

5 Ways of Looking at A Mountain

Summary

Mount Wutai is a sacred mountain in my hometown. The mountain has always been there, but different people saw different mountains at different times. I used photography to explore five different ways of seeing.

Through this project, I hope readers will realize that what you see is based on what you think, which is the basis for understanding others and the world.

Inspiration

Mount Wutai ranked No.1 in four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism. I grew up listening to the legend of Mount Wutai. It seems that everyone around me had an unusual experience there. I did some research and found that these kinds of records are countless. I tried to explore how people viewed Mount Wutai when they were looking at it.

Research

There are five chapters in this project.

1. Ennin's perspective

In 838, Japanese monk Ennin came to China to seek Dharma in Mount Wutai, and he recorded his journey in detail (*Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*). Because he was unwavering in the existence of God, his understanding of time and space was not linear. Inspired by his description, I combined some photos of peaks into a miniature sculpture.

2. Villager's perspective

I found a book called *Mount Wutai Folk Tales*. Folk tales can be passed down from generation to generation since these stories reflect the way people understand the world, such as the retribution for good and evil or the awe of nature. I went to some legendary places, trying to re-understand them from the villagers' narration.

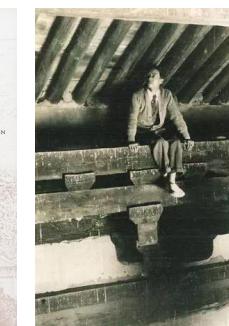
3. Liang Sicheng's perspective

In 1937, the architect Liang Sicheng and his colleagues discovered the Foguang temple in Mount Wutai, which was the first time that a relic of the Tang Dynasty was discovered in China.

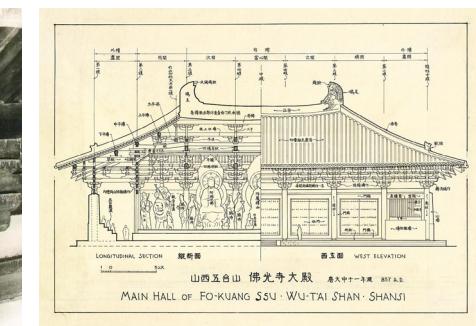
As an architect, Liang made a serious survey of the Foguang temple. Architects always want to see buildings from an omniscient perspective. So I made a collage to show the Foguang temple from Liang's perspective.



Mount Wutai Folktales



Liang Sicheng



Liang Sicheng's hand-drawn draft: the main hall of the Foguang temple

4. Father's perspective

During the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), Mount Wutai was considered a symbol of old culture and was abandoned. At that time, my father was serving as a soldier and was stationed in Mount Wutai. As a communist, he believed that all the legends of Mount Wutai were all feudal superstitions.

5. My perspective

In Chapter 5, I try to watch Mount Wutai in the same way as ancient Chinese painters. I pressed a glass plate on the photos because when I was little, my father put a glass plate on my desk and under which he pressed the Chinese landscape paintings he cut out of magazines.

Development

People do not see with their eyes but with their thoughts. By embracing uncertainty in the whole process, I tried to convey that feeling.

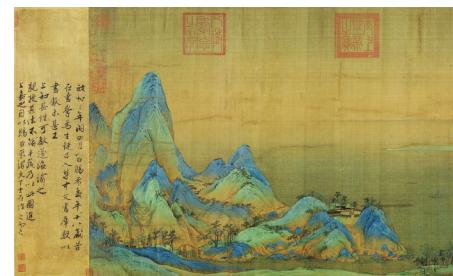
I lived in Mount Wutai for a week. But shooting is just the process of obtaining material. I put more energy on how to use the photos.

In the beginning, I put ideas first, but slowly, I began to put visuals over ideas. I did some experiments. For example, like my father back then, I made contact sheets. When I made the collage of the Foguang temple, I combined Polaroid photos and photos of old brochures by emulsion lift technique which I think is an excellent way to blend boundaries.



One day, for the convenience of shooting, I lived in a temple on the mountain. Watching the sunrise the next morning, I thought of a sentence from Chuang-Tzu: "Heaven and earth are very beautiful, but they say nothing about their beauty."

In 1937, the architect Liang Sicheng and his colleagues discovered the Foguang Temple, which was the first time that a relic of the Tang Dynasty was discovered in China. One of Liang Sicheng's clues is the Dunhuang fresco "The Representation of Mt. Wutai", which not only depicts Buddhist legends, but also serves as a map.



A panorama of rivers and mountains by Wang ximeng



At home, I tried a variety of photography processes, including emulsion lift technique of Polaroid, contact printing and so on.

