

BRUSH TALKS

A Journal of China

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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 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 first issue of *Brush Talks* for 2019, which marks the beginning of our fourth year. Readers of the past three issues know that we have been fortunate to share a series of essays by Jacob Rawson about his travels to China's sacred mountains. This installment takes us to the coast of Zhejiang, where Mount Putuo beckons. For our interview, we talk with Shu Chutian about her photography and videography as she begins her career after completing an M.F.A. This issue's portfolio showcases the ancient city of Pingyao, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Shanxi Province, as seen through the lens of photographer Stu Sontier. And our poetry selections conjure up nature in spring, with timeless imagery that is instantly recognizable despite being written fourteen centuries ago.

What all these have in common is history, from ancient cities to imperial dynasties to enduring religions. Even the artwork of a newly minted graduate is infused with history, as she builds upon the work previously done by others, both continuing and adapting traditions in the field. In Chinese history, years ending in nine, like this one, call to mind significant anniversaries of the last century: 1919, 1949, 1989. But there are others as well, and this year marks exactly one thousand years since the birth of Sima Guang, one of China's greatest historians. To commemorate him, we include an excerpt from his work *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (资治通鉴). The conversation between the emperor and the imperial censor reminds us of the importance of history — transparent and unvarnished.

Brian Kuhl

Contributors

Li Bo (李白, also romanized as Li Bai) lived from 701 to 762, during the Tang dynasty. He is widely considered among China's best poets.

Jacob Rawson is coauthor of the book *Invisible China: A Journey Through Ethnic Borderlands*. After completing a master's degree in Chinese Linguistics at the University of Washington, he set out to climb the nine sacred peaks of China in 2010. His writings on South Korea have appeared in *Fulbright Korea Infusion*. He lives in Washington State with his wife and daughter.

Shu Chutian (舒楚天) is an artist who recently completed her M.F.A. in Photography at Pratt Institute. Originally from Changsha, China, she currently lives in New York. Her website is chutianshu.org.

Sima Guang (司马光) was a historian and official during the Song dynasty. He lived from 1019 to 1086.

Stu Sontier is a photographer based in New Zealand. His photos that appear in this issue were taken on a trip to Pingyao, in Shanxi Province, in 2016. His website is stusontier.net and his Instagram handle is [@stusontierphoto](https://www.instagram.com/stusontierphoto).

Wang Wei (王维) was a poet and painter who lived during the Tang dynasty. Various sources give his date of birth as either 699 or 701 and his date of death as either 759 or 761.

The Sound of Surf

by Jacob Rawson

Yellow-black mists cover sluggish water

Suddenly the overcast sky breaks open: the sea turns red

Who rides the wheel of fire through snow-white crested tide?

Its red rays like arrows piercing a thousand peaks

—Tu Long, 16th century, from “*Twelve Famous Views of Mount Putuo*”

The slick new Harmony Line glides on its elevated steel bed above drizzly Zhejiang scenery. At 140 kilometers per hour, the fish farms and willows that droop over stream banks fade into an abstraction of enigmatic hues. Inside the train car, smartly dressed passengers sink into upholstered seats and watch movies on tablet computer screens while hooting and coughing into cell phones.

In the money-flush port city of Ningbo, coal-black BMW and Mercedes Benz sedans prowl the sterile boulevards while well-heeled pedestrians quickstep through open-air shopping malls, their patent leather footwear making a rhythmic *click-clack click-clack* on the smooth granite promenade.

As a light rain coats the asphalt and the air grows soft and musky, schoolboys duck under fruit stand awnings and I retreat into a retail center to pass the rain shower in a cineplex. *Lala's Promotion* tells the story of a young woman who works for the Beijing branch of an American company. Conspicuously-placed Lenovo laptops and Lipton tea glasses frame a cursory love story that is wrapped up in an allegory of pure materialistic bliss. Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong would be rolling over in his . . . (darn it) air-conditioned mausoleum.

* * * * *

At a nondescript wharf on Ningbo's industrial coastline, I find my flat-bottomed ferry, white characters meaning *Seagull* stenciled on its sky-blue hull. The vessel pushes off its concrete mooring and motors through the silty Qiantang River estuary past orange-hulled container ships and big red sea cranes. Buddhist-themed karaoke videos run on a large LCD panel bolted to a low bow partition, while septuagenarian pilgrims put hands together and heads down to pray to the digital bodhisattvas and glowing lyrics that scroll across the screen.

*Although I have shed endless tears
Although I have eaten bitterness
I still have a cherished desire
To reciprocate Buddha's grace*

In step with the music, the *Seagull* moves from the river mouth into the open East China Sea and begins to sway in the mounting swell. We glide past lighthouses perched on rocky outcrops, little windowless concrete cylinders with no sign of human occupants. Impossibly buoyant rusted-out fishing vessels list in the wake of an iron-hulled freighter. A fully laden cargo ship sags in front of dusty stone quarries carved out of a once-green coastline, while an empty container ship bares its rudder naked to the wind, its steel ballast just visible below the waterline.

I have come to this coastal region in search of the next sacred mountain, which is not really a mountain at all. Mount Putuo is the name of a small island in the East China Sea, some fifteen nautical miles from the Chinese mainland. The peculiar name makes a bit more sense in etymological context: Mount *Putuo* is the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit Mount *Potalaka*, the mythical home of the Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva. While this bodhisattva is depicted in male form in much of the Buddhist world, she has become a female figure in the Mahayana Buddhism of East Asia. Known as the Goddess of Mercy, she is perhaps the most widely revered bodhisattva in Korea as

Gwan-eum, in Vietnam as *Quan Âm*, in Japan as *Kannon*, and in China as *Guanyin*.

