



# AAJ

ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNAL  
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photo by Wilson Jiang

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Asian American Journal

(AAJ) is an outlet for

Asian and Asian American voices

to disseminate information in

order to promote activism in

the community and awareness

of Asian/American issues.

[www.aa2sbu.org/aaaj](http://www.aa2sbu.org/aaaj)

Hi - As you may have noticed, AAJ comes back with new things each time. This issue. I am so excited that Jia Yao, the popular just graduated photographer, will teach you some tips on taking beautiful pictures. Megumi Oshiba, an exchange student from Japan, is going to tell you how in Stony Brook, she unexpectedly confronts questions about her own country that she may not be ready to answer. We also have two students who spent time as volunteers teaching kids in remote areas in China, sharing touching stories about their students with you. There are also serious articles and op eds on injustice to provide a counterpoint to the beauty of our photos.

We are looking forward to continuing to provide a platform for Stony Brook Asian and Asian American students to present their lives and growth. Please read the history of AAJ in this issue. If you have any interests in photography, writing, arts, please submit your work to [aa2sbu@gmail.com](mailto:aa2sbu@gmail.com). It would be a great pleasure to read and publish your work.

—— Yayu Mei

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# AAJ : Asian American Journal

Giving an alternative visual voice to the campus on art, culture, lit, serious issues, photography, and whatever strikes our fancy...



First printed  
issue of  
AAJ  
given out  
at the  
AAC Bridge  
Take A Break  
From Finals  
BBQ  
May 1997  
Editor-in-Chief  
Mari Pagluighi  
top row, third  
from right

You've probably seen issues of AAJ around and wondered who did these fancy booklets, why, what's it about? It certainly doesn't fit any typical journal genre - neither news, op-ed, creative writing, nor arts. That's because it's unique in that its goal is to give students a voice in all the things that interest them.

We have written many 'club spotlights' on Asian clubs, but with over sixty clubs that identify with Asia or Asian America, from the Chinese Association (CASB) with its more than 30 year history to the new Himalayan Club, we wouldn't get to 'us' for years. So this time we're focusing on our very own little club, the student media publication known as AAJ, with a little nod to AA E-Zine, our sister publication.

Founded in 1996, Karina Heesoo Kim wanted to give a voice to what was then a very small minority. Editor Mari Pagluighi (yes, even with that name she was Asian, a Korean adoptee), with funding from the Provost, printed the first issue. USG has used the Student Activity Fee to fund AAJ ever since.

AAJ's focus is not on putting ourselves in a single body known as "Asian" - this label has already been given to us as a result of pluralism. Instead, our focus is on examining the diversity within this so-called cultural group. More often than not, those of minority status have been worried about fitting in, amid a society that can't help but look at unfamiliar cultures from a detached point of view.

This is why we encourage our writers to create anything they wish, preferably with a personal touch.

We have articles on topics that have nothing to do with Asian culture but share the human touch. We added international students to get their thoughts. We try to raise awareness of inequalities in Asia and America and thus the need for outlets like AAJ.

But despite all the fun we have and the care we put into our work, we always need to cajole writers into writing. Photographers we have more than we know what to do with! It's not that students don't have things they want to say. We're given ideas all the time. But writing has never been included in the list of "Asian stereotypes". Instead we get offers to do layout. Then when they realize how difficult layout actually is, they finally admit their true desire.

So if you have that inner desire but are afraid, this is not the same as having to be perfect for a class! You just get your thoughts down and AAJ editors will help with the rest. Sometimes a blank sheet of paper can be your best friend. If you have an idea, a point of view, and you don't want the time you've spent mulling it over wasted, then join us. Don't let fear of writing stop you from realizing the potential of writing.

Some join AAJ for the community and write simply to contribute. Others just send in their work and we never see them. But whether you want to join (and SBU AA E-Zine does the same with news and events bi-monthly online), or just submit, we're open to everyone. Once your first piece is published you'll learn that nothing is more fulfilling than to see your work, your ideas, in print for all the world to see too! ■



# What Do I Know About My Country?

Waseda University Exchange Student in SBU

*Megumi Oshiba*

If people ask me where I'm from, I'll say I'm from Japan. But do I really know everything about Japan? This is something I started to question after I studied abroad at Stony Brook University where the majority of people were not Japanese.

First of all, how did I even come to think that I'm Japanese? Although I was born in Kentucky for some odd reason, both of my parents are Japanese. They came from ordinary Japanese families, and now I'm also one of them. Also, I spent most of my lifetime so far in Japan. I practiced karate, had my first love, and studied hard to impress my parents... all these things happened in Japan. Yes, I'm Japanese.

So, when I went to Stony Brook, I proudly introduced myself as Japanese to everyone. There I even felt like I was representing Japanese people. Now that they knew where I came from, they started to throw questions at me. "Do you

like Naruto?" "Why do Japanese people eat KFC on Christmas?" "How do you make sushi?" "What's the history of the tea ceremony?" "How do you wear a kimono?" Most of the time, I was not ready to answer these questions right away because I wasn't sure if I did really understand what they were. Sometimes, there were people who knew much more about Japan than I, and they were not from Japan.



That's me on the left with friends in my dorm taking a selfie!

During the second semester at Stony Brook, I assisted Prof. Nagase in Japanese class. This experience was more challenging than I expected because all students assumed that I fully understood all grammar rules and meanings of words. I can't remember how many times I said, "Let me look it up" or "I'll ask Sensei (Prof. Nagase)." Each time I said things like these, they suspiciously looked at me and asked if I'm really Japanese or not. I know they asked this as a joke (I hope it was meant to be a joke), but I was ashamed that I could not be "perfect" as a Japanese exchange student.

I realized that even if I'm Japanese, it does not mean that I know everything about Japan. Rather, I take it for granted and never try to know why it's the way it is. These days, I secretly give a quiz to myself to see whether I can explain Japanese

culture. It's a small thing, but a big change in my attitude. I don't think I could come to be like this if I didn't go to Stony Brook and spend a year there. I recommend everyone to go abroad to experience the same thing. It can be a travel, study abroad program, job-hunting, or anything. Having an opportunity to represent a country makes you realize how much you don't know about your country. ■

# Violence Against Women in India

*Sandy Liu*

As a patriarchal society, India has always favored boys over girls. Men are seen as more valuable and profitable because of their ability to carry the family name and provide income through work. Women, however, are seen as a burden until marriage. The common practice of dowry generates the ideology that women are expensive and therefore do not contribute any benefits to the family. As a result, female infanticide is prevalent and skews the population ratio between men and women in India. This attitude inevitably creates an inferior gender and affects the status and rights of women. Every day, women in India face discrimination and violence.