圆仁

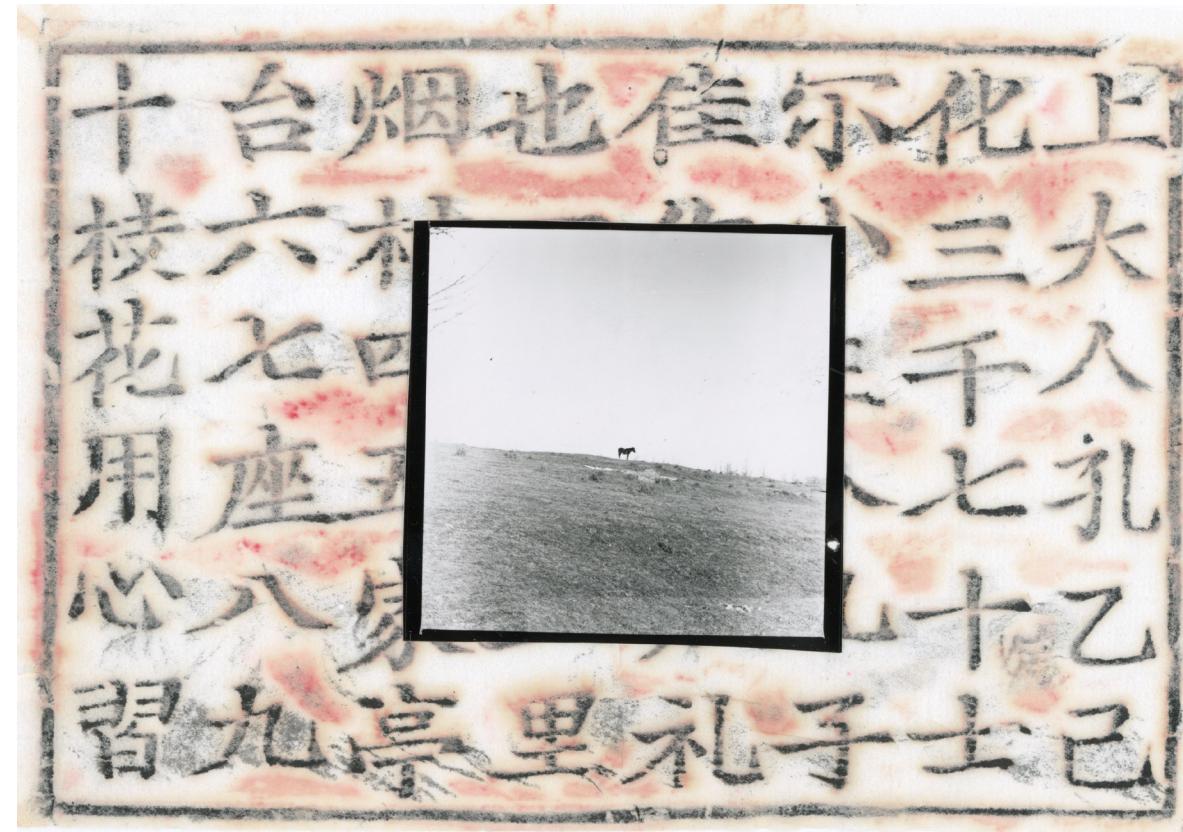
奇境特深。
不同别处，
树木异花。
不觉流泪。
遥望之会，

Looking from a distance, I couldn't help crying.

The trees and flowers here are different from other places, and the environment is very deep.