Guanyin is indeed the patron bodhisattva of this mountain-island, and as I step off the rolling gangplank and onto solid asphalt, I look across rows of vendors selling images of her stoic grin and flowing robes, fabricated from plastics, ceramics, and stone.

I sit with the street vendors and inhale a breakfast of rice porridge with “bodhisattva biscuits,” then saunter around the coastal road to a small peninsula that holds such tourist delights as the Giant Statue of Guanyin and the Purple Bamboo Forest. My interest lies in the Cave of Tidal Sounds, where for the past millennium pilgrims have reported seeing apparitions of Guanyin. Just outside the attraction, a large stone tablet proclaims IT IS FORBIDDEN TO OFFER ONE’S LIFE AND SINGE THE FINGERS. A tour guide standing nearby tells her disinterested group that this Ming Dynasty tablet was erected to dispel rumors circulating at the time that devout pilgrims should burn their fingers and ultimately leap into the cave as a fatal act of devotion to Guanyin.

The Cave of Tidal Sounds itself is a narrow opening in a cliff where waves enter a small passage between rocks and rush in between twenty-foot-high walls before crashing inside the cave opening. The residual splash bursts out above the opening, lending an air of pomp to the already boisterous pilgrim scene.

Those who had given up on their hopes of seeing Guanyin strike martial arts poses on top of rock formations, asking monks to take their pictures. As the waves work their way back under the cliff, there is another smaller opening, and this is where the pilgrims of past centuries tossed themselves down the thirty-foot-deep hole to show their devotion. A body thrown into the hole had little chance of surviving, and even a strong swimmer would be powerless against the jarring current that swirls violently below. The slick vertical walls afford no handholds, and it is a long way down to the sea floor. Fortunately, the pilgrims of today elect to throw coins and prayer papers, rather than themselves, into the abyss.

I fall into conversation with a delightfully voluble young monk from Shandong province. His blue tunic and cloth satchel set him apart from the brown tunics of the other monks of the island. He entreats me to study Vipassana, a type of Zen meditation.

“You will meditate for ten days, with no eating at night, and no talking except to the master. The master will listen to your questions. This type of Zen practice is particularly suited to you Westerners. It is very scientific, with none of the pageantry of mainstream Buddhism. No superstitions or myths. It’s like therapy. If it is in your destiny, perhaps you will try it.” He offers an *A-mi-tuo-fó*, then turns back to the cave opening to pray, and I wonder if I have met the world’s first Zen missionary.

After praying, he turns again to test me. “What is the goal of Buddhism?”

“To reach Nirvana,” I answer confidently.

He smiles. “Some would say you’re right, but not me. The ultimate goal is to have everyone in the world reach Nirvana. But this is not easy. Therefore, the best way the individual can spend his time is to help others. Helping others — this is common to all major religious icons — the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, the saints and prophets. They knew that the key was to help others. It was their disciples, their followers, that turned the teachings into selfish goals. Look around at the money involved in religion now.” He points to a monk selling wooden prayer bracelets and Polaroid photos from a plywood booth. “Take Jesus. Even after all of the terrible things people did to him, he did not express hatred. He continued to help others. Now consider what his followers do in his name.”

After eating a sack of lychees in a grove of leafy hackberry trees and pink magnolias, I return to the cave to think about what the monk had said. Could the pageantry of religion be removed, with the teachings still intact? I look down into the abyss, waiting for my vision of Guanyin. The tidal spume swirls, forming an image of white robes. An eddy of red incense paper and fruit peels forms her face. These shadows and waves form a confluence of gods and ghosts

and everything we ever want to see and ever can see. I have witnessed my apparition, and I have found my answer.

* * * *

My all-time favorite word is *shiosai*. The Japanese coinage comprises two Chinese characters — “tide” and “roar” — and means something like “the sound of the surf.” It is an obscure word in modern Japanese, never used in conversation and all but unknown to the younger generations. Its modern obscurity is perhaps the consequence of a hurried era that affords no time or place to stop and listen. Yet, on this rocky peninsula, I have come across a sanctuary devoted to hearing the waves. I have found a place to use my word. I trace the characters in a nearby patch of sand then watch the foamy breakers wipe them back into obscurity.

* * * *

I tramp along the grassy coastline and through thin woods on the less developed northern end of the island. A small naval base has posted large roadside billboards that enumerate the fourteen articles on countering separatist movements and insisting that Taiwan is an inseparable part of the People’s Republic. Soldiers in uniform shoot hoops on a concrete slab above a cliff wall, and I hear the sound of gunshots ring out from a firing range. I continue past aquaculture pens, where a grizzled oarsman tells me there will be no shrimp in the pens until September. By the roadside, discarded bottles of the local beverage offer a poetic couplet: “Like sunshine and sea spray, Mount Putuo Beer is for people passionate about this place.”

I duck away from the beating sun where a three-century-old hackberry tree stretches across a cool mossy yard. Stone steps lead down under the tree’s gnarled roots into a small cave that continues down ten feet as an ancient well house. In the underground chamber, a tablet carved in the year 1903 extols

the health benefits of the dozen or so minerals found in the well water, and an informational sign claims that ancient alchemists of the Qin Dynasty (third century B.C.) used its water to brew a tonic of immortality. The chamber is decorated in yellow cloth flags that proclaim THE DHARMA IS BOUNDLESS, with stone bodhisattva statues guarding the perimeter.

