

Becoming friends with Chinese writers, artists and film people, I felt comfortable and at ease whenever I was around them or their friends. Consequently, I did not consider myself as a complete outsider when I attended film events and met new people in Beijing and Shanghai during my sabbatical.

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In fact, I was beginning to feel more at home and freer in China than I had been in the U.S. for decades. I am of the generation of 1968. My personality has been shaped by the intensity of the struggle for racial equality, the anti war movement, the confrontational spirit of left wing politics and the excitement of living in San Francisco during the mid and late 1960s. Therefore, I experienced the important cultural events in China during 2001 and 2002 as a return to my roots.

### 10 YEARS OF QUEER CINEMA IN CHINA BY NORMAN SPENCER

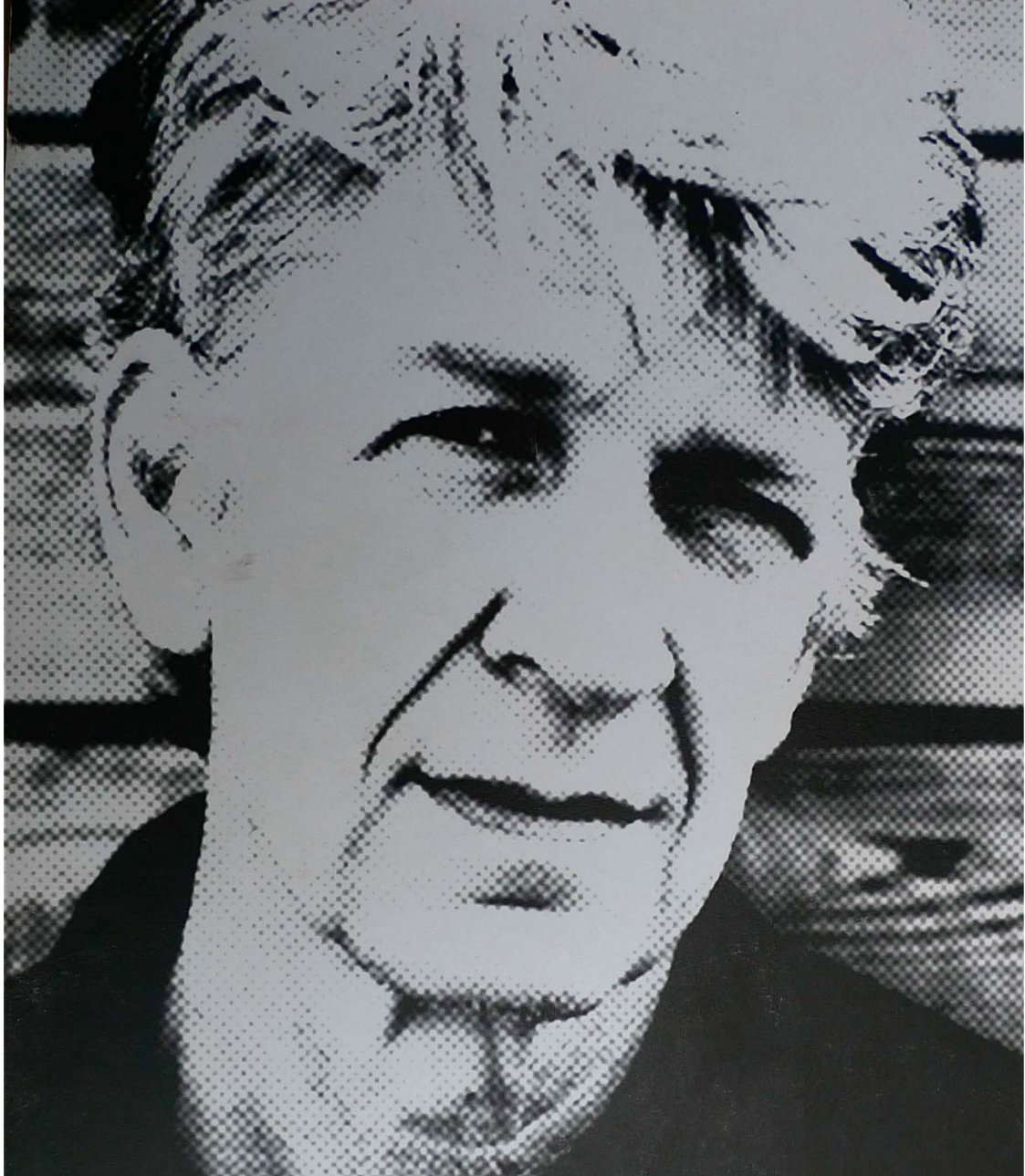


#### NORMAN SPENCER

Norman A. Spencer, Ph.D. has taught at universities in Africa, China and the United States including Tianjin Foreign Cultures University in China from 1982-1983 and China Communications University in Beijing from 2001-2002. He has written on African, West Indian and African American culture and politics. He edited with Shirley Geok - Lin Lim *One World of Literature* (Houghton Mifflin, 1993.) He edited and wrote the introduction for Yan Li's book *Things Are Symbols of Themselves* (Shanghai, 2006.) An interview with him about his cultural activities in China was published in Bei Dao's *Jintian* (Today) in Hong Kong in 2007. He published a photography memoir with commentary on Chinese independent and underground cinema in the twentieth anniversary issue of *Positions: Asia Critique* (Duke University Press, 2012) And his photography book *I Experience the World Through My Lens* was published by Artron Art Group / Yachang Beijing in 2014. A selection of his photography appeared in Yang Lian's *Xing Cunzhe* (Survivor) in Beijing in 2017. And an exhibition of his photography is scheduled for October, 2017 at the University of California San Diego.

