

Beijing Index

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We all give priority to the objectivity of photographs; however, everyone has to make a subjective choice when they shoot photographs. We have to choose the theme, the location and the time of shooting; we have to choose the people and objects entering the frame; we also have to choose the aperture and the shutter speed, etc. If we really do not know what to shoot, we can choose to shoot first and select later. We can choose a few out of a whole bunch of pictures on our own or we can ask someone else to choose for us. After selecting a few, we can leave the other pictures unattended or pigeonholed and wait for later generations to choose again. Think about how we handle pictures left by early generations? It seems like we kept all of them: some have artistic values and some have documentary values; so it is wrong to destroy any of them. Further more; even if we kept all photographs, it is far not enough to restore the past. Thus, the question is still how we make choices when shooting. Maybe we do not need to choose at all. There is a reason for choosing and not choosing: the former is more subjective and latter more objective; the former is more expressive and latter more documentary.

Therefore, I chose to use Seitz Roundshot. This way, I do not have to choose the shooting angle, because it is a 360 degree view. However I shoot it, It includes the front, the back, the left and the right. I would take a map of Beijing and draw meridians and parallels of equal distance. The crossing points of those meridians and parallels would be my shooting locations. Whether those locations are important or not important, interesting or not interesting; I would set up the camera and take a photograph in order to shoot something that's not planned. I just wanted to shoot more, and then some more. When we talk about objective recording, how objective is objective? How complete is complete? Maybe it is never too much; the more the better.

Those photographs were shot everyday from May 2007 to August 2008 (some of them were shot in May 2009) and lasted for one and a half years. I have used several thousand rolls of film to take photos on the intersections of meridians and parallels in Beijing, as a full-length documentary panorama; I was trying to record the changes, the culture and the everyday lives of Beijing during this period to its utmost completeness.