

# History of Photography: Introduction

*By Siba Aldabbagh*

In the first part of this two-essay 'History of Photography', penned so many months ago, I found myself faced with the dilemma of how history produced photography. In other words, the essay was concerned with how photography developed historically up until the present day. But then, in reading my own writing, I became critical of this stance. Could it simply be that historical circumstances synchronically produced photography, leading it by the hand through various stages, or has photography also been capable of forging history? I feel this dialogic approach is more worthy of study as art is not simply a reflection of its times, but also challenges the present, seeking in its own multifarious ways reformation and change. What helped me reach this point was Christopher Pinney's book 'Photos of the Gods': The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India . His main proposition here is that 'pictures were an integral element of history in the making' making the case 'for visual culture as a key arena for the thinking out of politics and religion in modern India' . Of course Pinney was working from a specifically modern Indian cultural context and I would not limit the discussion solely to how photography has thought out 'politics and religion', but also social and cultural discourses which may not be directly political or religious.

The implication of this reading of course empowers photography as an artistic medium; rather than photography being a desolate stage where artists perform their social and historical concerns, I believe that photography is where artists deconstruct the paradigms of their respective societies and cultures. In other words, photography is, and has been, capable of revolution. It is the purpose of the second part of this essay to shed light on this aspect of photography, not entirely negating the historical developments of the genre in the Chinese, Indian and Turkish contexts. Chastise me if you will, but unfortunately I have not been able to keep to my word and cover the history of photography in South America. I have found these pages are too limited in number and the content is too detailed and long. It

is hoped that we will be able to come this wonderful region at a later point in time. Finally, the essay will end with discussions of recent developments, publications and exhibitions relating to photography that either were not possible to incorporate into the main body of the essay or reflect developments too recent to discuss fully.

## **India**

One of the most disappointing texts I have come across in looking at photography is The Oxford History of Art series' book Indian Art . Despite covering a wide range of specific contexts including Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani sculptor, painting and architecture, there is no mention of the word photography. What this inherently does is set up a history which centralizes the role of traditional art forms, such as painting, thus marginalizing photography and even suggesting its alienation as an art form.

On the contrary, the presence of photography has existed since the invention of the daguerreotype itself. As The Marshall Albums shows, photography initially began as a practice used to substantiate historical accounts. Because of its apparent ability to capture relatively objective narrations, photography became the medium through which historical documentation and determination came about. Employed to substantiate archaeological findings, photography became an active agent 'within the construction of the historical narrative of India's pre-colonial past.' As Guha goes on to explain, considering the agency that photography played in the establishment of historical discourses suggests that archaeology often sees not only photography, but any other form of documentation as 'irrefutable fact', in other words, the scales are tipped in favour of 'establishing disciplinary epistemologies and archaeological knowledge' . I suggest that photography went a step further and actually helped to create disciplinary epistemologies and archaeological knowledge. Unlike KG Pramod who has argued that the Orientalists 'did not have much to do with it [the rise of photography]' , I

suggest that the framework and mindset of imperialism was built into the detailed tapestry of archaeological and photographic documentation in India.

If we are to look at the Marshall Albums, a specifically colonial form was established with the Marshall family documenting and creating a narrative of India through the camera obscura.

Before the invention and subsequent use of the photographic medium, lithography was the main medium for image reproduction and distribution. In the 1870s chromolithography was emerging; these were color images produced using multiple stone blocks in a variation of Alois Senefelder's process which he invented in Munich in 1798. These chromolithographs were trivialised by the Indian and European elite, but they remained powerful religious and political vehicles. An Indian painter, Ravi Varma, had his paintings mass produced as photographic prints from 1890. Ravi Varma was an Indian artist, whose subjects form the characters and narratives of the great Indian epics. Varma was strongly influenced by European paintings, and his study of Edward Moor's Hindu Pantheon is 'seen as an early charter for some of the representational transformations that Ravi Varma would very soon effect.' The mass distribution of these paintings-as-photographs, influenced by European artistic sensibilities but of Hindu deities and epic characters, suggests that the early usage of the photographic medium was mainly relevant to the Indian cultural and religious environment despite using modes of representation developed in Europe. Thus, the dawn of photography in India was mostly concerned with Hindu rituals.

