

尼泊尔，摄影转向的一次旅行

与摄影师赵起超的对话

认识摄影师赵起超是在 2021 年春天北京 798 大画幅摄影展上，他拍摄河北蔚县社火，黑白宽幅照片中乡土气息浓烈，人物造型扎实，给我留下了深刻的印象。同年夏天赵起超在发现彩虹艺术空间举办《埃塞俄比亚》主题作品展，以数字黑白饱满的影调书写非洲大地风情，获得了很多赞誉。疫情笼罩，摄影人被困住手脚，拍摄的脚步停顿了。然而这这也是一个契机，让我们安静下来整理过去的照片，进行深度的创作与思考。赵起超周游列国，摄影创作积累颇丰。大开本、厚尺寸的新作品集《众神之乡》准备就绪。2022 年 11 月初我们通过屏幕进行了一场对话。

朱炯

“器材佬”从风光转向人文纪实的摄影之路

朱：赵老师你好！我这两天认真看了你的摄影网站。你的自我介绍说：“我是一个狂热的摄影爱好者，对单镜头反光照相机、旁轴相机、大画幅照相机、数字后背系统及宝丽来一次成像系统都能熟练运用，便于我采用不同的摄影器材去完成不同的摄影作品，以达到最佳表现效果。”（赵起超的摄影网站 www.50mmc.com。）请介绍一下你是怎么走上摄影之路的？

赵：我是东北人，先后在大庆、北京、青岛工作。理工科出身，下海经商，工作很忙。2000 年我去上海出差，买了台日本佳能单反，对摄影的好奇让我走上了影像之路。繁忙的工作之余投入摄影，精神得到放松和休息。摄影为我提供了认知社会的新领域，开辟了另外一个思想的境界。坚持了二十多年，摄影成为我真正的爱好。

朱：爱好是最大的动力！我看到你在网站中展示了不同题材、不同风格的摄影作品，这说明二十年的摄影经历与积累，对影像艺术的认知有很大的变化。

赵：最初我喜欢拍摄风光。我能吃苦，起早贪黑，搭帐篷，冒风雨，全国各地拍摄了好多年。我拍了美景，自我欣赏挺好，又发朋友圈，给朋友看，大家点赞。但是时间久了，我发现那些美景照片在网络上也有很多相似的。我问自己，到底为什么拍照？我想必须拍摄一些跟别人不一样的东西。所以我不断寻找新的摄影方向。

朱：你在网页里可是把所有摄影器材类型都提到了，表示都能熟练运用。你到底都有些什么器材？你为什么买那么多器材？

赵：我开玩笑说自己是个“器材佬儿”。我首先是个理工男啊，新买一个器材就马上热情洋溢地使用，用顺手了留下来，不好用的就卖了。也有的器材换掉了，过几年又买回来。

朱：是吗？还会卖了又买回来？

赵：是。你看我网站上有拍摄东北的主题，用的是哈苏 X-pan。我 2005 年买了一

整套，当时就觉得宽幅好，拍了很多照片。但是佳能推出数码相机 EOS10D，我用了以后觉得数码相机那么方便，效果好，就把全部的胶片相机处理掉了。

朱：佳能的 10D？

赵：对佳能第一款成熟的数码单反相机，10D，然后是 20D，后来是 5D。

朱：那可早了，2006 年吧。当时的像素可不高。你用 X-pan 并不久就换数字了。

赵：对换数字了。不过用了几年以后，发现大家都在用，就像吃快餐一样的没什么味儿。这就又把胶片相机 X-pan 啊，禄来啊，再买回来，之后就没有撒手。

朱：你有这么一个胶片、数字、胶片器材的轮回运用过程，有意思！从你个人经历可以折射出摄影器材的发展以及摄影创作与器材关系的变化。

赵：对，有一个反复的过程。

朱：你把胶片机买回来是什么时候？

赵：X-pan 是 2015 年左右买回来的。

朱：那是去尼泊尔旅行之后了。

赵：对。我去尼泊尔用的是 Sony 出的第一款微单。当时买 Sony 是为了能转接使用徕卡的镜头。不过尼泊尔旅行的设备使用的是 Sony 的镜头，比较便捷。

朱：你现在有几款数码相机？

赵：我有阿尔帕相机和飞思的数字背，徕卡，富士三款数码相机。佳能早就出干净了，没有了。过去用佳能是拍摄风光，镜头比较全，从广角、中焦到长焦。现在风光基本不拍了。索尼的也不用了。135 基本上就是徕卡，有徕卡黑白数字机，彩色数字机。阿尔帕可以移轴，有时拍摄建筑，方便一些。富士像素高，类似一个大单反，更方便了。

朱：徕卡数字相机好用吗？

赵：富士中画幅有变焦，可以自动对焦，功能相对多一些，更好用。但是为什么要保留徕卡？出门旅游的时候徕卡更便于携带。带笨重的器材和家人一起旅游，对旅游的质量影响比较大。徕卡影像品质有保证，携带方便，很重要。《埃塞尔比亚》那本画册都是用徕卡拍摄的。

朱：摄影历史的一个重要发展动力就是器材的革新。器材提供了视角范围、成像效果，科技发展推动摄影题材和语言的发展。掌握器材、掌握技术，是从事摄影特别重要的一个路径。对专业摄影师来说也一样。你这位“器材佬儿”懂得不同设备对题材和语言表达的不同可能性。对器材熟知是你摄影创作的优势。应该说从器材运用入手，就是从技术控制入手掌握摄影，是一种专业的、有效的路径。

赵：我觉得算是一个进入摄影的途径吧。器材各有优劣势，器材对拍摄题材和风格影响挺大的。大画幅或者阿尔帕相机，拍摄一些固定的场景。它们的优势是我能在现场认真地取景思考，拍一张是一张，但是很多鲜活的生活画面不能入画。相反，像徕卡、富士这些相机，给你提供更多的方便。徕卡体积最小，在拍摄过程中对被摄者的打扰是最小的，更便于你去拍摄想要的画面。富士中画幅再自动化，一举起来都会对被摄者产生压迫感。这也是徕卡这么一个保守的相机到现在还是这么火的原因。因此我觉得不同的相机有不同的作用。

