





## China underground

China-underground.com and CinaOggi.it are two web magazines curated by Matteo Damiani and Dominique Musorrafiti dedicated to Chinese culture. Since 2002, China-underground has organized cultural events, festivals, and created documentaries, photo reports, and magazines.

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*This free ebook  
includes interviews  
with artists,  
writers, entrepre-  
neurs & thinkers*



**ZHANG CHONG**

Director



**JANICE WONG**

Pastry Chef



**LIU BOLIN**

Artist



**ALICE POON**

Writer



HUICHI CHIU

Actress



HENG YUE

Tattoo artist



JIANNAN WU

Sculptor



JUMPING GOAT

Band



YULONG LLI

Illustrator



KATHERINE LEE

Yoga Master



China  
underground



SOUTH OF CLOUDS, documentary on Chinese Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan Province by Dominique Musorrafiti and Matteo Damiani. The documentary shows, without commenting, a China linked to ancient traditions, which nowadays struggle to compete with the rhythm of modern life: villages, customs, music and lifestyles of the minorities Bai, Lisu, Nusu, Miao, Dai, Hani, Naxi, Yi and Hui, before the advent of Chinese mass tourism and the exodus of young people to the metropolis in search of a job opportunity.



PLANET CHINA 9 - Li Jingmei, Sissi Chao, Jill Tang, Xing Danwen, Shirley Ying Han, Echo He, Xia Jia, Xue Mo, Meng Du, PeiJu Chien-Pott, Jiayu Liu, Qu Lan, Tiffany Chan, Xiong Jingnan, Gia Wang, Chen Jie



PLANET CHINA 8 - Guobing Yang, RongRong & Inri, Hilda Shen, Zhang Bo, Zhang Chong, Wang Wen, Chen Donfan, Gan Jianyu, Webson Ji, Frode Z. Olsen, Yale Yuan Shifu



PLANET CHINA 7 - Matt Chen, Ken Chan, May Chow, Li Dong, Yu Bo, Jeremy Pang, Taozi, Michelle Lau, Cherry Li, Lee Xin Li, Piero Kuang Sung Ling



PLANET CHINA 6 - Interviews with Hao Wu, Badiucuo, Margaret Sun, Elsbeth Von Paridon, Yafei Qi, Eric Fish, Zhang Yang, Hannah Li, Song Wen, Michael Pettis



PLANET CHINA 5 – Interviews with The Chinese LGBTQ community in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and abroad. Interviews with Helen Zia, Joanne Leung, Shanghai Pride, Beijing LGBT Center, PFLAG China, Lin Zhi-peng (No. 223), Simon Chung, Lucie Liu, Chen Chen, Lin Junliang.



PLANET CHINA 4 – Interviews with Zhang Huan, Manya Koetse, Jeremy Tiang, Michael Standaert, Rebecca F. Kuang, Lisk Feng, Herman Lee, GuiGui SuiSui, Lance Crayon



PLANET CHINA 3 – Interviews with Wang Xiaoshuai, Stefano Boeri, Li Wei, Hui He, Yan Hua Wang, Boris Wilensky, Hua Dong [Re-Tros], He Sen, Ming Youxu, Josh Summers



PLANET CHINA 2 – Celebrating women who push boundaries. Interviews with Anita Wong, Helen Feng, Zhuo Dan Ting, Min Liu, Qin Leng, Thierry Chow, Tang Min, Yang Ruiqi, Augusta Xu-Holland, Chiara Ye, Matina Cheung, Heaney McCollum, Elle Lee



PLANET CHINA 1 – Interviews with Jia Zhangke, Daniel Lee Postaer, William L. Gibson and Paul Bruthiaux, Robert G. Price, Shadow Chen, Guoke, Chi Wang, Ben Randall, Kevin Tallon, Duran Levinson



CHINA SUBURBIA– From urban villages to ghost cities: snapshots of suburban life in Kunming's urban villages.

# LIU BOLIN

## The Invisible Man

*Photos Courtesy of Liu Bolin and Liu Bolin Art Studio  
Special thanks to Qin Han  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafti*

Society, Contradictory  
Relationships between Humans  
and the Civilizations are  
one of the main themes in  
Liu Bolin artworks



*Nine Dragon Series (Photographs /2010)*

Liu Bolin is an artist from Shandong, well-known for his artistic works in performance, photography, and social activism. He received his BA from Shandong College of Arts in 1995, and his MA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2001. Liu's most famous series, *Hiding in the City*, investigates the complex relationship between the individual and society by disappearing into environments, he represents the forgotten men of the growing economic system, where power struggles reign. Both Liu Bolin's photos and sculptures have been displayed in numerous museums and institutions around the world, in solo exhibitions as well he featured in group exhibitions too. He has collaborated with Kenny Scharf, JR, Jon Bon Jovi, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Fernando Botero, Carlos Cruz-Diez, and Annie Leibovitz. In 2015, Liu was commissioned by the United Nations-backed campaign The Global Goals to create an image that conveyed 17 goals – including ending poverty, encouraging sustainable development, and fight inequality and injustice – where he hid himself within 193 flags of the world. Liu Bolin currently resides and works in Beijing, China.



*Starry Night (Photographs /2015)*



*Boy and girl with line of internet (Fiberglass /2012)*

**Your most renowned works are from the “Hiding in the City” series, that you began in response to the Beijing artists’ village demolition. Can you tell us about this period? What did it mean for your artist’s path?**

Thanks to the attention of the upcoming Olympic Games of 2008, in 2005, Chinese contemporary art managed to attract a lot of consideration by becoming a reflection of China. The Suojiacun International Art Camp came into being under this background. By 2004, more than 140 Chinese and foreign artists were working there, and it was known as the largest international art camp in Asia at that time. However, from the beginning of 2005, the art district was continuously suspended for illegal construction, until it was razed on November 16, 2005. “Hiding in the City” series was completed the day after it was demolished in front of the ruins of the studio in the art

district, questioning the whole event with the artist’s disappearance, and using this piece to call the society to pay attention to the artist’s living condition. I opened up my path in the arts since then, and at the beginning of my creation, I have strengthened my attitude towards social questioning and reflection. It created a new starting point for my artistic path. At the same time, I also reinforced the idea of using the body to participate and summarizing and reminding events, and paying attention to the common topics of mankind.

**What were the biggest challenges during that period?**

The main challenge at the beginning of my creative process was to identify the best method to record the process of the participation of the whole body within the artwork. At first, I used the video and time-lapse photography method to record the scene, but later, I finally decided to use the freeze motion photography to record and realize it. What’s more, I was learning sculpture before, and I was not good at photography techniques. I had to learn how to take photos correctly while doing works. I paid a lot of tuition during the whole process.

***In 2017, Liu was a keynote speaker at the New York Times “Art for Tomorrow 2017” conference, stressing the importance of the artist’s role to convey environmental issues in their works***



**Have you faced some unexpected moments making your artwork projects?**

What impressed me most was that there were two problems when shooting the Bird's Nest work. One was because the light meter was not working. After all, the temperature was too low in winter, and there was no way to call and ask nearby friends what aperture should be used; second, after the final shooting was completed because the distance between people and the bird's nest in the background was too far away, the focal length of the Bird's Nest was not clear enough, so my only option was to only go to the spot to re-shoot on the third day.

*Nicknamed the Invisible Man, due for painting himself to blend into a background, Liu constantly tries to strengthen and deepen his artistic language. He continuously challenging himself*



**I read that at your beginning in the fields of art you started studying sculpture. What made you want to express yourself with a different art medium? Did your sculpture knowledge help you to be more creative and self-confident in your new art projects?**

I studied sculpture at the university and graduate, but I felt and I found that when I expressed my real feelings, the sculpture medium was very weak. That's why I decided to use my body as a canvas, to express myself directly and with more strength. However, all the knowledge learned in the assimilation process of sculpture has become the base for the shooting of urban camouflage

works. For example, in the selection of background in the work of laid-off workers, the choice of six laid-off workers in “Laid Off 706” comes from the study of the uniqueness of materials in sculpture. For different cultural backgrounds, shooting the restoration and expression of events also follows the rational use of the knowledge of art history learning.

**How do you feel about reviewing your work-related of that period and see the huge change in Beijing nowadays? How much has art changed in China since then?**

Chinese contemporary art has indeed flourished with the success of the Beijing Olympics. With the suc-



cess of the Dashanzi Art Festival in 2003, Chinese contemporary art has gradually been recognized by the world in the following years. As a contemporary Chinese artist, I'm very lucky to live in this era. Before this period, a group of artists like us who have no official positions would be considered as migrant workers, without formal jobs, living together with taxi drivers and other workers in rural areas. But since Chinese contemporary art has been paid attention to, the creativity and status of artists have also been greatly improved. The artist received widespread respect.