Hem Chander Bhargava is the oldest surviving picture publisher and was founded in 1900, eight years after Ravi Varma's publishing house. This was commercial in approach, appealing to the masses, but was more open to addressing the concerns of India's religious melting pot than Varma. As the drive was approaching the needs of the immediate market, photography started to divest itself from the manacles of European art.

From the mid-1930s, Narottam Narayan Sharma started to define a new way of Nathdvara style, which dominated the market until the 1950s. This was a form where Sharma overpainted photographs. What we see in some of Sharma's images is the impact of photography

in creating the Nathdvara/ Brijbasi allure. We can see this most vividly in the case of the image of Kailash Pati Shankar where the figure of "Shiv" is being modeled via a photograph.

Although there were many explorers and British colonials in India who used photography during the early period of photography, Sunil Janah, a contemporary of Cartier-Bressons, is hailed by Peter Nagy to be the first art photographer of modern India. For others, however, his photographs are more journalistic than they are art. But what is the use of categorization in this sense? Isn't it much more important to note the effort and legacy that he left for future photographers of India?

Let us turn to look at this legacy. Rather than fighting between these genres, let us appreciate what Janah has done to inform photographic practices in India. Has he in fact turned photography into a socially salient object? Does his photography engage with the social and political status quo?

Well, to begin with Sunil Janah was a member of Communist Party and the Communist party newspaper's photographer for People's War and subsequently People's Age. What was to make Sunil Janah's hallmark was his covering of Bengal and Orissa's famine of 1943. The stark images shocked the uninitiated nation which was directed towards news concerning India's struggle for independence. The images were printed onto postcards and sold; the money was used to raise funds for famine relief. Janah's sincere dedication to various humanitarian causes in India kept him in constant touch with most of the iconic leaders of the Indian struggle, including Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Subhash Chandra Bose, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

On the other side of Janah's photographic career, he insisted on imaging peasants, marginalized communities, industrial workers and the architectural landscape which waved across India in the middle of the twentieth century. The marriage between 'art' and an ardent intellectual need to document the various strata within Indian society helps to resolve this dichotomy between fine art photography and photojournalism.

Another important photographer also working in the 1940s was Homai Vyarawalla who was the first female photojournalist in India. Flowing in the same vein as Janah, Vyarawalla, working under the pseudonym

'Dalda 13', was one of the founding members of the News Cameramen's Association and was an official governmental photographer. Her works were published in various issues of *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The Weekly* and other local media. In contrast to images of public figures, Vyarawalla was fond of taking photos and creating a montage of narratives about the lives of the native population, irrespective of class, religion or political sentiment. It is interesting to note that Vyarawalla was employed by the British Information Service, covering functions at the British High Commission and having these photographs published in various elitist magazines such as *Time* and *Life*. Earlier this year, she was awarded the Pashma Vibhushan by the Indian Government, the second highest civilian award offered in India. Later photographers working in the 1960s and 1970s included Raghu Rai, Raghubir Singh, Jyoti Bhatt and Nasreen Mohamadi.

Nasreen Mohamadi, in her photograph of Fatehpur Sikri, *Untitled*, from 1975 (figures 13 and 14) is clearly concerned with geometry, scientific drawings and mathematical imagery. The grid is imperfect; the pavement joints are rough despite a regular pattern showing. 'An unexpected water channel at right angles disrupts the grid of the pavement, almost violently.' Her photographs usually avoid people directly – although the Fatehpur Sikri image includes a lone person – but they indicate clearly the human presence by focusing on architecture, streets, or plowed and manipulated landscapes.

Dayanita Singh is an interesting photographer in her own way. Drawing inspiration from other art forms, predominantly literature, her latest works, from the series *House of Love*, are a visual narrative deploying the basic tenets of Aweek Sen's short stories. The title is based on the Taj Mahal, a house which is synonymously a house of death and love, and which additionally forms the oyster within which the several pearls of photographs emanate from. In having this relationship between the Taj Mahal and the photographic work in question, a complicated cityscape is set up, with people from all walks of life meandering within and around the busy hub of an economic and cultural capital.