朱：你使用相机的体会很真切。那么你的器材与题材是如何搭配的呢？

赵：是根据题材而定。比如我现在比较集中在青岛拍摄，用大画幅相机，以黑白胶片为主，适合彩色的用彩色胶片拍。我也随身携带徕卡相机，记录生活。这个阶段这个题材我不用其他相机。我拍摄另外一个蔚县的题材，起因是我买了人生第一台大画幅相机，沙慕尼 8X20。我为了运用这台机器，在朋友的建议下去了蔚县。使用过程中发现机器太大了，太不方便了，就专门向沙慕尼定制了一台 5X12

英寸进行替换。这个尺寸合适，我就一直用它拍摄了六七年。那个阶段拍摄完之后，我把这个大画幅相机卖掉了。

朱：像你这样器材流动这么大的摄影师多吗？

赵：像我这样的可能不多。但是器材流动的现象是挺正常的，进进出出的。我观察职业摄影师这样的不多。我认识的很多艺术家朋友，设备使用非常单一。这是职业摄影师和业余摄影师的一大区别吧。拍摄《家》的黄庆军，也是大庆出来的，一直用尼康，他偶尔用一下阿尔帕，也不再用了。不像我们这种业余的，用的设备样式多。我这些年是强迫自己在一段时间固定器材。因为相机来回折腾，这个镜头有味道，那个镜头反差大……比较这些为什么呢？最终还是要拍出片子来。片子的内容才是真正的价值。作为观众来说，他并不关注你用什么器材。所以我逐渐明白，倒腾器材可以是一种乐趣，但是拍摄时器材是工具，不能在现场折腾玩。一个题材必须要专注使用一个固定的机器和镜头，这样能够把自己的精力用在拍摄上。

朱：早期拍摄，你一次最多带几台相机？

赵：有过几次什么都带上，大画幅、120 数字背、135。拍摄的时候很兴奋，可是回来后却发现值得回味的片子并不多，时间都耽误在折腾器材上了。尼泊尔和埃塞俄比亚的旅行拍摄对我来说感受深刻，因为我选择了最简单的器材，拍出来的片子自己满意。所以我这个器材佬的摄影器材之路是一个由繁到简的路。

朱：总结的好！“由繁到简”，现在拍摄器材使用有的放矢了。

朱：说到摄影的题材，我最早了解你的作品是河北蔚县的人文纪实，内容很丰富。你是怎么从拍风光摄影转向拍人文纪实的？

赵：蔚县专题是 2014 年开始拍摄的，是拍摄了尼泊尔之后找到的选题。2013 年底去尼泊尔这一次旅行摄影对我摄影的转型起到了关键的作用。当年我们全家一起去旅行。首先我想给爱人和孩子拍点纪念照，所以带了 Sony 的微单，家人也能便捷地给我拍照纪念。我自己更多的还是想拍摄风光，带了阿尔帕，还有三脚架。去了尼泊尔之后发现，可拍的风光并不多，除了雪山没有其他的内容。我们 9 天时间把尼泊尔跑遍了，也没有时间在一个地方待太久。在用小相机给家人拍纪念照的时候，我也拍摄了很多当地的人。

朱：你为什么去尼泊尔？

赵：我去过很多国家旅游。那一次选择尼泊尔，一个跟我们相邻的国家，宗教信仰跟我们有着千丝万缕的联系。我有强烈的好奇心，想去看看。去了之后有非常亲切的感觉，似曾相识。这个地方人的生活状态跟我们现在不一样。尼泊尔相对落后，社会非常传统。有个尼泊尔的朋友带着女儿来见我们，女儿吵着要去吃肯德基。这跟我们 90 年代的生活状态差不多，有那个时代的印记。尼泊尔以信奉印度教为主，也有佛教。我们去了恒河边，人死了以后送到河边烧掉。这与印度相似，人的社会等级分明，死人焚烧也必须按照等级在相应的炉子里焚烧。这些宗教文化现象都非常吸引人。多方面的因素影响，促使我拍摄了大量的照片。回来之后再看到照片，我发现那些风光照片，别人也拍了。你上网一搜，画面都有差不多，自己的风光片没有什么值得回忆的。反而是那些尼泊尔人文的照片，让人想起很多相遇，觉得很有人情味。甚至过一年、过两年看，仍然觉得亲切。风光片就不想再看了。尼泊尔是 2013 年底 2014 年初去。2014 年 3、4 月份我新买了大画幅相机，带着它去蔚县。我想拍摄跟别人不一样的表达，于是拍摄蔚县历史遗留下来的堡子建筑，拍摄乡民生活，拍摄社火。我觉得拍人、拍社会生活充满

魅力。

朱：那么尼泊尔的拍摄是你人文纪实的开启键了。

赵：尼泊尔专题确实是我摄影的转折点。基本上从那以后，我就没有专门拍摄风光了，偶尔几张。

众神之乡的启示

朱：好，那我们就进入你的尼泊尔专题。你拍摄的时间很紧凑。

赵：是，一共9天，基本上把尼泊尔的主要地方都去到了：纳加阔特、巴德岗广场，博卡拉、斯瓦杨步纳特寺、加德满都杜巴广场、博达哈佛塔，拍摄量很大，时间非常集中。

朱：封面的照片是尼泊尔核心的宗教场所吗？

赵：我还一下子说不上这个地方的名字，这是一个广场。尼泊尔作为一个宗教国家，它跟其他的地方的宗教样态不一样。我们一想到宗教，就会想到寺庙啊，教堂啊，都是一些固定的神圣的地方。尼泊尔不是，它除了有世界文化遗产级别的寺庙外，祭拜的地方随处可见。城市里有很多广场，总是会有佛像，大家随时会去摆个酥油灯啊，点个蜡啊，送个黄花啊。他们每天早上第一件事情好像就是去磕个头，拜一拜。这就是在广场，并不是在寺庙里。宗教是随时随地的。广场相对于一个集市，卖菜的，卖吃的，什么都有，也有很多的游客。

