

Taca Sui's photographs are quiet; still. Vivaciousness is not something that the artist seeks. Simple, stately and undemonstrative, his black-and-white, grey scaled pictures of landscapes, rock walls, curtains, statues, rivers, reeds and more, keep their meaning enclosed in a system of restraint.

This aesthetic purity echoes the Book of Odes, simply known as the Odes, to which Taca Sui has dedicated his images. Employed as impetus and inspiration, his 'Odes' refer to these ancient poems of Chinese culture, understood to be the first recorded works of oral poets gathered from the regional and rural places of China by, it is believed, the philosopher and teacher Confucius.

The poems, and in sympathy with them, Taca Sui's photographs, strive for subtle variations and undramatic statements. Dating back over 3000 years, they were most commonly composed in four lines, using structures of repetition and slight, nuanced modifications. They were intended to produce attentive listening and observations. Their humble qualities of reflection upon nature, the elements, love and acceptance offered moral and philosophical instruction.

After studying the classical text and its many commentaries, between 2010 and 2012 Taca Sui travelled to the regions from which the Odes were collected. Eschewing views of modern China, he searched to find sites and observances to frame with his camera that corresponded to, but did not illustrate, the imagery of the Odes. Instead, he sought to distil their quintessence and their qualities of a timeless culture.

One might think that Taca Sui's project is wrapped up in nostalgia, but his works do not seek or evoke a romantic spirit, or a glamorous, atmospheric appearance: they do not create a pantomime of history. Rather, they are almost forensic in their deliberate avoidance of the whimsical and harmonious mist, water, mountain and valley aesthetics of Chinese scroll paintings. Although they share some qualities of black-and-white ink wash paintings with their subtle shades and simple lines, there is nothing fanciful in their presentation; they have a kind of stoic dignity in the face of ongoing change, manifestations of which the artist keeps just outside the frame, around the bend, across the road and further into the village.

Taca Sui's project is to bring attention to those qualities of Chinese culture that remain intact, that have persisted in the emotional and philosophical psyche of China for millennia, which might be found in the slightest of glimpses, the smallest of details and the undisturbed natural moment. He does not seek to resist change, evolution or revolution, but shows the intrinsic nature of culture.

Juliana Engberg, 2014