Sunil Gupta is primarily concerned with gender politics where his images concentrate largely on homosexual



**Dayanita Singh**, *Continuous cities, House of love series*, 2010, C-print, edition of 3, 50x50cm - Courtesy of the artist.

themes and narratives which have been hidden under the rubble of Indian gender discourses. From the 1970s he was concerned with photographing homosexuality and the implied magnified epidemic of AIDS in the United States where he was studying at the time. In Raghu Rai's work, also from the 1970s, photographs zoom into the everyday lives of the Indian working classes, showing us glimpses of India's architectural landscapes whilst occasionally drawing on the individual and the self. His work reveals him to be more of a photojournalist than a fine art photographer.

Gauri Gill has an interesting photographic career. Most of her series span a period of more than five years, showing the sheer weight and dedication with which she works on themes most relevant to her. For example, the series *Notes from the Desert*, executed between 1999 and 2010, is a poignant cry for the vestiges of colourful tourism to be demolished, opting instead for black and white images which are both staged and spontaneous. The images are of Rajasthan, where environmental disasters and social evils perforate the scene with such glacial ugliness.

In the above analyses, I have only managed to scratch the surface of photographic work from India. Of course there are a large number of well-established and

creatively sophisticated photographers whose works I cannot do justice to here: Prabuddha Dasgupta, Ketaki Sheth, Raghubir Singh, Raghu Rai, Anay Mann, Aul Bhalla, Pushpamala N., Nikhil Chopra and Sudharak Olwe. I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the great achievements of Sudharak Olwe on a different level. Not only is he active as a photographer, but his essays on photography have contributed to the creation of a critical cloud of photography. In addition to this, Olwe is the head of the Photography Promotion Trust (PPT) in Mumbai, India. It is important to have such institutions as through their activities, which aim to 'support, showcase, and encourage to the use of photography as a tool for social change', a wider and more serious contribution is made to the advancement of the universal human condition. It is hoped that such similar initiatives are taken up in the Middle East.

### Turkey

When discussing art, it can be problematic to study the topic according to regional divisions. This is especially true when talking about the history of photography in Turkey. For when we assess the information available to us, and what we could conjecture as being part of the early period of the generic development, we find ourselves lost in a blizzard. I have proposed to talk about the history of photography in Turkey, but Turkey itself as a modern nation-state came after the invention of photography. As a geographical region, what we term Turkey today was in fact part of a wider area which we have come to know as the Ottoman Empire. We all know that today's Arabic speaking countries were enveloped into the wide embrace of the Ottoman Empire. But, for the purpose of this essay, I will limit the scope to what is defined as Turkey to the geographical boundaries of today's post-World War age. Occasionally, however, it will be necessary to talk about the Ottoman Empire on a wider scale.

The coming of photography in Turkey was unusually late considering the fact that it was part of the Ottoman Empire, which some consider as a homogenous region where social, political and cultural developments were taking place simultaneously. In reality, this mythical vision of an 'imagined' Ottoman community was rarely corroborated. Where photography in Egypt started



**Nazif Topcuoglu**, A Pre-Raphaelite picture, 2011, c-print, Edition of 5 + 2AP, 90x61cm - Courtesy of Green Art gallery.

almost as soon as the machine was invented in 1839, in Turkey photographs only began meandering into the social scene in the 1850s. The earliest studio was set up in Istanbul in 1850 by a Greek man, Basil Kargopoulo. Unlike the case in India where the early photographers were always attempting to document the resistance movements against the British, the photographic scene in Turkey was more anthropological, with photographs of architectural landmarks and street scenes gaining popularity. A steady stream of photographers followed the demands of the market and in 1855 James Robertson opened his own studio followed by the famous studio of the Armenian family, Les Frères Abdullah, which opened in 1858.

Orientalist photography, like in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, concentrated on ethnographic and anthropological studies. Photographers were genuinely

curious to know more about the modern life of the local peoples, especially within their respective metropolises, such as Istanbul. The surge in photographs of villages only came about after the Second World War. Alongside this interest in Istanbul from scholars, tourists, artists, painters, art historians, journalists and commercial photographers coming from abroad – predominantly Britain and France – local photographers were beginning to emerge, including art photography. These photographers were helped by the publication of several books during the middle of the nineteenth century on photographic techniques. These included Sarkis Der Torosyan's *Risale-yi fotograf* (Istanbul, 1866), Turkish in Armenian characters, which was followed by Husni's *Risale-yi fotografya* (Istanbul, 1872), in Arabic characters, and other Turkish works.

