

# BRUSH TALKS

*A Journal of China*

Vol. 2 No. 1 Winter/Spring 2017



# Brush Talks: A Journal of China

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*Brush Talks* publishes compelling nonfiction, along with photographs and occasional poetry, about China. We publish two issues per year and accept unsolicited submissions on a rolling basis. For more information, please visit [www.brushtalks.com](http://www.brushtalks.com).

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*Because I had only my writing brush and ink slab  
to converse with, I call it Brush Talks.*

SHEN KUO 沈括

(1031–1095)

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## Editor's Note

Welcome to the first issue of volume two of *Brush Talks*, marking the beginning of our second year. As we continue to grow and evolve, readers will notice some slight changes along with much that is familiar. For example, our cover has undergone some subtle design changes for a cleaner look and we highlight a single poet in this issue instead of presenting the work of different poets. Aside from the cover design, we do not consider these changes permanent; rather, as the journal's basic format remains the same, some variations will be made from time to time as opportunities arise to try different approaches.

This issue happens to coincide with the threat of losing the PBS television program *Sesame Street* to budget cuts. As Elizabeth Jaeger's essay reminds us, Big Bird and the rest of the gang have long inspired children; after reading her essay, you'd be hard-pressed not to want this inspiration to continue for future generations. Our interview with Bai Hongfeng presents one man's entrepreneurial spirit and how individuals in China today can reap the benefits of changes to the economic system made almost four decades ago. Our portfolio of photographs then shows the result of this: rising incomes for middle-class Chinese. Photographer Chris Round takes us on a cruise with Chinese vacationers as they travel from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Our second series of photos, by Alex Djordjevic, sticks to the heart of China, with street scenes from Beijing. And poet Chen Kerong takes us out west to her native Sichuan, where she depicts a youthful, modern Chengdu while also paying homage to her roots.

Looking ahead, we plan to devote a future issue to the theme of immigration related to the Chinese diaspora and are putting out a call for submissions. Please visit our website for more details.

Brian Kuhl

## Contributors

**Bai Hongfeng** (白宏锋) is a professor of biology at Huzhou University in Huzhou, Zhejiang. His website is [www.tell-se.com](http://www.tell-se.com)

**Chen Kerong** (陈科蓉) is a graduate student at Penn State University, studying for an M.A. in fiction writing. She is from Leshan, Sichuan and often writes stories about her hometown. Her poetry has previously been published in the literary journal *Cha*, and she is currently working on a novel based on her high school experiences.

**Alex Djordjevic** is a cinematographer, producer, and photographer whose work focuses mainly on social and environmental issues. In addition to his full-time multimedia work, he is an adjunct professor of cinematography and lighting at Drexel University. Alex had the opportunity to travel through China with his father in 2015, visiting Beijing, Xi'an, and numerous other towns along the way. He resides in suburban Philadelphia with his wife and two sons. His website is [alexdjordjevic.com](http://alexdjordjevic.com).

**Elizabeth Jaeger**'s work has appeared in *Boston Accent Lit*, *Damfino*, and *Blue Planet Journal*, among other publications. She has also published book reviews in *TLR Online* and has participated in an episode of *No, YOU Tell it!* Twenty years ago she traveled to China to fulfill a childhood dream of walking on the Great Wall of China. When she isn't writing, she likes to read, walk, and hang out with her son. She lives in New Jersey.

**Chris Round** is a fine art photographer based in Sydney, Australia. His photos that appear in this issue were taken on a cruise from Shanghai to Hong Kong in December 2015. His website is [roundtheplace.com](http://roundtheplace.com).



*Taoranting Park, Beijing, 2015*  
*Photo by Alex Djordjevic*

## In Big Bird's Footsteps

by Elizabeth Jaeger

I was eight years old in 1983 when Big Bird went to China. And I never forgot it. The Sunday before Memorial Day, my parents had taken me to a barbecue at the house of one of their friends. That night, the *Sesame Street* special *Big Bird in China* aired for the first time. Minutes before it started, adults rounded up and corralled us kids into the basement. They turned on the television and we gathered around it. Unlike most kids, I did not like television. I preferred to be outside running around or doing anything active. But I was still a kid, and that night, all the parents expected us to be excited about Big Bird. While everyone else chatted enthusiastically, I sulked at the prospect of being cooped up for over an hour. I couldn't wait for the show to end so that I could escape the confines of the house.

Then, about twenty minutes into the show, Big Bird arrived at the Great Wall of China. My boredom spontaneously disintegrated. Enthralled, I sat riveted, jealous. The urgency I felt to walk along that ancient crumbling edifice gripped me like a vise. I needed to get there. And so I made a promise to myself. As soon as I was old enough, I would go.