Violence against women is a national issue in India, with rape being the most common crime among them. The Indian government reported that a woman is raped every 22 minutes. Just last year, there were 24,923 cases of rape in India and this number is underreported since some women are afraid to speak out and seek help.

Last December, the gang rape of a 23 year-old female student in Delhi captured global attention. Her male friend was beaten up, leaving the woman vulnerable for attack. She was dragged to the back of the bus by six drunken men who took turns raping her and abusing her with an iron rod. After their gruesome deed, they left the two victims on the road. According to CNN, her injuries were so severe that several internal organs had to be removed. She was sent to a specialized hospital in Singapore but after two weeks, she was pronounced dead. Days after the attack, the suspects were arrested. This event created an uproar among civilians, who demanded laws to protect women against violence.

As a result of this brutality, this past March the parliament passed a law that prohibits sexual harassment of women in a workplace. Workplace includes any institution controlled or funded by the government, hospitals or nursing homes, sports

institutions, places where an employee has to visit that may require transportation, and at a dwelling or house. The government has become more active in implementing anti-rape laws and harsh punishments to those who commit this crime. These changes have encouraged victimized women to come forth and report their cases.

In September 2013, the four men from the Delhi gang rape were found guilty and are sentenced to death by hanging. Judge Yogesh Khanna believes that the punishment of death is justified since cases this extreme rarely happen in India. This verdict brought joy to many demonstrators, believing that this will elicit fear among men and perpetrators. While many are ecstatic about the court's decision, others are hesitant over the use of death penalty. Some believe that the death penalty is not the solution to ending violence against women and that this type of punishment will only accomplish "short-term revenge".

Although stricter laws have been implemented, the lack of sympathy and care for women is still persistent. Following the Delhi gang rape, another similar case occurred in Mumbai in August 2013. Five men took turns raping a 23 year-old photojournalist while she was on an assignment. Fortunately, the victim is still alive and the suspects have been arrested. Another case back in April reported that a 5 year-old girl was raped and died from cardiac arrest several days later. A more recent event reported that a 14 year-old girl went to a police department to file a rape complaint and was subsequently forced to strip in front of a police officer to prove that she was sexually assaulted.

One victim of assault in India, Ruchira Gupta, published an article called "Victims Blamed in India's Rape Culture," where she describes her experience as a victim and how she was blamed for being the initiator of the assault. Luckily, a pedestrian saved Gupta before her attackers went any further. She recalled that while she was testifying in court, the lawyers would ask



questions that implied she was responsible for the incident. Gupta describe this as a “demoralizing and toxic experience”. Consequently, many women in India choose to not speak up in fear of feeling more shame and judgment from others.

In order to reduce these violent crimes against women, Indian culture needs to change so that women are seen as equal human beings who are worthy of life and protection. Statistics for 2011 show that because of female infanticide, there are 940 Indian women for every 1,000 men and there will be an estimate of 30 million more men than women in India. Since there are

fewer women than men, men will have difficulty in finding a mate, which may contribute to their resorting to rape. Therefore, the future generation needs to be educated and change the current mindset that is so heavily engrained in Indian culture. In addition, dowry should be completely abolished so women won't be seen as a burden for her family, since many female infants are killed because poor families aren't able to “afford” a female child. Indeed, the daughters of India need protection and freedom from the violence that plagues them every day. ■

## Inhumanity of Child Trafficking

*Annie Li*

The idea of slavery is likely to bring up the image of colonial times, when African slaves were sold in America and around the globe. When slavery was finally abolished, it was by no means the end of it. In fact, “modern slavery” exists now in what we know as human trafficking. This “modern slavery” is an entirely different cruelty than simply forced labor. By looking at the abundance of trafficking in one particular country, China, we see many disturbing realities come to light: government officials forcibly taking away newborn children from their biological parents, and adoptive parents becoming worried that their adopted children might be victims of trafficking. Around the world, human trafficking mostly involves sex and labor. However, China's problem has more to do with child trafficking, where the practice involves selling orphans as a commodity to foreign adoptive parents. According to an article written by John Leland, “For Adoptive parents, Questions Without Answers,” in one particular case, more than a hundred orphans were sold in the city of Hunan, which led to the issue being first revealed to the public in 2005. What could have possibly caused all of this?

Human trafficking is universally recognized as a

major crime in violation of human rights. But even so, the practice is common in China. The reasons are simple: the criminals are unlikely to be caught and the practice is notoriously profitable. Observers can't tell for sure when people are being forcibly transported, and the profits to be gained provide an enormous incentive for corruption. To get to the root of the corruption, one must examine the One Child Policy that has been adamantly espoused by the Chinese government. Established nearly 33 years ago to stem the overpopulation in China, this policy has provisions that include restricting certain couples to only one child. China's oversized population was said to be harmful to food production, education and medical care. As described in the analytical work, “Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-Child Policy,” the government hopes to create a generation of ambitious, well educated children who would lead their country into the First World through this policy. Despite these efforts, the state could only provide jobs to 1.6 million of the 4 million yearly university graduates. Due to this, the One Child Policy was enforced with more severity than before. The rise in child trafficking is the direct fallout of this turn of events.

It's no surprise that the people who capitalize on this policy change are none other than those who've received a tremendous boost in authoritative power – the “Family Planning” officials; namely, the people who are given the task of enforcing the One Child Policy. Officials are sent to families who are suspected

to have given birth to a second child and, if the case is proven, they inflict punishments such as fines, dismissal from employment, and forced abortion or sterilization. Since they belong to much smaller, local government sectors, there's no universal restriction for them to follow and their activities are mostly of their own discretion. But one thing's certain: if a family does not meet the official's demands, which range from “missing regular gynecological exams” to “failure to undergo surgery

for intrauterine devices,” (examples mentioned in a New York Times article, “Abuse Cited in Enforcing China Policy of One Child”) their children will most likely be taken away. These officials then sell them off, and they typically end up being bought by orphanages, where they can be adopted by foreign families as so-called “orphans.” Such a process usually involves ample donations to the orphanages on the part of the adopting families. Another NYT article (“For Adoptive

Parents, Questions without Answers”), gives an example in which Karen Moline, the adopter of a boy from Vietnam, points out that she had no idea as to where her donated money went, despite initially believing that it's for good cause.