The Ottoman army took upon this initiative to train the military in photography for intelligence purposes, as well as to document the course of the fighting, especially useful during the First World War. To show the solidarity between the Ottoman Empire, Germany and Austro-Hungary, group photographs of Sultan Mehmet Resat V, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Kaiser Franz-Josef were circulated. Previous to this however, Mahmud II had his portrait publicly displayed, and Abdulaziz, a great patron of photography, appointed the brothers Vichen and Kevork Abdulla as Court photographers in 1862. These brothers were commissioned to create a photographic archive of social, educational and military inventions to modernize Abdulhamid II's empire. In 1914 the Ottoman Photographic Society was founded. This institutionalized the photographic form, helping to give it wider recognition and legitimation, and assisted artists and photographers, thus expanding the photography market in the Ottoman Empire.

The Photographic Society was to play a fundamental role in propelling forth fine art photography in Turkey, as well as in the rest of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of this milestone in the development of institutionalized photography, several institutions have been founded which aim to promote photography in Turkey and internationally. Examples of this include Galata Fotografhenesi, an organization founded in 2004, which organizes education and vocational workshops and events to assist in the development of photographers,

both amateur and professional. Another fundamental institution, the Turkish Photography Foundation (TFSF), founded in 2003, has helped to build on the Ottoman Photographic Society, accelerating the growth of photography as a fine art in Turkey. This was helped by the founding of the Republican Constitution in 1924, which recognized the freedom of association, the same year in which a great interest in art and culture bloomed. During 1932 and 1950 over 400 community centres opened in various urban and rural areas, creating a distinct artistic platform for the educated elite and the less educated rural inhabitants. This contributed to the creation of a national consciousness. It was during this same period that courses, exhibitions and competitions were held. It was the educational aspect, coupled with these events, which assisted the rise of many of Turkey's leading photographers.

One of these photographers was Sinasi Barutçu (1906 – 1985). He was Turkey's first fine art photography instructor (Türkiye Gazi Education in Ankara, in 1950), who founded the first photography magazine, the first photography club TAFK (Turkey Amateur Photo Club) and the first colour photography exhibition in Turkey. Other institutions exist in Turkey such as the Turkish Photography Foundation, TFSF and the Photography Academy which, since 2009, has been providing short term photography courses.

The Galata Fotografhenesi founded in 2004 has also been organizing several workshops and events surrounding photography.

In the light of proliferous historical interest in photography, it is a wonder that there exists in Turkey today only one gallery that specializes in Turkish and international photography. The Elipsis Gallery in Istanbul specializes in both Turkish and international photography, showing the likes of Michel Comte, David Drebin and Jose Maria Mellado. One group of photographs which caught my eye – and should by no means catch your eye too – are those by Ferit Kuyas. These photographs look at the architectural city scape of Chongqing, China, produced as a series of foggy images, very much like T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*. I can almost hear Eliot's voice, reading back lines such as:  
 What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, You cannot say,

or guess, for you know only A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, And the dry stone no sound of water. For when I looked at these image, I could see how ambition that grows in the city is no better than sterile branches that 'grow out of this stony rubbish'. Grottesquely excessive consumer spending, the speedy race to build the greatest towers and skyscrapers, and the irreversible destruction to natural habitats has bred a lifeless city, a city without humans suffice the policeman who serves as an agent of surveillance. Another artist whose works hinges on similar themes is Ali Taptık.

In a photographic portfolio more concerned with human agency, we come to the works of Nazif Topçuoğlu. I never quite understood the significance of drawing upon classical paintings until I began auditing Dr Tania Tribe's 'Approaches to Critical Interpretation & Aesthetic Theories' class here at SOAS. Sitting in the back of the class one day, staring unblinkingly into the data projector's screen, thinking of how I was to approach Turkish photography and the looming deadline ever coming closer, I thought I saw one of Topçuoğlu's photographs. Taking a better look and focusing my vision, I found that it was not Topçuoğlu's familiar photographs, but classical paintings by Artemesia Gentileschi. The profuse presence of bodies caught up in uncomfortably knit spider webs, the detailed backgrounds and props, the lavish linens and tapestries, and the enigmatic energy emanating from the canvas, are similarities too close not to draw comparisons with Topçuoğlu. But instead of narrative Biblical stories, our photographer here is more interested in representing youth, and especially gender roles, the male gaze and generally surveillance. The women in his images are all young and liberated from socially preconceived notions of roles and ideals.