朱：封面这张你的取景范围很广，为什么这么拍？

赵：当时广场人特别多，我尝试了不同的角度。后来决定要把环境带上拍摄。这是用阿尔帕数字背拍摄的。我就是想传递尼泊尔宗教的特点，是在社会生活中随处可见的。

朱：你有信仰吗？

赵：我本人没有信仰，是个典型的无神论者。

朱：你的照片进行后期剪裁吗？

赵：基本上没有剪裁。我不太喜欢剪裁照片。

朱：这本摄影集的照片色彩很有活力，光感好，佛像的黑色、建筑的黄色都很夺目。你在后期的色彩处理动得大吗？你是怎么控制颜色的？

赵：不大。我本身不喜欢太艳的颜色，淡一些的好。这张照片的色彩还原是正常的，我用数字背拍摄，色彩饱满，清晨拍摄光线明朗。我不想后期去改变色彩。

朱：我觉得颜色艳，但是很真实，是这个地方的特色，建筑环境和人物服饰，在阳光下闪亮。我感觉照片中的黑非常美，压住了整个画面，让艳丽的色彩不轻飘。

赵：比较符合尼泊尔的气质。

朱：书的名字《众神之乡》是怎么来的？

赵：这个名字是刘铮老师起的。我原来想叫“尼泊尔”，比较直白。刘铮老师起了这个名字，给我惊喜的感觉，对作品主题进行了提炼。因为尼泊尔的特点是全民信仰宗教，无论是印度教还是佛教。宗教覆盖整个社会，不仅是人，还有动物，以及自然。这个地方到处都有流浪狗，一个市场就有几十条。跟其他地方的狗不一样，它们既不会跟着人跑，也不会对着人叫，它们就安安静静地趴在那里。给人的感觉好像是动物们都受到了宗教的洗礼，心态变得特别平和。我在尼泊尔拍摄了百十来张跟狗有关系的照片。尼泊尔人对自然、对山都充满了敬畏之心。《众神之乡》可以理解为在每个生命的心里都有神明。

朱：这是一个充满诗意的名字，很美！我看到《众神之乡》作品集分成了四个章

节，首先是肖像，你的镜头让我们靠近尼泊尔人的面孔，甚至与他们对视。第二章你的景别放松了，看到人的行为，也看到了环境，好像带着我们到尼泊尔四处逛，展现尼泊尔的社会生活和宗教气氛。第三章聚焦在苦行僧这个特定的人群，给读者深入展现印度教的独特文化。第四章视野放开了，你的镜头带着读者看到了城市、乡野、雪山，你最后把孕育尼泊尔宗教社会的大自然呈现出来。

赵：是的，这是刘铮老师图片编辑的成果。他把我这一次拍摄的最大收获“肖像”放在第一章。

朱：肖像的景别都是中近景，挺统一的。你原来是拍摄风景，离人很远的。这次拍摄人物，有没有困难？人文纪实靠近人拍摄很难的。

赵：肖像都是 Sony 相机标头拍摄的。用固定的相机，固定的镜头，基本都是大光圈 F2，保持景别的一致性。那之前我在国内拍摄人物挺少的。因为人的防范心理很重。你一举相机他就问你“你要干什么？”、“你为什么要拍？”。尼泊尔就没有，也可能是语言不同，他说了我也不懂，我反而没有惧怕的心理了。我走上去拍，笑一笑，乐一乐就拍了。再一个跟这里的人信仰宗教也有关系。人很友善，你去拍摄了他也不在意。他就当你不存在一样，视你为空气。那些肖像大多数不是在广场拍摄的。我们沿途路过一些村子，总是下车去看看。这些村子受到游客的干扰少，对外来人不太拒绝，比较随和。

朱：拍摄前后都要跟人“笑一笑”，这是“秘诀”！你在尼泊尔拍摄人的经验是否用到后来在中国拍摄人文纪实中了？

赵：用上的。我在同一年开始拍摄蔚县，因为有了尼泊尔的锻炼，不仅跟人家笑笑，还要聊上几句，没有语言障碍了，聊好了再拍摄。现在我在青岛海滩拍摄很多人。那都是有沟通拍摄的。

朱：你用标头拍摄，离被摄人物很近。能具体讲一下这些肖像的拍摄吗？

赵：尼泊尔在高原上，阳光炙烈，人的形象有特征，也感觉比较有沧桑感。当时没有想要出本画册，就是觉得人有特点，要尽可能地多拍一些肖像。

朱：绿色头巾的这位女人形象，很有力量感。

赵：对我觉得这个女人很有自信，所以有力量感。

朱：你拍摄穿传统服装的人，也有年轻时尚的男人。

赵：这两个人反差比较大。大部分人的服装是传统的。他们不是，特别是带大墨镜的这位，很少见，在那个环境中很突出。

朱：下两页中有个男人肖像，戴着眼镜，在明朗的光线下他显出一幅高贵的样子。你拍摄了不同阶层的人。

赵：当时周围有很多人。他坐在台阶上，拿着杯子喝咖啡。他穿着西装，打扮地跟别人不一样。

朱：作品集第二章节内容非常丰富，镜头带着观众进入尼泊尔的社会空间，让我们看到人在宗教与世俗的两重空间中穿行。宗教无处不在，但是你的观看没有把它神秘化，而是更关注了尼泊尔人的生存状态。第二章开头就有这种街头可乐广告边停着摩托车和两头牛的照片。

赵：这个场景我记忆犹新。当时我们经过一个村子，看到了外来文化对乡村的影响。对于我来说，在尼泊尔看到了中国曾经经历的 80 年代。可乐广告，摩托车，都是现代文明的产物，牛和老房子都是过去延续下来的。这两个内容在一起有一种碰撞，所以我把它们拍下来。如果按照我以往的拍摄，可能会把可乐广告压掉，让画面色调更统一。现在我会更多地保留一些环境因素，这是我从拍摄风光转为