**What was the most difficult project you have done? Considering also the planning aspect, how long did it take for you?**

In 2006, I did the work 《下岗706》 about the laid-off workers in 798 Art District. I spent half a month to find six people who worked and lived in this space and were finally laid off and to let them understand

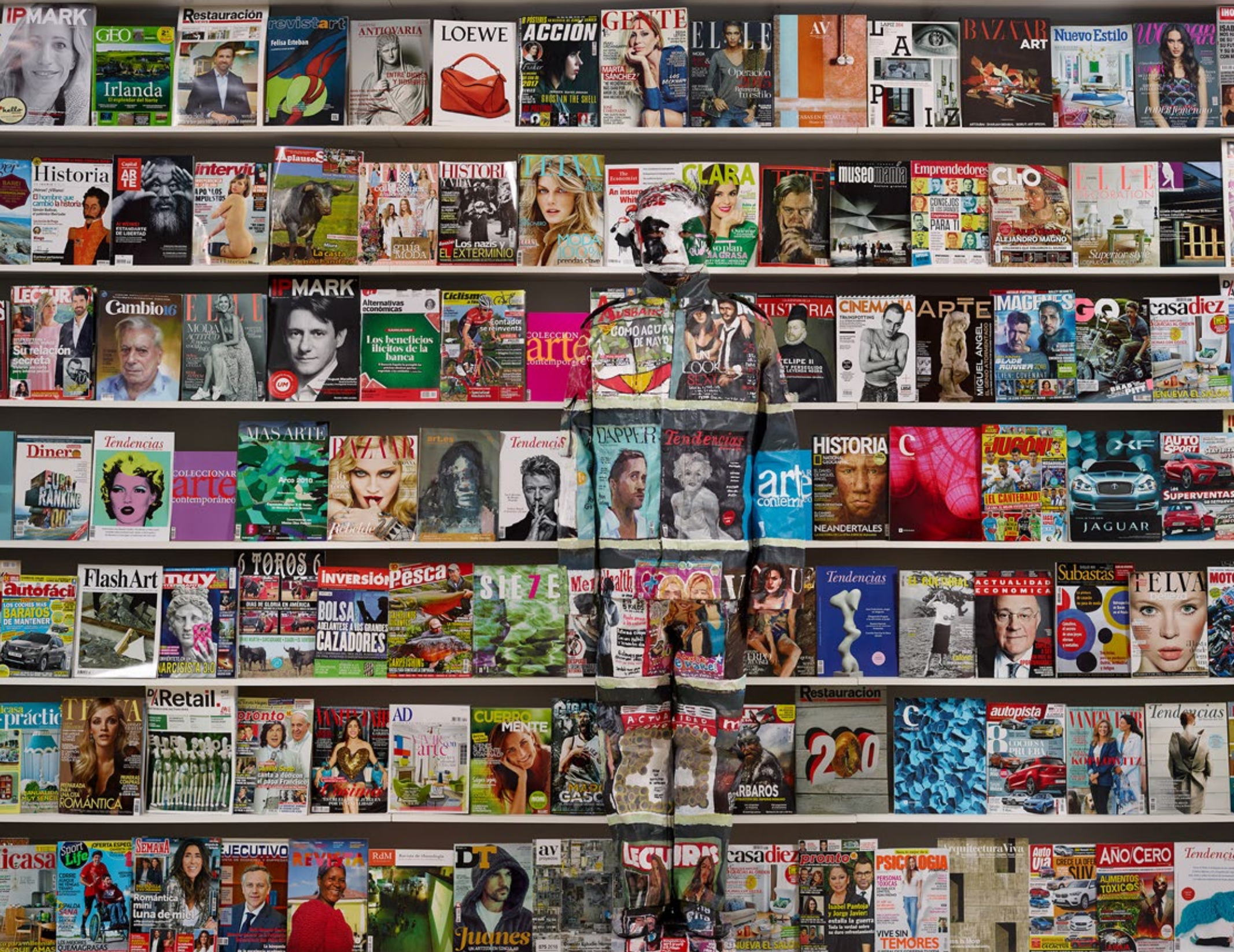
my work, and finally participate in my work.

**There is a piece of your artwork you are most attached to or particularly connected?**

In 2015 I launched the Hacker series, which I am currently very satisfied with. I hired real hackers to hack ten European government websites, download photos from the original site, I hid in them, and then put them back online so that the audience could see my work on the web pages.

**You create art performances around the world such a “Hiding in New York”, “Fade in Italy” etc. Did you find any difference in working abroad compared to China?**

There is no fundamental difference, I have been shooting around the world for more than a decade, with the strong support of local partners. So it's all going well. At the Colosseum in Rome, for example, it took



Spain Magazine  
(Photographs /2017)

His latest series of works “Art Hacker” marks his shift towards the virtual world, exploring new territory through his artistic investigation of the internet and digital age. Through his new artworks, he connects the problem in real life with the virtual world, and continuously engage in a discussion

five years for a local co-gallery to get permission to shoot.

**What keep you inspired and motivated? Do you have places (cities, monuments, etc...) where you would like to create new artworks?**

The dream of artists and the courage to challenge ourselves are the source of my strength. I’m currently planning a new series of hackers. Declaring war on the virtual world is what our generation of artists must do.

**Can you share with us any meaningful story behind your art project?**

In September 2015, I shot a work about illegal immigrants from Africa in Sicily, Italy. During the shooting



### *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*

process, I had a deeper understanding of their life and the reason why they came to Italy, so in the extra time, I started to work on THE FUTURE series. The words “future” were written on everyone’s body, which was not only a prayer for their fate but also a blessing. The works are not only works of art, but also vivid souls and lives. I try to carry it with my works.

Through his artworks of human sculpture, performance art, and photography he shares his thinking towards human beings, helping to consider the real limitations of human beings.



**Do you think social media and new technologies are influencing art and audience? Do they help art and artist to get closer to the audience, or there are new kinds of layers and filters? What is your relationship with the new art community? Does this affect your way of creating new work?**

We, humans, are undergoing a huge transformation that we have not yet realized. A new model of life is taking shape, represented by web and virtual technology-based mobile clients. Humans are being enslaved by invisible big data and algorithms. All human behavior is served and monitored as data. Sensitive artists are making use of this technology and thinking to make new media works.

*Memory-Day*

At last year's Venice Biennale, artist Zheng Shuli of Taiwan Pavilion made her own judgment based on face recognition technology. Art of any era is a combination of technology with the human thinking and worries of humans at that time. The public is aware of the production of new art, just as we still don't understand abstract art, but abstract art for the history of art has become classical. I appreciate the emergence of new artistic styles, especially the works of art that combine new network technology and electronic computer software. I really want to integrate myself into a new field where only we can explain our works.

*Photos courtesy of Fortissimo Films  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafiti*

# Zhang Chong



**Z**HANG CHONG was highly motivated to become a director since his beginning at the Beijing Film Academy. After his studies, he started a career as a screenwriter and producer for famous Chinese television programs. This experience has enriched his knowledge and skills in the film industry, both in terms of resource organization and techniques. In this way, his approach to directing his debut film is pleasant and also rich in quality. Super Me is his first film as a director. In his film, we can see numerous influences from various origins including literature, psychology, psychoanalysis, such as Freud, Jung, and Borges. The film tells of a journey into the depths of the mind and daily internal struggles. A film where genres such as science fiction, romance, comedy, action, fantasy, adventure, and psychological thriller meet and combine.

**What motivated you to choose to deal with the theme of dreams and the unconscious in your first direction?**

There are many records about dreams in the history of human civilization. Even some major historical events have something to do with dreams. Some many scientists and artists get inspiration from their dreams. Since more than 100 years ago Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt's experimental psychology studies separated psychoanalysis and psychology from traditional science becoming a recognized scientific category. Later, many masters were born including Freud and Jung. Our movie is based on these theoretical assumptions. Each of us will inevitably encounter some uncomfortable things in life, We often lament that our luck is not good, the time is not right, and we often forget that we are in the era of great opportunities. Everyone's world is subjective. The reason why I chose this theme is that the most important thing in our cognitive process is to recognize ourselves. Before we figure out what we want, we need to recognize ourselves. The film is a way of knowing the world for me. I am eager to share this with you.

*Find inner strength,  
and be the super  
version of yourself*



I read that you started filming the movie in 2016. There were changes from the beginning story to the current version? How was the shooting process? Did you face any difficulties during the shooting of “Super Me”?

The story was written in 2012 and the preparations started in 2016. It took more than three years and four years. There are five or six versions of the movie telling a completely different story. Let me give an example. There is a version where the hero, Sang Yu, is a screenwriter whose dream is obviously to make a good film from his screen-

play. His knowledge of cinema is endless. A movie fanatic probably knows more than 5000 films, an expert much more. In this version, what he thought about during the day he would have dreamed of it at night. The dream world of Sang Yu was made up of a variety of classic films. Later we gave up the script because it involved too much dealing with film copyrights, and it was difficult for us to get them. Moreover, copying scenes and characters from many classic movies is not only difficult but also if there is a slight misstep it can easily fall from a tribute to a spoof, and I don't like spoofs. I want to

*A super dream that can make a sleeping person, into a rich one during the night. But being able to realize your dreams, does it really allow you to have a super life?*





make a serious film thoughtfully, so I gave up this plan. The difficulty in the film now was how to get more people to understand our concept of the dream scene. One was merely a problem of production and implementation, and the other instead was the main character's back and forth transformation. There's an obvious allegory in this movie. I hope that everyone can enjoy the movie, without the feeling of being taught. It did take a lot of work.

**The world of art is a significant element of the film. In the “revelatory” sequences a bas-relief occurs many times, which is destroyed by the demon. Can you tell us about its story? Is it a piece of art on commission?**

Although we could count on the imagination of artists, sound engineers, and special effects artists, we always relied on the “Dictionary of Dreams” when we were filming. Each scene and object is well thoughtful and reflects some

aspects of the subconscious. The average viewer sees a scene full of imagination, while a more expert viewer can grasp references from different cultures. I didn't explain certain things because we weren't filming the “Da Vinci Code”. The bas-relief you mentioned represents breaking through the cage of our thoughts.

**In both the films “Super Me” and “The Fourth Wall” the main characters find within themselves, the solution to overcome their difficulties and make their lives better. One in dreams and the other overcoming traumas. Is the answer within us?**

Yes. All good stories contain a moral, all artistic existence is meant to conquer the public's feelings. The protagonist is subjected to a process of growth and searches for answers. Likewise, the public must try to find their answers.