In some cases, the One Child Policy is enforced so

severely that people are encouraged to expose their neighbors for rewards. Before long, signs of abuse begin to surface, especially in small towns and rural areas, where, as revealed by NYT in “Abuse Cited in Enforcing China Policy of One Child,” local officials are rewarded or punished based on their ability to meet quotas. Because of the requirements, local officials have become



Graphics by Hui Cai

more ruthless with the parents who have violated the policy, some of whom going as far as taking away children regardless of whether or not the family has violated the policy in the first place.

With the One Child Policy in place, why is it that many parents still illegally give birth to a second child? The reason is another serious, underlying obstacle: a traditional preference for male children. The multitude of reasons range from “physical protection” to “old-



age support,” but the one that’s the most generally agreed-upon is that the lineage of families is traced through the men, from father to son. It is the women who must change their family name upon marriage. As quoted in the research article, “Son Preference and the Persistence of Culture: Evidence from South and East Asian Immigrants to Canada,” not having a son is analogous to the “extinction” of the family line.

Knowing the benefits of having a son, childbearing parents are conflicted when the One Child Policy is enforced. Some families risk the chances of getting caught and still go on to give birth to a child, hoping to produce a son. Others would forgo the risk and would instead turn to the black market. For child traffickers, the incentive for procuring children is only increasing. Knowing that some traditional families will do anything to get their hands on a son, criminals continue to abduct children and sell them off to families who are willing to pay.

Most foster parents never knew where their adopted children had come from, believing that the birth parents are no longer alive or unable to raise them, and that it’s their responsibility to give the children a better life. As news about child abduction and trafficking in China begin to surface, many foster parents are beginning to realize the truth, although it does give them nightmares. Believing that adopting orphans can give them a better environment, many of them are worried that their adopted children could be from families that are victims of trafficking. As foster parents in China, what responsibility do they have now? Try to find the birth parents? And even if they could, are they obliged to return their children? Some of them refuse to comment about trafficking in fear of angering the Chinese government. Others resort to denial, under the notion that the more they treat it as an “actual issue,” the more chances their child has of encountering a teasing schoolmate asking, “Oh, did they steal you from your family?” Foreign foster parents are just as powerless, having no way of confronting the messy pile of corruptions and policies that plague a country foreign to themselves.

Thankfully, the Chinese government has finally recognized the need to combat child trafficking. The National Plan of Action Combating Trafficking in Women and Children was enacted with no apparent plan other than to highlight the issue. China really needs to put an actual plan together in order to prevent trafficking, since trafficking gangs are still able to sell children in black markets to this day. According to statistics from Xinhua (a major Chinese news agency) more than 5000 children had been rescued from trafficking as of September 6, 2010. In recent news, more than 6000 law enforcement officers all over China rescued 63 children and 14 women from the black market in March 2013. The Chinese policy seems to have come up with a plan to return the children to the care of their biological parent, involving the use of DNA identification. Much to everyone’s shock, some children were discovered to have been sold to traffickers by none other than their own parents. The parents were apparently convinced that they were selling their child into a wealthy family so that she or she can live a better life. What could be the price tag that motivated such parents? According to an officer, the typical price for a male infant is around 50,000 Chinese yuan and a female infant is sold for 20,000 yuan. (For comparison, one US dollar is equivalent to about 6 yuan.)

As history has shown, merely arresting criminals is not enough to solve the crisis. There’s always going to be someone eager to take their place. If anything, we can start by treating the One Child Policy as the root of the problem. However, eliminating the policy is not an easy task, especially since it was crafted under the noble pretext of controlling “food production, education and medical care.” Despite that, the least one can do is raise awareness. As more people know about child trafficking, the more leverage they have in stopping it. The media should not be censored. These children did not do anything wrong, but they are being taken away from their biological parents’ care. They don’t deserve this. Please help prevent future children from being taken away. ■

# Camp 14: Total Control Zone Film Review

*Sandy Liu*

Camp 14: Total Control Zone is a documentary that unravels a young man's experience in a North Korean death camp through interviews and dark, gray animations. It isn't news that human rights are being violated everyday through this dictatorship government. However, Camp 14 enables us to understand vicariously what prison life is actually like through the emotions and stories that the cast displays.

Shin Dong-Hyuk looks like any ordinary man walking down the streets of Seoul, Korea. Little do we know he is actually one of the very few people to escape from a North Korean labor camp. He now lives a quiet, simple life in a seemingly empty apartment. Behind all this simplicity, we can see that Shin is still traumatized about his past and feels anger when looking in the mirror.

Born and raised in Camp 14, a remote North Korean labor camp, Shin Dong-Hyuk had always thought he lived a normal life. He saw his first public execution when he was four and wasn't surprised when a female classmate was beaten to death over a few grains of corn as punishment. Prisoners suffered from starvation and malnutrition, receiving only maize and Chinese cabbage soup three times a day, every day of the year. Meat was on the menu only when a lucky prisoner happened to catch a rat.

When asked if prisoners were tortured in the camp, ex-prison guard Oh Young Nam chuckles and replies that torture is normal in the camps and even suspects outside will receive the same fate. Shin stretches out his arms and reveals that his arms are bent the wrong way due to prolonged periods of having his arms tied backwards with a rope as a form of torture. Another ex-prison guard, Kwon Hyuk explains that fire and water torture is often used upon prisoners. Shin reminisces

the time when a charcoal fire was brought under his back and he still has the scars as a reminder. When asked about water torture, Shin is hesitant and asked if he can talk about it later.