There are a notable number of artists who use photography as part of their oeuvre, including Hale Tenger, Kutlug Ataman, Halil Altindere, Hussein Chalayan, Nilbar Gures, Huseyin Bahri Alptekin, Extrastruggle. Other photographers such as Ansen Atilla, Merih Akogul, Ferit Kuyas, Bashir Borlakov, Kezban Arca Batibeki, Murat Germen and Ahmet Ertug. Ahmet Ertug is one of the most well-known from this list. Photographing private libraries, his subject is concerned with the

mass collection of knowledge, the private minutiae of epistemological archives. The irony however, is that despite the apparent seclusion of the library from any human intervention, the architectural grandeur and intricate interior seem to suggest otherwise.

With elaborately decorated ceilings, gilded coving and bookshelf structures, the foundation of our culture and human civilization today stands neatly arranged in rows. His images of opera houses, architecture and sculpture from Byzantine, Ottoman, Roman and Hellenistic periods speak of a deep love affair with past glory, with the fusion of European and Near Eastern cultures. Due to the position of Turkey itself, in between various cultures and regions such as continental Europe, the Mediterranean and the Islamic Middle East, the detail, width of angle and vibrant colours suggest an informed eye which is more intellectually rigorous than photography by other artists. This could be due in part to the fact that Ertug is also an active scholar who writes profusely on art and architecture. Such an eye lends depth and clarity to the images produced.

### **South East Asia: China**

As in the case of almost every other non-Western region, photography was introduced to China during the beginning of what became known as high imperialism. Western diplomats, tourists and missionaries felt compelled to document their fascination with China's foreignness, according to Frances Terpak, curator of photographs at the Getty Institute in Los Angeles who is interested in 19th century Chinese photography. It did not take the native Chinese very long to adapt to this new technology and photo portraiture was soon in full swing. What is interesting to see is that in the Chinese context, photographers were often painting calligraphic text over their images in the style of the 'literati' painters, a school of amateur painters and poets.

The calligraphy does not exactly read as poetry – instead the texts functioned as a tool of marketing for the new, urban Chinese photography studios – but it is interesting to see how a distinctively Chinese stamp was made to integrate the western mode into Chinese culture and experiences. This is a technique still used in Chinese contemporary photography today, but one which has also been acquired by other photographers

such as Shirin Neshat in Iran, although Shirin's words are actually lines of canonical Iranian poetry.

It is interesting to note how cultures have not simply borrowed the Western-imported instrument of photography, but have adapted it to suit their own cultural and historical experiences. Let us take a peek into what China was going through at the time to fully understand why this adaptation became necessary, and why a new medium was indispensable to document and explore these new found ideas and realities. During the latter years of the nineteenth century, China saw an unprecedented growth in Western and Japanese capitalistic penetration, which helped to goad China from an agriculture economy to industrialization. As a result of the rise in industrial and capitalist businesses, urbanization simultaneously took place with the knock on effect of causing a large number of people to move to China's urban metropolises. As one scholar has suggested, the clash between Chinese and Western values created a 'destabilising conflict' in the nineteenth century, where 'Chinese intellectuals were attempting to grapple with the implications of the powerful scientific and technical knowledge and related social and political ideas that were arriving from the West: they attempted to incorporate ideas and concepts that they considered necessary to strengthen China's defenses and economy while tenaciously preserving values they perceived as essentially and unchangeably 'Chinese'.

It is in such a heated cultural and political environment that photography flourished; the urban metropolises were the first to embrace photography as a popular medium of self expression, so much so that courtesans, such as the Empress Dowager Cixi, were fans. In fact, Dowager Cixi's photographer was a woman who could not handle the camera well. She was sent to study under the supervision of a French photographer in order to return and take photos of the court ladies. These images were displayed at the imperial court, in people's homes, and were even given as presents in aid of social mobility and networking. In contrast, the rural populations of China were strongly critical and even afraid of the camera, going as far as to believe that the camera could steal a person's soul.