**In both your films we see that experiences and choices can change a life. How much do you think nowadays people realize that a small choice involves big differences?**

I believe that everyone has this experience when they think about their lives, but when facing the pressure of our existence, the tired heart always refuses us to think like this. Immersing ourselves in reveries offers us nothing directly, and often this process makes us miserable. People who accept reality often stop thinking about the possibility of choosing again. But I always wanted to ask questions about reality. Is the reality that we take for granted the real-

ity? Murakami in *South of Border*, *West of the Sun* said that it is necessary to clarify the reality around us with the unreality of the world. I think everyone should think about it.

**How much of you, from your personal life experience and philosophy can we find in your movies?**

It can be said to be everything or nothing. Movies are a tool for me to understand the world, what's in the film is my attitude and vision of the world. It has little to do with the details of my own life, but it does reflect my very personal thinking and exploration.



In “Super Me” we can perceive a criticism of materialism, which is not synonymous with happiness. We live in a wild and compulsive consumerist era. Do you believe that a psychological thriller like “Super Me” can open a door to questions and help to recalibrate and rebalance the reality of the ego?

This is a good question. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Physiological needs, Safety needs, Esteem needs, self-actualization), the protagonist Sang Yu falls into dreams following this hierarchical logic, first, solving the problem of food and clothing, then thinking about the rest.

The narrative method is from reality to magic. Why from reality? The movie is asking questions about reality. Many movies don’t answer. Good movies should be ambiguous. If the audience asks questions about the movie itself, the audience can get their own answers, and even find an opportunity to think about their lives. I think that’s what every creator wants.

*The integration and visual fusion between real elements and special effects is remarkable*



# JANICE WONG

*Photos courtesy of Janice Wong  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafti*





**I**n 2005, after economics graduate at Monash University in Melbourne, Janice Wong went to Paris to study at the Le Cordon Bleu. She worked in various leading kitchens including those located in San Sebastian, Chicago, and New York. She finds her own style when in 2007 she returned to Singapore and opened her first restaurant, 2am: dessertbar, at Holland Village. Janice Wong's unique approach to food creates beautiful interactive art. She has an eye for the finest detail and her passion for culinary art has propelled the passion to test the limits of dessert making. Chef Janice Wong's edible art installations have been commissioned by galleries and restaurants since her creations have unique tastes that surprise the guests and clients. Janice Wong has learned from some of the world's best chefs, including US luminaries Thomas Keller and Grant Achatz, virtuoso Spanish chocolatier Oriol Balaguer, and prodigious French pastry chef Pierre Hermé. In November 2014 she launched her eponymous sweet concept brand, Janice Wong. Chef Janice has received worldwide recognition for her cutting-edge creations.

How and when did you get interested in cooking and baking? How did you understand you wanted to be a Chef? What motivated you?

Well, I started in 2005. One of my main passion was to be a Dessert Chef, and that's why I went to culinary school in Paris and started from there. I get motivated during my studies in Melbourne, Australia, where I saw a lot of fresh products. I was very inspired by the ingredients and the culinary culture. I decided that I wanted to bring that experience of mine back to Singapore.

You have studied and worked around the world in Melbourne, Paris, Tokyo, etc.. What has meant for you? You bring a fresh new taste to Singapore. Did your journey influence your tastes and creativity? What has changed for you since then?

I think for me, the main thing was to be very focused to really get a lot of skill sets and to learn as much as I could. And in every country that I was visiting, this really shaped my idea of food. I studied in Paris, and I worked there. I went to work in Australia, and then I went to work

*Pastry Chef Janice Wong has released many books, filled with a mix of innovative creations, which she developed using different types of flour. She playing with ingredients, textures, flavors, and perceptions to make unconventional combinations.*



in Spain, and then in the USA. I went to study in different countries, and that allowed me to really open my mind, also to be amongst different disciplines like art, food, design, and architecture. I think these journeys have shaped me and changed me over the years to what I have become.

What do you love most about your job? What are the greatest rewards?

I truly like bringing a lot of joy to people, and I think that's why we're chefs because we have the ability to cook our dishes and to create art for people. And this brings a lot of joy to people.

You are half pastry chef and half artist. Are your dishes like canvases where you create your artwork? You made edible art installations. Can you tell us about your culinary philosophy?

My philosophy is about your world is your imagination. So it's about however you imagine your world to be with its very colorful, black or white, very, very flavorful, joyful! Desserts tones that I use reflect it. Desserts are some of the examples that I use in my philosophy. I also balance the Perfection and Imperfection, which is the title of my book. I strive for perfection, but I also appreciate the imperfection.

*The cakes of Versailles high tea menu is inspired by the movie Ottolenghi, in which Chef Janice Wong is featured*



In Asia culture food is tasty and delicious, but also is visually beautiful. Since people taste also with eyes, is it an inner rule to make food more appetizing? Where do you find inspiration, and how do you balance between the taste experience and the visual aspect?

Well, food doesn't have to be beautiful, it is just the first thing that people see. So for me, food is about the five senses, and sight is one of the senses. So that's also one of my philosophy, it's always about the five senses: you smell the food, taste and you feel it. And of course, you see it. So I think all of them are very important.

You wrote many books. You show how to use different types of flour and playing with flavors. There are ingredients or flavors that best reflect your style?

I always work with flavors that are inspiring to me or different types of cultures. So to me, it's like when I'm in Singapore. I'm born here, and the flavors of Singapore are very pronounced, very spicy, very flavorful. When I'm in Japan for a long time, there's much discovery of flavors and cuisine as well, because it's very different there. So it's very important for me to don't be subject to one culture and one type of flavor.

*Her ideas are threaded by a commonality: a pursuit for perfection in imperfection, and an appreciation of imperfection in perfection, presenting an artistic, gastronomic world of flawless imperfection and flawed perfection.*





Do you think there are some ingredients less used that can add a special tasty experience?

Yes! Well, I use, of course, a lot of chocolate, different types of chocolate. But I also do a relevant use of miso, mustard, and vegetables. I use quite a lot of different types of ingredients.

When you started your career as a female chef, you were one of the pioneers. What were the biggest challenges you faced at the beginning of your activity?

The biggest challenge, in the beginning, was related that in Singapore, there was not a Dessert culture. We don't eat a lot of desserts, not like, in Japan or even in India, where they eat desserts at any time of the day. Here in Singapore, we eat more sa-

vory and sweet. This was one of the big challenges to introduce a good High Tea menu. We just recently launched our Cakes of Versailles High Tea. You can see our High Tea, on 2 AM Dessert Bar ([www.2am-dessertbar.com](http://www.2am-dessertbar.com)) website. We have to make a nice balance of sweet and savory always, is not just like to prepare a sweet menu.

How is the situation in Asia today? What has changed since your beginning?

Well, a lot has changed. I mean, in the past, I used to just have one Dessert bar. Now we have more and more outlets and a bigger team. So we need to manage a lot more. Also, people's expectations have changed, habits have changed, more technology, more creation, more collaboration. So much has changed in the last few years.

Even if in western countries, people have begun to know more about Asian culinary varieties, few know about Asian dessert like mooncakes. The variation of them is huge, and you mastered the art of cooking unique styles that are almost too beautiful to eat. Are mooncakes increasing in popularity? Did western people were less familiar with them due to the connection to Mid-Autumn Festival, which is less known outside Asia?

Yeah. I would say, that culture is a very important part of certain things. Mooncake is very popular here in Singapore and also the Chinese New Year because of all the goodies. They are a very big cultural part of us and is a tradition to exchange presents

and gifts. But for example, for Asian, I would say, celebrating Easter, is really difficult! I've tried many times, every year, to make many Easter eggs and some people just don't give as a gift Easter eggs here in Singapore.

*“I am always exploring new possibilities in the culinary and arts.”*

*- Pastry Chef  
Janice Wong*

*Pastry Chef Janice Wong has redefined the dessert experience and pushing the boundaries between sweet and savory with carefully researched progressive dishes.*





*Janice Wong has been named Asia's Best Pastry Chef by the prestigious San Pellegrino Asia's 50 Best for 2013 & 2014. She also won the title of Pastry Chef of the Year from the World Gourmet Summit Awards in 2011, 2013, and 2015, including the title of Young Woman of the Year from Her World in 2012*

Can you share with us any meaningful story or significant memories from the kitchen or behind your workspace?

A nice memory I have was, of course, when I first opened the bar, when we had the Dessert bar and we made a sweet menu only. This is a really nice memory for me. When I first opened at the age of twenty-four. A very good memory is also when we did our art exhibition for The World's 50 best Restaurant. I also did another art exhibition last year.

