



the Light & Mist of
YUAN YANG
NARRATIVE AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE CHONG

STEVE CHONG PHOTOGRAPHY
www.stevechong.com



THE LIGHT & MIST OF
YUAN YANG
steve chong photography

NARRATIVE / PHOTOGRAPHY : STEVE CHONG



FOREWORD

During the winter of 2007, I was leading a photography group from Malaysia. In the days of the expedition, I discovered that everyone in the group was a very seasoned professional photographer. But there was a long haired gentleman in the group who was behaving suavely, who particularly caught my attention; in terms of composition, choice of camera equipment, shutter speed and aperture, he was so different from the rest. He was no other than Steve Chong, a photographer who has been cast by the spell of the terraced paddy fields, who was regarded as the specialist in winning awards in the international league of salon.

Mr. Chong's tenacity towards photography and his passion for the terraced paddy fields had seen him traveling thousands of miles over the years to Yuan Yang. He had come during four seasons; his hard work had enabled him to create many different compositions from the four seasons.

Mr. Chong's persistence and the quest for photography had set a new course in my life. I can safely say that for every composition Mr. Chong made here, I was next to him with my camera, but then with our different approach and attitude towards art, and from technical points of view, albeit the same scene, I find mine had always been substandard as compared to that of Chong's.

The Chinese have always been regarded as hard working people, but in this regard, this artist friend of mine had taken a step further. There was a case where I led a few photographers from Guang Dong and Guang Xi, we resolved to photograph the Long Banquet in Ha Bo, but we had to stay at the humble peasants' houses and to share their food. The Chinese from the group had shied away; they would rather live in the town situated about 170 kilometers away instead of staying with the peasants. But Mr. Chong insisted he stay; as a result he was able to capture many wonderful photos.

When Mr. Chong showed me the fruit of his hard labor over the years, I was shocked. His craft was of the finest kind, showcasing the spectacular paddy fields, at the same time depicting the life of the local Hani and Yi people. His art had illustrated the paradise like landscape of Yuan Yang. The paddy fields through his camera were stunning; sometimes it looks like the stairway to heaven and other times looks like the dance of a thousand serpents. He has also showcased the battle of life between the people and nature, ultimately bringing the paddy fields to first class fine art while not forgetting to inject his own feelings.

I salute him for his art, to his pure soul and to his noble course in life. It is my wish that with the release of this book, more people will discover Yuan Yang and come forward to share the beauty of this magnificent landscape.

Ma Li Wen
Yuan Yang, China
20-5-2010



STEVE CHONG

Steve Chong is a third generation Malaysian born Chinese. He discovered photography by chance in the year 2001, later he caught the world's attention with his unique style of conceptual photography.

He since ventured into the area of international salon, including Austria, America, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Argentina, Malaysia, Spain and Singapore. To date, he has won more than a hundred awards, which are comprised of mostly gold medals.

After that Chong was invited to the prize giving ceremony at Austria Super

Circuit, arguably the largest photography competition in the world.

Since 2006, the phenomenal scenery of Yuan Yang has captivated Chong, and consequently made him a regular in Yuan Yang. Traces of him can be discovered at various spots in Yuan Yang all through the four seasons. Later, with a set of images he captured at Yuan Yang, Chong was awarded Associateship (ARPS) by the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain.

Chong subsequently compiled the images he captured and wrote the accounts about the images which later led to the publication of this book.

THE LIGHT & MIST OF
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PREFACE

My very first impression of the paddy fields came during my geography class in primary school. I can still remember vividly how our teacher made the effort to explain the differences between the dry paddy and the wet ones. He categorically explained the distinction between the crops while not forgetting the cultivation process in countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. Interestingly, there was not even one image about paddy shown in the reference book. What had been illustrated however, were the various locations where the paddy was sown, there was no mention at all about the terraced paddy fields in China. How the paddy fields look was left entirely to our imaginations.

It was only after I had developed an immense interest in photography, that the book “China” by renowned French author, Yann Layman, finally enabled me to see for the first time images of terraced paddy fields. The book cover was an image of the paddy fields illuminated by the reflection of the evening glow. It was so different from what I had imagined that it left a profound impact on me. It was then that I decided that I must travel and photograph in this place.

