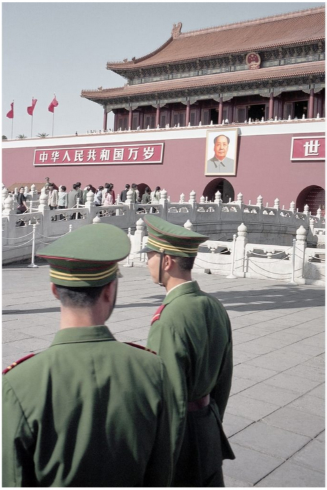
FOOTLOOSE MAGAZINE
THE CULTURE SEEKER.

Through the Eyes of Rick Stolk: An Analogue Photo Story of 1997 China

This photo story is the journey of Rick Stolk across China in 1997. From cityscape to nature to people, Rick tells us about a culture we hear about, or even remotely familiar with, but do not know enough. Rick travels around Beijing and other places like a native who is witnessing the daily life, state of affairs, life in the lifeless and captures everything to create an atmosphere which makes the viewer feel the stillness and the restlessness in daily life of a culture.

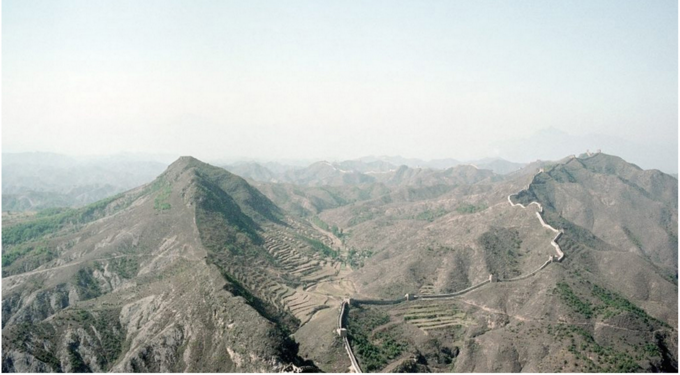
Medium: Leica M6 camera, Fuji Superia Reala and Agfa APX100.



Tiananmen Square, Beijing, October 4th, 1997.

"…I thought that Japanese people were fanatic in taking pictures of people in-front- of-no-matter-what, but what I see here in China takes the cake. They hit the streets in groups, put on a bright colored cap per group and follow their guide, adorned with megaphone and extending flag.

I was waiting in the middle of Tiananmen Square, but had to keep moving all the time, not to be unwantedly included on other people's pictures…"



Great Wall, Simatai (120 km. northeast of Beijing), October 7th, 1997.

"...After a 3-hour bumpy ride (Beijing's morning traffic included), the sight was impressive: The Wall balancing on the peaks of a mountain range. This part of The Wall is particular nice and interesting, because it hasn't been restored and although it scares of a lot of tourists, as I reflect, it does take me back to the days when it was how it was."