# ALICE POON



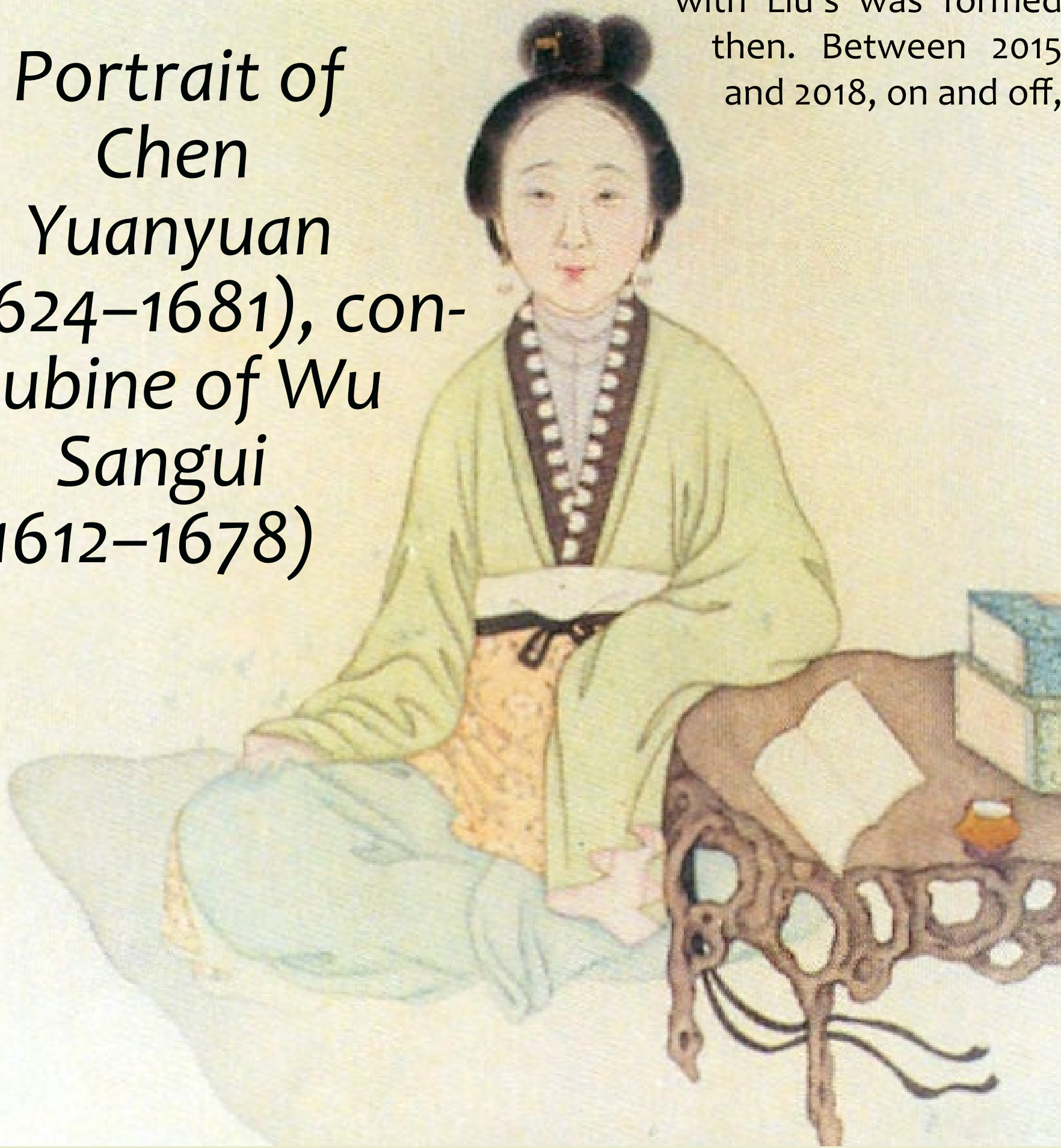
*Photos courtesy of Alice Poon  
Interview by Matteo Damiani*

**B**orn and raised in Hong Kong, Alice Poon steeped herself in Chinese poetry and history, Jin Yong's martial arts novels, and English Literature in her school days. This early immersion has inspired her creative writing. Always fascinated with iconic but unsung women in Chinese history and legends, she cherishes a dream of bringing them to the page. She is the author of *The Green Phoenix* and the best-selling and award-winning non-fiction title *Land and the Ruling Class* in Hong Kong. She now lives in Vancouver, Canada, and devotes her time to writing historical Chinese fiction.

Where does the interest in the lives of these three fascinating female figures come from?

When I researched in 2014 for a subplot minor character Chen Yuanyuan for my earlier historical novel *The Green Phoenix* (published in 2017), I accidentally stumbled on Liu Rushi's biography, titled *An Ulterior Biography of Liu Rushi*, written by the eminent historian Chen Yinke, who lauded her as the embodiment of the Chinese nation's spirit of independence and liberal thinking. My interest in Liu was immediately piqued, and a vague idea of blending Chen's story with Liu's was formed then. Between 2015 and 2018, on and off,

*Portrait of  
Chen  
Yuanyuan  
(1624–1681), con-  
cubine of Wu  
Sangui  
(1612–1678)*





I plowed through the 800,000-word, 3-volume, biographical tome. In 2016, I also chanced to read Kong Shangren's famous classic historical play *The Peach Blossom Fan*, and Li Xiangjun's story left a deep impression. It then struck me that these women were among the Eight Great Beauties of Qinhuai and their lives were the most dramatic. I felt strongly that they had far more moral courage and integrity than people are willing to give them credit for. By early 2018, the idea of writing a novel featuring them took concrete shape.

**How long did it take you to make this volume? How did you go about finding information?**

The research started in 2014 and continued in fits and starts until early 2018. In mid-2018 I started to

work on the first draft. The full manuscript was completed in mid-2019. The main source of information for Liu Rushi was her epic biography by Chen Yinke. For Li Xiangjun, I relied on *The Peach Blossom Fan* and Hou Fangyu's short biography of her. As for Chen Yuanyuan, Wu Weiye's narrative poem *Song of Yuanyuan* and Mao Xiang's memoir *Reminiscences of the Plum Shaded Cloister* were the key source. Other information about the period and cultural details mainly came from Yu Huai's *Banqiao Zaji* (*Diverse Records of the Wooden Bridge*), Jonathan Spence's *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man*, and Zhang Dai's *The Dream Recollections of Taoan*, plus various English-language reference books related to women, culture and the literary world in Ming China.

**Why did you choose this particular historical period? What did the invasion of the Qing mean for Chinese society and culture?**

The period in question is one that straddles two ruling regimes: the Ming and the Qing dynasties. I have a particular interest in this turbulent period because growing up I had come across intriguing and poignant human stories of love, sacrifice, divided loyalties, and patriarchal cruelty from the period through books, operas, movies, and TV dramas. As a grown-up, I've found these stories highly relatable, as they seem to reflect in some way our present-day human condition. Also, this period in Ming history saw the culmination of literary (in particular poetry) and music development. It witnessed a dynamic interaction between cultured courtesans and the literati, both in the romantic and literary sense. In short, in my new novel, I wanted to highlight three courtesans' love stories and their gritty struggle against a misogynistic society, as well as the era's unique and vibrant artistic tapestry. The Qing's invasion into Han China certainly stirred up violent resentment in Chinese society, especially during Regent Dorgon's oppressive reign as he tried to use brutal force to subdue the Han Chinese by foisting Manchu customs on them despite their repulsion (a notorious example was the shave-head mandate on pain of death). Luckily his violent rule didn't last



## TALES OF MING COURTESANS

Alice Poon

*Tales of Ming Courtesans*  
Publisher: Earnshaw Books

long, and thanks to the benevolent rule under Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang/the Shunzhu Emperor and later the Kangxi Emperor, there came a chance for war-torn China to heal and prosper as the Manchu rulers realized that only civilized ways could win hearts and minds. The Han culture and civilization had very deep roots and had always been the Han Chinese's pride, so the initial violent clash with the Manchu couldn't but leave gaping wounds on society, both physical and emotional. As a matter of interest, this part of Chinese history is fleshed out in my 2017 novel *The Green Phoenix*.



*Painting of Li Xiangjun 1817,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art*

**How does the fate of these three women intertwine with the fate of China?**

While alive, all three women struggle for survival, dignity, and hope for a better life, but that struggle is in vain, much like the Ming Dynasty's futile fight to avert its fate of humiliation and defeat. But in the story, the women refuse to give up hope.

**How were courtesans socially considered in China at the time?**

Courtesans, like actresses, entertainers, and prostitutes of

the time, were socially classed as "jianmin" (worthless people). They were considered below the commoner class, which effectively meant they were social outcasts.

**What was the fate of the protagonists?**

Liu Rushi, upon her husband's death, was bullied by her husband's relatives into taking her own life. Li Xiangjun passed in her sickbed with a broken heart, having been abandoned by her lover. Chen Yuanyuan lived into old age, but her fading years were said to be spent in quiet solitude in a nunnery.

## What were the episodes that most touched you?

To tell you the truth, I teared up in several places of the story while writing the first draft. One episode that touched me most was where the child Liu Rushi faces the death of her mother. I still choke up whenever my mind goes over that scene because it always brings back the sad memory of my own mother's death from lung disease. There was a scene where Liu Rushi and Chen Yuanyuan have a heart-to-heart talk on the night before Liu's wedding. They have been estranged from each other for a while due to an earlier row based on some misunderstanding. The way they are able to bare their souls to each other that night moved me deeply.

## Are there traces in contemporary Chinese culture of the influence of these female figures?

Many Chinese people are familiar with the folklore about Chen Yuanyuan. One of Jin Yong's famous novels – The Deer and the Cauldron – recreates Chen's story and features her daughter as one of the wives of the protagonist. There are numerous movies and TV historical drama series that feature Chen. Iconic historian and intellectual luminary Chen Yinke (1890 – 1969) spent ten years of the latter part of his life to write the 800,000-word *An Ulterior Biography of Liu Rushi*. He reconstructed Liu's life



*Portrait of the courtesan  
Liu Rushi, ink on paper, by Lu Ji  
and Cheng Tinglu*

story from her impressive collection of poetry and letters as well as her peers' literary works (poetry, epistolary writings, and memoirs). Some of Liu's paintings are in the custody of The Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. There is a 2012 China-produced film that features Liu Rushi as the protagonist. Both Chen Yuanyuan and Li Xiangjun were both renowned kunqu opera singers. This operatic art reached its peak of development in the late-Ming era. Kunqu opera was named one of the masterpieces of Intangible Heritage by UNESCO in 2001.

A portrait of a woman with dark, wavy hair and bangs, wearing a white off-the-shoulder sweater. She is resting her chin on her hand and looking directly at the camera against a dark blue background.

# Huichi Chiu

*Photos courtesy of Huichi-chiu and Muchoartemanagement  
Special thanks to Mar Rubio and Muchoartemanagement  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafiti*

**H**uichi Chiu is a Taiwanese actress based in Spain since the early 2000s, where she spent most of her career. Huichi Chiu graduated from the Kaohsiung Pedagogical University in 2000 with a degree in Fine Arts. From 2003 to 2005 she studied acting at a theater school in Madrid, where she specialized in particular on the theories of Jacques Lecoq. She made her first appearance in 2005 in the film *Proverbio Chino*, a short film by Javier San Román, for which she was nominated at the Goya Awards 2008. She acted in various Spanish feature film productions and also had various theater appearances. She has received various nominations and awards from International Festivals for her valuable acting interpretation.