人文的最大变化。

朱：照片呈现的社会文化冲突，细节很丰富。我看到墙上还有佛教万福的符号。画面前景黑色的阴影，显示出你抓拍的状态，现场感很强烈。你有没有考虑过前景的这块黑怎么处理？

赵：拍摄的时候其实都没有关注到前景的黑影。当时就看到牛、摩托车，赶紧拍。回来选片子时，注意到这块黑色，我没有剪裁，不想动它，因为我觉得画面的底部需要重一些，黑色阴影带给画面稳定感。另外这个黑影也说明这边空间有东西。

朱：人文纪实摄影的造型处理和风光摄影很不一样，看似不讲究的部分其实很有作用。人文纪实摄影拍摄的速度快，边走边看，边拍摄，思考的过程也是非常迅速地。现在编辑照片做书的时候，就会在照片中有新的发现，也有对画面更加细致深入的分析。可以看出来，你在尼泊尔的观察重点是传统与现代的冲突与并置。

（p102）威武的狮子塑像边上有三个男人认真地看报纸，平静的画面中隐藏着喧嚣，有意思！

赵：这是一个早上，在背阴的街上站了很多人。这个场景吸引了我，因为看报纸这件事情跟大狮子雕像不太搭配。看报纸好像应该是在家里啊，酒店啊，咖啡馆或者办公室。这里是一个集市，一个宗教味儿特别浓的地方，竟然有这么多人看报纸。我不假思索地按下了快门。

朱：第三章的主题是苦行僧吧，什么含义？

赵：我只能说个大概啊。他们信奉印度教，他们要在现世闭关、修炼，这样来世获得幸福。叫苦行僧，就是尽可能地降低生活需求，吃的最少，喝的最少，赎罪以获得心灵的解脱。有一页对开四张表情不同的特写。第二个人他头上盘的那么多头发，估计一辈子没有理过发，都是擀毡的。第三个人修行时间短，头发不够长。

朱：人们给他们钱吗？

赵：一般不给钱。但是在集市的一些苦行僧，是要给钱的。受到现代社会的污染，有些人不给钱不让拍。

朱：那你给钱吗？

赵：有一张合影，好多人站在一起合影，是给钱的。他们都是在各自的地方坐着躺着，不给钱不可能站的这么齐爽。

朱：还有女的苦行僧？

赵：修行不分男女。有个情况，摄影师要是欧洲人不要钱，看着是中国人就要钱。可能是被惯出毛病了。

朱：书的第四个章节是环境、风景了。这个部分用阿尔帕相机拍摄的吗？

赵：不都是，前面四张是索尼拍摄，后面都是阿尔帕拍摄的。

朱：书中设计了对折页打开的两张风景照片，很大气！平静永恒的雪山、峡谷，孕育着无限生机。照片中的天空特别蓝，你加滤镜了吗？

赵：高原拍摄，天空就很透，不需要加滤镜。我也不喜欢加滤镜。这张照片有云海，非常难得。陪同说这个季节没有云海。我以前在东北五大连池也遇到过这种云海奇迹。开玩笑说，我“人品好！”

朱：我们都说被大自然眷顾的人肯定是人品好！这两张风景是同一天拍摄的吗？

赵：同一天拍摄。后一张是先拍的，是早上太阳刚刚升起，朝阳只照到山尖。等到太阳升起，我们快下山的时候云海起来了，又拍摄了第二张。

朱：你到尼泊尔来拍摄风光的愿望还是实现了！这个单元体现了你风光摄影的特长。

做书是一个审美提升的过程

朱：赵老师，你这是第二次请刘铮老师做编辑，出版作品集了。可见你们合作得非常愉快。你作为摄影师，对刘铮的图片编辑工作有什么体会？

赵：首先我觉得一个专题作品，拍摄是完成了三分之一的工作，接下来要归纳整理，最后是输出成集。如果不达到最后一步，就等于没做。我拍摄很有热情，甚至是“狂热”。然后我可以挑选照片，从技术标准和造型标准挑选好看的照片。但是编辑一本作品集，不是漂亮照片的集合，它需要具有艺术的高度，我觉得自己不具备这样的能力。其实我自己一直把给家人拍的照片做手工书，一年至少一本，做了几十本了。要把一个专题的大量照片梳理、整合为一本有艺术水准的书，是需要真正的专业能力。我把几百张、上千张的照片交给艺术家刘铮，他用了两三个月的时间来系统地梳理我的照片。他的编辑就是给我的作品提出最好的意见。

朱：摄影师自己编辑照片本身就是有局限，思维的局限。刘铮的选片跟你的选择出入大吗？

赵：我是业余摄影师，没有受过系统的艺术教育训练。我开始学习摄影，更多受大众审美影响，追求好看，不好看的选。我现在希望能够抛开大众审美，希望获得高级美的认识能力和创作能力。我也看很多画册，跟年轻摄影师聊天，开阔思路。我给刘铮老师照片的时候，给他讲了很多拍摄时候的想法，但是我没有明确的作品集的结构，篇章的设置，至于照片的选择与组合，都是刘铮创造性地工作。我是拿到他的编辑版本后，仔细去品味，他为什么选这张？为什么这些照片安排在一起呈现？我借助他的编辑工作来学习艺术家的审美，以此摆脱大众审美的束缚。原来我拍摄的大美风光照片发朋友圈，点赞一大片，发刘铮老师选的照片，朋友圈没人理。大众审美和艺术审美完全不是一回事。

朱：这么明显的反差啊！你还是相信刘铮老师啊！

赵：我总结，做书不仅是学习如何编排，更是学习、提升艺术审美。这次的尼泊尔专题，对我来说摄影题材与审美转型的一个节点，刘铮老师的编辑工作是帮我把这个转型进一步的提炼。具体到书的题目，到章节设置，都是对主题的深化。从总体上说，做这本书的最大收获，审美提升，是拓展思维，是发展自己的风格。

Nepal: A Journey of Photographic Transformation
A Conversation with Zhao Qichao

I first met Zhao Qichao at the large-format photo exhibition in Beijing's 798 Art District in spring 2021. He had photographed festival entertainment in Yu County, Hebei. The country atmosphere and sturdy figures in his black-and-white wide-format pictures left a deep impression on me. In summer of that same year, Zhao Qichao held "Ethiopia" at Find Rainbow Books & Gallery. It was very well-received, conveying the ambience of Africa in the saturated tones of digital black and white. As the pandemic swept the globe, photographers had to stop working, but they gained an opportunity to slow down and organize their past pictures, a chance to think and create more deeply. Zhao Qichao has traveled to many countries, and he has amassed an impressive body of pictures. Those pictures were edited into the substantial new photobook *The Home of the Gods*. We had the following conversation online in early November 2022.