In the spring of 2007, my encounter with Yuan Yang finally came, and thus began my quest of photographing the paddy fields.

The first impression was staggering. The boundless paddy fields, which sometimes look like a multitude of silver lines and other times look like dragon’s spines, set off with the reflections of sunlight and the magnificent sea clouds, could make any photographer humble. I fell for this place almost immediately.

What I failed to anticipate was, however, that setting my foot down at Yuan Yang could make such dramatic impact to my photography career. From the acceptance to the Associateship of Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, to the publication of this book, had all begun with the first step of traveling to Yuan Yang. Perhaps I had an unexplained relationship to the place.

The ancestors of Hani tribes were great engineers. Using only very simple tools such as the hoe and plough, but aided with tremendous determination, they constructed the spectacular paddy fields on the slopes of the mountains, at the same time, cleverly devised an irrigation system by drawing water from the highland. There is a saying in Yuan Yang, “the higher the mountains, the higher the water.” Statistics have shown that the difference between the lowest terraces to the highest was more than 3000 steps, about a kilometer apart. It was a mega project taking tens of generations to complete.

There were many mega projects in human history; however, few are still functioning to date. The Great Wall of China no longer serves as a defensive wall, the pyramids in Egypt have become a major tourist attraction, it seems only the Du Jiang Yan dam and Yuan Yang are still serving mankind obediently.

I thought God must have been rewarding the people in this region since He chose this place to paint His fascinating art pieces, attracting photographers from all over the world to photograph in Yuan Yang.

I was lucky enough to have recorded some of these art pieces. It is my wish that through my lens, I am able to express the spirit of the hardworking Hani tribes and their deep respect for nature, and at the same time the art created by both man and God.

Steve Chong
25-4 -2010

PHY 2010



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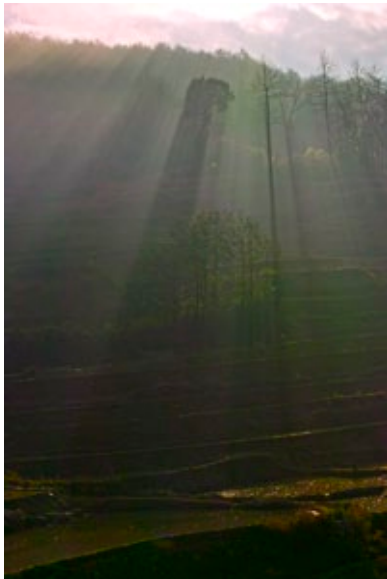
Chapter 1

THE LIGHT

The Art of Timing

The photo on the right carried a rather significant meaning to my expeditions in Yuan Yang, simply because it was the very first photo I captured there. My destiny with Yuan Yang began with this image. From a certain aspect, it has enlightened me in many ways, unfortunately, at the same time, it has also recorded a regrettable moment.

I remember vividly; the location was at Duo Yi Shu, the reflection of the sun had fallen on a very interesting angle: surrounded by layers of mist, the light was trying to break through and had showcased an astounding moment. Miraculously, there was a ring encircling the reflection.



Failing to capture the amazing scene had been a dreadful experience. After the painful episode, I had been acting a little nervous. Like "A nervous rat"; as my counterparts had been teasingly calling me. I thought I would rather get a bad shot then not getting any! Seen here are ray beams piercing through the hazy sky.

To a photographer, especially one who was regarded as a newbie in Yuan Yang, the moment was absolutely magical. I had to admit, I was rather ambitious during my maiden tour to Yuan Yang. Dying to get good images, I had not only brought along the 135,6x7 but even the bulky 4x5. I confess I was determined and greedy at the same time. However, dream and reality always go against each other, the taller the dream, the harder the fall.

I was in awe of the moment before me. Struggling to decide which camera to use, eventually, I went for the 4x5. I set it up hurriedly, composed, focused, metered, inserted the film holder, pulled the dark slide and then fired the shutter. Still I was just not quick enough. Just when I wanted to press the shutter, the ring disappeared before my eyes. It was one of the most painful moments to see something so wondrous slip away. I was totally annoyed, disappointed, and remorseful, in short really a mixed feeling. To avoid further disappointment, I quickly fired a few shots with the 135; then again, the best moment had passed.