**You moved to Spain to study flamenco and then you studied acting at a theater school in Madrid. What did motivate you to become an actress? Where your passion for acting come from?**

I am a shy person and I have a tendency: where is the danger, there I go. I think the need to overcome my own fear and limitations motivated me to choose this profession.

**Who influenced you as a person and as an actress? What do you enjoy the most about acting?**

My grandmother. She was the kindest person in the world. Never thought about herself, always caring about everyone around her. Her generosity makes me a better person as well as an actress.

**What were the biggest challenges at the beginning of your career? Did you face any unexpected moment?**

Most of the time I act in Spanish. It's my language on the stage. Although I've been practicing hundreds of times, there still a kind of stress involved. If I get lost, make a mistake, or go blank, I have to do whatever to get out that big, never-ending black tunnel, but with extra pressure. That brings me to the present time. And I love those unexpected moments when we are on the stage, for some inexplicable reason, we begin to laugh our heads off. As we can't do that because it's

*Huichi Chiu was nominated for the short film Proverbio chino by Javier San Román at the Goya Awards in 2008.*

never the right time to do so, it's terribly hilarious.

**What limits of life did acting help you overcome and what did it help you strengthen? What is the biggest lesson you have learned from it?**

My parents don't want me to be an actress. They prefer their daughter to be a teacher, have a stable job and life. Now I can make ends meet doing what I like, that's a miracle. Now we get a global pandemic, we can hardly see the end of it. We can lose our job, our beloved. So, what does a stable life mean? Acting in fact helps me to be in the present, not only on the stage but also in our life. We have to get through it no matter what happens. As we always say: the show must go on.

**You are also very talented in contemporary dance and martial arts. How do you balance your time with these activities? Are they became a meaningful extension of your acting career?**

I am sorry to say that I am not tal-





ented and actually I am quite clumsy. But this training keeps me prepared, being invigorated. It's a very important discipline in practice of martial arts. I can say in any kind of job. And as I have a Chinese look, they always want Asian people to kick somebody or do some Taichi, Kungfu before having a romance or family problem.

**You were born in Taiwan, now you live and work in Spain. What are the main differences and opportunities of both countries?**

I would like to be able to work in both countries, to share my expe-

*Huichi Chiu is one of the main characters in Season 3 of “Locked Up”, originally titled in Spanish as “Vis A Vis” in which she plays Akame, the leader of the Chinese gang in Cruz del Norte.*

riences, to support something, and act in Chinese! To play not only stereotyped roles but enjoying telling stories. But I need to reconnect with society. I am completely new, an outsider for my own people. As I've been living and working in Madrid for many years, I am more familiar with the lifestyle, know my duties are and my rights as a citizen here. The main difference I can figure out is that Taiwan will always be my homeland sentimentally, but to be able to work as in Spain, I'll have to start as a beginner in my own country...or try to have someone to rebuild me, make me more...I don't know. It's very important to promote oneself in Taiwan. Unfortunately, I am not good at it.

### **What do you feel before acting on theatre or before shooting on set?**

I feel grateful to be there, trying to control my nerves, remembering my lines, and not to auto boycott myself. To be in the present and be aware of everything. It's a proper time to practice mindfulness or Zen.

### **What is a character you played that has excited you the most? Is there one in which you felt more related and connected?**

I can't tell you which was 'the most'. I enjoyed every character even if it was a small part of the story. I can find one part of myself inside, and try to spread it out, to put it under a microscope. Acting is like making

experiments in a laboratory. Maybe I could say when I played Lady Nijo and Win in the play 'Top Girls', written by Carol Churchill, for me it was quite challenging. Not only because of the special way to say those plenties of lines, but also the meaning and the fight being a woman in history. As we, the Asian people we have the idea of reincarnation, I felt like I was carrying the wishes of a woman from centuries, we were pronouncing these words for them. That was something almost sacred.

### **Can you share with us any meaningful story from the backstage of the cinema set?**

Once I was in a rape scene in a film. That was very tough because of many hours of shooting during the whole night long. We practiced a lot to make sure of the shooting angle, the choreography of those violent actions, we tried to maintain the high needed energy, doing lots of silly exercises before every take. After many hours of working, the whole team was exhausted. I was so tired that I felt like my soul was floating out of my body. When the director thought she had already got the right moment, she shouted 'Cut'! I was out of the camera shot and I began to cry. At that moment, I knew that was the right moment, the true instant of a human being. Nobody saw that and I realized that sometimes, the most precious thing happens unexpectedly. And we have to know how to catch it.

*Photos courtesy of Jiannan Wu  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafti*

# Jiannan Wu



*Trilogy- III*

**J**iannan Wu, born in 1990 in Dalian, China, is a young artist specializing in sculpture with realism. He is an Elected Member of the American National Sculpture Society, a member of the American Medallic Sculpture Association, and founder of the Art American China Project. Jiannan Wu received his BFA Degree in Sculpture from the China Academy of Art and his MFA Degree in Sculpture from the New York Academy of Art. Through formats of relief and semi-relief, Jiannan Wu presents the theme of contemporary urban life in a realistic and narrative way. He was selected for Terra Foundation Residency in Giverny France

2015 and ABC Stone Carrara Mer- 2018. Jiannan Wu is the recipient  
it Award Residency in Italy 2016. of the Elizabeth Greenshields  
Jiannan Wu is also the winner of Foundation grant. His works  
the MFA National Competition, and artistic achievements have  
winner of the Compleat Sculptor been published in The New York  
Award 2016, and the 2017 Dexter Times, The China Press, People's  
Jones Award presented by the Daily China, The Paper, Hi-Fruc-  
American National Sculpture So- tose Magazine, T(here) Maga-  
ciety. He successfully held his zine, Artrepreneur, etc.  
solo exhibition in New York in



New York New York



**How and when did you decide to choose sculpture as your form of creative expression? Why did you decide to become an artist?**

The choice of becoming a sculptor is serendipity. I started to draw and paint when I was only 4 years old. Upon entering the art university, I chose sculpting as my concentration as I'm fond of model kits and toys. In the beginning, I didn't know much about sculpting. Later on, I realized that the action figures and film special effect industries are really booming in the US, so when I graduated from the China Academy of Art I decided to come to the US to pursue further education and training in sculpting. The ultimate goal was to enter into the film industry at that time. Serendipitously, during my graduate study at the New York Academy of Art, my sculptures received recognition from the art industry. Then offers of exhibitions from galleries and interviews from the media followed. It was so natural for me to begin my professional art career as a sculptor after graduation. In retrospect, I didn't have a strong desire to be an artist since I was a child, and chance played a large part in it. However, the desire has grown stronger in recent years.

**Who influenced you as a sculptor? Can you tell us the sculptures that impressed you the most?**

I'm a fan of Raymond Mason's sculptures, which have certain helplessness and falseness in the light banter. Robert Taplin, my teacher in



*Selfie Kelly*



*The Curious Case*

NYAA, also had a big influence on me. As for the specific works, I really appreciate Wisdom of Entang Wiharso, Us No 2 of Cai Lei, and A Tragedy in the North: Winter, Rain, and Tears of Raymond Mason.

**Where do you find your inspiration? What do you want to tell with your pieces of art?**

Most inspirations for my creation come from contemporary daily life. My art prominently features the theme of people's daily life in a narrative way. Selfie Series is about the selfie phenomenon among the

young generation, Subway Series presents different subway scenes in the New York metropolitan area, and the current ongoing Country Love series restores the country life in Northeast of China. In my sculptures, I try to express my love for life and my faith in humanity by conveying the interest and vitality of people's daily life in a humorous and realistic style. I consider myself a storyteller, solidifying an ongoing segment of the story scene into tableaux and inserting corresponding interest and thinking into it. By putting "people" under my spotlight, I focus on the shaping of each

*In his sculptures, he tries to express his love for life and his faith in humanity through conveying the interest and vitality of people's daily life in humorous and realistic style.*

character's personality and details. Each scene in the work is a stage, and each character has his own audiences and the world.

**How long does it take to make a sculpture project?**

Currently, I'm mainly working on some small-sized works and each piece usually takes about 40 days to complete. In the past, I had created a large piece around 5 feet in height which took about 8 months to complete.

Country-Love: Village-Beauty





*Country Love: Big-Show*

**Your art focuses on details, that can be physically touched. What do the materials represent to you? What about the sense of touch?**

The material represents a certain period of time in the past or memory of mine. Unlike paintings, the sculpture takes a longer time to create and its material has experienced many changes in form and state in the process of creation because of my participation: growing from nothing and changing from soft to hard, thick to thin, cold to warm, and so on. Therefore, the whole evolution process of the materials in a piece of work actually corresponds to the state of my life at that time, which can be regarded as another record. I like the tangible touch, which makes me feel secure and safe. This is also part of the rea-

*Jiannan Wu is devoting himself to promoting the art and culture communication between America and China. He successfully curated two Sino-American art exhibitions in Beijing and Dalian in 2018. Jiannan Wu currently works and lives in the New York City*

son why I have been fond of model kits and toys since childhood and have chosen sculpture as my specialization. Maybe it has to do with possessiveness.

**Are there any materials do you prefer to use to create your artwork and why? How do you choose them?**

I used to apply water-based clay. But I thought that many details would be lost in the molding and casting process, so I began to look for new materials. Then the polymer clay came to my eyes, which is convenient and can be baked directly, eliminating the step of molding and casting.