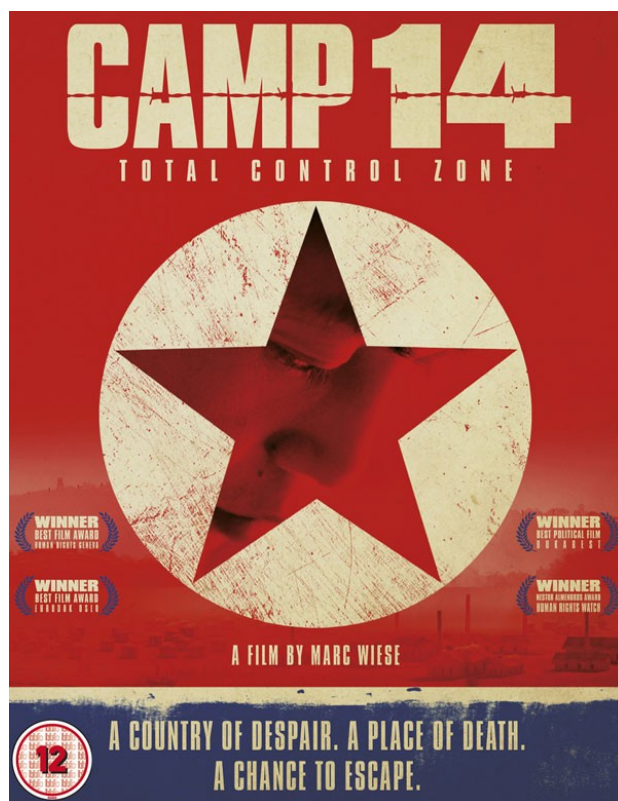
Probably the most heartbreaking memory is when Shin betrayed his mother and brother by telling authorities about their plan to escape the camp. There was a regulation that prisoners had to let the guards

know about anything suspicious among the inmates. Shin was just following the rules, hoping to get a full meal in exchange. Instead he was confined and tortured for more information. As if out of consideration, he was released from torture just in time to see the public execution of his mother and brother. He said that he did not cry and didn't know that one was supposed to cry when seeing his/her mother die.

Although Shin experienced such horrific abuse in North Korea, he still considers it his home and would like to go back if the border to North Korea opens

up. Being a North Korean prisoner may be harsh, but it has been the only kind experience he is able to identify with. The animalistic way he had always been treated almost made him unable to comprehend what it means to be human. In the conclusion of the documentary, he admits that he misses the "pure innocence" he once had.

Camp 14 reveals some disturbing and sickening aspects of humanity. Through this documentary, we can truly sympathize with the prisoners and the life they live that "is worth less than the life of a worm." Although the documentary may seem slow at times, it is a must-watch and the abridged version is available on YouTube.



Images Credit to [http://www.camp14-film.com/Camp\\_14/Home.html](http://www.camp14-film.com/Camp_14/Home.html)





# My Korean Travelogue

## Busan and Seoul

*Annie Li*

### Busan, South Korea

Busan is the second largest city of the Republic of Korea (a.k.a. South Korea), located on the southeast coast. It is an important trading city, only 50 km across the Korea Strait to Japan, with the world's 5th busiest seaport by cargo tonnage.



As seen above, its famous beach is typically filled with rows of umbrellas during the summer months. Just outside of the city proper is Haeundae, an affluent beach front community attracting thousands of tourists. Haeundae takes its name from the ninth century poet Choi Chi-won whose literary name, Haeun, means Sea and Clouds.



Choi enjoyed the view from the beach so much he built a pavilion nearby. Calligraphy he engraved on a rock still exists.





## Seoul, South Korea

What can one find in the capital of the 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy in Asia that is of historical importance? Well, Gyeongbokgung Palace, or Northern Palace, is one important attraction.

It was the foremost royal palace when the capital was moved to Seoul. According to the article, *Gyeongbokgung, the Main Palace of the Joseon Dynasty*, Gyeongbokgung Palace was completed in 1395 and it means “Palace Greatly Blessed by Heaven.”



The bridge was originally on the north side of the pond connecting Geoncheonggung residence but was relocated to the south in 1953. *Up*

According to the article, the architecture structure in the photo is called the Hyangwonjeong, meaning “Pavilion of Far Reaching Fragrance.” It was built under the command of King Gojong, when the palace’s back yard was remodeled in 1873. Surrounding the structure is a man-made pond called Hyangwongji. As seen on the right side of the photo is a bridge called Chwihyanggyo, which means “intoxicated with fragrance.”



The King's throne inside Geunjeongjeon Hall. *Up*

Side view of Geunjeongjeon Hall. *Left*





As for recreational areas, Cheonggyecheon Stream is possibly the one of the most notable public parks in Seoul. Constructed for environmental purposes, it is a gathering place for residents and tourists alike. Stopping by during a stressful day will relieve you from stress, especially when you place your feet into the stream.



It is a peaceful place to relax and spend a day. But just be careful, walking into the stream is prohibited.

Myeong-dong is a well-known shopping district in Seoul. Various fashions and brand names are in stock, many of which have more than one store in the district. A cosmetic brand can be found more than five times in Myeong-dong. ■



Myeong-dong. *Up*

Myeong-dong underground shopping center entrance.