A woman in her seventies descends into the chamber chanting the Mantra of Great Compassion. She nods and lowers her chanting to a low whisper, then stops and turns to me.

“This well water can cure the sick!” She chuckles, and tells me she was born on this island in the years before Communist liberation.

“We islanders used to work the earth. Wheat and potatoes.” I ask why they did not catch fish. “We didn’t have boats! We would take our sweet melons to the boat owners and trade for fish. But farming was hard work.” She sighs, and then chuckles again. “Now the local government plants trees all over the island, and we are not allowed to till the soil and plant crops. It’s all part of the new policy . . .” She trails off, struggling to find the word.

“Environmentalism?” I offer the new Chinese buzzword.

“That’s it!”

I ask if the island’s transformation into a Buddhist tourist mecca has benefited her family. “Of course it has! Farming was too hard. Now my oldest son and daughter both run inns, and I sell incense to their guests!”

* * * *

At just under one thousand feet above sea level, Foding Mountain marks the highest point on the island but is easily the lowest of the nine sacred peaks of China. The next lowest peak on the list, Southern Mount Heng, rises more than three thousand feet higher.

The short trail is shaded by broad camphor trees and waxy *Distylium* shrubs as I begin climbing amid a steady stream of vacationists. Hikers pose in front

of a large carving in the cliffside that reads THE MYRIAD MASSES WORSHIP TOGETHER.

In the lively group next to me, I overhear one pilgrim say, “If you’re lucky you’ll see snakes climbing the mountain to kowtow to Guanyin.”

“Aren’t they poisonous?” I ask, remembering the warning of a park ranger earlier in the day.

The reply is quick and deliberate. “Buddhist snakes don’t bite.”

I continue up the trail, keeping my eyes peeled for the more dangerous secular serpents. Further up the stone steps I fall into conversation with three young men from Henan Province. They tell me they came to the island to install the plumbing in a new tourist hotel. “It’s hard work, but the pay is good.” They, like me, were compelled to pay the steep 160-yuan fee to enter the island, which made a sizable dent in their monthly wages of 2,000 yuan. Their supervisor has gone to the mainland for the day to buy more pipe, so they are taking a rare day off to see the pilgrim sights.

They have never met an American, and they show a giddy curiosity about my country. “The level of violence in the U.S. amazes us.” He says it like a compliment. “There are so many shootings and stabbings. We don’t have that at all in China.” I am almost amused at his thesis, since China has suffered four school stabbing events within the past two months, and police have been dispatched to fortify elementary schools across the nation. While the attacks were widely reported in international news sources, the domestic media has censored any mention of the stabbings in recent weeks. The media censorship is likely an attempt to strengthen the country’s image during the Shanghai World Expo, and these men have clearly not received this news. I inform them, but they shrug. “We aren’t interested in news events, anyway. We like to watch movies online!”

The men offer parting wishes and take leave down a brushy side trail, and I reach the highest point of the summit area where my progress is stopped by a crudely-welded steel gate and a befuddled young guard dressed in camouflage. He sticks out an open palm as I approach.

“Military area. No visitors.”

I put my hands together, bow, and offer an *A-mi-tuo-fo*. The guard is not amused, and waves me back down the hill. In the deserted woods near the fortified area, soldiers have constructed defensive foxholes with sandbag walls, and then, apparently, pilgrims have used the bunkers and nearby tree trunks to spin a web of Buddhist prayer flags that flutter in the intermittent breeze. I squat inside a sandbagged bunker munching through a pile of oranges and humming “Uncle John’s Band” for an audience of moths and magpies. I do not know quite what to make of this strange isle of the Goddess of Mercy. In its heady sea breeze, I at once want to stay forever and leave right away. ☹

竹里馆
王维

独坐幽篁里
弹琴复长啸
深林人不知
明月来相照

In a Retreat Among Bamboos[†]

by Wang Wei

Leaning alone in the close bamboos,
I am playing my lute and humming a song
Too softly for anyone to hear —
Except my comrade, the bright moon.

[†] English translations of both poems in this issue are from Witter Bynner, trans., and Jiang Kanghu, *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929).

Interview

Shu Chutian (舒楚天)

Shu Chutian is an artist from Changsha, in Hunan Province, currently living in New York City. She works in the media of photography and video, and recently completed an M.F.A. at Pratt Institute. Some of her work will be shown this summer at the 2019 Graduates Art Fair, at the Shanghai Exhibition Center in China, from July 11 to July 14. (The full address is 1000 Yan'an Middle Road, Jing'an Qu, Shanghai.) We caught up with her in late spring for this interview.

BT: Let's start with a little about your background and life in China. Did you live there until you came to New York to attend Pratt?

SCT: I grew up in Changsha, a city in the southern part of China. Like other kids in China, my experience was nothing special. I went to kindergarten, then junior high, high school, and finally to college. Later in 2016, I was an exchange student at Arizona State University. In 2017, I came to New York.

BT: Did you study art or photography when you were in China? And what is your undergraduate degree in?

SCT: No I didn't, I majored in Business English. Then I figured out I was really not talented in Business English.

BT: Is there a connection to art in your family, such as relatives who are also artists? Did your parents encourage you to study art?

SCT: None of my relatives are artists. But I feel my parents are very into art because now, in their fifties, they go to a school called "senior university." This is a school specially designed for seniors by providing classes like dancing, music,

painting, and so on. So my dad started to study piano, and my mom started to learn traditional Chinese painting and got really into it.