I bought a lot of brands and categories at the start. I tested the hand feeling, hardness, baking time, and other features of each style, and finally chose the brand Super Sculpey as the most suitable one for me. In addition, I also use a lot of tin foil and iron wire to make the inner armature of the sculpture.

**How does the idea of the series of color reliefs “Country Love” came about?**

The “Country Love” series I am currently creating comes from some of my feelings and memories of my early life in northeast China. Due to

*Country Love: Classmate Reunion*



the special geographical features and history, northeast China has its unique landscape and cultural phenomena. Its plain, passionate, and humorous lifestyle, customs, and language are beyond the region and popular in the whole nation. I was born and grew up in northeast China, so I was immersed in its unique culture since my childhood. I was especially influenced by some performing arts such as sketch comedy and TV shows with northeast characteristics. Thus, In this series of sculptures, I present the “people” and “objects” in contemporary rural China from different angles to show the country culture in northeast China, especially the changes and new social relations out of the collision between foreign pop culture and the local traditional customs, and the anxiety about the localism and identity since the 1990s.

### **What about the idea behind “Selfie Series”?**

Selfies have become a popular and near-universal phenomenon in contemporary society, especially among younger generations. Individuals often pose with gestures and facial expressions that they think would be perfect before the camera, and after snapping a picture, they re-touch and filter before posting on social media. Some even go further, either paying a hefty price tag or ruining the environment to make the perfect background in their photos. Uniting these people is a desire to

portray an ideal life to the internet public; however, most of these selfies are not accurate portrayals of the real-life that these young people live day to day. They are a false image, and to some degree reflect the dearth of both face-to-face interactions and confidence in this generation. They follow blindly, escape from the self, and pursue the “collective self”.

By using a fisheye lens on original selfie photographs to exaggerate each figure’s expressions and bodily gestures, this collection subverts the idealized selves as the individuals had originally intended. Contrary to their original desires, the individuals are instead uglified to a certain extent, producing a strong visual impact with an ironic and comedic effect.

### **Can you tell us about your first time in The States? Did you face an experience that makes you want to communicate different themes through your artwork?**

Compared with the “other world” feeling of a previous generation of Chinese when they first came to the United States, our generation now feels maybe only “another air”. Because we were originally brought up under the influence of western pop culture, there is no big culture shock. Excitement still occurred, of course, especially the first time I went to the Met, Whitney Museum, and other museums to see the mas-

terpieces I saw in books as a child. The inspiration for starting the subway series actually comes from the excitement of a new environment and new culture. I came to New York from China to study in 2014, and the completely different cultural atmosphere made me surprised and excited. I was shocked by the mess when I took the New York subway for the first time, then it became more and more interesting to me through my daily encounters with it. The New York Subway is like a miniature world, and also a microcosm of the city: passengers from various countries and ethnic backgrounds speaking a variety of languages, belonging to a variety of jobs and occupations, each carrying their own stories, step into a narrow train car. They come into the truest sense of contact with each other. They occupy the same space for but a brief moment, moving together before going their separate ways. After getting off the train, perhaps these people of a serendipitous encounter will never come together again; and perhaps those who have come together, again and again, sharing a commute along the same path, will become familiar strangers. Or perhaps with a fateful chance, they will break this estrangement and walk into each other's lives. So I began to use the language of sculpture to present what I see as the raucous restlessness and the exuberant vitality of urban life. If I had never come to New York, I would never have touched on this theme.

**Recently The States went from pandemic to protests on the death of George Floyd. Is your creative mood affected and changed by this difficult time? What do you think about this issue of the struggle for rights?**

I feel a little bit anxious, especially caused by some social security problems. The content and timeline of my creation haven't been affected a lot, because most of the works I'm working on have been decided earlier. However, my income is more or less affected by the pandemic as many previously scheduled exhibitions have been postponed, and some teaching jobs have been canceled. I think it may be a good thing from another perspective. It gives me a break from my hectic schedule and time to catch my breath and think. When the whole industry begins to explore new ways under the current crisis, artists also begin to re-examine the meaning of art and creation. I don't think most residential foreigners can properly stand in the real context of American social problems, as they can't fully understand its historical background and experience their national mood. Therefore, instead of blindly following and being politically correct, we should be more rational and cautious in expressing our attitudes. We can't treat every social event as a cathartic window. I support the pursuit and expression of right for all just and pure purposes, within the bounds of the law.

*Photos and illustrations courtesy of Yulong Lli  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafti*

# Yulong Lli

*Inspiring Shanghai Illustrator Yulong Lli turning draw and illustration artwork into a moment of joy and possibilities*



**Y**ULONG LLI is a Shanghai-based freelance illustrator who studied at the China Academy of Art and is represented by Richard Solomon in New York. In his drawings and illustrations, he seeks and explores new ways to tell stories through different colors and creating compositions, where his creative style remarks the fusion of eastern and western culture. The inspiration for his graphic design also comes from vintage posters and modernism. He has an impressive list of well-known clients: Apple, Airbnb, Google, Uber, Ikea, LVMH, Gucci, Cartier, Pernod Ricard, Starbucks, Vogue, GQ magazine, Esquire, Cosmopolitan, New York Times, ELLE Decoration, Johnson & Johnson, Bloomberg Businessweek, Men's Health, Hong Kong Airlines, Modern Weekly magazine, LVMH, etc ... These are just some of the many brands that Yulong Lli has worked with. He has received many international awards, including Hiii Illustration 2016 best of best, 3X3 illustration annual, Communication Arts Illustration annual, and ADA's Genius Award.

*His illustrations convey a real optimism, as they have a positive outlook towards the future but with full awareness of the present*



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# SHANGHAIREN





## How did your adventure in the illustration world begin? What motivated you to become an illustrator?

I majored in animation during college time, and I realized that I prefer illustration to 3D after trying different intern jobs. At the same time, I never give up on updating my daily sketches and share them on social media casually, which brings some chance to grow up as a professional illustrator, especially my first international client, Airbnb.

## Who influenced you as a person and as an illustrator?

When I get started with my illustration career, I'm always in Lisk Feng's shadows. From her works, I realized there are so many possibilities of illustration, which I never saw. However, to become a professional illustrator I need to organize my visual language representing my unique personal tastes and aesthetics, so it's hard for me to point out an illustrator who influenced me now. I use to discover something that fascinates me now, like music or movie, which is not just about illustration.



**Do you remember your earliest drawing? What was it about?**

It's the Sailor Moon, a Japanese comic and animation character. I asked my father to buy me a picture book of her and copied one with Chinese painting.

**What illustration impressed you the most in your childhood? What are your best memories?**

Chinese picture storybooks impressed me a lot when I was a child. It's an old-fashioned way to tell traditional Chinese stories by images with fewer words. As well known, most of the children don't like to read a book full of words, so that's my best joyful experience of study.



*His  
illustration  
works also  
deal with  
themes of  
diversity and  
inclusion  
using  
vibrant, and  
joyful colors.*



**What are your sources of inspiration? What are some of your favorite subjects to draw, and what is the creative process behind your artwork?**

My inspiration always comes from my daily life, but I also collect a database of my favorite artworks just in case, like contemporary arts, photography, vintage posters, etc. When I get a new assignment, I think about the key points behind the story first. After research and paper doodling, I will sketch and make color palette based on my mind's direction. Lastly, I add details inside and finish everything.



**What better focus your personality, in your creations? Does the color palette you use reflect the way you see the world?**

I think that color palettes and constructions reflect my personality very well. Still, I also try different ways to hire what I love into my works as surprise, like my favorite but unaffordable furniture or fashion style. LOL! My friends always joke with me about my color taste, saying they come from a person who falls in lovemaking him feels cheerful. I'm willing to hear that because that's exactly what I want to deliver through my work.



**What do you like most about your job, and what are the greatest satisfactions?**

It's a very simple, painting. I choose illustration because it's a comfortable way for me to express myself, and images are very straight forward to build a bridge between me and spectators. Visual communication with them makes me feel satisfied as I know we find some common feelings from my works.

*Yulong Lli's design is fresh, sparkling, vital, and energetic and reflects his way of seeing the world.*

**What is the biggest challenging when you have to start a new project?**

The biggest challenging I have to face is a deadline, using the limited time to present a good idea with what I have, especially for editorial works as they always come and go in a hurry. Besides, I'm not sure whether the topic is familiar for me or not, but I'm enjoying it.



**Are there any of your illustrations related to a moment that marked a significant point in your life? Could you share with us the story behind it?**

I was invited to create a cover illustration for a fictitious magazine named the Shanghairen last year, inspired by the New Yorker magazine. At that time, I exchanged to the UK, stood outside of my familiar environment, so I have an opportunity to describe my feelings of shanghai as a new resident after living for about seven years, focusing on the resident's daily life.

**Since you are a Shanghai-based illustrator, can you tell us how the city has changed in the last year due to the Pandemic situation? Does this period has affected your way of creating and work?**

I went back to my hometown and stayed at home for about half a year, so when I came back to Shanghai, the situation has been under control. Therefore, what I saw is a typical metropolis city, but people is used to wear a mask on the street. During this time, I accept some commissioned works related to Coronavirus, including a public donation campaign to WHO. It's good to do something to support and record as a creator.

*Photos courtesy of Heng Yue  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafiti*

# Heng Yue



**Y**ue Heng is a Chinese tattoo artist born in Yueyang, Hunan. He is the owner of “New Assassin Tattoo Xincike Studio” ( 岳阳新刺客 ). He has been struggling throughout his life. Since his childhood, Yue spent his enthusiasm on kinds of art, painting, calligraphy, and Zhuan Seal Script (a typical official character in very early Chinese history, AD 1st Century), implying his association with tattoo art in his fate. After a whole diversified career experience, he was deeply intrigued by tattoo art. Since then, he decided to devote himself to Chinese tattoo art. Yue’s style is a mix of innovation and realism. He custom made every tattoo for each client. That’s why his works are so attractive. Yue thinks of tattoos as unvarying body art and treats every job, every customer with his heart and soul.