When the show ended, I slammed opened the back door and sprinted into the yard where the adults — having enjoyed an hour of respite from their children — were engaged in a conversation. Excitement erupted out of me. Rudely, I interrupted the discussion to make a pressing announcement, "I'm going to China!" A moment of silence followed, and when no one responded, I breathlessly repeated, "I'm going to China!"

Patronizingly, a few people patted me on the head. "Sure you will," they said, in the same tone they might have used had I declared that I

wished to be a witch. None of them had ever been to China. So why would I be any different?

\* \* \* \*

In the summer of 1996, the year I graduated from college, I left New York City to teach English in Korea. Around New Year's, I had a week off from work. Remembering that promise I made to myself so many years ago, I decided to fly to Beijing for vacation. I should have been delighted, thrilled by the prospect of making a childhood dream a reality, but anxiety, thick with fear and trepidation, twisted my stomach. At twenty-one, aside from traveling to Seoul for work, I had never traveled abroad. I had never gone anywhere — not even to a neighboring state — alone. How did one go about booking a flight? How could I settle on a place to stay and then make a reservation? And most overwhelming, how would I find my way around a city in which no one spoke English? The more I thought about the trip, the more angst I felt. Soon panic threatened to eclipse desire.

One night at a bar with Jake, a friend and fellow American, I mentioned my intention of going to China. Two beers and a couple of shots of *soju* had numbed my apprehension, and so I could discuss the prospect of going with an enthusiasm that eluded me when I was alone. Confident and adventurous, Jake did not share my concerns. Years before, he had backpacked through Europe so he knew what to do, how to get around, and he loved doing it. One of the reasons he had left his corporate job to become a teacher was because wished to explore more of the world. Of course, he'd be interested in China.

“Were you planning to go by yourself?” Jake asked, flagging down the waiter and ordering another round. “I hadn't given much thought to what I would do that week, but China — yeah, let's go. My buddies back home will never believe it — the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square.”

“Are you serious?” I asked, relief and excitement flowing through me in equal measure.

“If you don't want company —”

“No, no, company is great . . . I just . . . I can't believe you're actually gonna go.”

And it wasn't just Jake. We asked our other friends — John, Kevin, Lauren, and Susan — if they wanted to go and they all said yes. So the planning — the real tangible planning — began and by early November our hotel and plane tickets were booked.

On December 28, I went to bed early, but I couldn't sleep. Excitement buzzed around my head, needling me every time I started to drift asleep. I twisted and turned until the sheets became tangled around my legs. Freeing them, I lay impatiently on my back, folding my hands as if in prayer and staring up at the glow-in-the-dark stars that someone had once pinned to the ceiling. I stared until my alarm went off. Then, jumping out of bed, I bounced into the shower, tossed on some clothes, grabbed a handful of the Christmas cookies my parents had sent, and bounded out the door and over to the subway — our designated meeting spot.

We landed in Beijing in the late morning. As soon as we checked in at the hotel, I wanted to go immediately to the Great Wall, but it wasn't within walking distance; it wasn't even in the city, but on the outskirts, about eighty kilometers away. A visit would have to wait. And so we signed up for a private tour the following day, and then went for a walk around the city. We had a map, but we opted instead to wander aimlessly, see where we ended up. The air was cold and damp, but we bundled up and the adrenaline pumping through our bodies kept us warm.

After a while we came across a Catholic Cathedral. I was surprised. In school, I had learned that communism had wiped out Christianity.

Evidently, my teacher had been wrong, and I wondered, for the very first time, what other misinformation had I been fed in school. I began to understand that if I wanted the truth, I had to go out in search of it, tease it out of the mishmash and propaganda that some mistake as fact.

Buddhism was, of course, more prevalent than Christianity, and so we weren't surprised when we encountered a Buddhist temple. Though I had never been interested in architecture, the traditional Chinese buildings intrigued me. Most of them were painted red, symbolizing luck and happiness. The roofs sloped down on opposite sides of the structures, and the tiles reminded me of tiny ripples on the water. Marching in a straight column down each corner was a parade of mythical creatures. They fascinated me, and for long moments I stared half expecting to see them move. Wandering into the temple's courtyard, we saw monks engaged in a fast-paced game of badminton. The shuttlecock flew so rapidly back and forth that I grew dizzy trying to follow it. Engrossed in their game, the monks appeared not to notice us, and so we pressed forward. At the door to the temple, we removed our shoes and solemnly approached the statue of Buddha. Candles, incense, flowers, and offerings of food stood on an altar. And though I knew practically nothing about Buddhism, I knelt down, bowed my head, and felt a sense of peace, a sense of calm, that had always eluded me in church.