Ennin. *The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*









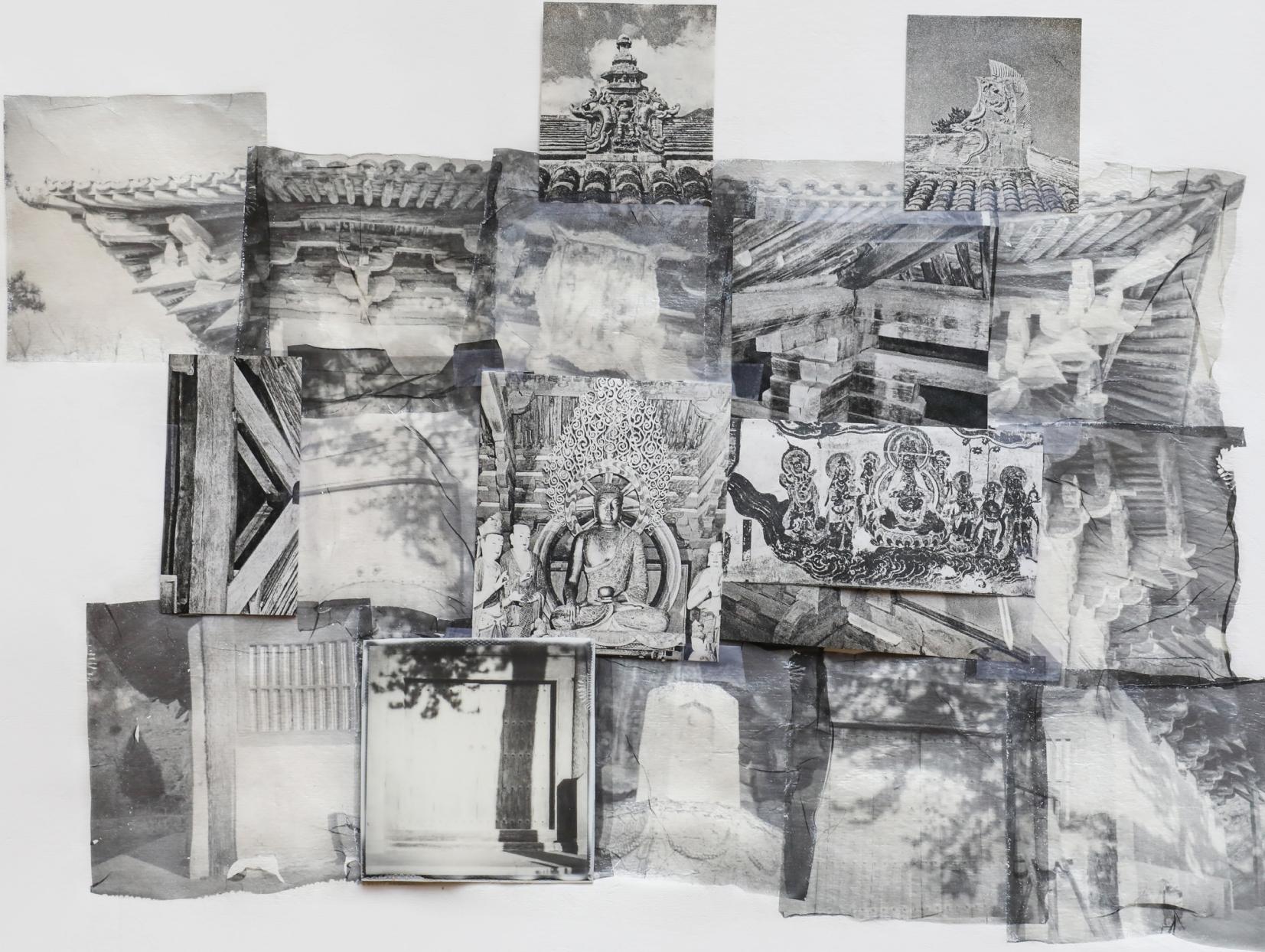
佛陀波利朝聖
五台山時，遇
到一老者，問
其是否取來一
尼經」，隨後
老者不見。佛
陀波利隨之明
白這是大覺點
化，便返國取
好經書。

Buddha Pala arrived on Mount Wutai to pay obeisance to Manjusri. He met an older man who asked him if he had brought a sutra. Then the older man disappeared. Pala knew the older man was a manifested body of Manjusri, so he returned to obtain the sutra.