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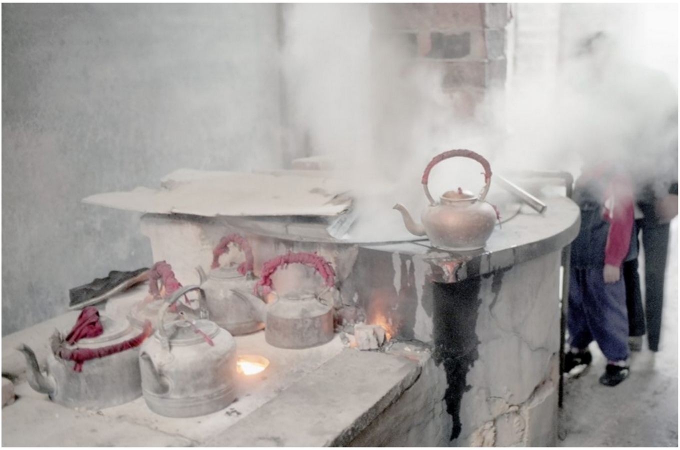
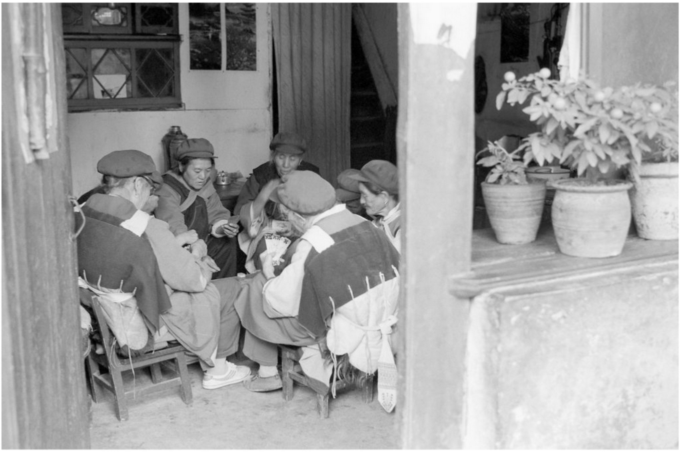


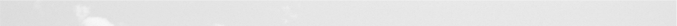
Xi'an, China, October 12-16, 1997

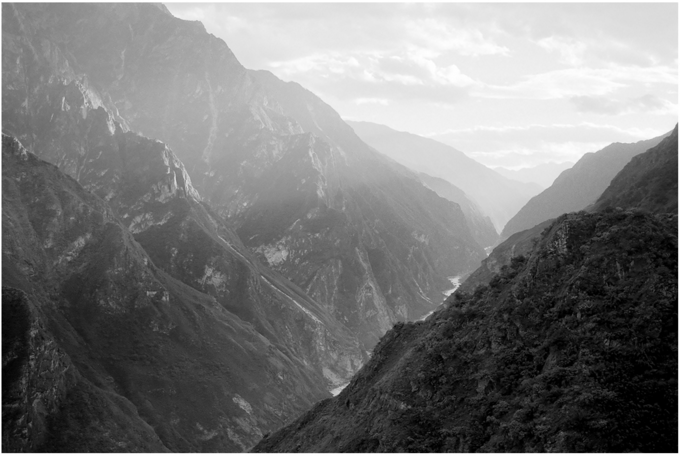
The streets were extremely dusty and grey. There was almost no color. I spend a lot of time in tea houses where the tea was free and one could have as much as one wants. It was called a 'bottomless tea'.



Lijiang (Old Town), China, October 29, 1997

"…This is what China probably looked like in the old days. Small wooden houses with tailors, cobblers and woodcarvers like Gepetto, a babbling river where people are doing their laundry and are melting their deep frozen fish…"





Hutiao Xia, China, October 31, 1997

“…30 km. High Path / 6.30 – 19.00…

I get up at 5.30, have porridge for breakfast and begin an absurd walk of 13 hours. Started in high spirits: I had to follow the yellow arrows towards ‘Sam’s Guesthouse’. The beginning was hard: it was 2500 meters above sea level. First, the notorious ’28 bends’: up the mountain in, well, 28 bends.

Breathtaking.

The mountains were enormous and frighteningly rough, mountains were evil wizards live, over the sonic pleasure of exploding dynamite, echoing like a thunderstorm.
Slowly it became hot.

At two I ate noodle soup at the ‘Half Way Restaurant’.

At four I went over a cliff, sitting/sliding on a girder and a minute later I was hanging on a patch of grass, a 30 meter deep canyon beneath me. I *write this understated, but that night it kept me awake: I could have been killed.*

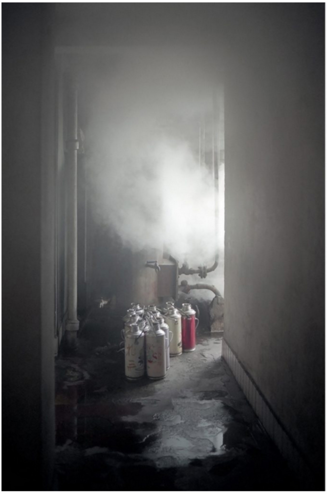
Blood and sweat. And trembling legs.

