后，朱宪民的自我救赎也就完成了。

朱宪民伴随中国摄影经历了一个个曲折，现在重新出发。从此朱宪民明确了一生的奋斗目标，他选择了黄河，选择了最有感情最熟悉的土地和人民。黄河会成为他一生的拍摄题材，并成为他的摄影生命之本。

他的摄影创作也从此开始携带着自己的精神与灵魂，不再改变。

对处在20世纪50年代后的所有中国摄影者来说，“生不逢时”成了一句咒语。摄影师的作品后面隐藏着这个时代的诸多问题。过度的封锁使得中国那一代摄影者既看不到真实的世界，别人也无法通过他们的劳动看到真实的中国。

朱宪民成了那个时代奇迹般的“幸存者”。



朱宪民的故乡是山东濮城（现河南范县），那里是典型的夹河套地形，生活的环境偏僻、封闭、落后。

黄河边的人一生下来就在沙土里。朱宪民刚生下来，接生婆就把他埋在沙土里——没有尿布，没有褥子。那种沙土用锅炒、用筛子罗，是暖和的。在沙土里他会躺到一岁，大人要劳动，没人抱他。

朱宪民出生的1943年是大灾年，黄河都干了。父亲用车子推着一家人逃荒来到黄河南岸。朱宪民刚会爬，父母要出去干活，不能管他，他扑到砖头垒的炉子旁，烫着了腿。没有钱治，一把热乎乎的黄河沙土敷在伤口上，没有发炎，现在连疤痕都没有。

人的一生记忆最深刻、最值得回忆的当属童年。直到现在，童年生活的场景还历历在目，朱宪民还能触摸到黄河边沙土的温度和气息，而这正是朱宪民黄河摄影内在的源头。

朱宪民的父亲老实厚道，沉默寡言，大字不识一个。他没动过儿子一手指头。朱宪民离家时，父亲对他说：“儿子，不要犯法，不要坑人。”这两句话，他记一辈子。

朱宪民的姥姥，舅舅家参加革命的人多，他的母亲30年代就是老党员，土改时被推选做区妇联主任。朱宪民一、两岁就被母亲抱着参加党员会。五、六岁时母亲带他去各村斗地主分田地。母亲不让他看那些激烈的人折腾人的场面，但他还是有很深的印象。

十七岁朱宪民背着行装从黄河边走了出来，出门时背着个小花布包，里面有母亲给做的几个地瓜饼子。1987年，朱宪民拍摄了《出外打工的青年农民》，他感慨地说：“一个背花包袱的乡下小伙子离开老家进城看那张照片就知道我离开家乡时的模样了。”

朱宪民离开家乡到城里时还不知道鞋里要穿袜子。他很好奇，城里人为什么在棉鞋里还要弄个套子？棉裤里为什么还穿一条裤子？长裤里面还有短裤？在那之前，他也不知道世界上有苹果，因为他的家乡只有枣。

十七岁离开黄河，三十六岁又背着相机朝黄河边走去，这似乎又是上苍的安排。

三

到了黄河边，朱宪民才发现自己从来没有与黄河切断根脉。当他站在黄河岸边端起相机看到取景框中的种种景象，心和手都在颤抖，眼里不知是雾还是泪水。胸中有火，身上冒汗。那一刻，他知道他找到了摄影的根，这才是摄影创作真正的源泉。

朱宪民拍摄的所有人物都是离土地最近的人，那些人有与土地联系最紧的快乐和悲伤。和布勒松不同的是，布勒松的拍摄冷静甚至“冷冰冰”——他与人烟烟火总有一段很远的距离。而朱宪民直接、热忱——“拍照片首先是要爱！爱你拍的土地，爱你手里的相机。我爱黄河，为它骄傲更为它牵肠挂肚！我爱河边的百姓，他们是多好的黄河子孙！我就是其中一员。”