We walked until hunger begged us to stop and then returned to the hotel where we inquired as to where we might get some dinner. The nice man at the desk recommended a restaurant and not knowing any better, we took his advice. I had grown up eating Chinese food and in my ignorance and naiveté, I expected the food in China to be no different. I enjoyed sweet and sour chicken, dumplings, chow mein, General Tso's chicken, and wonton soup. What I ate at home, I expected to find in China. It made sense. It was Chinese food — wasn't it? At

least it smelled like it. The thick scent of fried oil hanging in the room reminded me of Chinese restaurants back home. So when the waiter sat us at a table and handed us our menus, I was completely flabbergasted. Almost nothing was familiar. Alongside chicken, vegetable, and pork dishes — all with strange-sounding names — were items like dog, bull frog, and deep-fried scorpion. I had never been much of an adventurous eater, especially when it came to meat, and so I had no desire to be daring or different. I ordered dumplings because they had always been one of my favorites. When the waiter set them down in front of me, they looked weird, not what I was used to. The wrappings were thin and super crispy, and the meat was chopped, not clumped. I took several bites, but by the time I finished eating, I concluded that I liked those better than the ones at home. Kevin ordered bull frog and swore that it tasted like chicken. Jake couldn't wait to sample the deep-fried scorpion, and was devastated when the waiter told him they had run out. What the others ordered, I do not recollect.

That night I didn't sleep much more than I had the previous night. I couldn't wait to get to the Great Wall. I had waited thirteen years to walk in Big Bird's footsteps, and the moment was finally upon me. Would anyone believe that after all these years my ambition had only grown, expanding until it could not be contained? How many people, how many kids, grow up to realize at least one of their childhood fantasies? As I got dressed and loaded a new roll of film into my camera, I honestly believed that I was the luckiest person. In that instant, I believed that dreams, if you embrace them passionately enough, do have the potential to come true.

John, as always, was running late, and I sat in the tour van growing impatient, excitement coursing through my blood, an electrical current that could not be contained. Finally, he arrived, pulling on his black leather jacket as he ambled out of the hotel. I tried to write in my

journal as we drove north, but like a kid going on vacation for the first time, I could concentrate only on my anticipation. And then, in the distance, the Great Wall rose up into view and a squeal of delight escaped from my throat. *I'm here. I'm here. I'm really here.*

The van stopped and before the driver could pull the parking break I tore open the door, jumped out, and gazed up in awe. Like a colossal serpent, the wall slithers through the countryside. Rising and falling, it follows the contours of the land. The ancient Chinese built the wall in an effort to deter invaders from the north, and much of what remains today dates back to the Ming dynasty. Nothing back home, nothing I had ever seen in the States, was half as old, half as impressive.

“Are you coming?” Lauren asked. “Or do you just intend to gape at it all morning?”

“It’s just so . . . incredible.” It was one thing to see it on television. But in person, I could feel its history, its magnificence pulsing out of it.

The air was cool but not cold, and the sky was gray. Inhaling the mountain air, I caught a hint of snow. Together, the six of us climbed the stairs to the walkway, shedding a layer in the process. We had expected it to be much colder. John and Kevin sat down at a refreshment stand and had a beer. Jake, not wanting to miss anything, wanting to experience as much of the Great Wall as possible, surged ahead of us. If we had left him alone to walk all the way to the end, he probably would have. Lauren and Susan strolled along far behind him. And I wandered somewhere in the middle, somewhere between Jake and the girls, wanting to memorize every stone, every crack, and the feel of the surface beneath my feet. I must have shot an entire roll of film, if not more, shifting the angle of the camera ever so subtly, wanting to capture everything my eyes could see.

We spent the morning at the Great Wall and when it was time to leave, I wanted to stay. I did not want to let go of the moment, but the

moment was letting go of me. And so with one last parting glance, I purchased a black tee shirt with white lettering — *I climbed the Great Wall of China* — and then soberly slunk back into the van.

Snow fell the following day. John was ill and stayed in bed. The girls signed up for a tour of the city, but Jake, Kevin, and I set out to walk to the Forbidden City. According to the map, it wasn't far, and the snow, falling and silencing the city, made the adventure somewhat surreal. Along the way, we passed through Beihai Park. Once upon a time the park served as an imperial garden. I had no doubt that in the summer flowers bloom, adding dabs of vibrant colors to the landscape, but on that morning the snow painted everything white. The only colors we saw were splashes of red, green, and gold which decorated the many pagodas scattered throughout the grounds. White sculpted stone bridges connected various small islands. Walking across them, I felt as though I had traveled back through time, or perhaps simply entered an alternate reality — a fairy tale. On the frozen water, children and adults pushed and pulled each other on makeshift sleds, laughing and genuinely enjoying themselves during the blast of winter weather.