I learned a good lesson from this episode; I had no one to blame but myself. On the positive side, it has given me a great enlightenment: having good reflexes and always being in standby mode are the essential qualities for a photographer in Yuan Yang.

As far as the gears are concerned, it would be wise to have lighter and more flexible equipment. The 120 and 135 are a good choice.

The 4x5 and 8x10 on the other hand are generally slower, because it is hard to predict when the "best" moment is, so the chances of getting a great shot would be relatively lower.

Correct timing is an essential part of photography, such as life.



The First Gift

22nd. December 2007, I returned to Yuan Yang embarking on my second expedition.

Learning from the first experience, I felt a little nervous but at the same time the expectation was high. I realized that the place was full of photographic opportunities. Having said that, I knew I was still inexperienced, after all, I had only begun photographing the paddy fields and mist.

Three days have passed, and today, like many photography groups, the first place we paid pilgrimage to was Duo Yi Shu. There were neither spectacular sea clouds nor beautiful clouds in the sky, and the much talked about “magical mirror” was hardly seen.



The tenacious and persuasive Hani girls would not miss any chance to sell their merchandise. “Please would you buy an egg from me uncle?” The phrase is quite common at Duo Yi Shu.

Duo Yi Shu, like any other day, was reluctant to show her charm. What greeted us was a blanket of mist. The situation would easily upset any earnest photographer and tourist, but conditions like this were considered “normal” in Duo Yi Shu. The stronger the desire, the more the photographer will be disappointed.

The mist showed no sign of subsiding, and I had already photographed too many young Hani kids selling eggs. When my hair and eyebrows were drenched by the mist, I could not help but to give in. It appears that I will have to return on another day. After lunch, my guide, Master Ma, having studied the weather, suggested that we should not return to Lao Xian Cheng, but remain on the road and photograph whatever came our way, until we reached Tiger’s Mouth. ‘To photograph whatever comes our way’ meant every places would be the same where we go, because everywhere was buried in mist. It would be worthless even to try. Tiger’s Mouth it seems is the final frontier of the day. I have no objection to Master Ma’s suggestion. Under such weather, his strategy sounded logical.

After getting in and out of the vehicle a few times and shooting a number of nameless locations, the disappointment grew. My enthusiasm however strong, was weakening, and the cold breeze had made me feel sleepy. I have had, after all, little sleep since flying from Malaysia.

Just when I thought a nap could do me good, I took a look outside the window. I noticed the sky was clearer now, though there was still a thin layer of mist. The sky had broken through, and there were ray beams shining through, and there were even reflections on the paddy fields.

I was completely shocked, gone was my sleepiness. I shouted: “Look on your right, Jesus light! Stop the car!” The driver hit the break immediately, and Master Ma had awakened. He took a look and calmly said: “Quick grab your gears, let’s get down.”



The Second Gift

cont'd

I was the first who got down, while running. I could still hear Master Ma shouting, “Quickly, take a few shots; we have to go to Tiger’s Mouth, the angle there will be better.” While I was running, I changed to mid-range lens, without even erecting the tripods, I just fired away.

This was really shooting on the run.

I could only take a few shots, as Master Ma was shouting loudly: “Come let’s go to Tiger’s Mouth quickly.”

Reluctantly I ran back into the bus, while complaining: “It is fine here ...”

Master Ma said confidently, “Trust me Mr. Chong, Tiger’s Mouth gives you better angles.”

I wasn’t quite convinced though, while looking out the window breathlessly; I thought this was the first present delivered to us.

When we arrived at Tiger’s Mouth, I was glad that I had listened to Master Ma, because what I had experienced next has made such a profound impact in my photographic career.

Winds were obviously blowing steadily above the Tiger’s Mouth sky, the clouds were dancing to the tune of the winds, and there were a few light beams shining through between the crack in the clouds.

And suddenly, it transformed into the image on the right. I reckoned this was the second present delivered to us.



The situation didn’t improve much after lunch; it was as gloomy as ever. Visibility had sadly narrowed down to only a few feet. Weather like this would make any photographer depressed.