Zhu Jiong

A Gear Guy's Journey from Landscape to Documentary

Zhu Jiong (ZJ): Zhao Qichao, hello! I've spent the last two days looking carefully through your website. The introduction states: "I am a passionate photography enthusiast who is well-versed in SLR cameras, rangefinder cameras, large-format cameras, digital backs, and Polaroid instant systems. I use different photography equipment to achieve the best visual effect across photographic genres." [Zhao Qichao's website: www.50mmc.com.] Can you talk about your photography journey?

Zhao Qichao (ZQC): I'm from the northeast, and I've worked in Daqing, Beijing, and Qingdao. I'm an engineer by training, but I ended up going into business, which was quite hectic. In 2000, I took a business trip to Shanghai, where I bought a Canon SLR. Curiosity about photography set me on this path. I invested what time I had outside of my busy job into photography, which gave me a way to relax. Photography has offered me a new way of understanding society and another way of thinking. I've worked on my photography for more than twenty years, and photography has truly become my hobby.

ZJ: Enjoyment is truly the best motivation. I noticed different subjects and styles of photography on your website, which shows notable changes in your understanding of photography over the last two decades.

ZQC: Initially, I liked to photograph landscapes. I could bear hardship, working from dawn to dusk. I lived in tents and braved the wind and rain. I traveled around China taking pictures for many years. I photographed beautiful landscapes that I really enjoyed, and when I posted them for my friends to see, everyone liked them. However, after a while, I discovered that all of these pictures of scenic spots online looked very similar. I asked myself why I was taking these pictures. I had to do something different, so I continued to explore other avenues in my photography.

ZJ: On your website, you say you're well-versed in all of those different types of photographic equipment. What equipment do you actually use? Why have you bought so much gear?

ZQC: I joke that I'm a "gear guy." I started out as an engineer, so whenever I buy a new piece of equipment, I'm just itching to learn how to use it. The ones I find easy to use, I keep; the rest I sell on. There have been a few things that I've sold, only to buy back a few years later.

ZJ: Really? You'd sell them then buy them back?

ZQC: Yes. Some of the pictures of the northeast on my website were taken on a Hasselblad XPan. I bought one in 2005. I really liked the wide format, so I took a lot of pictures. However, when Canon released the EOS10D digital camera, I found that digital cameras were so much more convenient and had a great effect, so I sold all of my film cameras.

ZJ: The Canon 10D?

ZQC: Yes, the 10D was Canon's first mature DSLR, then they released the 20D and the 5D.

ZJ: 2006 was early, and the resolution wasn't very good. You switched to digital not long after you started using the XPan.

ZQC: Yes, I moved to digital. However, after a few years, I discovered that everyone was using it, and it became uninteresting, like fast food. I bought film cameras like the XPan and Rollei again, then I never gave them up.

ZJ: It's so interesting that you cycled from film to digital, then back to film! Your personal experience reflects developments in photography equipment and its changing relationship to photographic creativity.

ZQC: Yes, it was a reversal.

ZJ: When did you go back to film cameras?

ZQC: I bought the XPan back around 2015.

ZJ: After you went to Nepal.

ZQC: Right. When I went to Nepal, I used Sony's first interchangeable lens digital camera. I bought the Sony to transition to Leica lenses. However, I used a Sony lens on my trip to Nepal because it was convenient.

ZJ: You now have several digital cameras?

ZQC: I have three digital cameras: an Alpa camera and a Phase One digital back, as well as a Leica and a Fuji. I got rid of the Canon a while ago, so I don't have that anymore. In the past, I used a Canon to shoot landscapes because of the full range of lenses, from wide-angle to medium and long telephoto lenses. Now I don't really shoot landscapes, and I don't use the Sony much anymore. My 135 mm cameras are mostly Leicas; I have a Leica black-and-white digital camera and a color digital camera. The Alpas have a movement, which is sometimes more convenient for photographing architecture. The Fuji has great resolution, similar to a large SLR, but more convenient.

ZJ: Are the Leica digital cameras easy to use?

ZQC: The Fuji medium-format has a zoom and can auto-focus. It has more functions and is easier to use. So why do I keep the Leicas? They're easier to carry when I travel. Carrying cumbersome equipment when traveling with family makes a big difference on a trip. The Leica guarantees a certain image quality and it's easy to carry, which is really important. I shot all of the pictures in my *Ethiopia* book on a Leica.

ZJ: Innovations in equipment have driven important advancements in the history of photography. Equipment offers a visual scope and effect, and technological advancements have spurred developments in the subject matter and style of photography. Having a grasp of the equipment and technology is a very important way to get into photography. It's the same for

professional photographers. As a gear guy, you understand the possibilities of different equipment for different subjects and styles. Your familiarity with different cameras benefits your photography. If you begin with cameras, you're mastering photography from the technical aspect, which is a specialized and effective way of doing things.

ZQC: I think of it as a way into photography. All equipment has its advantages and disadvantages, but it can have a significant influence on subject matter and style. With a large-format or Alpa camera, I have to photograph something fixed. The advantage is that I can consider the framing carefully. I can take one solid picture, but I can't capture fresh, lively scenes. In contrast, the Leica and Fuji cameras are very convenient. The Leica is the smallest, and it is the least intrusive for the subject when you're taking the picture, so it helps you take the pictures you want. The Fuji medium-format is automated, so the subject feels pressured the instant you pick it up. This is another reason why a conservative camera like the Leica is still so popular to this day. Different cameras have different uses.

