

The Poverty Line

Photography and text by Stefen Chow, Lensculture.com 2013.

WHAT IS POVERTY?

Poverty is hard to define, even though it is a term that we use very often.

The Poverty Line project is an attempt to show what it means to be poor, by taking photos of daily amounts of food you can buy if your income lies at the poverty line. The Poverty Line explores a simple question: what does poverty mean in different countries?

Each picture denotes the food choice a poor person will have in a particular country, once a day, at the time the photo was made. The food is presented as a simple still life on top of local newspapers from the same day the food was purchased at public markets.

The project is a collaboration between photographer Stefen Chow and economist Hui-Yi Lin, which began in China in 2010 and has since expanded to 24 countries across 6 continents. The Poverty Line uses the universal lens of food to examine the choices you would face if you lived at the poverty line.

We are not simply trying to compare poverty in different countries; we want to create a way to understand poverty within the context of a single country. By first calculating a per-person, per-day expenditure based on the country's national poverty line, we produced a visual representation of everyday food items that would be accessible within that country for that amount of money. Where possible, we selected foods particular to that locality. We faced challenges in determining a method that would be feasible across different countries' systems, and this project our way of bringing all this information together in one accessible, yet eye-catching visual presentation.

After viewing these images, we hope that viewers will leave with an increased awareness of poverty and food issues in countries around the world, and engage in discussion with others.

The project has been a grand prize winner at the Arles Photography Open Salon, nominated for the Prix Pictet and a finalist for the Hong Kong WYNG foundation prize. It has been exhibited in France, Georgia, Germany, Malaysia, Hong Kong including a solo exhibition at the Three Shadows Gallery in Beijing, China. It has also been stated as a reference by the World Bank for a visual understanding on poverty.

— Stefen Chow

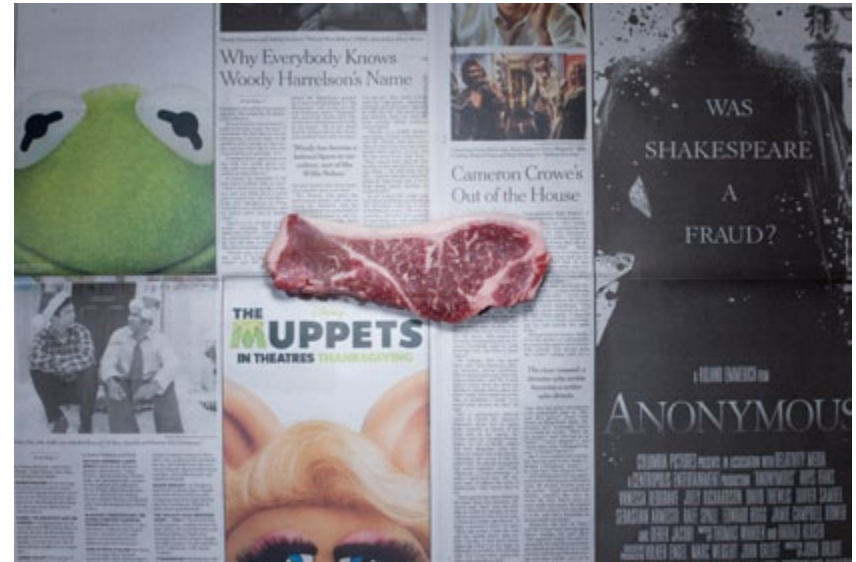
Be sure to visit The Poverty Line website — it is rich with information and a model for how to use photography as a visual reference to explain complex ideas. Also watch this short video as Stefen Chow explains this project in a TED Talk:



Link to original article: <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/stefen-chow-the-poverty-line#slide-1>



Chicken Drumsticks. Beijing, China. April 2012. 6.30 renminbi (0.99 usd, 0.75 euros) © Stefen Chow



Beef Steak. New York, USA. October 2011. 4.90 dollars (3.60 euros) © Stefen Chow



Cheese Burgers. New York, USA. October 2011. 4.90 dollars (3.60 euros) © Stefen Chow



Vegetarian Burgers. Noida, India. December 2011. 32 Indian Rupee (0.60 usd, 0.46 euros) © Stefen Chow



Cabbages. Noida, India. December 2011. 32 Indian Rupee (0.60 usd, 0.46 euros) © Stefen Chow



Bananas. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. December 2011. 2.33 Brazilian Real (1.23 usd, 0.93 euros) © Stefen Chow



Bananas. Antananarivo, Madagascar. September 2011. 127.37 Malagasy Ariary (0.64 usd, 0.51 euros) © Stefen Chow



Apples. Dubai, UAE. September 2014. 11.08 Emirati Dirham (3.02 usd, 2.30 euros) © Stefen Chow



Scallops. Sydney, Australia. August 2011. 7.52 Australian Dollar (8.02 usd, 5.61 euros) © Stefen Chow



Radish. Arles, France. November 2011. 5.60 Euros (7.68 usd) © Stefen Chow



Black Rice. Arles, France. November 2011. 5.60 Euros (7.68 usd) © Stefen Chow



Plain Buns. Beijing, China. April 2012. 6.30 renminbi (0.99 usd, 0.75 euros) © Stefen Chow