The Third Gift

cont'd

While photographing, I told Master Ma: “Sigh, should I have ever doubted you!”

He didn't reply as he too was busy photographing.

The clouds were constantly changing and didn't stop for a moment; the sky above Tiger's Mouth was experiencing something really spectacular.

How could I have ever let such scenes slip away! I didn't stop, and was checking the exposure and trying different compositions.

Now, it appears to me, our third present was ready to be delivered.

There was a colorful cloud that flew by and came to the center of a light beam, forming such an unbelievable scene.

Even the hawkers and the local Hani people stopped and were obviously struck by such a fascinating view. Some said: “What a sight, I have never seen this before. Seldom can you see this!”

Excitedly, I kept firing away, worrying that the moment would instantaneously disappear as soon as I clicked the shutter.

Interestingly, when the colorful cloud finally passed by, the ray beams eventually died down.



The scene before the colorful cloud moved into position may not have looked that dramatic as compared to the image on the right but there was an interesting pattern in the clouds, reminiscent of a unicorn.



Dessert

Just when I felt so excited and decided to call it a day, I noticed on the left of the belvedere, the clouds were reflecting the remaining light from the sky.

The paddy fields consisted of red, blue, green, orange and a variety of colors, creating an abstract piece of art.

Carefully I took a reading and then took a few shots.

While taking the shots, I felt like I was having dessert after such a wonderful meal.

The whole shooting episode lasted for nearly an hour. Not only was I treated with a great photographic experience but also at the same time saw the endless possibilities of photographing in Yuan Yang, and I had enjoyed every moment of it tremendously.

I thought All-mighty today had been very kind to us, not only had He sent a gift, not one but many.

That day was December 25, Christmas Day.



After the dazzling show, like the last the dance in a finale, the light was seen moving away gradually, as shown here in the reflection. I couldn't have missed such a dramatic and emotional moment.



PHY 2010



APPRECIATION

There are many people who I would like to thank for their assistance, guidance and help in the completion of this book. Without them the book would never have become a reality.

I would like to thank Mr. Ma Li Wen, who has treated me with tremendous kindness and generosity. Without him many images in the book would not have been captured. His familiarity with the weather and geography of Yuan Yang is unmatched. But what most impressed me was his generosity in bringing me to some of the best scenic spots in Yuan Yang. He often said, he likes making new friends, but I considered it a blessing to be his friend. Enjoying wine and listening to his tales about Yuan Yang in the evenings were some of my best memories in Yuan Yang.

Images in this book were captured almost exclusively with the Sigma cameras and equipment. I have always believed in the detail and color reproduction of the Sigma hardware. I would like to express my heartiest gratitude to Mr. Kazuto Yamaki, the COO of Sigma Corporation, who I have not met personally but who has so generously supported me with the camera equipment. When Mr. Kazuto learned about my project in Yuan Yang, he unconditionally sent me the equipment all the way from Japan. But most of all, I was so touched by his firm belief in my idea about photography all these years. I strongly believe that Sigma Corporation under his leadership will strike new heights.

I would also like to thank Dr. Freddy Ng, the Managing Director of Sigma Singapore, who also has supported me for almost every one of my photography expeditions.

I am also obliged to Suzuki Shin, who helped me with the Japanese translation. Mr. Suzuki is a master in the Japanese and Chinese language. With his assistance, the translations went smoothly. To have met Mr. Suzuki at the Long Banquet in Ha Bo, Yuan Yang was my biggest gain from the trip.

I would also like to thank Mr. Jeffery Yew Chern Wey who has painstakingly assisted me in proof reading the Chinese version.

I would also like to thank the ex. Minister of Education of Malaysia Datuk Hon Choon Kim, who has given me encouragement and support in my photographic career. The expeditions in Yuan Yang with him have been a joyous experience.

A big thank you to Ling Sie Ling and Jonathan Tai who have supported me through thick and thin. Their encouragement has been the propeller to my creativity.

I am eternally indebted to my family. My brother, Yi Sheng, who upgraded my computer hardware and made my desktop publishing completed without a hitch. My Dad, who has been so patiently proofreading every passage after it was penned and offered invaluable advice after that.