ZJ: You have very clear ideas about these cameras. How do you match the equipment with the subject matter?

ZQC: It's determined by the subject matter. For example, I have focused a lot on Qingdao in my photography, using a large-format camera and black-and-white film. When the subjects are better suited to color, I shoot on color film. I also carry my Leica with me to record life. I used just one camera for this time and this subject [Nepal]. I did another project in Yu County because I bought my first large-format camera: a Chamonix 8 x 20. In order to use this camera, I took a friend's advice and went to Yu County. While I was using the contraption, I found it too large and inconvenient, so I switched it for a custom Chamonix 5 x 12. This was a more suitable size, and I used it for six or seven years. When the project was finished, I sold that large-format camera.

ZJ: Do a lot of photographers go through as much equipment as you do?

ZQC: There may not be many who do exactly what I do. However, it's quite common for people to cycle through equipment, bringing in new things and getting rid of others. Very few professional photographers that I've seen are like that. A lot of my artist friends use just one kind, which is a major difference between professional and amateur photographers. Huang Qingjun, who created *Home* and is also from Daqing, has always used a Nikon. He occasionally used an Alpa, but he doesn't much anymore. It's different for us amateurs, who use a lot of different kinds of cameras. In recent years, I've forced myself to stick to one kind of camera for a time. Going back and forth over cameras, discovering that there's a certain atmosphere with this lens and a higher contrast with that one... What's the point of comparing these things? In the end, the goal is to take pictures, and the real value of those pictures is the content. Viewers don't care what kind of camera you used. I gradually learned that buying and selling equipment can be fun, but all of this equipment is simply a tool when you're taking pictures. You can't mess around with it on a shoot. You should use a dedicated camera and lens for each subject. That way, you can focus your energy on taking the pictures.

ZJ: In your early days, what was the greatest number of cameras you took with you at a time?

ZQC: A few times, I took everything with me—a large-format camera, a 120 digital back, and a 135 mm camera. I was really excited while I was taking the pictures, but when I got home, I discovered that there were very few pictures worth looking back on. I wasted a lot of time switching out my equipment. My photography trips to Nepal and Ethiopia left deep impressions on me, because I chose the simplest gear, and I'm satisfied with the pictures I took. In my journey as a gear guy, I have moved from complexity to simplicity.

ZJ: "From complexity to simplicity"... that's a good way to put it! Now your photography

equipment has a defined goal.

ZJ: Speaking of subject matter, the first works of yours that I encountered were your pictures of Yu County in Hebei. It's a very rich series. How did you shift from landscapes to people and culture?

ZQC: I started my Yu County project in 2014. It was the topic I discovered after going to Nepal. My trip to Nepal in late 2013 played a key role in the shift in my photography. That year, the entire family went traveling. First of all, I wanted to be able to take holiday photos for my wife and child, so I took my Sony interchangeable lens camera, which they could also easily use to take pictures of me. Personally, I had hoped to take more landscape photos, so I brought my Alpa and a tripod. After arriving in Nepal, I discovered that there weren't many scenic landscapes to photograph, aside from the mountains. We traveled all over Nepal for nine days, so we didn't stay in one place for very long. While using my small camera to take holiday pictures for my family, I also photographed a lot of the local people.

ZJ: Why did you go to Nepal?

ZQC: I've traveled to many countries. That time, I chose Nepal, in part because the country neighbors ours and there are countless religious ties. I was extremely curious; I wanted to see what it was like. Once we got there, it felt very familiar, almost as if I had been there before. They live very differently than we do now. Nepal is a bit backward, and the society there is still rather traditional. A Nepalese friend brought their daughter along to see us, and she complained that she wanted to go to KFC. This is how we lived in the 1990s; it really felt like that era. Most people in Nepal are Hindus, but there are also some Buddhists. We went to the bank of the Ganges River. When people die, their bodies are burned on riverside funeral pyres. Like India, there is a caste system, and people must use the crematorium associated with their caste. These religious rituals are exceedingly interesting. Many different landscapes have prompted me to take lots of pictures. When I got home and looked at the pictures, I discovered that other people had already taken them. When I did a search, all of the images looked essentially the same, and my landscapes weren't that memorable. In contrast, the pictures of people that I took in Nepal remind people of many other encounters. They had a real human touch. Looking at them a year or two later, they still feel very close. I don't ever need to look at the landscapes again. I went to Nepal in late 2013 to early 2014. In March or April 2014, I bought a new large-format camera and took it to Yu County. I wanted to take pictures that were different, so I photographed the historic village architecture of Yu County, the lives of the villagers, and festival entertainments. Photographing people and social life was so exciting.

ZJ: So the pictures you took in Nepal were the key to your cultural documentary work.

ZQC: The Nepal project was a turning point for my photography. After that trip, I generally didn't focus on landscapes. I would just shoot one or two on occasion.

The Inspiration Behind The Home of the Gods

ZJ: Right, now we should talk about your Nepal project. You took all these pictures on a really tight timeline.

ZQC: Yes. I was there for a total of nine days, and I went to almost all of the key places in Nepal: Nagarkot, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Pokhara, Swayambhunath Stupa, Kathmandu Durbar Square, and Boudhanath Stupa. I took a ton of pictures in a rather short period of time.

ZJ: Is the picture on the cover from a key religious site in Nepal?

ZQC: I don't remember its name right off the top of my head, but it's a square. Nepal is a religious country, so it deals with religion differently than other places. When we think of religion, we think of temples or churches, which are fixed sacred sites. That's not the way it is in Nepal. In addition to the temples that are UNESCO World Heritage sites, there are places of worship everywhere. There are many squares in the cities, which always have Buddha statues. People can light lanterns and candles and offer flowers anytime. It seems that the first thing they do every day is bow and say a prayer. This was in a square, not a temple. Religion can appear at all times and places. The square is opposite a market that sells vegetables and prepared food—it has everything. There are also a lot of tourists.