*Right*







photos by Sammy Chan





photo by Bradon Loo





photos by May Hao Wang









PH Tuan Annual CB Wang Asian/ American Center 2013 Winners

Architecture Prize: Thomas Feng, top right

Corky Lee Prize: Ezra Margono, bottom right

Garden Prize: Yang He, above

Ai Weiwei Prize: Jia Yao, page 26

2014 Photography Contest : [www.aaezine.org/tuanwangphotocontest](http://www.aaezine.org/tuanwangphotocontest)









photo by Brian Loo



photo by Sammy Chan





photo by Max Wei





photos by Demi Guo





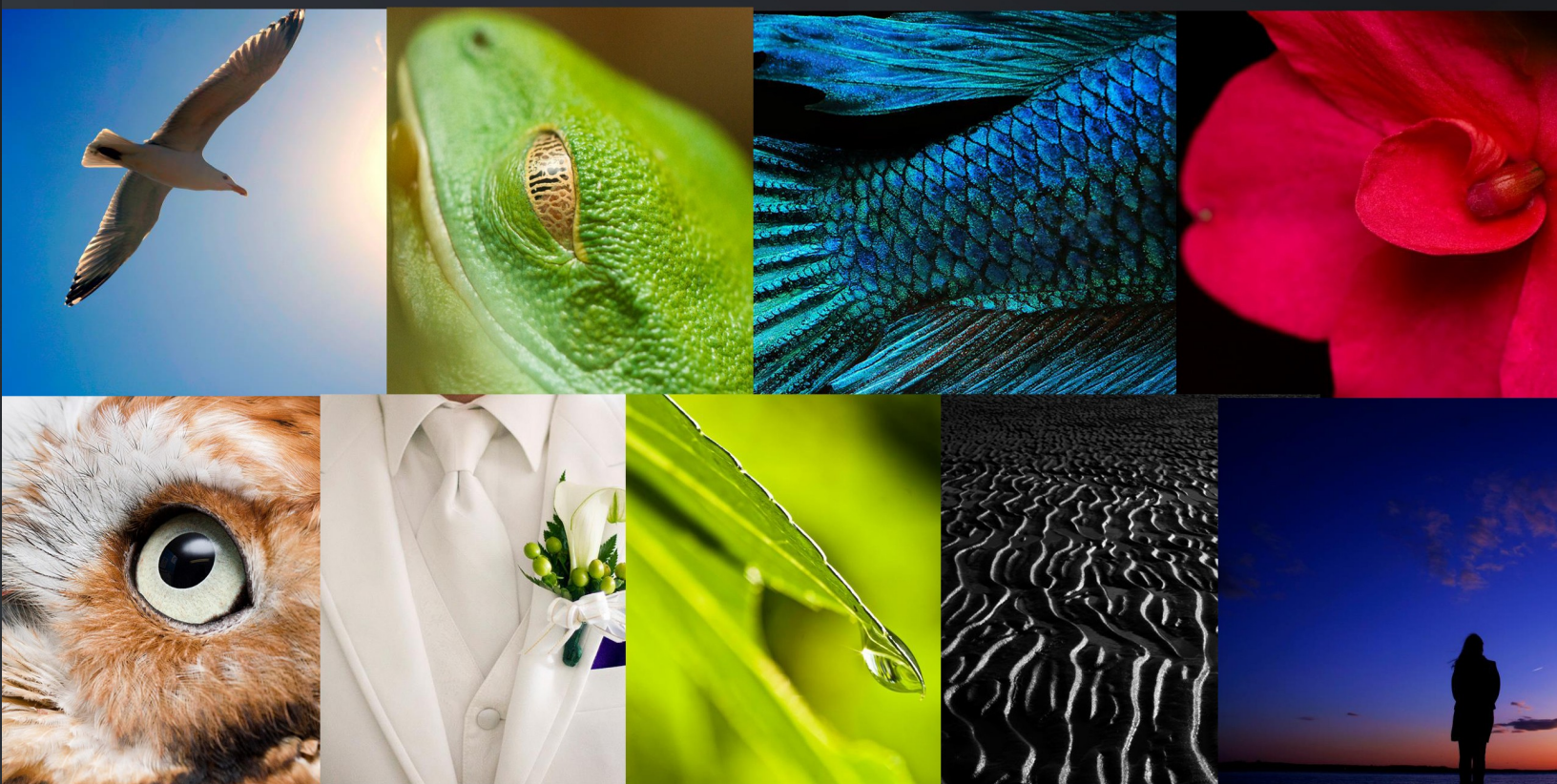
STUDENT WEDDING

PHOTOGRAPHER

“EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD IS  
BEAUTIFUL, THAT IS WHY I CANNOT  
STOP PHOTOGRAPHING. ”

JIA YAO





### **Q: How did you start photography?**

Jia: “It all started when I discovered that camera my father left me. Though that camera was more than 10 years old, but it soon changed my life completely.”

### **Q: How does photography affect your lifestyle?**

Jia: “Most of my friends did not believe I was an introverted person before though I really was. Photography taught me to go outside and seek the beauty of the world instead of watching TV at home. The more beautiful photos I capture, the more I appreciate this world, then the happiness naturally came within me.”

### **Q: A lot of people say photography is an expensive hobby, do you agree? How can you afford expensive cameras?**

Jia: “Yes, it is an expensive hobby for sure, but I think you can train your eyes and make your money back through events and wedding photography. It is possible if you truly love what you are doing. For me, I am lucky enough to have my parents to pay for my tuition, I was not allowed to find a job in the first two years of college because I was an international student, so I lived off campus in a cheap basement for 6 months and saved enough money to get started. Now, I found two jobs on campus and life is good. If I can do all of this, pretty sure everyone can enjoy photography without breaking their wallets.”





## Q: Why do you choose wedding photography?

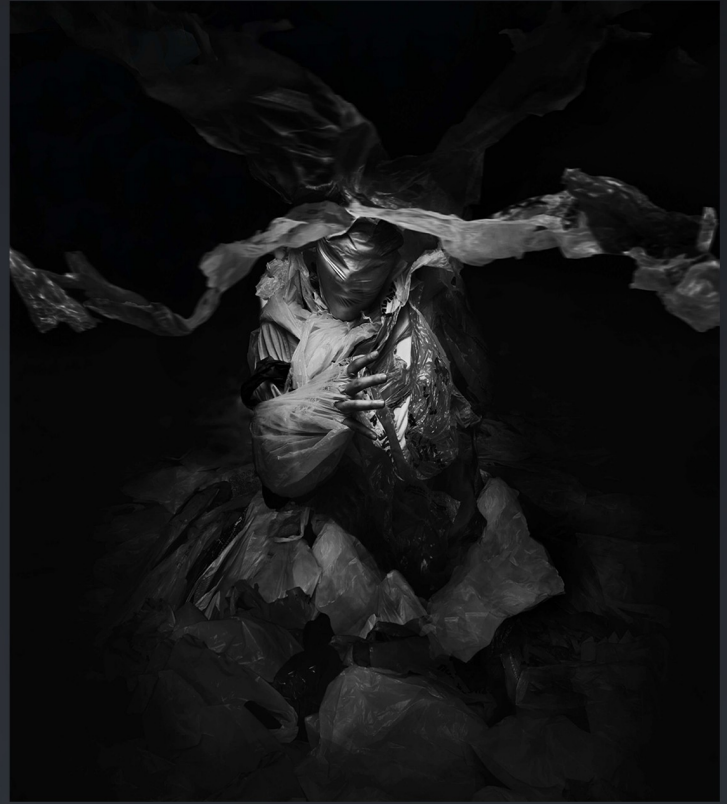
Jia: "Wedding Photography is one of a kind, I will be there to capture something precious that the couple will remember for the rest of their lives. It is such a meaningful thing to do and it only happens once. It requires you to master your camera and react fast to different situations. I personally love challenges about photography and always encourage myself to try new things about photography. Though sometimes it is hard and stressful, but if we try our best, there will be nothing to regret."