Usually, my mom doesn't care what I am doing, she just lets me grow as I wish. My dad at first didn't want me to engage in art because he was concerned about whether I could make a living by myself. But later, he started to encourage me as always and tried his best to understand what art is and what I am doing. I was so moved by him, and I am proud that he is always willing to accept new things and never give up thinking.

BT: How has living in America changed you as an artist?

SCT: I feel the most significant change is that I understand more what “foreign land” means to me. When I was a kid, I always wanted to know more about foreign culture and felt it was cool to do so. Later, when I actually stayed in a foreign country, I found myself really fascinated by the feeling of “exotic” and things that I am not familiar with. My work also contains this aspect as well. Besides this, living in the U.S. has brought me lots of other changes as well — if I need to talk about them all, I might use up all the magazine pages. [*laughs*]

BT: In an interview you did with *Musée* magazine, you said that your work often includes the themes of loneliness and alienation, something bizarre, and something funny. How did you settle on these themes to explore? Did you experiment with other themes and then choose these or have you always gravitated to them?

SCT: Actually, when I was interviewing with *Musée* magazine I didn't prepare well, and speaking English made me so nervous. I didn't know what I was talking about at that time. I feel I didn't speak like an artist at all. But fortunately, my hairstyle and what I was wearing are very artist-like. [*laughs*]

My process of doing art is very intuitive. I didn't deliberately want to express these themes at the beginning of a project. I would only realize what my works are about when I finally finished a project.

BT: Does that mean you do not go into a project with a set idea or theme in mind? If so, how do you start it? Do you just have a flash of insight about something and then let that take you wherever it leads in terms of the details?

SCT: Before I start a project I will have an idea in mind, and I also know what I am going to do with every step. But I don't know exactly what the theme is. Take "I Imagine They Meet" as an example. Before I started, I knew I would shoot the pedestrians and pair them up, let them walk into each other and then disappear at same intersection line. But I didn't know what it is about; the only thing I know is I want people to meet. After I edited the video, and saw it from a more objective perspective, I started to notice this work is not just about "meeting" but lots of themes, for example the interweaving of different time and different spaces.

BT: What is a favorite photograph of yours and why? Talk a little about the process of creating it — the idea for it, the composition, what you want to express with it, etc.

SCT: I don't have a favorite photo. I have lots of favorites photos and it's hard for me to pick one. The reason why I shoot is that sometimes I will have an image in mind and want to bring it to reality. I don't know why it exists. Whenever people ask me questions like "What is your work about?" I always feel it is difficult for me to answer it, like I have a language disorder. Maybe what I wanted to say is all in my works.

BT: What camera equipment do you use (or most like to use)? What's the reason for that preference? And how much post-processing do you like to do?

SCT: I don't have a specific camera I most like to use. I usually use what I can get. I used to use Sony α 7 series. I think this camera is very good to use, as it works very well in low lighting conditions and the color of the photographs

are very beautiful. I also use the Canon AE-1 film camera, because I feel the color of film is very beautiful too. Almost all of my friends have a Ricoh GR II, and I love this one as well. I don't know too much about equipment and am bad at technique. My professor complained one hundred times about my focus problems . . . these are the parts that I need to improve.

In the post-process I will adjust the light by making the darker area lighter. And I will also erase some things that I don't want to be in the photographs, like a garish trash bag on the ground.

BT: Who are some photographers (or other kinds of artists) whose work has influenced your own? Why are you drawn to them and their work?

SCT: I love "Everything is Everything" by Toki Kanaka. I was so moved by this video because he could find something very interesting and pleasant from trivial everyday objects. I also love Zhang Peili. I like how he conveys his ideas by using a calm and restrained way.

BT: What aspects of Chinese culture/art/history/life do you think are represented in your work, whether consciously or unconsciously?

SCT: Except for the Chinese language, I feel that my works are not the kind that people will immediately know the artist is Chinese when they look at them. But my works are related to China since the experience of living in my country has influenced me so much. If I didn't grow up in China, my works wouldn't be like this.

BT: Your videos are intriguing. Like you said in the *Musée* magazine interview about your work, "the subject is always placed beyond our expectation or present in a way we are not familiar with." I like the video "I Imagine They Meet." Where did the idea come from for that? Which neighborhoods did

you film in? And were the people paired in each clip always from different neighborhoods?

SCT: The idea for this video suddenly popped out when one day I walked on the street and watched the pedestrians. Then I was thinking of this idea all the time and finally found time to film and edit it. I picked a few places where I usually go: lower Manhattan, Chinatown, the Upper East Side, and Williamsburg. The people are paired up randomly. Sometimes they are from the same neighborhoods, sometimes not. This is an ongoing project, I will add different locations and seasons in the future.

BT: How about your video entitled “Sit”? What did you want to express in filming that? And what have others who have viewed it told you they see in it?

SCT: My idea about this video is a neurotic, systematic repetition. When I see this video by myself, I feel the repetition even becomes boring. But I love the boringness and I feel it is very beautiful and poetic to me. Most people told me they feel this piece is about finding one’s own place or about boringness and emptiness. A person once told me this piece looks like dance, and I feel very happy he said that.

BT: What compels you to make art and how do you see your role as an artist?

SCT: Making art is my natural need, like eating and sleeping. I always have something in mind and want to bring it to reality. I feel artwork can educate people. But right now I don’t think I have reached that level. I am making art because I have a desire to express myself. I hope in the future my work can also bring something to my audience.

BT: What’s next, in both life and art? Do you plan to stay in the States? What are you working on now or planning to work on (be it a specific project or a concept/theme), if you don’t mind talking about it?