**What made you want to become a tattooist? What do tattoos mean to you?**

When I was young, I had a strong interest in Chinese calligraphy and seal cutting, but I didn't have any relevant learning and training. I had a lot of careers before I started tattooing. I started as a tattoo artist to support my family, but as my career began, I gradually found that I liked it more and more, and I began to study it more and more.

**What about the first tattoo on your skin?**

My first tattoo was a mask of Prajna.





He loves to design the work based on client thought, preference, style, characteristics, emotion, and belief. He doesn't give opinions, he just listens. After, he starts to make a design, blending to the picture in their mind



**How long have you been a tattoo artist? Can you tell us a bit about your beginning?**

I've been doing tattoos for 17 years. In the beginning, I came into contact with an informal tattoo shop, but later, after I learn to do tattoos, I get self-taught.

**Do you remember the first person you tattooed? What did you tattoo?**

Of course, I made a totem to represent the sun.

**Have your techniques changed since you started tattooing? Can you tell us about the kind of tattoos that you enjoy most to work on?**

Technology changes almost every year, and of course, it's an upward state. I prefer the realistic type, which is more creative and has a strong texture.

**How much do you think tattoos are a private thing, and how much are they a public thing, to show for others?**

I think it's the individual opinion of each person.



**What are the changes that you've seen in the last years? Is there still a stigma attached to tattoos?**

It's been a normal development over the last few years, and our attitude towards tattoos is becoming more open and accepting. Some of the bad opinions about tattoos are now almost rare, and few people have such opinions about tattoos.

**Do you think nowadays there still is a rebellious element to getting tattooed?**

I think tattoos have always had an element of rebellion, which is the own characteristic of tattoos.

**Do you think social media has changed the tattoo world or introduced particular trends? Do social have contributed to the proliferation of tattoos, making them more mainstream?**

For some policy reasons, social media has not really helped the development of tattoos in China, especially in recent years. The development of the Internet enables due to technology to communicate and learn more quickly, and it also helps tattoo artists to develop and improve their skills more quickly.

*His mantra says  
“With my  
artwork, any  
inch of your  
tattooed skin  
would find the  
value of  
beauty, and  
every single  
time, I throw all  
myself in!”*

**Can you share with us any meaningful story behind your work?**

My works are designed on-site after communication-based on the ideas of each client. It can be said that each work actually has its underlying meaning. The whole design idea, the creative process, and the story behind it are always very, very long. Because of some language problems, I cannot explain this part of the content except than Chinese for the moment.





*Photos courtesy of  
Jumping Goat & Maybe Mars  
Interview by Matteo Damiani*

# Jumping Goat

**J**umping Goat (跳山羊) is a post-punk, garage noise band from Xi'an, the ancient capital of China. In 2019 Jumping Goat released its debut album 'Walking on the Ice'.

**Vocal & keyboard:**  
Tingting Xiao

**Vocal & guitar:**  
Wei Xin

**Bass:**  
Fuxin Hao

**Drum:**  
Shunzhe Zhang



## *Walking on the Ice is the debut album of Jumping Goat*

**What are the major influences on your sound?**

We are really into the 70's & 80s indie rock music scene in the western world. Our music was deeply influenced by the grandmother style post-punk band, such as Joy Division, Gang of Four, Bauhaus, etc. These listening habits shaped the root of Jumping Goat. Recently, we were also fascinated by lots of heavy post-punk bands, such as IDLES, Shames, Black Midi, Psycho Monks, etc. Maybe we will try more powerful music on the next stage, which is more live house or gigs-oriented.

**Where does the name 'Jumping Goat' come from?**

Jumping Goat is a Chinese folk word "Tiao Shan Yang" 跳山羊, we directly translated it to English (The jumping goat is a folk children's game

that simulates goat jumping, similar to the game of leapfrog). It means leaping frogs or vaulting when we grew up in primary school. But people don't use this word anymore. So we picked it up to memory this period of happy memory.

**How and when did you start your career as a band? How did you meet?**

We met each other around 2013, on DouBan, which is a very important youth culture website. All of us already had bands, but we still eager to do some different sounds, such as pioneer music or indie music. The bassist posted a message to find a musician. I saw it and drop him a

message, very easy! We were bored with punk, metal, or Britpop. We were based in Xian. We spent 2-3 years with each other during this period. We also created most of our songs during 2013-2015. And then we temporarily dissolved because the guitar player read Ph.D. in the UK.

**How the environment you live in have shaped your sound?**

Xian is one of my favorite cities in China. It was the capital of China for 13 dynasties. Xian is not modern but we like its long history. People's lifestyle is very relaxed and slow. We





*Their songs face the problems of millions of their peers: separation from family, the dangers of adulthood, the sense of alienation of Chinese youth*

can spend lots of time writing music, talking with friends, and drinking all night.

**What are the main topics for most of your songs?**

Our song mainly talks about the real problems we faced, such as the value of teenagers, the separation of a family. However, we prefer to tell a story or say it in an obscure way. For example the song “forest”, we intend to describe the danger of adult society. Like a zoo, all kinds of animals with different desires and motivations, which is like a forest, full of love and hurts.



**Can you share with us a story from backstage?**

Our band has a strange habit, we used to do something together before gigs, to relieve our pressures and relax each other. We always went to the restaurant to have a good meal and drink a lot during 2013-2015, when we just started Jumping Goat. However, recently, instead of drinking and eating, we prefer to go to a massage shop to take massage therapy. We found massage is better than food and alcohol, which could warm our up quickly.

*They met  
each other  
around 2013,  
on DouBan,  
a reference  
point for  
youth culture  
in China*



**Which artists would you like to collaborate with?**

We really into collaborating with dancers on the next stage. We watched lots of dancing-rock bands such as Bonaparte, LYNKS AFRIKA, etc, which largely fascinated us. These kinds of bands refined the show of rock and roll. We fully agreed that sound is only one element of the show. We hope to add some new ways to present the gigs that more cult and dark, such as VJ, dancer, and so on.

**Will you tour abroad in the next future?**

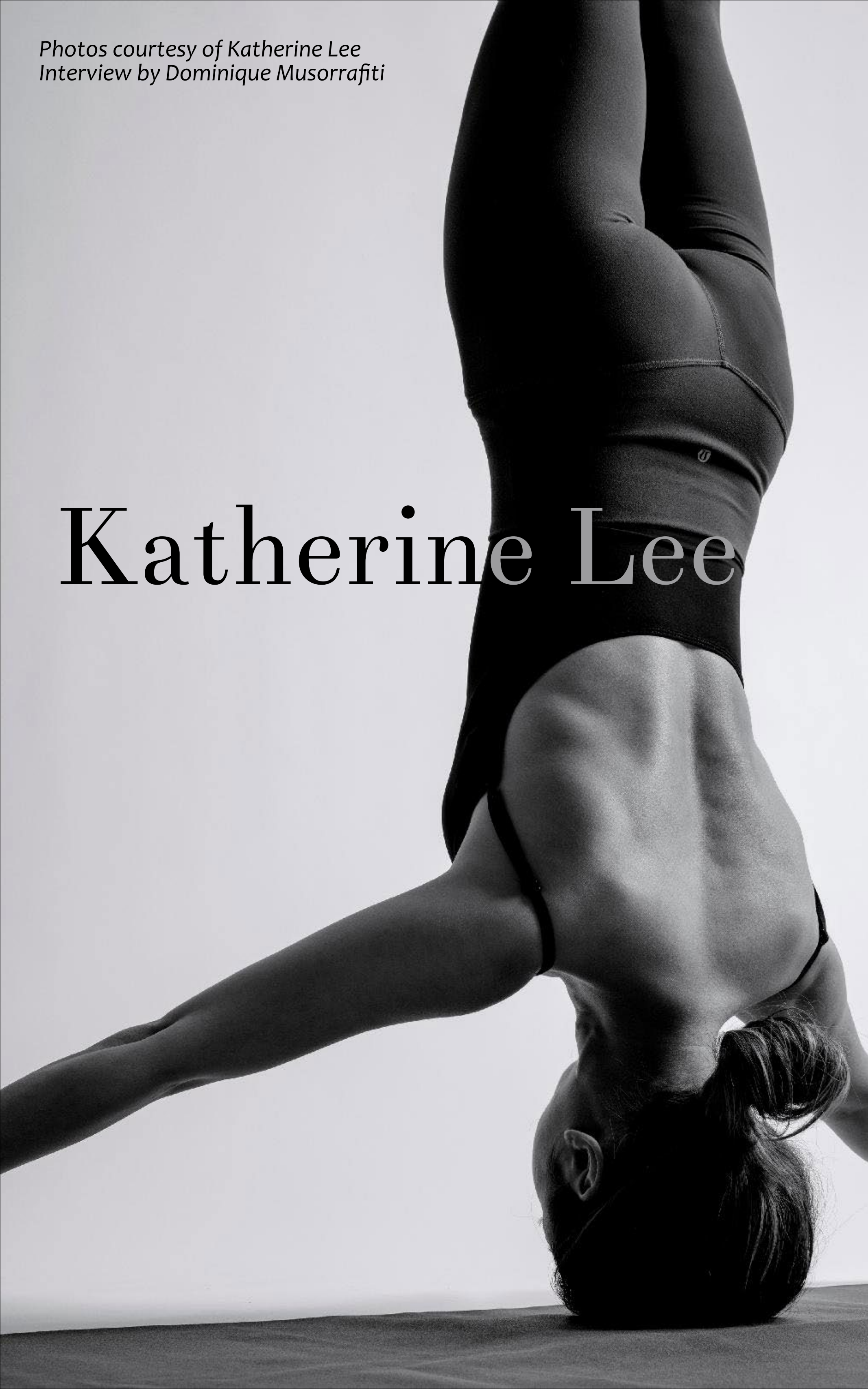
We really expect to bring our sound to different countries, collaborate with local artists, talk with native people, and drink lots of craft beers. We also looking forward to recording our next album abroad.