## Q: Which one is your favorite work, why?

Jia: “This is the hardest photograph I have ever worked on because post-editing took me about 2 days. I am proud because this photograph shows my concern about plastic pollution in the future. This is also a self-portrait, I used self-timer to take this shot. This is the first time I try to use a direct visual message to communicate with my audiences.”



## Q: Any advice for beginners?

Jia: “Just several tips I would like to share with you guys:

1. ALWAYS remember to rely on your brain more than your camera
2. Use your camera to EXPRESS yourself
3. Expensive camera provides quality, but only you can do the right COMPOSITION
4. Choose LENS wisely, buy upon your needs
- 5 . Photograph people you LOVE not random food, they will be valuable in the future
6. Do not DELETE pictures after taking them, use your camera as a film camera
7. SMILE to the people around you, it is contagious
8. APPRECIATE other photographer's work even if they have flaws
9. Observe first and always wait for the RIGHT MOMENT
10. Do photography because you will have FUN, not because of MONEY”



*Need inspiration or help on photography? send me a message on [www.fb.com/frameyourlove](https://www.facebook.com/frameyourlove), love to help! hope my works inspire you guys as well :)*



# Journey of the Learner's Advocate

*by Wei-Yun Deng, translated by Allen Lee and Dennis Lao*

## I. En Route

Our destination is a small village in Qiandongnan Prefecture, located in southwestern China in Guizhou Province.

Departing from Guangzhou, it takes about seventeen hours by train. To save money, we've bought tickets for a less comfy ride. The chaos onboard the train is still floating in my mind, it won't fade. After we disembark, our journey now consists of twists and turns, dust and sand messily blown up by the wind, our luggage resting in the trunk coated with dust and grime. And then a mountain road, beckoning to us through the car window, winding up towards a village on the slope of the mountain, located some 600 meters above sea level. Traveling from the foot of the mountain to the village takes us 2 to 3 hours. Needless to say, the journey has had hardly any straight path to

this point. But, there is the breathtaking scenery; it feels like walking in the clouds, a pleasant music coming from nearby creeks. On the green fields bloom occasional yellow flowers, a green mountain surrounds a matching green lake, and an imminent forest threatens to swallow us like a wave.

## II. The Village on the World's Margin.

The concept of patriarchy still exists in the village. The boys in the village are considered precious, whereas the girls take responsibility only in household chores. No matter what kind of talent is possessed by a girl, she is expected to marry young and have children. No matter where we go, it is difficult to find a girl my age who is single. You see girls marrying right when they graduate from junior high school or high school. In the village, there is a girl who does exceptionally well in school and receives high rankings.







To our dismay, she gives up education to get married. What saddened us is the fact that girls with such bright futures submit to living a life in the household at such an early time. They are willing to give up the chance of further advancing their education, just to be relegated into becoming a part of someone's household and serving her husband. "Is it worth it?" I pose the question to her, looking for the slightest hint of regret. Even when I already know her answer, the calm expression on her face fills me with nothing but pity.

There is yet another tradition whose purpose eludes me. Women are encouraged to marry within their village. As a result of incest, their marriages develop into bitterness. Many children in villages like this one are suffering or dying because of genetic disorder or congenital defect. These are the same children who might have what it takes to develop intellectually and achieve good grades. There is one young girl whom I find to be very special. She is a very pretty little girl with eyes that shone. When I ask her

what grade she is in, she becomes so shy that she could only look at me and smile. During the next few days, I notice that the girl likes to draw. Usually, she would do it on her own, but sometimes I will partake in her creation. One day, when school was over, I tell her that I would walk her home. She stops halfway and whispers in my ear "Xiao Yun Jie Jie, can I give you a present?" Before I could answer, she pulls out a drawing of a girl smiling, the little tableau wrapped up like a gift. My eyes become wet and I could think of nothing else but how much I love her.

### III. the Forgotten Sound of Reading

The children in the village have a passion for school. Every morning, kids would knock on the schools doors and yell for class to start. They are hard-working and often ask us for help after school. More than ever, there needs to be improvement in the education system in this small village. The school is comprised of ninety students and three teachers. Because this village is so isolated from the rest of



society, people here don't see the importance of education. The facilities in the school are in a state of disrepair. Although books and food are free of charge, some families don't allow their children to complete all nine years of required education, thus only a few children are allowed to even graduate from junior high. The older generation's attitude toward education places it in an awkward light. In their point of view, education now does not require spending money, and with the concept of give-and-take completely eradicated when it comes to education, it is better that people don't study so that they can be of use in their homes or in the fields, or on a job earning money for the family. During the first day of class, we realize that there is one boy who didn't attend school because his family needs him at the market. To us, this is disappointing news. Later, a few parents come into the classroom requesting that their children return home to help in cooking. I refuse to let any kids go, but we don't speak the same language and it was hard for us to communicate. The kids willingly leave the classroom. At that moment, I could only feel helpless.

Slowly, we realize that what we are doing then was truly of utmost importance. Those detrimental concepts and principles are deeply ingrained in the minds of the older generations. No, being poor is not scary—what's truly scary is peoples' refusal to improve themselves. If an entire generation has this mindset, how can we have a better future?