Crossing the street, we arrived at the gates to the Forbidden City. Compared to the throngs of tourists which descend upon the Imperial Palace in the warmer months, the complex was relatively deserted. For long stretches of time, as we explored the various buildings that constitute the Forbidden City, we did not see a single soul. A hushed silence accompanied us as we wandered through history. At first, I was dismayed that a dreary gray veil hung over us. Whatever pictures I took would certainly come out looking drab. But once I put the camera away, I couldn't deny that the snow added a certain charm, a certain mystique. The roofs of the buildings continued to fascinate me as they had when we visited the temple. Yellow was the color of the Emperor and so most of the roofs contain yellow tiles which stood out in stark contrast against the red walls.

Exiting the Forbidden City, we entered Tiananmen Square. I knew of the place only from the news, the massacre that had occurred seven and a half years earlier. In my mind, I saw a crowded gathering place strewn with blood. My eyes settled upon a vast and considerably empty space. A massive portrait of Mao hung on the Tiananmen gate. His dour face staring down at the people proffered the illusion that he was somehow still in control, still making all of the decisions that affected the nation. One of us, probably Jake, noticed an electronic billboard in the distance counting down from a relatively high number. Perplexed by what it might signify, we watched, entranced as we tried to puzzle out its purpose. An answer, however, eluded us. It wasn't until later that day, when we inquired at our hotel, that we learned that clock was counting down the seconds until Hong Kong reverted back to China. I knew that England "owned" Hong Kong, but I didn't know why. I didn't know the history. Again, I thought back to high school, and realized how little I actually learned about non-European countries. My formal education had ended—or so I thought at the time—which meant if I wanted to fill the gaps in my education, I'd have to do myself.

In a few days, we'd be stopping in Hong Kong, a brief detour before returning to Seoul. But I already knew that someday I would return. A week in China wasn't enough. To get to know it, to explore more than just two cities, would require a month or more. And to see the entire world, well I was already beginning to doubt that a lifetime would be enough.

\* \* \* \*

Most kids who watched *Sesame Street* learned to count and to read. Some may even have picked up a smattering of Spanish. But the lesson I learned from Big Bird had far greater consequences and affected my life more profoundly. As a child, the Great Wall completely captivated my attention. My need to get to China superseded all else. I once thought

that if I followed Big Bird and walked on the Great Wall, I would be content. But I was wrong. Instead it inflamed my discontent with the status quo, with staying in one place for too long. As an adult, a mother, I would sit down and re-watch that one *Sesame Street* special with my son. And when I did, I was amazed by how much I had forgotten — practically the entire plot. The Great Wall, contrary to my memory, played only a small role. The story opens with Big Bird discovering a scroll in Chinatown, and on that scroll is a picture of a phoenix. Enchanted, Big Bird decides he must find that phoenix and so he sets out for China, following four distinct pictorial clues. My path may not have involved tangible clues, not like it did for Big Bird, but China broadened my knowledge of the world, it ignited my curiosity. With each succeeding international trip I took, I learned about cultures and histories and people with experiences vastly different from mine. But I also learned how much I didn't know and oftentimes to fill those holes, I planned another trip. In a sense, I followed the hints laid out by my ignorance and instead of leading me to a phoenix, my travels taught me compassion and understanding. Had it not been for Big Bird and the Great Wall of China, I might never have left the comforts of home. And had I stayed, I would have missed countless jewels, adventures that enriched and continue to sustain me. 🌀



*Dazhulan neighborhood, Beijing, 2015*  
*Photo by Alex Djordjevic*

## McDonald's

by Chen Kerong (陈科蓉)

---

We never try to fit in Chengdu.  
You, a French, I, from Leshan,  
don't belong here. Nobody cares.  
This is the city of diversity. But everyone  
makes compromises like KFC,  
it now serves chicken wings of Sichuan flavor.

The key for a franchise to survive is uniformity,  
mais parfois il doit être intelligent. Versatile.  
McDonald's has its pride. Very American.  
It rarely adjusts its menu to local people's tastes.  
Like it or not, it's there, won't change  
for you or me.

Especially at a late winter night,  
when there are not many options,  
when we have little money left,  
too little to call a taxi to go home,  
when we cannot afford to lie  
on the bench in the park, cold.  
The big bright yellow M indicates  
it's the only place open to us.

Chengdu runs nonstop for 23 hours a day, except now.  
At 4 am, when nocturnal animals, finally exhausted,  
return home, when nice kids are still dreaming about tomorrow.  
We are here. It's drizzling outside,  
the street lamps light the road orange.  
If we were on a plane, we would find  
these orange lights indicate city,  
indicate prosperity, indicate humanity.  
But no, the city, shut down, the light —  
an illusion to cover the death of the night.  
Only McDonald's is alive, serving —

The drowsy cashier leans on the counter,  
a drunk man bangs the window,  
a beggar clings to the door, scratching his crotch.  
We sit beside the window, share one hot milk.  
One car or two flashes by, nonstop, a rustle.  
We are forgotten by the night.  
We are hidden under the light, wide awake  
as the only survivors of humanity  
in the silence of a franchise.