朱宪民的摄影基于爱、理解的同情——他在镜头里看到的不是别人，就是自己的父亲和母亲、自己的兄弟姐妹、自己的儿女！每个“他”中都有自己的一部分。

朱宪民一生没有拍过自己的父亲母亲，他看到黄河边所有的妇女都是他的母亲和妹妹，黄河边所有的男人都 是他的父亲和兄弟。

“那是我的母亲”——《母女俩》中那个背柴的母亲（山东 1989），《各有心事》中那个衣衫打满补丁的妇女（山东 1989）；

“那是我的父亲”——《三代人》中的父亲形象（河南 1980），《民以食为天》那个大碗遮住脸的老汉（河南 1980）；

“甚至我自己”——《集上小吃》中带着两个孩子赶集的中年男人（河南 1986），《山村》中架着马车准备出门的一家之主（山西 1998）；

“我要是没有离开农村，我的孩子应该就是这样”——《课余》（山东 1988），《等看新娘》（山东 1989），《早市上的兄妹》（河南 1995）……

“一切和我有关”，这就是朱宪民拍摄时的心理活动，几十年没有改变。

朱宪民只拍摄正常视觉下所感受到的世界，搞不明白的东西他不会去拍摄。从最初的肖像式拍摄到记录黄河生存方式、地貌、山川、河流、生态、田间集市、牲畜、农具、生活用品、运输工具……无一不在朱宪民的镜头中留存。

四

朱宪民个性热烈多彩，自然通透，江湖义气，他不沉溺于沉思，生命随兴而为。

朱宪民选择了与天性相投的影像方式——自然、人间性、出于本能，深具善意。情感在他的摄影中最重要，情感驱动着所谓摄影感觉。

上天赋予朱宪民影像上的才能已经足以让他完成他要表现的一切——而且还用不完。被摄者本身的丰富性和朱宪民的热情与影像才能恰恰成正比。没有什么摄影模式挡在朱宪民面前，他也决不会让所谓的风格影响内容的表现。

成功的图像向来明确无疑。30年来朱宪民一直使用的是同一种方法：自然的平实的记录。他几乎不采用过分逼近的手法，追求所谓视觉冲击力。

朱宪民还是一个未被图像和理论污染的摄影者。他靠天性、靠直觉、靠情感、靠原始记录选择和拍摄，惟独不靠什么理念。他把所有的框框扔在一边。胡武功肯定地说：“朱公虽然没什么摄影理论，但一直是摄影实践的先行者”。

在阅读完世界纪实大师的作品，明确自己将会用剩下的大半辈子拍摄黄河时，朱宪民首先回到家乡进行拍摄。他丝毫不敢有衣锦还乡、荣归故里的感觉。他总告诫自己：千千万万悄悄地回去，别扰民。每次回老家，走到距离自己家村子还有三四里路的地方就下车。他不想让乡亲们觉得自己是什么了不起的人。回到家里他会换上弟弟的衣服，骑着自行车，在黄河大堤上走，在村子里到处转悠，相机藏在衣服里。

在拍摄时朱宪民常想：我要不离开这里，我就是他们中的一员，就是那个穿着老棉袄在墙根下抱孙子晒太阳

的老汉。有一次他在集市上拍照片，想拍一个卖豆芽中年人的特写，拉近一看——他中学的同桌！在学校时这个同桌是班长，门门功课考90分以上。朱宪民这张照片快门按不下去，甚至连过去和同桌打招呼的勇气都没有，怕伤害他。“如果公平竞争，我肯定不是人家的对手啊！如果他正常考大学，也肯定在我前边啊。我只不过一个瞬间决定走出去了，而他留下来了。”

朱宪民说他真的不敢在这样的人面前“怼”。（东北话：得意忘形的意思）

朱宪民记录了一条苦难的大河。但是在他的影像里很少有痛苦和眼泪，也很少有丑陋呆滞的人。人道、人本、人文在他那里似乎是天生的。

朱宪民不愿意把镜头对准极端的事例和人，对刻意表现生活中丑陋、过度贫穷、不幸，绝望有自己的看法。在中国，确实有很多贫穷落后的地方，但朱宪民选择人的生活常态来拍。这是他理解的摄影家记录历史变迁的方式，也是一种对历史负责的态度。

拍摄故乡，拍摄黄河，朱宪民自始至终都是一个温情的歌颂者。

五

把拍摄日尔曼民族众生像作为终身事业的奥古斯特·桑德这样描述自己：

“我从小就熟悉这些人的生活……因此，一开始我就从个别类型的村民当中，看到一种相同的典型。那是人类品质的记号。”^④

朱宪民不会这样归纳，但他做的就是和奥古斯特·桑德同样的事情。

当今世界文化的特征之一：在他者中寻找自我。欧洲在异域寻找自我——亚洲、中东、美洲……我们的摄影家也常常置自己最熟悉的土地放在一边，背井离乡，到自己最不熟悉的西藏、新疆、内蒙古那里去做猎奇式的拍摄。正是像奥古斯特·桑德和朱宪民这样的摄影者坚持着摄影的品质——他们在前方的路上行走，给后继者留下