SCT: I am planning to stay in New York for a few years. And I will continue making art for the rest of my life. A project I am working on right now is a video about space division, making a space become smaller and smaller but also bigger at the same time. ☯

访谈 舒楚天

舒楚天出生于湖南，是一名图像和视频工作者。目前生活和工作于纽约市。她刚刚完成了在普瑞特艺术学院纯艺系硕士学位，部分作品将于7月11日至7月14日在中国上海展览中心的2019年毕业生艺术博览会上展出。（地址为上海市静安区延安中路1000号。）我们在五月末对她进行了采访。

BT: 请介绍一下你在中国的背景和生活。来纽约Pratt上学前一直住在中国吗？

SCT: 是的。我是在长沙长大的，一个南方的城市。我就是是一个很普通的中国小孩呀，和其他小孩一样上幼儿园，初中，高中，然后就读大学了。然后我大概在16年的时候交换去了亚利桑那州立大学上学，之后17年来了纽约。

BT: 你在中国的时候学过艺术摄影吗？你的本科学位是什么？

SCT: 我在出国之前完全没有学过艺术诶。我本科学的是经贸英语。去读大学的时候才发现我在经贸英语这方面也太没有天分了吧，怎么学都学不好呀。

BT: 你是否来自艺术世家，或者有家人从事艺术工作？你父母支持你学习艺术吗？

SCT: 没有呀。但是我感觉我爸爸妈妈还是很喜欢艺术的吧，因为他们现在五十多岁了突然爱上了老年大学。老年大学就是中国的一种专门给年龄大的人开的学校，免费的，可以学画画，舞蹈，音乐等等。于是我爸突然开始去学钢琴，我妈突然开始去学画画。而且还特别热情练习那种。不过他

们的热情当然也有可能因为是免费的啦。。。。

其实我妈是一直不管我，我爸一开始是不太支持我学艺术，他担心我之后养不活自己。但是之后他很快就理解了，并且非常支持我，还努力去理解艺术是什么，我正在做的是什麼。我看到我爸这样我很感动，因为我觉得他是个愿意去接受新事物并且不会放弃思考的人。

BT: 美国生活对你的艺术人生有什么样的影响？

SCT: 我感觉对我最大的改变是我更加了解了“异乡”对于我来说是什麼。以前小时候会特地去接触去喜欢异国的一些文化来显示自己的个性，感觉好像自己这样比较酷。后来真的来到了另外一个国家，我发现我着迷的其实是“异国”这种感觉，是文化的差异。我知道了我自己对没有见过，不熟悉的事物有一种迷恋。我觉得我的作品中也带有着很强烈的“在异乡”的特征。

当然生活在美国带给我的变化还有很多很多啦，感觉要给我一整本书的版面我才能说完哈哈哈哈哈。

BT: 在与Musée杂志的采访中，你说你的作品经常包括孤独和异乡的主题，有时候神经质，有时候很有趣。你是如何确定这些主题的？是尝试过其他，还是一直以来就在做这些主题？

SCT: 其实在和Musée magazine做采访的时候我完全没有准备好，而且说英语真的太让我紧张了。。。都完全不知道自己在说什么鬼。。。感觉我说的话一点也不像个艺术家。。。不过还好我的发型穿着还是像个艺术家的哈哈哈哈哈。

其实我做作品的方式还蛮直觉的，做的时候没有刻意去想要表达这些主题。做完了之后，我把我的作品放到一起，才知道我的作品有关于孤独、错置、神经质和趣味。

BT: 也就是说你创作之前并没有已成型的想法？如果是这样的话，你如何开始创作？是任由脑海中闪现的灵感指引你建构出细节吗？

SCT: 我在做东西之前会有一个想法，并且我也知道我的每一步要怎么去做。但是我不太确切的知道我的主题是什么。比如说，拿我想象他们相遇来举例。在开始拍摄之前，我知道我会去路上拍行人，并且知道我要把两个人配对，让他们相向而行，然后在同一个节点消失。但是当时我并不知道这个作品的主题会是什么。我当时知道的只是我想让他们相遇。当我把这个东西做出来之后，我再从一个客观的角度来看待他，才知道这个作品还关于很多别的主题，比如：不一样时间和不一样空间的交织等等。

BT: 你最喜欢的照片是哪一张以及为什么最喜欢它？能否谈谈创作过程，比如它的构思、构图、你想表达的主题等等。

SCT: 我没有最喜欢的一张照片，我有好多最喜欢的，很难选出来一张。其实让我说为什么我会拍下一张照片，我一般都有些说不出来，因为我拍照是因为已经有了一张图像在我的脑海中，然后我把它拍出来。我也不知道为什么为什么他会存在。每当提到“我的作品是什么这个问题”，我好像患了语言困难症一样，目前没有办法找到合适的句子说出来。我想我表达的东西都已经在我的作品中了吧。

BT: 你在用的或者最喜欢用的相机型号是什么？为什么喜欢它？会做多少后期处理？

SCT: 我相机都用得蛮杂的，基本就是有什么有什么。之前会向我们学校借 Sony $\alpha 7$ 系列来用，我觉得很好用！在光线很暗的情况也表现很好，画面的颜色之类的也都很漂亮。之后还有用 Canon AE-1 胶片相机，觉得胶片相机拍出来的颜色也特比漂亮。不过我用胶片相机有点对不准焦。。。我还有借朋友的理光 GR II 用，因为发现身边朋友人手一台。我用过也觉得挺好用的！其实我对器材之类的不是很懂，对拍照技术之类的也不是很懂。但是这是我需要改正的地方啦，我教授已经抱怨过我无数次说我对不准焦了。