## Interview<sup>†</sup>

Bai Hongfeng (白宏锋)

*Bai Hongfeng is an associate professor of biology at Huzhou University in Zhejiang Province, China. He led a team of researchers who discovered a new species of plant in the genus Cardamine, of the family Brassicaceae, found only in China. While a laudable feat in itself, that was not the end of the story. Testing showed that the plant, Cardamine hupingshanensis, is unusually rich in the trace element selenium. It was at this point that Professor Bai began to think like an entrepreneur as well as a researcher.*

**BT:** To begin, tell us a little about where you're from and what it was like growing up. Did you grow up in the countryside or a city? Where did your interest in plants come from? Were you always interested in them (or in the outdoors/nature) as a child?

**BHF:** My hometown is Kaifeng in Henan Province, an ancient city that was the capital of the Song dynasty, but called Bianjing then. Since childhood, I lived in rural areas until the age of 30, when I moved to the city, so I have a special love of nature; the mysteries of nature have been curious all this time. In my childhood, my two favorite things were to catch fish and to dig for voles.

**BT:** And how about professionally? Where did you go to university and what degrees do you have? What is your main job, and how long have you been doing it?

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<sup>†</sup> The interview was conducted as follows: Questions were sent to Bai Hongfeng in English and he answered in Chinese. The translation of questions into Chinese and answers into English was done by Bai Hongfeng and Yang Zhengxin.

**BHF:** I received a master's degree from Hunan Normal University College of Life Sciences, and then went to Huzhou Teachers College in Zhejiang Province, from 2003 to now. I've been at Huzhou Teachers College [now Huzhou University] fourteen years, engaged in teaching biology, and at the same time I also have been dealing with *Cardamine hupingshanensis*.

**BT:** What is the background of this plant? Did you discover it yourself or was it already known?

**BHF:** *Cardamine hupingshanensis* is a plant unique to China, and the local people often eat the wild plant because it tastes delicious. Its habitat is mainly in Hunan and Hubei at the junction of the Huping Mountain area, which lends its name to the plant.

Researchers found this plant for the first time in the 1980s. After looking for information, it was found that there was no record of the plant in Chinese flora; since they didn't find the differences between it and *Cardamine circaeoides*, it had not been treated as a new plant species and announced to the public.

Since 2005, we intended to publish it as a new species of plant in the taxonomy. After reviewing a large amount of information, in September 2006, we completed the article about classification of *Cardamine hupingshanensis* as a new species of plant, and it was published by an American journal of taxonomy called *Novon*.<sup>1</sup>

**BT:** When did you get the idea for your business of growing plants for vitamins, and how did it come about?

**BHF:** In 2005, I had successfully completed the process of moving

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1. See Hongfeng Bai, Liangbi Chen, Keming Liu, and Linhan Liu. "A New Species of *Cardamine* (Brassicaceae) from Hunan, China," *Novon* 18, no. 2 (2008): 135-37.

*C. hupingshanensis* from the wild to the farm and intended to put it on the market as a wild vegetable, but it was not so easy. After all, it takes time for people to accept new things, and educating the market cannot be completed overnight.

In 2008, we suddenly discovered that *C. hupingshanensis* was a plant that was super rich in selenium, and its selenium-enriched capacity was tens of thousands of times that of ordinary plants. So we began to re-examine and study it from the selenium-rich perspective and successfully extracted the selenium protein from the plant.

Selenium is essential as a trace element in the human body. The success of the extraction of plant selenoproteins was exciting because organic selenium from plants is safer than inorganic selenium and has no unpleasant scent, and more importantly, it is soluble. So far, there has been no natural soluble organic selenium from plants, so we provide a new kind of selenium nutritional supplement.

In 2010, we extracted the selenium protein, and in 2011, we started to make selenium protein tablets and had a small amount to test the market. Because it is natural and effective, and from wild vegetables, it has become very popular with people.

**BT:** Do you know why *C. hupingshanensis* is so rich in selenium compared to other plants?

**BHF:** Before 2008, I was also studying *C. hupingshanensis*. In the process, almost all the elements were tested, but we had not tested the plant's selenium content. In 2008, it was by chance we found this plant so rich in selenium.

In the case of selenium-enriched cultivation method, the ability of *C. hupingshanensis* to absorb selenium is tens of thousands of times that of general plants. For example, we grow *C. hupingshanensis* in selenium-

rich soil, and the plant's selenium content is up to 4000 milligrams per kilogram, while the selenium content of general plants is usually only tens of micrograms per kilogram.