ZJ: The photograph on the cover is a rather wide-ranging scene. Why did you shoot it this way?

ZQC: There were a lot of people in the square that day, so I tested out different angles. Later, I decided to photograph the surrounding area using the Alpa digital back. I wanted to convey the unique facets of religion in Nepal, which are everywhere in social life.

ZJ: Are you religious?

ZQC: I'm not. I'm a classic atheist.

ZJ: Did you crop the image?

ZQC: Not really. I don't really like cropping pictures.

ZJ: In this book, there is a lot of vitality in the colors and a great sense of light. The black of the Buddha statue and the yellow of the building are quite striking. Did you tweak the colors after the fact? How do you control the colors?

ZQC: Not a lot. I personally don't like it when the colors are too bright. I prefer something slightly paler. I restored the colors in this picture to a normal state. I used a digital back; the colors are saturated, and the morning sun is bright. I don't want to change the colors later.

ZJ: The colors are gorgeous, but they're real. It's particular to the place—the buildings, environment, figures, and clothing shine in the sunlight. I think that the black in the image is really beautiful. It presses down on the entire image and makes the gorgeous colors feel heavier.

ZQC: It fits with Nepal's atmosphere.

ZJ: How did the book's title "The Home of the Gods" come about?

ZQC: Liu Zheng gave it that title. I originally wanted to call it "Nepal," something rather straightforward. I was pleasantly surprised by the name he proposed; it refined the theme of the project. Nepal is unique because everyone is religious, whether Hindu or Buddhist. Religion touches all of society—people, animals, and nature. There are stray dogs everywhere; there were a few dozen in one market. They're different from dogs elsewhere, because they don't chase or bark at people. They just lie there quietly. You almost feel like even the animals have been touched by religion and imbued with calm. In Nepal, I took about a hundred pictures of dogs. The Nepalese have a distinct reverence for nature and the mountains. You could say that "The Home of the Gods" means that there is divinity in the heart of every living thing.

ZJ: It's so beautiful—such a poetic title! *The Home of the Gods* is divided into four chapters. The first section is portraits. Your camera brings us closer to the Nepalese people, so that we can look at them face to face. In the second chapter, your shots are more relaxed. We see people's actions and the environment. It seems like you bring us everywhere in Nepal, showing us its social life and religious atmosphere. The third section focuses on a unique group of

ascetics, immersing the viewer in a unique culture within Hinduism. The fourth chapter takes a broader perspective. You bring the viewer to cities, villages, and mountains, showing the natural world that nurtured Nepal's religious society.

ZQC: Right. This is the product of Liu Zheng's photo editing. He wanted to place the portraits, the best part of this project, in the first chapter.

ZJ: The portraits are all medium close-up shots, which are quite unified. You started out shooting landscapes, keeping your distance from the human world. Was it difficult to photograph these people? Sometimes getting close to people can be challenging.

ZQC: The portraits were shot on the Sony. I used a single camera and lens, and almost all were taken with a wide f/2 aperture, which created consistency across the shots. Prior to that, I had taken very few photographs of people in China, because people are very guarded. The instant you raise your camera, people start asking questions: "What are you doing?" "Why are you taking pictures?" This didn't happen in Nepal. It may also have been the language difference. I may have been asked those questions, but I didn't understand. In any event, I didn't have any trepidation. I walked around and took my pictures, smiling and happy. It's also related to the religious beliefs of the people here. People were very friendly; they didn't care if you took their picture. They acted as if you didn't exist, they treated you like air. The majority of those portraits were not taken in the square. We always got out of the car to take a look at the villages we passed along the way. These villages haven't really been disrupted by tourists, so people were amiable and welcoming to outsiders.

ZJ: Smiling at people as you take the pictures, that's the secret! Did you apply your experience of photographing people in Nepal to your later projects in China?

ZQC: Yes. The same year, I started to photograph Yu County. Because of my experience in Nepal, I knew to smile at people, but I also chatted with them a bit. Because there was no language barrier, we talked before I took the picture. I'm now taking a lot of pictures on the beach in Qingdao. I talk with all of those people beforehand.

ZJ: With the kind of lens you used, you had to be very close to people. Can you share more detail about how you took these portraits?

ZQC: Nepal is on a plateau, so the sun is very strong. The people were very much shaped by that place and time. I wasn't thinking about a book back then; I just wanted to take a few more portraits because the people were so interesting.

ZJ: The picture of the woman with the green kerchief has a real sense of power.

ZQC: I found this woman very confident, which gave her power.

ZJ: You photographed people in traditional dress, as well as fashionable young men.

ZQC: There was a significant contrast between the two. Most people were dressed in a traditional way. They weren't, particularly the one in the sunglasses. This was quite rare, so it stood out in that environment.

ZJ: In the next two pages, there's a portrait of a man wearing glasses. He looks so noble in the bright sunlight. You photographed different classes of people.

ZQC: There were so many people around. He sits on the stairs drinking a cup of coffee. He was wearing a suit, so he was dressed differently than other people.

ZJ: There's so much in the second chapter. You bring us into the social spaces of Nepal, showing us how people move between religious and worldly spaces. Religion is everywhere, but you don't make it seem mysterious. Instead, you focus on the lives of the Nepalese. At the beginning of the second chapter, there is a motorcycle and two cows next to a roadside Coca-Cola advertisement.

ZQC: I remember this scene like it was yesterday. We were passing through a village, and we saw the influence of outside culture on it. To me, Nepal felt like China in the 1980s. Coca-Cola advertisements and motorcycles are a product of modern civilization, while the cows and old houses have come down to us from the past. Because of the collision between these two elements, I took the picture. In my previous work, I would have squeezed out the Coca-Cola advertisement to make the colors in the image more coherent. Now I retain more environmental elements in my pictures, which is the most significant change in my work as I transition away from landscapes.