纪实摄影的标准。

朱宪民一生只做了一件事：记录了一条最重要的河流，他成为最富中国意味的摄影家。我们可以把朱宪民拍摄的黄河看成是摄影家的精神自传，一个人在一条河流中的个人史。因为他的拍摄是在中国历史上最重要的变迁中完成的，也将成为贡献给中华民族的影像。

1987年，德龙把朱宪民的黄河画册拿给布列松看，布列松题词：“真理之眼，永远向着生活——赠朱宪民”。

朱宪民的作品是名噪一时、过分高估还是成为20世纪末到21世纪初中国摄影的宝藏之一，谁也不能妄下结论。本文探讨的只是朱宪民走过的道路——一条与众不同的道路。

2006年8月写于北京

One Man and One River

By Chen Xiaobo

I regard myself as a dutiful photographer keeping a chronicle of the Yellow River, one participant in a special industry.

I am fortunate in engaging in a trade I am interested in and settling on a subject worthy of life-time devotion.

I have devoted myself to the subject of the Yellow River in my career as a photographer for I am well-equipped to handle such a subject of which I developed a good command. It does not suggest I am better than other photographers.

I would sacrifice all mundane enjoyment for this undertaking which deserves the devotion of a life-time.

I firmly believe that the photos I've taken of the Yellow River would win due recognition in 100 years.

By Zhu Xiannin

I

27 years ago, Zhu Xiannin was transferred from Jilin to China Photographers' Association (CPA) and charged with international affairs of the Exhibition Department. With his family staying behind, he made the office his home and led a solitary existence.

No. 61 of Hongxing hutong witnessed Zhu Xiannin thumbing through the pages of foreign photo collections at those lonely nights.

It was an extravagant feast for an eager and starving Chinese photographer.

Henri Cartier Bresson works shed light on how close to life photography could get. Photographers should be "scouring the streets all day long for every fleeting moment in life worth recording".

From 1932 to 1936, 30 photographers with the Farm Bureau of the United States unanimously trained their lenses upon the refugees trudging along the highways and those families which suffered setbacks and struggled in the margins of the society without any assistances.

W. Eugene Smith's photographic works radiating genuine humanitarianism struck an emotional chord with both professionals and amateurs. Photos taken by him brim over with emotions rather than technicalities.

These were exactly what photography was all about.

It suddenly occurred to Zhu Xianmin that for the past 20 years working as a photographer, he had been beating around the bush and stuck in the dead end all along.

The photos taken by him in 1966 entitled "Fresh school graduates heading for the countryside for a militarized life and labor services" , "Craftsmanship classes in a rural elementary school" and "Promoters of the Mao Zedong Thought from the Forestry Bureau of Linjiang in artistic performances" focused on ordinary folks, though they still stuck with the "posing-for-pictures" practices. By then, Zhu Xianmin had become a pioneer of some sort among his generation of photographers.

Li Mei once observed that "in the history of contemporary Chinese photography, few photographers of Zhu Xianmin' s generation set their sights on the everyday life of the ordinary people in the early 1970s, much less keeping a track of their existences in a modest, natural and dutiful manner. Mr. Zhu is unique in that he got a head start over his peers in instinctively ushering into his photos those people about whom he cared. What' s more, he was an exception among his generation of photographers, identifying himself with the common people and going to great lengths to highlight such an identity."

By a stroke of luck, Zhu Xianmin got to know about Bresson and his works during this period. He thought of it as the grace of God. Bresson marks a milestone in the history of photographic art. "If the 'ABC' of photography' refers to the basics of photographic art, then HCB (the initials of Bresson' s full name) is synonymous with advanced photography." (by Ernst Haas)

In those evenings of 1979, by seeking solace in those works by Bresson, photographers with the US Farm Bureau and Eugene Smith, Zhu Xianmin finally achieved his self-redemption.

Having overcome one setback after another, Zhu Xianmin started anew along with China' s photographic art. He made the Yellow River, the land and people he held so dear the subject of his photographic works. The Yellow River is the inspiration for his photos and the theme of his life-time pursuit.

From this point on, his photos have been defined by this uniqueness which is deeply rooted in his soul.

Chinese photographers felt like living under a curse since the 1950s for they believed they were born into a wrong age. A wide range of problems unique to this era could be found behind the photographic works. Blindfolded, this generation of Chinese photographers couldn' t catch a glimpse of the outside world, nor could they project a true image of China in their works.

Zhu Xianmin miraculously survived the era.