**BT:** Where do you grow the plants, and how much quantity is involved?

**BHF:** Now the plant is grown in several places, such as Hunan, Hubei, Henan, and Zhejiang Provinces, but the quantity is not a lot, about 10 hectares, and the yield is not very high, about 15,000 kilograms per hectare. On the whole, *C. hupingshanensis* is not widely cultivated.

**BT:** How do you extract the necessary ingredients to make into pill form? Do you contract with another company to do this or do you have your own factory/processing plant now?

**BHF:** At present, our selenium protein is mainly crude extract because obtaining the pure selenium protein is relatively expensive and the yield of pure selenium protein is very low. The selenium protein crude extract is sufficient as an ingredient for nutritional supplements. We contract with three companies for extraction. We have our own planting farm, but cannot extract the selenium protein, so the production method is consigned processing.

**BT:** What are the health benefits of the pill you sell? And are they as beneficial in pill form as they are in the plant itself?

**BHF:** Selenium protein pills are one of our products, and the main raw material is the selenium protein. Selenium is an essential element of the human body, as an antioxidant and for anti-aging and cancer prevention. As a natural, plant-based selenium protein extracted from wild

vegetables, it is a safer selenium supplement and it can be more effectively absorbed. Eating the plant to get the benefits of selenium is not as effective because the selenium in the cell wall of plants is difficult to absorb since humans don't have the specific enzyme to digest the cell wall.

**BT:** Where do you sell what you produce? And is business good? How much do you sell?

**BHF:** Our market is now primarily mainland China, the main products are selenium protein tablets and selenium protein as a raw material. Some people buy *C. hupingshanensis* as a vegetable, and some buy it as a bonsai plant—after all, this plant stays green in winter. My company was established in 2015, and I gave it the name Sky Selenium. The English name is Tell-Se, meaning telling the story of selenium.<sup>2</sup> The company has just started and sales are good. ☺

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2. The Chinese name he refers to is 天硒, or *tian xi*. He chose that because the character 天 (*tian*) for “sky” sounds similar to “tell” in the English name Tell-Se.

访谈†  
白宏锋

白宏锋是中国浙江湖州大学生物副教授，他领导他的研究团队发现了一种十字花科碎米荠属种下的新植物——壶瓶碎米荠，这种植物是中国独有的。更让人值得骄傲的是，事情并不是这里就结束了。他们检测后发现壶瓶碎米荠富含微量元素硒，也正是这一原因，白教授除了做学术研究外，也开始把壶瓶碎米荠引入商界。

**BT:** 首先，请介绍一下你老家在哪里，成长环境是什么样的？是在城市还是农村？对植物感兴趣有什么起源？孩童时代就喜欢植物和大自然吗？

**BHF:** 我的故乡是河南开封，一座古老的城市，曾经是宋朝的首都，但是叫汴京。从小生活在农村，直到 30 岁才移居城市生活，我对大自然有特殊的热爱，对自然界奥秘比较好奇，一直至今。童年时代，最喜欢的两件事，一是捉鱼，二是挖田鼠。

**BT:** 你的教育背景是怎样的？在哪里念的大学，什么学历？你在从事什么工作？已经工作多久了？

**BHF:** 我毕业于湖南师范大学生命科学学院，并在那里获得了硕士学位，之后到浙江省湖州师范学院工作（现更名为湖州大学），从 2003 年至今，在湖州师范学院已经 14 年了，在从事生物学教学的同时，也一直和壶瓶碎米荠打交道。

**BT:** 能简单介绍下这个植物吗？是你最先发现这种植物的吗，还是之前已经有人发现了？

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† 此次采访以英文提问，白宏锋用中文回答；采访问题翻译为中文，以及回答翻译成英文，由白宏锋和杨正昕共同完成。

**BHF:** 壶瓶碎米荠是中国特有的十字花科植物，味道鲜美，当地人们经常采食，主要分布在湖南和湖北交界处的壶瓶山一带，名字由此而来。

上个世纪 80 年代，第一次被研究者们发现，通过查找资料，发现中国植物志中没有这种植物的记录，但是由于没有弄清它和露珠碎米荠的区别，一直没有当作植物新种对外公布。

从 2005 年，我们就打算将其作为植物新种从分类学方面对外公布，查阅大量资料之后，2006 年 9 月，完成了壶瓶碎米荠作为植物新种的分类学文章后，并将其投向了美国的分类学杂志《Novon》。

**BT:** 你什么时候开始计划做植物提取维他命生意？结果怎么样？

**BHF:** 2005 年，我已经成功地完成了壶瓶碎米荠从野生转到人工种植过程，并且打算将其作为野生蔬菜投放市场，让其早日走向更多人的餐桌，但是这个过程不是那么容易，毕竟人们接受新事物需要一个过程，教育市场也不是一朝一夕能完成的。

2008 年，突然发现壶瓶碎米荠是一种超级富硒的植物，其富硒能力是普通植物的几万倍，所以我们开始重新审视之并从富硒的角度研究它，并成功地从壶瓶碎米荠植株中提取出硒蛋白。