ZJ: In the pictures, the social and cultural contradictions are presented with a lot of rich detail. There's also a Buddhist symbol on the wall. There's a shadow in the foreground, showing the impromptu nature of the pictures. You really feel like you're there. Did you consider how to deal with the black in the foreground?

ZQC: When taking the pictures, I didn't notice the shadow in the foreground. When I saw the cows and motorcycles, I rushed to take the picture. When I set about choosing the photos later, I noticed this shadow, but I didn't crop it out. I didn't want to move it, because I think that the bottom of an image should be heavier. The black shadow gives a stability to the image. In addition, this shadow shows that there's something in this space.

ZJ: Shooting documentary work is very different from landscape work. In documentary photography, you need to shoot quickly—walking, looking, and taking the pictures. You have to think fast. When editing the pictures and making the book, you can make new discoveries, and you have the opportunity to analyze the images in more detail. Evidently, your observations of Nepal focused on the collisions and juxtapositions between tradition and modernity (see p. 102). Three men are engrossed in reading the newspaper next to a powerful lion sculpture. It's so interesting that there's noise hiding within the calm!

ZQC: I took this in the morning, when many people were standing on the street in the shade. I was drawn to this scene because I thought that the lion sculpture didn't match with the newspaper reading. I felt like people read newspapers in homes, hotels, coffee shops, or offices. This was a market, a place with a strong religious atmosphere, but there were suddenly so many people looking at the newspaper. I pressed the shutter without thinking.

ZJ: The subject of the third section is ascetics. Why?

ZQC: I can only talk about them in general terms. They're Hindus. They practice by isolating themselves from this world, which is how they obtain happiness in the next. They're called "sadhus," and they reduce what they need to live as much as possible. They eat and drink very little, atoning for their sins to achieve spiritual freedom. There is a page with close-ups of four faces. The second person has so much hair; I assume they've never cut it. The third person had only been practicing for a short time, so their hair wasn't very long.

ZJ: Do people give them money?

ZQC: Generally not. However, you need to give money to some of the sadhus in the market. They've been polluted by modern society, and some people won't let you take their picture if you don't give them something.

ZJ: Did *you* give them money?

ZQC: I gave out money for the group portrait with a lot of people in it. They were sitting or reclining in various places, so if I hadn't offered some money, they would not have been standing so neatly.

ZJ: Are there female ascetics?

ZQC: Both men and women can be ascetics. Sometimes, if the photographer is European, they don't ask for money, but if the photographer is Chinese, then they do. It's a problem.

ZJ: The fourth chapter of the book is about nature and landscapes. Was this section taken on an Alpa?

ZQC: Not entirely. The first four were taken on a Sony, then the rest were taken with my Alpa.

ZJ: The two landscape photographs on foldout pages are so impressive! The eternal calm of the mountains and gorges nurture so much life, and the sky is so blue. Did you add a filter?

ZQC: When you take photographs on the plateaus, the sky is just that clear; you don't need a filter. Also, I don't really like filters. There's a sea of clouds in this picture, which is quite rare. My companions said that the phenomenon wouldn't happen in the season we visited. I had previously encountered this sea of clouds miracle at Wudalianchi in northeastern China. I joked that I was just lucky.

ZJ: People favored by nature are certainly lucky. Were these two landscapes taken on the same day?

ZQC: Yes. However, the latter picture was taken first, just after sunrise. The sun shone on the mountain top. We waited until the sun had risen, then we hurried down the mountain. At that moment, the sea of clouds appeared, and I took the second picture.

ZJ: You still managed to take landscape photographs in Nepal! This section reflects your skill in landscape photography.

Book Production as Aesthetic Elevation

ZJ: Qichao, this is the second time that you have asked Liu Zheng to edit and publish a book for you. It seems that you work well together. As a photographer, what was your experience with Liu Zheng as a photo editor?

ZQC: For a book like this, I think that taking the pictures is just one-third of the work. Next, you have to organize them and, finally, print and bind them. If you don't take that final step, then it's as if you've done nothing. I am passionate about photography; you could even call me a fanatic. I can identify pictures that are good on a technical or formal level. However, when you edit a book, you're not just creating a collection of pretty pictures. There needs to be an artistic weight, and I don't think that I have that capacity. I've always made handmade books out of the pictures I take for my family. I do at least one a year, so I've made dozens of books. It truly requires professional skill to sift through the large number of photographs associated with a project and turn them into an art book. I gave Liu Zheng several hundred, maybe over a thousand, photographs, and he took two or three months to systematically evaluate them. During the edit, he gave me excellent feedback on my work.

ZJ: As a photographer, you're always limited when you edit your own book; there's a mental

block. Was there a big difference between Liu Zheng's choices and yours?

ZQC: I'm an amateur photographer; I haven't received any formal art training. When I started studying photography, I was more influenced by a mass aesthetic. I wouldn't shoot something unless it was beautiful. I now want to depart from that mass aesthetic and nurture the ability to identify and create a higher level of beauty. I have also seen a lot of photobooks and talked with young photographers, which have expanded my thinking. When I gave Liu Zheng the pictures, I talked to him about what I was thinking as I took them, but I didn't specify the structure of the book or the arrangement of the sections. The choice and layout of the images were entirely the result of his creativity. After I received his edited version, I carefully went through everything. Why did he choose this picture? Why did he put these pictures together? I've learned about the artistic aesthetic from his editing work, which has allowed me to shake off mass aesthetic constraints. When I posted the big, beautiful landscapes I photographed, they would get a lot of likes, but when I posted the pictures Liu Zheng chose, people didn't notice them. The mass aesthetic and the artistic aesthetic are entirely different.

ZJ: That's such a stark contrast. You have a lot of faith in Liu Zheng!

ZQC: Overall, I think that making a book is not just about learning how to lay it out; it's about learning and cultivating an artistic aesthetic. This Nepal book was a turning point in subject matter and aesthetics for me. Liu's editing work helped me further refine this transition. Everything from the title of the book to the arrangement of the chapters was intended to complement the theme. My biggest takeaways from this book were the elevation of my aesthetic, the expansion of my thinking, and the development of my style.

朱炯

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