#### IV. Farewell Words

When we finally enter the train on our way back, nobody wants to leave. The pure look of all those clean-hearted young faces of the village children has bored deep into my mind, and I couldn't help experiencing a wave of melancholy. I keep wondering, what if our sudden appearance is actually a burden for the children? Is our appearance a kind of pollution in this pure clean mountain? Though we leave with more doubts than before, it is still our sincerest hope that these children will realize the life-changing potential of education. These past ten days have been very precious to us, and more than anything, I would like to describe every detail. I used to think I was very brave, traveling to the mountains to change lives. However, I realized how little I can do. I can only hope our hard work has resulted in even a slight change in the village. ■







# THE STORY BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN

*by Gongzhan Xie*

## I. Conflicts with the Naughty Boy

“That is a weird name!” After I introduced myself in an ill-equipped classroom that was full of first-grade kids, a little boy shouted that out loud, implanting the moment into my memory. This naughty boy was Shi Zhao, a ten-year-old boy who was studying in Chunlei elementary school located in a poor mountainous region in China. I met him when I went to Yunnan province as a volunteer teacher in the summer of 2013. However, to this day, I have no idea how to accurately describe him since sometimes he was as annoying as a devil and sometimes he was as cute as an angel.

Like other kids from the local mountainous area, his skin was tan as he had been exposed to sunlight directly. He had sparkling eyes, with long lashes, full of innocence and confidence. When he smiled, his missing teeth made him look adorable, and he was a little bit short compared to kids his age from the city. In addition, his beautiful voice and fluent Mandarin made him stand out in the class. As I looked at him more

closely, I noticed that his red scarf was tied incorrectly. (A red scarf is the symbol of the Young Pioneer. The Young Pioneer is a mass youth organization for children aged six to fourteen in the People's Republic of China.) His ragged clothes essentially portrayed his poverty but no matter how tattered his clothes were, his behavior and expressions always conveyed how passionate he was about life. Overall, he can be considered as a loveable child from his appearance.

Shi was a smart kid who had read a lot of books but strangely, his thirst to accumulate knowledge actually caused a problem. Knowing the answers of most questions that were asked by the teacher, he did not feel the need to pay attention to the teacher in the classroom. Therefore, he started to disturb others and disrupt the classroom order. Regardless of the fact that I spoke to him continuously about his behavior, his conduct in class remained unaltered.

## II. Home Visiting

On the daily work summary session, the



volunteering team talked about his behavior as a chosen topic and decided to let him be in charge of class order when the teacher is not in the class. It went well at the beginning since he put his attention to others' behavior instead of acting weird during the class. But after two days, the situation changed for the worse. As the monitor of the class, he instigated other students to skip classes. When I went back to class, I found that the classroom was empty during the lecture because everybody was in the gym playing games.

"Go back to your class room! It's not a game lesson for now!" I got mad and shouted to them.

"No, I am in charge of this class and everybody keep playing!" Shi replied resolutely and decisively.

Even though he looked so authoritative, students went back to class after seeing my angry face. Shi was so embarrassed that he cried profusely. "I don't like you!"

he said in a sobbing tone. Being really mad at that moment, I ignored him and walked away.

From that day, he began to annoy and defy me by singing, talking to others and walking around in my math class. At first, I pretended that he was not there and taught other kids to do the math problems. He got crazier and started acting out even more by standing on the table and shouting when everyone was trying to focus on their schoolwork, in order to attract my attention. After class, I told him that I needed to talk to his parents. He said, "Ok, you can come with me after school!" The arrogant way he said that shocked me and

made me curious about his family.

The way to his house was exhausting. It was hard for a girl who grew up in a city and took taxis to school every day to imagine walking four hours a day in the mountains to get to school and back. After two-hours walking, the one way trip on the mountainous path almost took my breath away, the poverty of his family

shook me to my core and I started to view Shi in a different light. A small black and white television, an old table and a small bed are crowded in the tiny room. I looked around and could not believe that there are still people in China who live in adobe houses. When I spoke to Shi's mother, and shook her hand, I easily figured out that she was a young woman who had been tortured by poverty just from the roughness of her hand. "I am so sorry that Shi acted so horribly at school! I think you should know that Shi is different from others because he has congenital heart disease. We are bad

parents because we cannot afford the cardiac surgery, but we try our best to meet his other requirements. That's probably why he becomes domineering. I will try to talk to him." Her humble manner and strong local accent were striking.

On the way back to school, I tried to find the best way to help him. The first problem was that Shi should be able to afford proper health care, so I wrote an email about Shi's family situation and sent it to the charity which supports the school. Fortunately, they said they are willing to support Shi's surgery when he was old enough to receive the treatments.





### III. Farewell

After finding out the exciting news, Shi changed a lot. Although he was still a troublemaker sometimes, he was changing into a more easy-going boy. Toward the end of my volunteer job, I sat by him and listened to another teacher's lecture on a rainy day. He leaned over and asked: "Do you know the reason why I cried last night?" I thought it was another one of his tricks, so I told him to pay attention to the class. "I cried because you were gone in my dreams last night!"

Suddenly, the devil that I had always seen in my eyes changed into an angel. I had always thought he would want me to leave because I was strict with him. I had always thought he hated me because I put him in the corner of the class. The fact that he actually liked me surprised me. My eyes filled with tears before I knew it.

"You are a special teacher even though sometimes you are annoying. I will be a good kid when you come back!" As if on cue, the rainy sky took on a new shade

of bright, hopeful blue just for my heart.

After I came back home, he still wrote to me and told me about his life. I am so glad that I had this kind of relationship with a little boy and I hope I'll have another chance to see him again.

Being involved in such an activity and getting to know little kids like Shi let me realize that I have a long way to go as a volunteer and that I have to incorporate my experience into my life so that I can make a difference.

What we did for these impoverished children was tiny compared to what they were able to teach us. They taught me that you can obtain an education no matter how harsh the conditions and that these harsh conditions are by no means able to stop anyone from being careful and full of life.

Children are gifts of God and caring for them is the same as caring for the future of the world. ■

*All images by Gongzhan Xie*







## Ai Weiwei Prize to Jia Yao

### PH Tuan-CB Wang Asian/American Center Photo Contest 2013

On April 22, 2013, the Port Jeff Documentary Series presented "Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry" at the Wang Asian/American Center. In the audience was Jia Yao. He came out of it saying, "That was really good. Amazing." More importantly, he had a new vision of what he could accomplish with his photography. The previous year he had won the P.H. Tuan - Charles B. Wang A/AC Photo Contest with an offbeat photo of his face floating in the sky above the Center. Its silvery pagoda tower stood alone above the tree tops.