硒是人体必需的微量元素，植物硒蛋白的提取成功是一个令人振奋的消息，因为对人来说，有机硒比无机硒安全的多，并且没有不舒服的气味，更重要的是完全可溶。到目前为止，市场上没有纯天然的可溶性植物有机硒，我们为人类提供了一种全新的硒营养补充剂。

我们 2010 年提取出硒蛋白，2011 年开始把它做硒蛋白片剂并且小批量投放市场试水。它天然有效，并且还是从野生植物中提取的，因此很受人们欢迎。

**BT:** 你知道为什么壶瓶碎米荠的硒含量比其他植物要高吗？

**BHF:** 2008 年以前，我也在研究壶瓶碎米荠，在此过程中，当时几乎所有的元素都检测了，而没有检测植株中的硒含量。2008年，很偶然的机会，发现这种植物超级富硒。

在富硒栽培措施情况下，壶瓶碎米荠的硒富集能力是普通植物的几万倍。比如，我们在富硒土壤里栽培壶瓶碎米荠，植株的硒含量可达 4000mg/kg，而一般的植物硒含量一般是每公斤只有几十微克。

**BT:** 你在哪里种植壶瓶碎米荠？有多少产量？

**BHF:** 现在好几个地方都砸种植壶瓶碎米荠，比如湖南、湖北、河南、浙江等几个省都有部分种植，但数量不是很多，大约有 10 公顷，产量也不是很高，每公顷产量大约 15000 公斤左右，总体看来，壶瓶碎米荠并没有广泛栽培。

**BT:** 你如何从中提取有效成分并把它制成片剂？你和其他公司合作还是自己公司独立生产加工？

**BHF:** 目前我们的硒蛋白主要是粗提物，因为获得纯净的硒蛋白需要比较高的成本，并且纯净的硒蛋白产量非常低。对于作为硒营养强化剂原料来说，硒蛋白粗提物足够了。

有三家公司和我们有业务来往，我们有自己的种植基地，但是没有自己的硒蛋白提取工厂，生产方式是委托加工。

**BT:** 你的产品主要有哪些功效？摄入片剂和直接当做蔬菜食用，功效一样吗？

**BHF:** 硒蛋白片是我们的产品之一，主要原料是硒蛋白。硒是人体必需的元素，具有抗氧化、抗衰老和预防癌症的作用。作为从野生蔬菜里提取出来的纯天然植物硒蛋白，是一种比较安全的硒营养补充

剂，它能够更有效地被吸收。如果食用野生蔬菜补充硒元素的话，也能达到补硒目的，但是植物细胞壁中的硒很难吸收，因为人体没有消化植物细胞壁的酶。

**BT:** 你的产品主要销售到哪些地方？公司效益如何？卖出去很多吗？

**BHF:** 我们的市场现在主要是大陆，主要产品是硒蛋白片、硒蛋白原料，也有些人买壶瓶碎米芥作为蔬菜，一些人买它是为了观赏，毕竟这种植物在冬天里看起来还是比较可人的。

我自己的公司 2015 年才成立，我给公司起的名字叫天硒，英文是 Tell-Se，意思是讲述补硒的故事。公司刚起步，效益还可以的。☺



*Cardamine hupingshanensis* leaf. (Photo courtesy of Bai Hongfeng.)



*Cardamine hupingshanensis* on a farm in Huzhou, Zhejiang. (Photo courtesy of Bai Hongfeng.)



*Beijing, 2015*  
*Photo by Alex Djordjevic*

## Chengdu

by Chen Kerong (陈科蓉)

Tonight, Machu Picchu, still boisterous, though no performance.  
The window, wide open. A small flower, almost withered, on the sill.  
Pretty girls wearing the same make-up cling to blonde foreign kids.  
They look the same to me: blonde hair, blue eyes, straight nose  
as a statue, carved delicately. But you, what's special about you?  
You, a Frenchie: dark brown hair, deep green eyes, hook nose,  
with a little hole on your green T-shirt, bigger and bigger.  
They speak and laugh in broken English and Chinese, drinking  
1664 Blanc, fifty yuan per bottle, fancy French beer.  
We, stand outside, can't pool enough to enter.  
The flower is suffocated by the perfume worn by the girl next to the window.  
You say I'm just jealous: "Do you wanna sit with those rich foreign kids?"