My expeditions in Yuan Yang have been one of the happiest moments in my life. I am blessed to have captured the magnificent landscape and to write the accounts of the expeditions. I couldn't have accomplished the mission without the help from so many people.

Thank you for helping me realize my dream.

Steve Chong
05-05-2010

PICTURES & PLACES

地点 Places

多依树	Duo Yi Shu
老虎嘴	Tiger's Mouth
坝达	Ba Da
菁口	Jing Kou
老县城	Old Town
麻栗寨茶厂	Ma Li Zhai Cha Chang
黄草岭	Huang Cao Ling
阿猛控	Ah Men Kong
胜村	Sheng Cun
倮马点	Lo Ma Dian
全福庄	Quan Fu Zhuang
爱春	Ai Cun
大瓦遮	Da Wa Zhe
抛竹寨	Pao Zhu Zhai
猴子寨	Monkey Village
龙树坝	Long Shu Ba
螺珈田	Lo Shi Tian
哈播	Ha Bo
昂玛突	Ang Ma Tu



THE ART OF TIMING
25/FEB/2007
DUO YI SHU
ANALOGUE CAMERA
FUJI VELVIA 50
F8
1/125S
PAGE: 11



FIRST GIFT
25/DEC/2007
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX17-70
F4.5
1/500S
PAGE: 13



SECOND GIFT
25/DEC/2007
TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX17-70
F16
1/40S
PAGE: 15



THIRD GIFT
25/DEC/2007
TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX17-70
F13
1/40S
PAGE: 17



DESSERT
25/DEC/2007
TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F8
1/4S
PAGE: 19



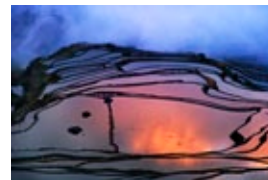
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F16
1/50S
PAGE: 21



SETTLE DOWN
26/DEC/2007
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX10-20
F8
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THE INDELIBLE IMPRESSION
02/FEB/2009
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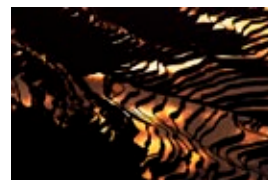
MAGIC MIRROR
16/DEC/2008
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F5.6
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THE RETIREMENT PLAN
03/FEB/2008
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MA LI ZHAI CHA CHANG
04/FEB/2009
MA LI ZHAI CHA CHANG
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EARTH LIGHT
28/DEC/2007
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EARTH LIGHT
21/DEC/2009
BA DA
SIGMA SD14
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MAGIC OF DUO YI SHU
16/DEC/2008
DUO YI SHU
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ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
05/MAY/2009
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX10-20
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PAGE: 59



THE DRAGON
12/DEC/2008
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX18-50
F5.6
1/80S
PAGE: 37



TIGER'S MOUTH
05/FEB//2009
TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F8
1/8S
PAGE: 49



3000 PEOPLE
04/MAY/2009
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX10-20
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HAPPY ENDING
16/DEC/2008
DUO YI SHU
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SIGMA EX18-50
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1/2000S
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THE FIRST LIGHT
13/DEC/2008
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REVISITING DUO YI SHU
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DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
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GAMBLER
12/DEC/2009
TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
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RENDEZVOUS IN MAY
28/DEC/2007
BA DA
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MELANCHOLIC
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HUANG CAO LING
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
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2.6S
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GAMBLER
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TIGER'S MOUTH
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX10-20
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THE LIVING ABSTRACT
27/12/2007
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
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UNFOLDING THE SECRETS
28/DEC/2007
OLD TOWN
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX24-70
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1S
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RAY OF LIGHT
25/DEC/2007
TIGER'S MOUTH
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BUDDHA'S LIGHT
21/DEC/2009
BA DA
SIGMA SD14
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UNFOLDING THE SECRETS
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2S
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TRANSIENT MOMENT

03/FEB/2009
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SIGMA SD14
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F8
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PAGE: 73



TIME & PLACE

02/FEB/2009
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PRUDENT

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SPARKS

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THE ELEMENTS

22/DEC/2009
PAO ZHU ZHAI
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
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CULTURAL SHOCK