Professor Spencer was active in the Civil Rights Movement in the American South during the early 1960s. He attended the Highlander Folk School where the famous song "We Shall Overcome" originated. He was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) while he was a student at Sewanee: The University of the South which was racially segregated during this period. Later he fought in the Vietnam War as a seaman in the U.S. Navy but was active in the anti-war movement when he returned to the U.S. He did a M.A. at San Francisco State University when it was a center for the Black Arts Movement and later wrote a Ph.D dissertation under the direction Amiri Baraka/ LeRoi Jones, the radical African American writer, intellectual and political activist, at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Professor Spencer currently lives in New York City and is a full time professor of English at State University of New York at Nassau. He is married to Peng Xiaojian (Shanghai, 1974). They have a house in a Bai (minority) village near Old Dali in Yunnan Province in the south of China where they spend their vacations and sabbatical leaves.



## THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF NORMAN SPENCER: AN EXHIBIT

October 10, 2017



穿过语言的镜头

# Being There

By Chris Berry

Norman Spencer's photographs of figures from the world of the Chinese arts and academia, beginning from the 1990s, are very compelling to look at. But it is not easy for me to put my finger on what makes them so fascinating. Many of the subjects are celebrities, like the film director Jia Zhangke or the author Mianmian. But the pictures are not depthless icons, like Warhol's celebrity portraits. Nor are they like the documentary photography I often see coming out of China. Yes, they are very casual, but they are not shots of street China. Sometimes the subjects strike a careful pose and look at the camera, but in a manner too relaxed to be confused with publicity portraits shot by a commercial photographer. Some of the pictures are taken in clubs, or on movie sets, but they do not have the ambushed look of paparazzi shots, either...

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They seem to capture the moment from the perspective of someone who was there long enough to be part of the scene, not an outsider hovering around the edges. Of course, not many people get this close to celebrities, and even fewer non-Chinese speaking foreigners get to hang out in this way. I have been researching China for years, and I also recognize some of the people in this book as friends whom I have known for years. But I do not think I really pass time with them in the way that these photos suggest Norman does.

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Perhaps this sense from the photos of being there is Norman's contribution to what the Chinese call the "xianchang" aesthetic. Xianchang is a term you find on your television screen to let you know you are watching a live feed. It conveys that sense of being in the moment, of contingency, and experience. It is a term that people have been using ever since the early 1990s.

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Norman's photographs also make me think about how and why we should remember the past, and specifically China's recent past. And what does it mean to take these seemingly private, even ephemeral moments, out of the photo album and publish them? Of course, part of it is the pure pleasure of looking at a photo of someone I know but have not seen for a while. There's documentary director Du Haibin, and how bright that smile of his is! And the man many see as the father of Chinese independent documentary, Wu Wenguang, is on the same page, surprisingly pensive for someone otherwise confident and even commanding. But is the pleasure of these photos only a sort of nostalgia? It is only about turning the page and saying to myself with a sigh, "those were the days"?



Chris Berry is Professor in Film Studies at King's College, London University.



Norman A. Spencer (Ph.D., SUNY Stony Brook) taught at China University of Communication in 2001-2002 and has published on Chinese art, literature and film. Through his connection with Beijing artists and his field base in Dali, Yunnan in Southwest China, he has closely followed the development of Chinese independent filmmaking. Bei Dao's Hong Kong-based journal *Today* (Jintian) carried an interview with Professor Spencer on his cultural activities in China in 2007. Professor Spencer's photography memoir "*10 Years of Queer Cinema in China*" appeared in the twentieth anniversary issue of *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* (2012), a leading academic journal published by Duke University Press.

Professor Spencer's photographs captured the intimate moments of key players in Chinese alternative culture, especially queer cinema. The collection of his photographs enhances the UC San Diego Library's world-renowned reputation as the best place to study underground and independent Chinese cinema.

By Yingjin Zhang

Yingjin Zhang is the Distinguished Professor of Modern Chinese Literature at UC San Diego.



Yan Li & Liu Sola



Zhang Yimou, film director



Zhou Xun & cinematographer



THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF NORMAN SPENCER



Ai Weiwei, artist & political activist



Shi Tao & friends



Zhao Tao, actress



Bei Dao, poet



Cui Zi'en, film director & friends



Mian Mian, writer & actress



Zhang Yang, film director, Yu Er, dancer & Cao Weiyu, actor



Yue Minjun, artist, Huo Feng, singer & Tao Hong, actress



Zhang Ziyi, actress



Wu Wenguang, independent film director



Jia Zhangke, film director