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后期的话我一般调光，一般都是把太暗的地方拉亮一点点之类的。偶尔也

会抹掉一些我不希望出现在画面中的东西，比如地上的颜色太扎眼的垃圾袋，或者画面的最旁边突然冒出来一个人头之类的。

BT: 哪位摄影师或者艺术家对你的创作有启发？他们为什么吸引你？

SCT: 我喜欢Toki Kanaka的Everything is Everything。我看了之后真的特别感动，他能从很琐碎细小的日常物品中找到非常有趣和让人愉悦的地方。我还很喜欢张培力，我很喜欢他用表面上看起来很冷静克制的方式来传达一些观念。

BT: 中国文化/艺术/历史/生活有哪些方面无意识或者有意识的在你的作品中体现？

SCT: 除开有中文的元素之外，我感觉我不是那种别人一看我的作品就知道我是中国人的那种情况吧。但是我的作品一定是与中国相关的。因为作为一个中国人我的经历肯定也影响到了我的作品。如果不是在中国长大，我就不会是现在的我，我的作品也不会是现在这样了。

BT: 你的视频很吸引人。就像你在Musée杂志采访中所说的一样，“事物总会超出我们的期望或者以我们不熟悉的方式呈现。”我很喜欢“I Imagine They Meet”这个视频。这个创意源自何处？视频是在哪里拍的？每个片段中配对的人都来自不同的社区吗？

SCT: 这个视频的想法是有一天我在街上边走路边看行人，突然冒出来的。然后我就每天想着想着，然后找了一天把这个视频剪出来了。我当时分了几天，挑了几个我正好要去办事情或者逛街的地方：曼哈顿下城，中国城，上东区，威廉斯堡等等。两个相遇的人我是随机配对的。这是个正在进行中的作品，之后还会加进去不同地点，不同季节。

BT: 你的视频“Sit”想表达什么理念？可以分享下看过这个视频人的评价吗？

SCT: 我当时拍这个视频的想法就是想要做出一个有点神经质的且有系统的重复的一个东西出来。拍出来了之后确实挺重复，并且重复得都有点无聊了。但是同时我有觉得这个重复很美丽。一般大家都会告诉我说他们觉得这个视频是关于寻找自己的位置，或者就是关于无趣和空洞，一种行为的不断重复。有一次有个人觉得这个作品像舞蹈，我听到之后觉得挺开心的。

BT: 是什么驱使你进行艺术创作，你如何看待自己的艺术家角色？

SCT: 我感觉做艺术对于我来说是自然需求吧。就像我想吃饭想睡觉想和朋友出去玩一样，感觉时不时的就想做些什么东西出来。我感觉艺术家是有教育作用的。但是我现在可能还做不到这么高的层次。我觉得现在我做艺术的原因还是有点自我的，就是表达我自己。但是希望在将来，我也希望我的作品可以给我的观众带来一些什么。

BT: 你下一步有什么计划？打算留在美国吗？如果不介意，可以分享一下你近期的创作吗，具体计划或者创意概念都可以。

SCT: 目前我暂时会继续待在纽约。我会继续做艺术。之后我想做一个有关切割空间的视频，在这个视频中，空间在不断变小的同时也在不断扩大。☯

SAMPLES OF SHU CHUTIAN'S WORK APPEAR ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.