**What is your next project?**

First, we plan to write some new songs in 2020, even publish an EP. Second, we want to find one or two dancers with a modern dancing background. Maybe they will join in Jumping Goat group and play together with us on stage.

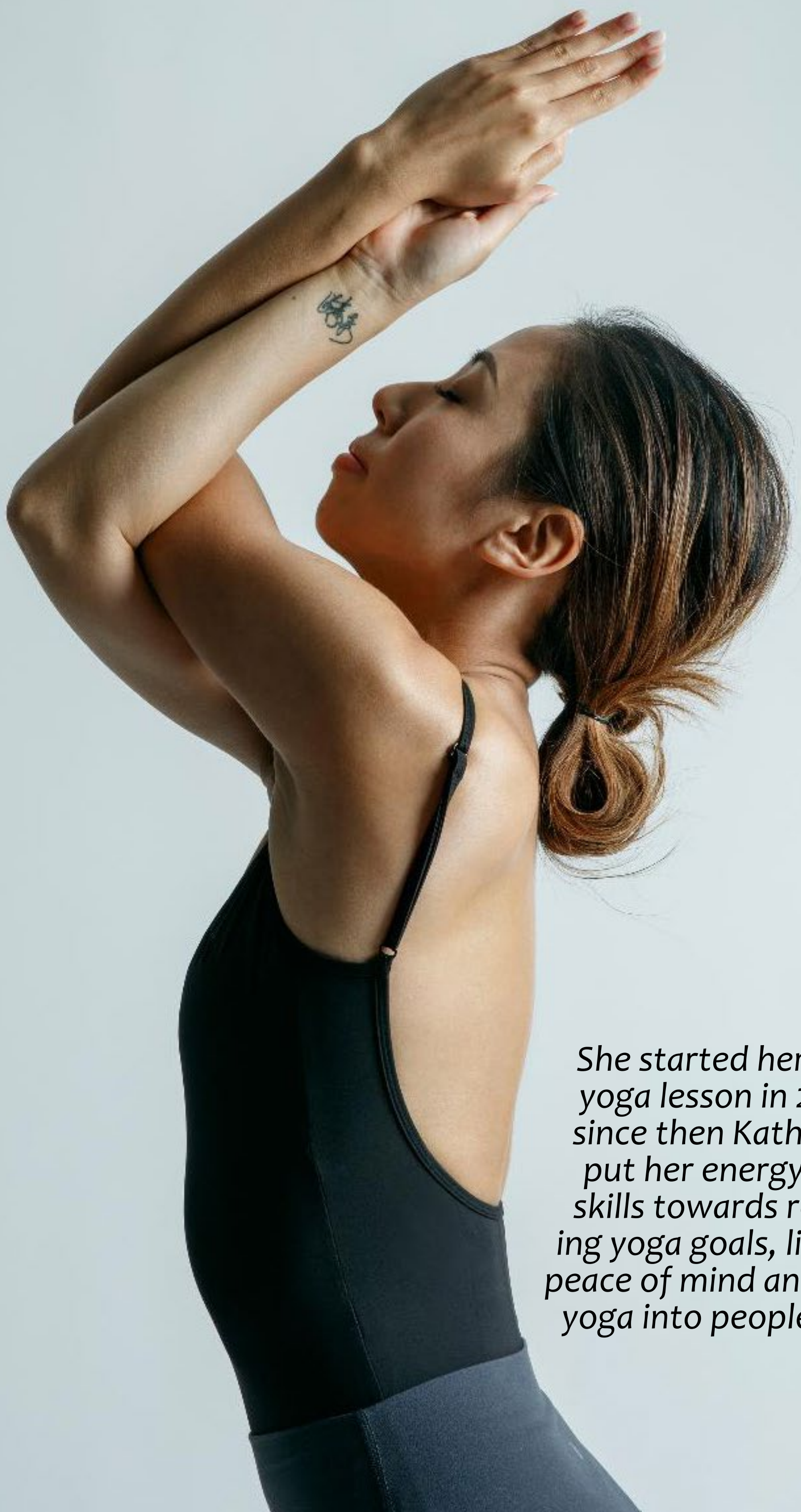
*Photos courtesy of Katherine Lee  
Interview by Dominique Musorrafti*

# Katherine Lee



**K**atherine Lee is the founder of Hong Kong's SUKHA Yoga & Wellness. After 20 years of practice, she got her first Hatha Yoga Instructor Certificate from AAFP and started teaching in 2003. She teaches at different yoga centers, clubhouses, corporates, and privates. Katherine Lee is a passionate yoga teacher that believes one should never stop learning. She obtained the Aerial Yoga Teacher Certificate and Sport Science and Fitness Foundation by AASFP in 2015 and E-RYT® 200 with Master Samrat Dasgupta in 2016. In 2017, Katherine started her studio and won the champion of "VIth International Yoga Championship 2017" (IYC2017). Katherine Lee, during her lessons, helping to reach and establishing an energy balance and flow in the chakras and energetic field of the body.





She started her first yoga lesson in 2001, since then Katherine put her energy and skills towards reaching yoga goals, like the peace of mind and bring yoga into people's life

**How and when did you start to get interested in yoga? What attracted you the most?**

I started my yoga practice in 2001 (Age 14). I have a gymnastics background when I was young, which came with many injuries during the practice. This pitfall made me realize I need a milder practice to compensate and condition my body, that's why I started doing yoga. The thing yoga attracts me the most is the tranquility and calmness it brings to me. Unlike other sports that require intense competitions or even comparison, yoga practice provides me space and time to just relax.

**How long have you been practicing yoga? Can you tell us about your yoga philosophy?**

I have practiced yoga for 19 years. My yoga philosophy is 'live at the moment'. Yoga practice helps me settle my mind in the modern world, people nowadays are occupied with different jobs and duties, very often they forget the most important essence of life, which is to seize the present moment.

**Why did you choose to be a yoga teacher? What's your mission as a yoga instructor?**

As a yoga instructor, I adhere to the goal of improving others' mind and body health. The body discipline and mind training in my teaching help shape better wellness of my stu-

dents' physical and mental health. This is also my mission of bringing a positive change to their inner and outer physique.

**What type of yoga do you teach? What are the main benefits of this particular form of yoga?**

I teach a wide variety of yoga practices, including Hatha, vinyasa, pranayama practice, stretching, sound therapy, meditation, and aerial yoga. Through the practice, it helps stimulate the muscles and tendons, which physically improves ailments and maintains a sustainable good lifestyle. In the mental aspect, a consistent practice enriches the mental wellness of a person, granting them a more stable lifestyle.

*Katherine is keen on bringing transformation to her students through the yoga practice by providing them with the personalized attention they need to fulfill their wellness goals.*

**How has yoga enriched your life? What has it done for you? Which yoga aspects are most important for you?**

Yoga has basically colored every page of my life. The benefits to me are far beyond mere physical improvements. Meditation, in my opinion, is the most significant part of my yoga practice. The practice of asanas (yoga poses) is a preparation for a more steadfast meditation, it provides a solid foundation for me to further develop a steady mindset for a more in-depth meditation.

**How important is meditation in yoga practice?**

Meditation is the center of my yoga practice. Yoga focuses on the union of mind, body, and soul, therefore sole asana training is not enough for thorough and in-depth yoga meditation. Combined with meditation practice, my yoga practice enables me to reach a higher state of wellness. It also serves as an approach for me to relax my mind amid my busy daily schedule.

**What are some common, incorrect assumptions about yoga?**

Many people assume yoga practitioners are all born to be flexible that stretching is the most important part of yoga practice. Most of the yogis I know were not born flexible. It is a public misconception that people need to be flexible to

do yoga. Yoga helps condition their body and improve their strength, balance, and flexibility. It is a process that cannot be accomplished in a short period, yoga is welcome to people of all levels and sport backgrounds.

**Do you believe there are age limits to practice yoga or start attending a course?**

No, yoga is suitable for people of all ages as it offers modifications to learners of different levels. In yoga, we believe mind over body, in which our capability is only limited by our mindset. Yoga is a spiritual practice that suits all ages and genders, it does not just involve difficult asanas or dynamic flow but also meditation and yin yoga.

**What role can play yoga to cope and overcome daily life issues during COVID 19 time? Can it keep people healthy during the pandemic?**

This year has been a turbulent and stressful year for most of us, I believe a regular practice of yoga or meditation helps with maintaining our mental health as well as boosting our energy. While most of the activity has been put idle, we can still maintain a positive mindset and a healthy physique with the help of yoga. It also provides a platform and a strong community to connect us together during the isolation period.

*With her SUKHA  
Yoga & Wellness  
team comprised of  
qualified  
teachers, she  
introduces to  
everyone a yoga  
journey through  
different kinds:  
Fitness Yoga,  
Spiritually-Oriented  
Yoga, Gentle Yoga,  
Aerial, Pranayama,  
Prenatal, etc.*

**Any advice for people who think they don't have time for yoga? How can they fit it into daily life and make it a habit?**

Many people may think that a yoga class lasts at least an hour and it does not fit into their tight schedule, but we can still cooperate yoga practice into our daily life. A short 30 minutes of guided yoga practice before work or before bed can be an excellent way to start a regular yoga practice. Try to cut down the time we spend on watching TV shows or playing computer games, roll out the mat, and just feel your body on the mat. Priority is the key to everything, there will also be a way to start practicing yoga if you want to.





# China Under Ground