Despite the dichotomous approach to photography, tensions soon gave way to a flourishing photography scene. One of the earliest photographers was Lang Jingsham (1892 – 1995). His style was not so much about portraiture as it was about fine art photography; he attempted to make his photographs look like landscape paintings and even painted on top of his photographs. He was the director of The Photographic Society of China for 42 years. Photography books were also popular during this early period, thus Chinese landmarks and famous sights were frequently photographed, published and sold for the international market. Later in the 1940s and 1950s fine art photography withered away. This

**Wang Qingsong**, Follow him, 2010, C-print, 130x300cm - Courtesy of the artist.



started from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, but was replaced with the use of photography for commercial and documentary purposes. Travellers and tourists used photographs and made postcards out of them, prostitutes used their photographs on cards to advertise themselves, and the family of a deceased would take a portrait photo of the dead whilst the body was painted. The absence of photography during this period was followed in the 1980s by a strong return of the repressed artistic genre as artists began to explore its different uses, which in turn led various exhibitions to be set up. Today, the expression of Chinese identity is at the forefront of Chinese photographers' concerns. In addition, there are still some social taboos that artists are trying to grapple with, such as homosexuality and nudity. Cai Guoqiang (b. 1957) is one of China's leading contemporary fine art photographers, whilst also working with other media and as a curator. His vision straddles political controversy and a deep understanding of philosophical issues. Very recently at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Guoqiang exhibited his first solo exhibition in the Middle East.

Wang Qingsong employs more humour to depict the uncanny absurdity of western cultural and economic hegemony through the lens of globalization and brand names. I find his approach quite problematic, as China is more than the west's back garden. China is actively involved in world consumerism, not just as a consumer market, but also as producers. For if you look at a lot of clothing labels, what do we see other than 'Made in China'. I do not think such a clear cut stance can be made here. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how Qingsong subverts commercial photography to make a commentary on the direction that Chinese culture is heading. As well as denouncing such economic tentacles, Qingsong is equally critical of certain practices in China. One of these is the educational establishment and the drive embedded in Chinese Confucian philosophy of complete obedience and submission to parents and elders to the extent that even if individuals strive to become active intellectuals in society this becomes a tool to earn the favor of one's family.

Wang Jinsong is a Chinese painter who has worked with video and photography. Like Qingsong, he is concerned with the country's drive to modernity by following



**Hong Hao**, 10 years chinese Contemporary, 2006, digital photo, edition of 12, 127x218cm - Courtesy of Chinese Contemporary.

Western family models as in the case of China's one child policy. Hong Hao chooses to take a different track, making personal accounts of himself to reflect on wider societal changes. Such work is in tune with Maha Malluh, who employs personal objects to comment on Saudi Arabian society's race for brand exclusivity and associated social prestige, globalization, the advent of the petrodollar, the subsequent erosion of traditional values (not forgetting the role of the religious clergy in shaping much of the short-sightedness prevalent in Saudi society) in her photographs.

Similarly, using material culture, Hong Hao opens up his life to us, showcasing in his photographs objects that have been part of him, part of Chinese culture, and an important part of the general world culture driven by consumerism. If we look at these images closely, they become quite familiar, whilst also strangely 'unheimlich' to use Freud's term. Hao is very much a critical figure in the way that he creatively shifts epistemological, and here I am thinking cartographically, paradigms: in his series *New World Order*, the world is reoriented not to define states according to official names of countries and cities, but according to the presence of global corporations, economic and military strength.

Cui Xiuwen, whose earlier shock and awe tactics of bringing underground sexual practices into the limelight in contemporary China by taking photographs of prostitutes in brothels earned her the first lawsuit against an artist, is heavily occupied by gender anxieties and concerns in contemporary China. Not stopping after coming under state scrutiny for her radical outspokenness, Xiuwen has become more subtle in her opprobrium of how women have found themselves in



brothels as a response to the booming Chinese economy and the necessary social imbalances this entails. Instead, her later works have focused on the experience of maternity by single women and the loneliness this can cause in between the Chinese megalopolis and cultural tradition. In the image below, we can see how the subject is thrown at the feet of a Chinese temple. It seems that this young girl has been abused as discarded from the red patches under her eyes. Sadly, the girl has no one to turn to, dejected and ostracized from society.