Zhu Xianmin came from Fan County of Liaocheng Prefecture in Shandong Province. His hometown was characterized by terrains known locally as “Jiahetao” (a stretch of land sandwiched between rivers) and his country fellows led a backward existence in seclusion in an off-the-beaten-track pocket.

The people living by the Yellow River thrive on this expanse of sandy clay. The midwife left the new-born who was later named Zhu Xianmin in the sand without a diaper or a mattress beneath him. The sand, sieved and heated, felt tender and warm. Zhu Xianmin was kept lying in the cradle of sand till one year old, for his parents were too busy tending the field to provide him with much care.

1943, the year when Zhu was born, saw a serious famine and the Yellow River went dry. The family was carted by the father to south of the River to stay out of the famine's way. The parents left for work with the baby staying behind all by itself. Zhu Xianmin who had just learnt to crawl got his leg scalded after getting too close to the makeshift fireplace built upon bricks. The family was too poor to afford any medical treatment. A handful of warm sand was applied to the boy's wound and it was by sheer luck that Zhu was spared inflammation. Today not even a scar could be found in his leg.

Childhood is the most unforgettable and emotional part of human memories. Up till now, Zhu Xianmin could still see vividly his boyhood experiences in his mind's eye. The warmth and scent of the sand by the riverside remain familiar to him. All these serve as the inspiration for Zhu Xianmin's photographic works centering upon the Yellow River.

Zhu's father, an honest and taciturn man who remained illiterate all his life, had never physically abused his son. Before Zhu left home to start a life of his own, he told him never to violate the law and cheat others, which was seared in his mind ever since.

Many of Zhu's family members on the maternal side took part in the revolutionary course. His mother, a veteran communist in the 1930s, was elected director for the Women's Federation of the district during the Land Reforms. Curling in the mother's bosom, Zhu attended communist meetings at the age of one or two. When he was five or six years old, he was always on his mother's coattails as she shuttled between villages, rallying the people against landlords and parcelling out their fields. His mother went out of her way to shield his eyes from those boisterous scenes, which left a deep impression on him anyway.

At seventeen, Zhu Xianmin packed up and left his hometown by the riverside. He set off, carrying a small bundle with several pancakes made by his mother in it. A photo produced by Zhu in 1987 entitled “A young peasant leaving home to work as a migrant worker elsewhere” features a rural youth heading for the city with a small bundle on his back. “It was exactly what I looked like decades ago on my way out,” Zhu sighed.

In his early days in the city, he didn't have the slightest idea about socks. He couldn't help wondering why people in the city bothered to wear a pair of small socks.

on their feet, another pair of pants in their cotton pants and yet another pair of short pants further inside. He knew nothing about apples for dates were the only fruit he had ever seen back home.

Isn't it predestined that Zhu, with a camera slung over his shoulder, returned to the Yellow River at 36, 20 years after his departure.

3

Hardly did Zhu reach the banks of the Yellow River when he realized that the links between him and the river remained intact. Standing by the riverside, he scanned the landscape through the lens of the camera, hands trembling, his heartbeat quickening, tears welling up in his eyes. He felt a fire was burning in his chest and droplets of sweat trickled down his body. It hit upon him that this was the spring for his photography.

All those who are closest to the land have been made subjects of Zhu's photos, which focused on their joys and sorrows.

Unlike Bresson who remains sober or even "icy" in photo-taking—he kept the mundane world at arm's length—Zhu is more passionate and forthcoming. "Love should be the driving force behind photographers. The love for the land, and the camera in your hands. I love the Yellow River so dearly. It's always been my pride and I keep it in the most tender part of my heart. I love the folks living along the River. Nice chaps and the offspring of the Yellow River. I am one of them," Zhu was overflowing with emotions.

Love, understanding and compassion inspired Zhu. Through the lenses, he saw none other than those he viewed as his own parents, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. He saw part of himself in every single "other".

Zhu Xianmin has never taken any photos of his father or mother. To him, all the women by the Yellow River are his mothers or sisters while all the men are either his fathers or brothers.

The mother trudging ahead with mountains of firewood on her back in "the mother and the daughter" (taken in Shandong, 1989) and the woman in a heavily-patched dress in "unique concerns" (taken in Shandong, 1989)—"I saw my mother in them."

The father in "three generations" (taken in Henan, 1980) and the old man with his face shielded by a big bowl in "food, the top concern" (taken in Henan, 1980)—"I saw in them my own father."