Jia knew there was opposition to proposed 6-story dorms behind Wang. They would come halfway up the pagoda tower's height, destroying the aesthetics of its solitary outline against the blue sky. They would destroy the beauty and serenity of the classic Chinese garden. Students, faculty, staff, and community members had contacted President Stanley to express their dismay and offer alternatives, but he had never responded to anyone. Jia had signed the online petition when Stanley fired the Director of Asian/Asian American Programming, and knew first hand the petitioner's had been ignored. Jia wanted his work to express that. "My photo is about showing the truth about what is happening. It represents the authority figure who is not listening to the Asian community about what we want for the Wang Center."

To get the effect he wanted, Jia knew he would get in trouble if he took all the chairs he needed outside, so he took a few and kept moving and photographing them over and over, then Photoshopped it all

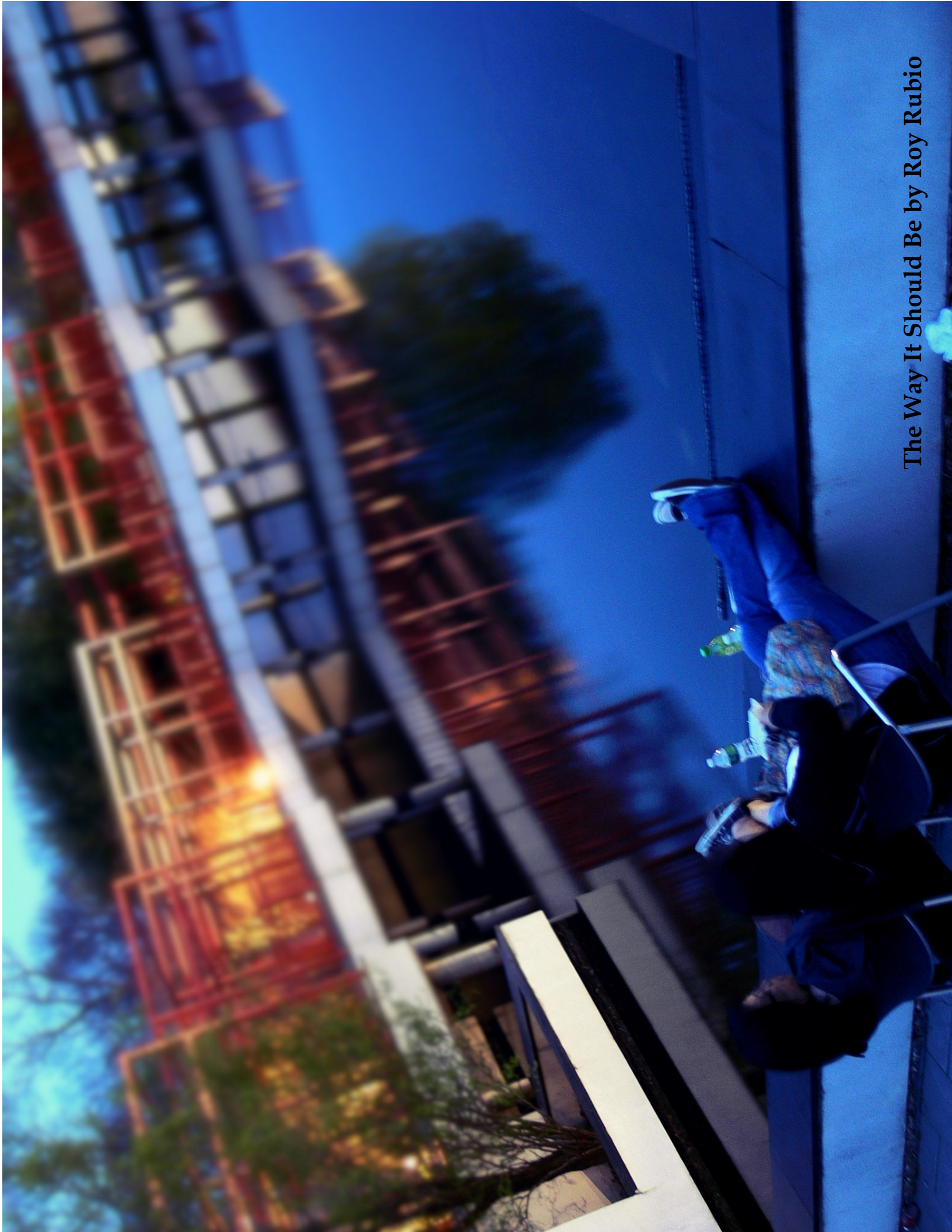
together. He sat in the center, representing Stanley, with a blindfold over his eyes and headphones over his ears. Jia described the photo on Facebook: The booklets on the chairs represent students. The laptops represent educators who had used the internet as a tool to express their feelings toward the President. The person in the center dominates the whole. He has earphones and a blindfold on because people in authority can do whatever they want and hear whatever they want. The red blindfold shows the desire of the authority figure to change the Wang Center in contradiction to the Asian community, represented by the culturally significant red color in the background.

"Overall the photo shows that even when students and educators come together, it is no match against authority. This makes us wonder if true democracy really exists on a student and educator level. The harsh sunlight used is to show this is NOT a pretty photo, rather a harsh situation."

Those running the contest saw in Jia's work what they saw happening to the Wang A/AC - one person, purposely deaf and blind to the pleas of those around him, negating their very existence. They chose to give a special prize to honor Jia's work. Just as Ai Weiwei portrays the indifference of many Chinese officials to its citizens, Jia Yao portrays Stanley's indifference to the Asian community and all who appreciate and enjoy the unique beauty of the Wang A/AC. ■

[www.aaezine.org/savewang](http://www.aaezine.org/savewang)





The Way It Should Be by Roy Rubio





*photo by SBU international student Diyuan Hu*

*Bayanhushuo Grassland, Hulunber, Inner Mongolia, China*

China National Tourism Association  
CNTA : [en.cnta.gov.cn](http://en.cnta.gov.cn)