五名山苦蘿及卷丹花
五七一年攝

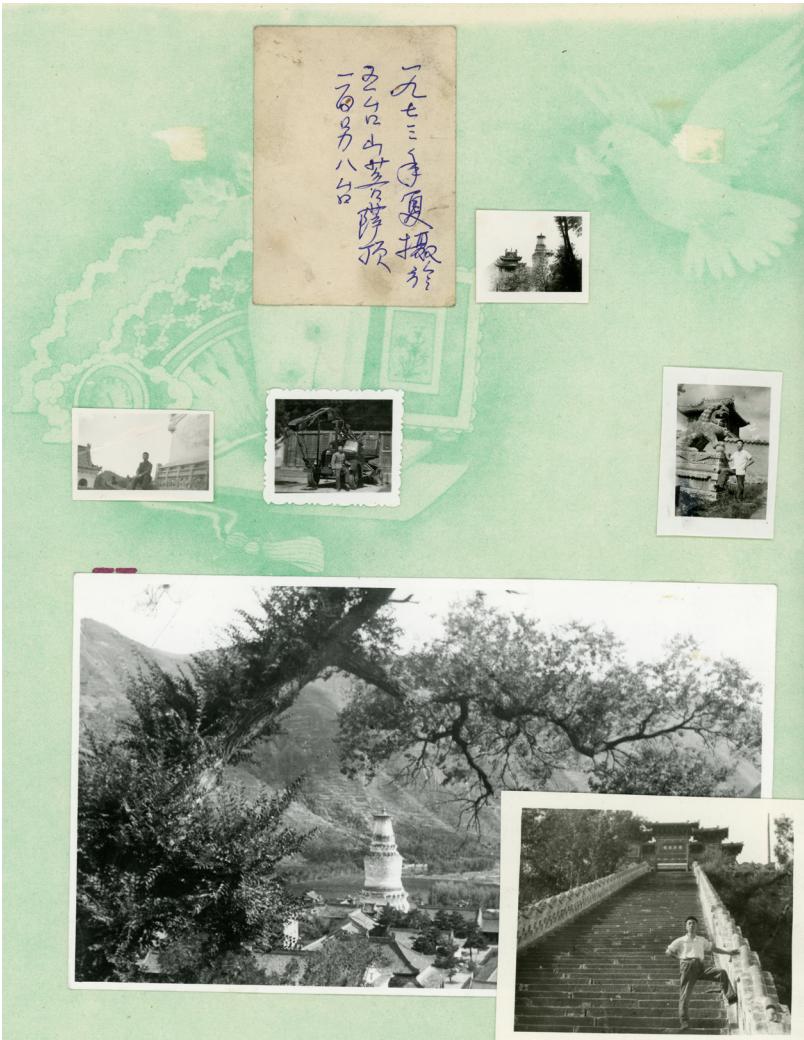




CHAPTER 3

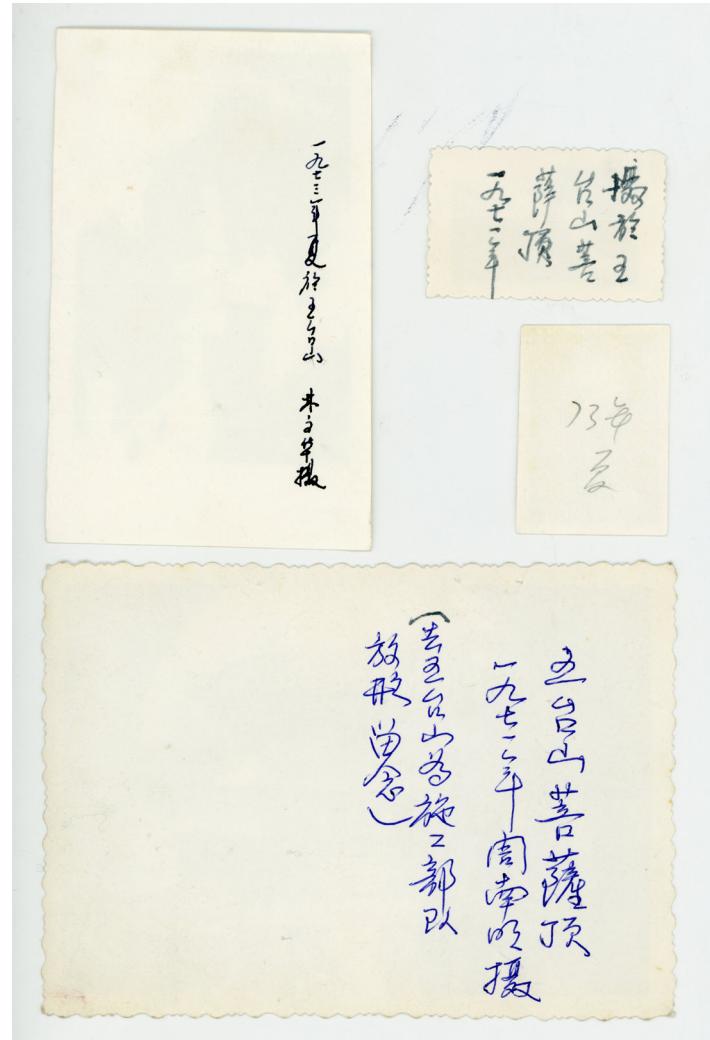
光 佛 真 容 建 于 禅 寺，
大 唐 中 一 年。

Foguang Temple is a Buddhist temple built in 857 AD, during the Tang Dynasty.



CHAPTER 4

革命影片。
山上，放映
寺院前的山
把屏幕挂在
他曾和战友
作为部队的
电影放映员，
时代，五台
山是一个被
打倒旧世界。



In my father's youth, Mount Wutai was an ensemble of the old world that has been overthrown. As a movie projectionist in an army, he and his comrades hung the screen on the gate of temples to show war movies.



CHAPTER 5

曰五台。
之台，故
有如平地，
顶无林木，
五峰耸出，

The five peaks are steep, but their tops are flat, like five platforms, so it's called the mountain of five platforms, Mount Wutai.