Between Baoshan and Lincang, China, November 14, 1997.

"…Just had a 13-hour bus ride: I'm in the hotel which belongs to the bus station. The journey (ed: Boashan – Jinghong) *takes longer than expected because the condition of the roads due to rainfall.*

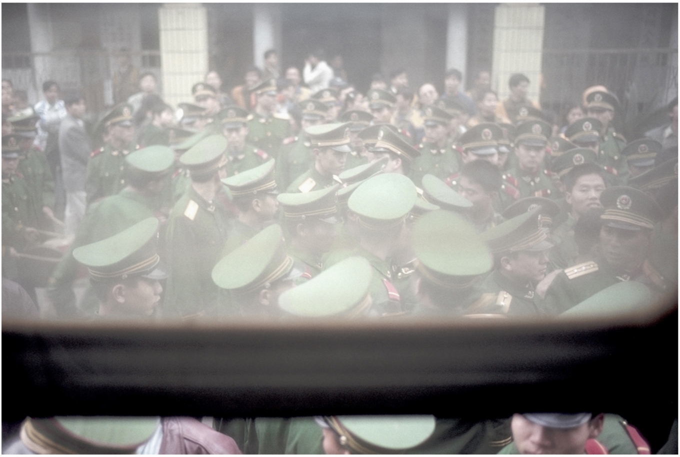
My tailbone is extremely painful, and tomorrow at least another 12 hours to Lancang and the day after that another 127 km to Jinghong.
The ride was long and eventually painful, but very beautiful. I saw the sun rise over the rice fields, the terraces.

Red soil, houses made of red soil, bee keepers along the road, buffaloes…"



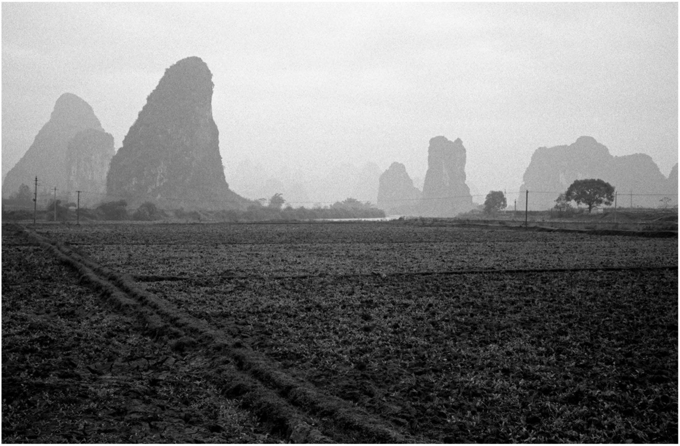
Somewhere between Lincang, China and Lancang, China, November 15, 1997.

"I was stuck at the bus station for 9 hours and I took a walk around to observe the things around which just lay as they were. There are a lot of things that we call "non living". But there are so many processes and reactions and movements happening in still things that we don't know, a dimension that is impossible for us to fathom. So here are the-perhaps-living-non-living Water boiler and thermos bottles in a tea house."



Kunming to Yangshuo, China, November 27-29, 1997, during a 30-hour train ride.

"I spotted these men in uniform from my train who had deboarded their train, back from their lines of duty to meet their families."



Around Nanning, China, December, 1997.

The stupefying ‘karst sceney’ around Nanning.

About the Photographer

Rick Stolk (The Netherlands, 1970) studied photography at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague, The Netherlands, from 1992-1996. Currently living in Schiedam with wife, daughter and Labrador and working as a photographer. Also head of the medical photography department of the Erasmus Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.