

## **Shen Wei about his works:**

I discovered photography when I first moved to the United States from China in 2000. Although I studied and worked as a graphic designer in China but I have never had any exposure to fine art photography. The art schools in China then had very limited resource and photography did not seem to be considered serious art form. I initially wanted to study design when I enrolled into Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD), but after I took an introduction of photography class, I was really fall in love with the media and love the mysterious aspect of photography and decided to become a photographer. After received a BFA from MCAD, I moved to New York City, and received my MFA from School of Visual Arts in 2006.

Chinese Sentiment is my second long-term project. I started the project after having my Almost Naked solo show in New York. I always wanted to make a project about China and was thinking about a way to approach the subject differently than a lot of photographers who have already been photographing China. China was such a popular place to be for photographers from all over the world. Most photography work at the time was focused on the scale and appearance of the development that is very visible everywhere in China. China was and is still having an on-going massive transition; the transition is definitely something that's very interesting to me as well. But I was more interested in people and the daily life in China, which not many photographers (including Chinese photographers) were exploring. So I started to travel around in China in 2008, photographing the city and life and people as I passed through cities after cities, towns after towns. Being away from China for 8 years, I looked at China from a very new prospective, not a local eye anymore but not as foreign neither. Things that was so common once in my life had become a bit more fascinating, I discovered details of everyday life that I would have never paid attention to before. It was an amazing experience to rediscover my history and culture more profoundly.

At the same time, I was approached by Charles Lane Press for publishing a book. Charles Lane Press is a new publisher based in New York City and has a reputation to publish very high quality photo books very slowly. They were interested in my Almost Naked series until I showed them my Chinese work from my very first couple of trips in China. So they decided to wait for me to finish the project and then start to work on the book.

Overall, I made at least 10 month-long trips to China from 2008 to 2010, travel through 25 cities and numerous small villages. It was a life-changing journey to be able to feel as I am really getting more and more familiar with the Chinese living and culture. It was in fact like a dream to me, like how I photographed the whole series. As I pass by huge architectures, grand roads and parking lots all across China, I always have my eyes landed on things that's human, scenes that's emotional and sentimental to me, moments that reminded me my life as a young boy running through the shantytowns of Shanghai. Many of my photographs are agitated by my memory, and my curiosity of what kind of little things has been changed and has not been changed. I was educating myself along with my travel.

The entire process of making this book took about one year, from the editing, the design to the essay and the printing. I was involved in every aspect of it. That was a really good learning experience for me to see how a book was made. Charles Lane Press hired Lesley Martin who is the publisher of Aperture to edit the book. The editing process was quite long; we had numerous meetings making decisions on the sequence of the work. We also went through a list of writers and were very happy to have Peter Hessler agreed to write the essay. I have already read two of Hessler's books about China, and was so excited to talk to him about my work.

The book was launched in May 2011 with a solo exhibition at Daniel Cooney Fine Art in New York City. The exhibition since has been traveled to Boston, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Chinese Sentiment was also included in the photo festivals in The Netherlands, Greece, Singapore, China, and South Korea.

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I always think my generation is very lucky to have this amazing experience of living through a massive transition. I grew up in the Shantytown, life was simple, without anything materialistic. When Shanghai started to have its dramatic buildup in early 90's, everyday was like a fun journey to me, seeing constructions all over the city was an amazing scene that's still vividly in my mind. Roads, subways, skyscrapers and more and more people seem just popped up in this city from nowhere. There were more new and nice and very expensive things available to people, and people became a little more spoiled a little too fast.

I was in my teenage at the beginning of the boom; the change of the country gave me a tremendous amount of curiosity about the change of society, people, and life. But when you are living in all of those, you might not see things as profound. There is an old Chinese saying - *the lookers-on sees more than player*. It is not until after I have lived outside of China for a long time, little by little, I became much more appreciate my childhood and teenage life in Shanghai. I feel fortunate about that part of my life when I didn't know and need an extra materialistic life. I was happy just the way it was, very simple but nice. Even as my lifestyle has changed over the last decade of living in the west, I often think about my childhood in the shantytown, it humbles me. If I have never realized that, I probably wouldn't make such a project like Chinese Sentiment. For me, Chinese Sentiment is like a diary of my past. I was seeking that last piece of sincerity.

China today is obviously very different as I grew up, it feels strange and unfamiliar and overwhelming when I go there. But at the same time I feel an extremely tight connection to it. What bonds me with China is the language, the food, the landscape and the culture. For me, those are what really matter to me, things that make me missing China is not the skyscrapers but the culture.