We walk by the long Yulin Road, late at night, just to find a bite  
of egg fried rice, the cheaper the better.  
A frozen beer sounds lovely, *Snow*, cheap Chinese brand,  
ten yuan per bottle, the vendor rips you off.  
Foreigners are rich. They think. Too naive.  
Before a street barbecue stall, we face the street.  
You eat, drink and smoke, *Pride*, ten yuan per pack.  
I grin: "Aren't all the foreigners rich?" You laugh:  
"I gave you a Velvet Underground T-shirt, though."

More and more people, more and more cars  
heading to midnight supper, dancing in clubs.  
There is no space now in Machu Picchu  
for us, we have nowhere to go. All  
you can say: "Don't worry. I'm rich."  
I look at you, pitiful. I don't know who  
I pity. We chip in eighty yuan and leave the bill on the table.  
We don't know if it's enough. We pass  
by Machu Picchu, still boisterous, though no performance.  
The night soon will end.  
We both are leaving Chengdu anyway.

## Portfolio

Chris Round

*Chris Round is a fine art photographer based in Sydney, Australia. He is primarily interested in documenting the everyday world around him, with a particular interest in landscapes featuring human interventions that visually activate their surroundings in strangely compelling ways. He is drawn to spaces that convey surreal or fictitious narratives, fortuitously photogenic environments that he tries to carefully document rather than photographically exaggerate. Some of his work also explores the notion of place in the context of his dual citizenship in Australia and the UK. His work has won awards both locally and internationally, including being shortlisted at the World Photo Awards; a finalist for the HeadOn Landscape prize; winner of Best Architectural Image, Kodak Salon, CCP Melbourne; and winner of the Regional Landscape Prize Perth CLIP award.*

*As well as being a photographer, Round also freelances as a copywriter and art director in the advertising industry. In late 2015/early 2016, he was involved in the making of a pan-Asian TV commercial for a cruise company. It was decided to shoot on a cruise that sailed from Shanghai to Hong Kong, via Okinawa. As Round tells it, “These photos were taken in December 2015 while we were on the ‘shoot recce,’ so there was more free time to roam the ship, observing passengers and their activities. The series was shot on medium format cameras (Pentax 67 and Mamiya 7ii) using my preferred film stock, Kodak Portra — a film that’s known for its ‘real’ tones and low contrast, qualities that suited the conditions I encountered in the East China Sea.”*

*The following pages present photographs from this series, entitled Cruise.*

## CRUISE

The huge social and economic change that has swept across China in recent decades has brought with it the demand for new vacation experiences. Cruise companies are one of the beneficiaries of this demand, with Western-style cruises becoming ever more popular. As well as being a status symbol, cruise holidays are a chance to escape the frenzy of everyday life and the polluted skies of the cities. Cruising also has intergenerational appeal in China, with extended families holidaying together and some elderly members perhaps leaving the country for the very first time. Even during the cooler winter months many cruises remain popular, with passengers taking to the decks and enjoying the various activities.

The images were taken in December 2015 on a cruise from Shanghai to Hong Kong via Okinawa. I concentrated primarily on the outdoor areas, trying to capture a sense of journey through waters that were no doubt new to many aboard the ship. Wandering around this vast floating island, I was drawn to the ever-changing seascapes, views of the ports, and the different aspects of life on deck in the cool East China Sea air.

























**Homeless**  
**— in Chengdu**  
by Chen Kerong (陈科蓉)

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A ladybug crawls on the windowsill.  
In the dried yellow mud scattered  
beneath a broken clay flowerpot,  
I squish it beside a frail withered root  
pulled out by someone long ago.

Twelve years ago, during Spring Festival,  
the beginning of Chinese New Year  
I squeezed another one  
creeping under a clod in front of the grave  
of Grandpa's father, a mound of earth,  
covered with pebbles. On the tombstone,  
moss grew. Grandma kneeled down, praying  
for the fertile land. Before inhumation was  
forbidden, the dead were buried  
on their own farmland.

Twelve years later,  
across from my rented apartment,  
a neon sign flickers now  
beyond the fumes of early morning.  
It reads CICC,  
Chengdu Communications Investment Group,  
right there, above a block of old apartment buildings  
squeezed together, so low, with cement walls  
yellowed and dark windows.  
They are too old to remain.  
*Make Way for the Living!*

Grandma thrust two incense sticks deep  
into the ashes left by joss papers  
made of straw, rough and yellow,  
burnt as ghost money to the dead ancestor.  
Beyond the smoke, two incense sparks flickered  
like two eyes glaring at me, warning  
*Nobody dared to touch the Land for the Dead!*

It was the last time I visited the tomb  
before the land was gone. They had to  
move — the living and the dead.  
There wouldn't be another grave  
where Grandma could kneel  
and bend her head so low  
that her withered hair touched the ground,  
growing into the earth  
like a bough, dried and frosted.



*Dongcheng District, Beijing, 2015*  
*Photo by Alex Djordjevic*