Scanner, 2018



Kitchen, 2018



Fall, 2018



Changsha, 2018



Changsha, 2018



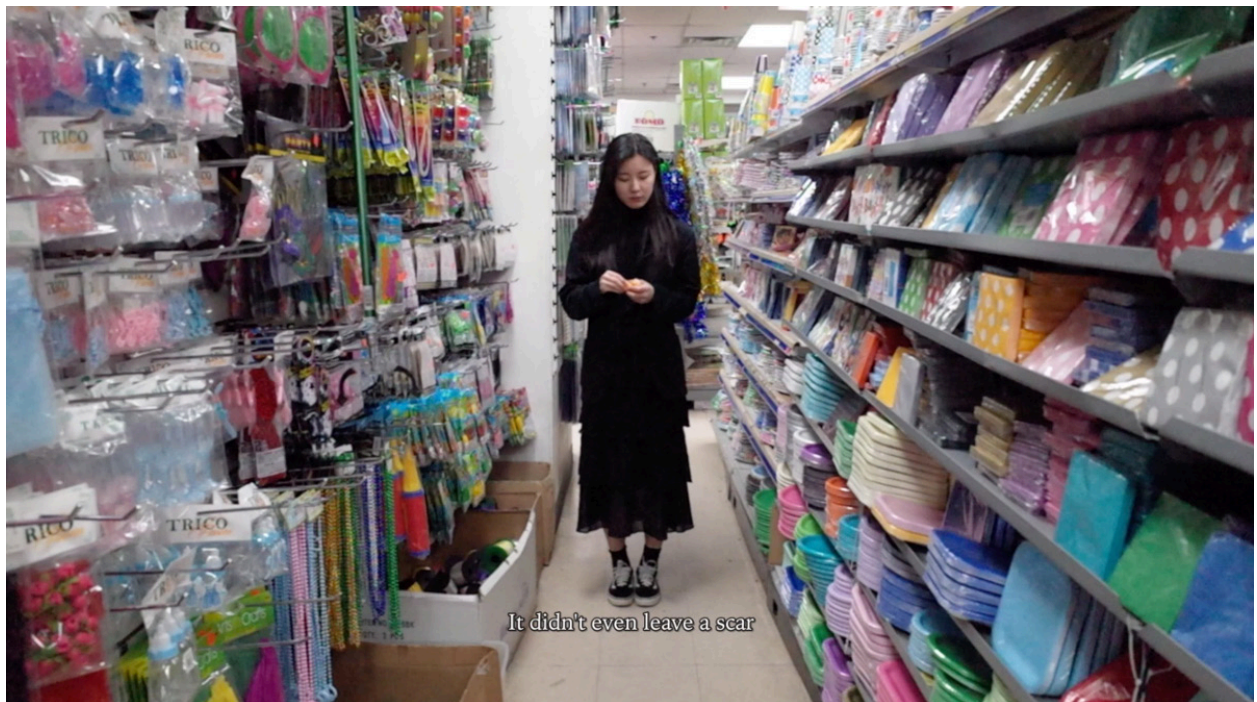
Chopping Board, 2018



Screen grab from *How to Use Toilet Paper*, 2018
(single-channel video, black and white, silent)



Screen grab from *I Imagine They Meet*, 2019
(two-channel video, color, sound)



Screen grab from *Tooth Impaction*, 2019
(single-channel video, color, sound)

Excerpt: *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance*[†]

by Sima Guang (司馬光)

The year 642, summer, fourth month. The Emperor Taizong spoke to the Imperial Censor Chu Suiliang, saying, “Since you, Sir, are in charge of the *Diaries of Action and Repose*, may I see what you have written?” Suiliang replied, “The historiographers record the words and deeds of the ruler of men, noting all that is good and bad, in hopes that the ruler will not dare to do evil. But it is unheard of that the ruler himself should see what is written.” The emperor said, “If I do something that is not good, do you then also record it?” Suiliang replied, “My office is to wield the brush. How could I dare not record it?” The Gentleman of the Yellow Gate Liu Ji added, “Even if Suiliang failed to record it, everyone else in the empire would” — to which the emperor replied, “True.”

[†] From *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 656.

Portfolio: Pingyao Supernatural

Stu Sontier

Stu Sontier was born in England but has lived in New Zealand since the age of eight. As a photographer, he previously worked with traditional silver gelatin printing in an extended documentary tradition and was an active committee member of PhotoForum for many years. After a break which included raising a child and reassessing the personal importance of photography, he now works in a more conceptual way where traditional photographic “rules” are viewed as malleable and open to exploration. He traveled to Pingyao, in Shanxi Province, in 2016 to participate in the Pingyao International Photography Festival, assisting in the installation and oversight of an exhibition curated by John B. Turner. Below is Sontier’s introduction to both the trip and the photographs he took, some of which appear on the following pages:

In 2016, I had the opportunity to visit the ancient walled city of Pingyao in Shanxi Province, assisting with the install of an exhibition of photographs made by New Zealander Tom Hutchins in 1956. This was the culmination of a project by John Turner, a contemporary of Tom’s now residing in Beijing.

Being my first visit to China (although not to Asia in general), I was overwhelmed by encountering the reality of the place. This somehow kick-started a need to photograph again, something that had been latent for almost fifteen years during my son’s childhood.

I had the ability to connect with people through the English students who acted as interpreters for us visitors and who were keen to share ideas. However, finding a connection to the environment, essence, or the rest of what China in its vastness is took much longer. Many of my prior impressions were vague and impersonal, ingested through the Western lens of media, movies, and books.

In fact, I remain flung back and forth between familiarity and disjunction with an almost physical jolt, and, looking again at the photographs from that trip, I see an attempt to come to terms with that. This work was the solidifying

of interests that had just resurfaced—in the spreading of light, in the limiting or relinquishment of focus, and in the attempts to be both conscious and accepting of limitations that were imposed either technically or mentally. Like an uncertain and unfinished journey, these interests mirror the engagement, confusion, and fascination that I experienced and that continue for me after that visit.