27/DEC/2007
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SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX
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SPARKS

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THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

28/DEC/2007
JING KOU
SIGMA SD14
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DISCOVERY OF YUANYANG

25/DEC/2007
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PAO ZHU ZHAI

22/DEC/2009
PAO ZHU ZHAI
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PAGE: 79



THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

28/DEC/2007
JING KOU
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX
F4.5
1/1000s
PAGE: 90



MY DATE

03/FEB/2009
MA LI ZHAI CHA CHANG
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F8
1/250s
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THE VOLATILITY

22/DEC/2009
PAO ZHU ZHAI
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F8
1/125s
PAGE: 81



SURREALISTIC MOVIE

13/DEC/2008
DUO YI SHU
SIGMA SD14
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F5
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PAGE: 93



15 YEARS

08/MAY/2009
OLD TOWN
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50
F4.5
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PAGE: 107



THE VOLATILITY

22/DEC/2009
PAO ZHU ZHAI
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STILL LIFE

28/DEC/2007
JING KOU
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A JOLLY GOOD LIFE

04/FEB/2009
OLD TOWN
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SIGMA EX10-20
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BLUE PADDY FIELDS
21/DEC/2009
AI CHUN
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ANSWER
24/DEC/2007
LUO MA DIAN
SIGMA SD9
SIGMA EX24-70
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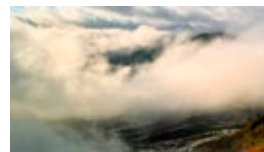
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BLUE PADDY FIELDS
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REWARD
21/DEC/2009
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THE TICKET
19/DEC/2009
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DA WA ZHE
22/DEC/2009
DA WA ZHE
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THE UTOPIA
12/DEC/2008
TIGER'S MOUTH
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IRRIGATION SYSTEM
25/DEC/2007
BA DA
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
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PAGE: 137



DA WA ZHE
22/DEC/2009
AI CHUN
SIGMA SD14
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F8
1/125S
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LITTLE TREE
22/DEC/2009
HUANG CAO LING
SIGMA SD14
SIGMA EX50-150
F8
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PAGE: 129



THE 'SHOOT MORE' PRESCRIPTION
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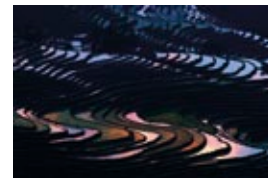
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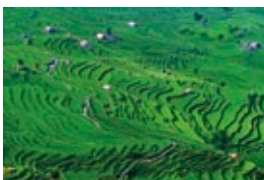
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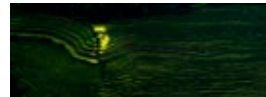
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THE LIGHT & MIST OF
YUAN YANG
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NARRATIVE / PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE CHONG

Publisher / Printer :
Multimedia Printing & Graphic (M) Sdn Bhd
No 11-15, Jalan 3/14,8A, Taman Sungai Besi Industrial Park, 57100 Kuala Lumpur.

Pages : 216

Edition : 1st

ISBN : 978-967-5168-46-8



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THE LIGHT & MIST OF YUAN YANG
YUAN YANG
NARRATIVE AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE CHONG



Renowned Yi photographer, Mr. Ma Li Wen said "When Mr. Chong showed me the fruits of his hard labor over the years, I was shocked. His craft was of the finest kind, showcasing the spectacular paddy fields, at the same time depicting the life of the local Hani and Yi people."

The ancestors of Hani tribes at Yuan Yang were great engineers. Using only very simple tools such as the hoe and plough, aided with tremendous determination and stamina, they have constructed the most spectacular paddy fields on the slopes of the Ai Lao mountains, at the same time, crafted one of the most magnificent pieces of earth art in the history of mankind.

Steve Chong, is renowned for his unique conceptual style of photography. Since 2006, the phenomenal scenery of Yuan Yang has captivated Steve Chong. Traces of him can be discovered at various spots in Yuan Yang all through the four seasons.

"The Light & Mist of Yuan Yang" was the result of Chong's tenacity towards art and his passion for photography. Come, let Steve Chong, through his lens and narrative, walk you through a journey into the phenomenal landscape of Yuan Yang and its people.

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