There are many other artists and photographers whose works it would have been a privilege to discuss. Unfortunately these pages are not ample to do them justice. For those with a keen eye for photography in the international scene, there are a large number of artists whose determination to communicate their societal and humanistic concerns need a more detailed study. Such artists include Qui Zhijie, Chen Jiagang, Cang Xin, Zhang Huan, whose photographs I advise are not for the faint hearted, as well as Hong Lei, Zhang Dali, Huang Yan.

### **Afterword**

I have had a long think about how to conclude this essay, how to give the final word. But, as this is a history, there really is no final word. In fact, I hope that this modest piece of research will culminate in a far grander project which aims to complicate the simple statements that I have made, for there is always fruit in constructive criticism and the rewriting of any epistemology. It is on this note of constructive criticism that I now turn, and rather than conclude, I will briefly comment on some more recent developments of the genre.

Arab Photography Now, edited by Rose Issa and Michket Krifa, is a book recently launched. Claiming to chart North Africa and the Middle East's 'leading' photographers of today, it is unusually limited in scope. I mean 30 artists only! Really? To select thirty artists, and to state verbatim that these are the leading figures seems strangely hyperbolic. Where is Shadi Ghadirian? Steve Sabella? Halim Alkarim? and all those artists and photographers who are continuing to shape our perception of the world around us? This does not mean that the artists mentioned do not deserve to be included in the book's project and scope. On the contrary, these artists indeed all have a profound message to communicate via their photography. However, my concern is that art critics, curators and gallerists put their favoured artists on such a pedestal that the audience, or public, or viewer, is not told that these selected artists are indeed a handful of a wider many. My second, but also lesser, concern is the choice of title. Why is the title specifically 'Arab', only to be told later that the photographers are from North Africa and the Middle East? Shouldn't it be the other way round? Shouldn't the title be broad, and then later narrowed down? For the term 'Arab' excludes Iran, which is part of the Middle East. Anyway, enough of that. Let me speak of an exhibition, which opened earlier in October 2011 at London's Tate Britain: Gerard Richter: Panorama. Unlike the early photographers of the nineteenth century, who drew inspiration from paintings in order to be accepted in the fine art circles of elitist Paris, Gerard Richter turns the tables and employs photographs, not the fine art type of photography I have discussed here, but journalistic photography and commercial photography, that has a more direct approach than fine art photography.

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## About the writer

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13. Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
14. Jacob M. Landau, *Exploring Ottoman and Turkish History* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004).
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16. *Brush & Shutter: Early Photography in China*, Edited by Jeffrey W. Cody and Frances Terpak
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19. John Falconer at the British Library is possibly one of the better scholars to refer to
20. Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India*
21. C A Bayly, 'Traces of India', *The Raj India & the British* (1600-1947)

## End Notes

- i. Charles Pinney, 'Photo of the gods': *the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2003).
- ii. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- iii. *Ibid.*
- iv. Martha Mitter, *Indian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- v. Sudeshna Guha, 'Introduction' in *The Marshall Albums: Photography and Archaeology* (New Delhi: Mapin: Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2010).
- vi. KG Pramod, Email to writer, 22 April 2011.
- vii. Pinney, 'Photos of the gods', p. 62.
- viii. *Ibid.* p. 93.
- ix. Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 119
- x. [http://news.getty.edu/press\\_materials.cfm#2-3-5553](http://news.getty.edu/press_materials.cfm#2-3-5553)
- xi. For a detailed bibliographical note on the history of photography in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey see Jacob M. Landau, *Exploring Ottoman and Turkish History* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004).
- xii. Of course, there are a number of galleries who represent artists who use photography as well as photographers. One of these is x-ist based in Istanbul, Turkey.
- xiii. T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland', ll. 19-24.
- xiv. Michael Dillon, *China: A Modern History* (London; New York: IB Taurus 2010), p. 5.