"And even myself,"—the middle-aged man at the local fair with his two kids in "snacks at the fair" (taken in Henan, 1986) and the head of a family setting out on

a horse-towed cart in "a mountain village" (taken in Shanxi, 1998).

"Had I not left the countryside, my children would have been among them."—"afterclass hours" (taken in Shandong, 1988), "anticipating the arrival of the bride" (taken in Shandong, 1989), "the elder brother and his sister at the morning fair" (taken in Henan, 1995), etc.

Zhu has been driven consistently by the "I-am-one-of-them" mentality for the past several decades.

He trains the lens of his camera on the part of the world he could visually experience instead of those subjects about which he knows little. Zhu's works cover a wide range of subjects, from photographic portraits in the early days, the way of life of those living by the Yellow River, the terrains, mountains, rivers, eco-environment, to rural fairs, livestock, agricultural instrument, articles for daily use, transportation vehicles, etc.

4

Being passionate, natural and magnanimous, Zhu is not the meditation type and loves to have his life run its own course.

He chose a distinctive approach to photography which is a perfect match to his character—that is natural, instinctive, alive with kindness and human emotions. Emotions play a significant role in his works, which keep keen his feel for photography.

The talents bestowed upon Zhu enable him to give expression to whatever he intends to present. The diversity of the subjects is in proportion to Zhu's passion and photographic skills. He is not shackled by any particular photographic style and he would never have his works tampered by any of the so-called genres.

Successful photographers always cling to an explicit approach to photography. As far as Zhu is concerned, he has been pursuing a natural and unassuming approach to photography instead of an overly aggressive one only to achieve the so-called visual impact.

Zhu remains untainted by imagery and theories of photography. Human nature, instinct, emotions and original records are what he relies on. He keeps himself free from any conceptions and casts aside all stereotypes. "Though Mr. Zhu boasts no photographic theories, he has always been standing at the forefront of photographic practices," Mr. Jiu Wugong observed admiringly.

Inspired by the works of the master photographers, Zhu Xianmin returned to his hometown, determined to devote the rest of his life to the photographic presentation of the Yellow River. He didn't make a fuss about his return and took care not to disturb the neighbors. He would disembark three to four li from the village for he didn't want to be seen as a VIP by the locals. Upon arrival at home, he quickly changed into his brother's clothes and cycled along the embankment of the river or

made the rounds in the village, with the camera tucked inside his clothes.

During his photo-taking tours, it occurred to him repeatedly that had he not left home, he would have been one of them, just like the old pai in a threadbare cotton coat enjoying the sunshine at the foot of the wall with his grandson cradled in his arms. At one time, when he was trying a close-up shot at a middle-aged peddler of bean sprouts at the local fair, he suddenly made him out as his high school deskmate. Then he was the monitor of the class and never scored below 90 in exams. Zhu's finger went weak and he couldn't muster up enough courage to go over to say hello for the last thing he wanted was to hurt his feelings. "I would have been no match for him, had the playground been leveled for both of us. Had he got the chance to sit for the college entrance examination, he would have scored far higher. I left while he stayed put. That made all the difference."

Zhu confessed that he really didn't dare to show off before these fellows.

Zhu Xiaomin kept a photographic chronicle of the miseries of the Yellow River. Yet sorrows, sufferings, ills and ugly and dull people are a rarity in his photos. In their place, there is humanism with which he was gifted.

Zhu turned his lens away from extremities in life. He has reservations about painstakingly portraying the ugliness, abject poverty, grief and desperation in life. Zhu admitted that his country has not cast off all its poverty and backwardness, yet he feels disposed for the presentation of normalcy which defines people's life. To him, this should be the photographer's approach to historical transformation and a responsible one at that.

All through his career as a photographer, Zhu has been affectionately paying tribute to his hometown and the Yellow River.

August Sander, who had made photographic presentation of the German nation his lifetime mission, once remarked, "I knew very well these people's life ever since my childhood... So early in my career, I managed to identify a trait which was shared by many villagers. That is essentially a hallmark of human character."

Zhu Xiannin has never made such generalizations, yet he coincides with August Sander in what he has been doing all along.

To search for "self" in the "other" marks one of the features of today's culture. Europeans are making the rounds in Asia, the Mideast, the Americas, etc. in search of the "self". Photographers are turning their backs on the land most familiar to them and flocking to such places as Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia about which they know little in persistent pursuit of novelties. It is photographers like August Sander and Zhu who hold steadfastly to the quintessence of photography, leaving behind them benchmarks for documentary photography.