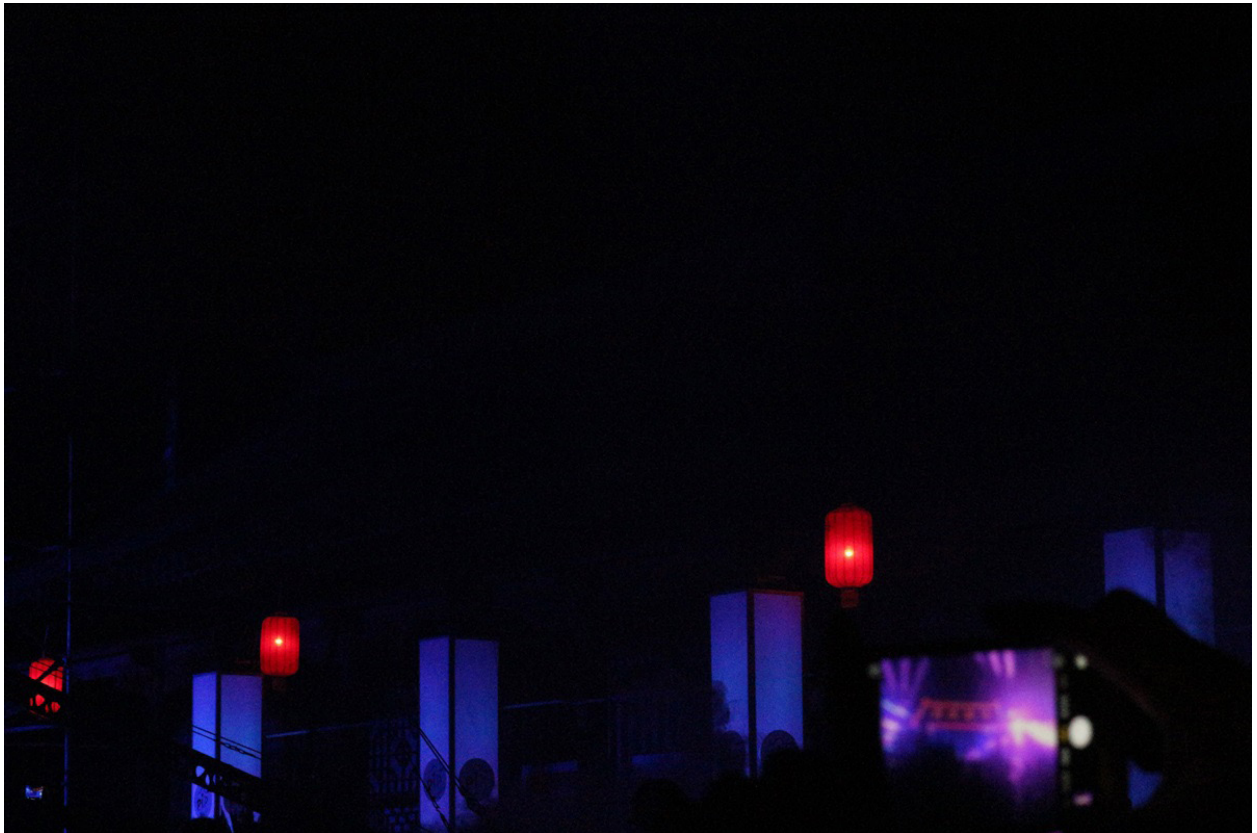








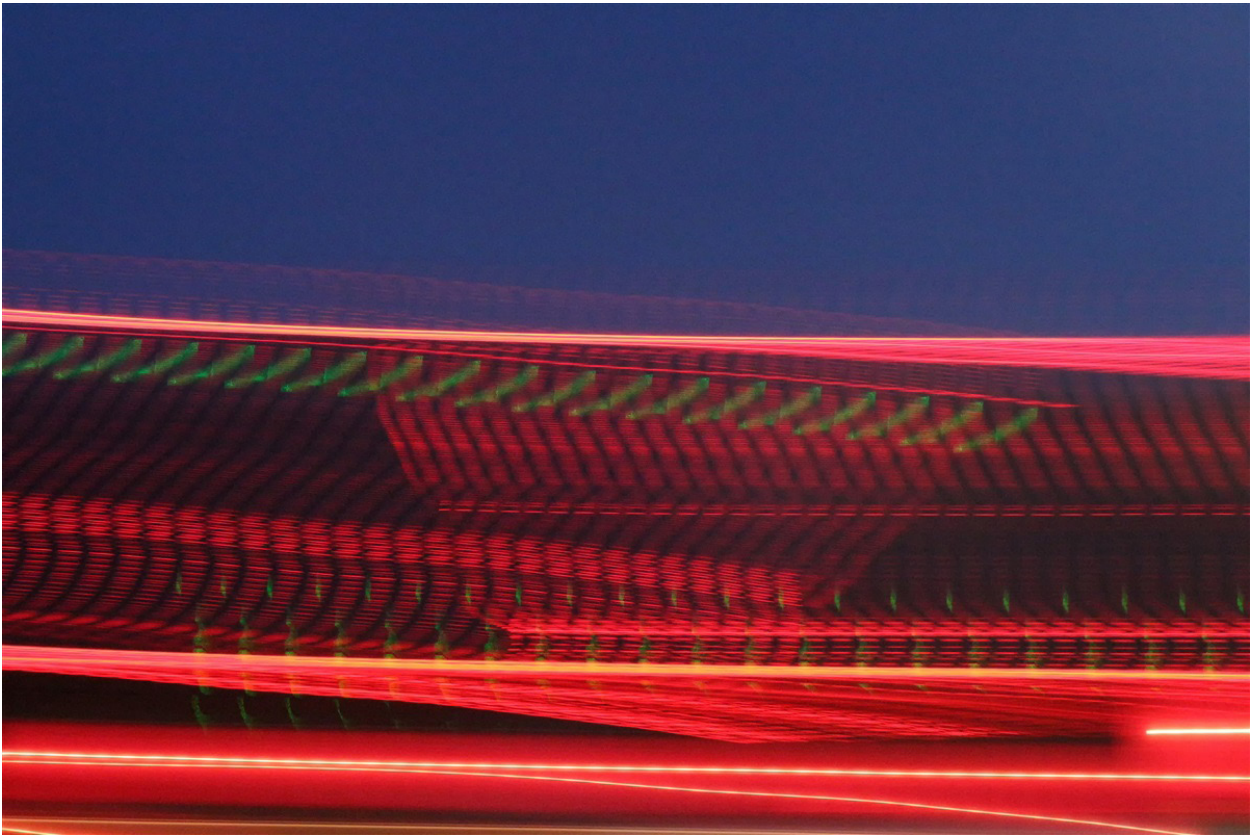
















春思
李白

燕草如碧丝
秦桑低绿枝
当君怀归日
是妾断肠时
春风不相识
何事入罗帏

In Spring

by Li Bo

Your grasses up north are as blue as jade,
Our mulberries here curve green-threaded branches;
And at last you think of returning home,
Now when my heart is almost broken. . . .
O breeze of the spring, since I dare not know you,
Why part the silk curtains by my bed?