The Reed 2025

The Reed

The Student Journal of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute
2025 Edition

Contents

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Cover: Yuhan Zhang, *Echoes of Devotion* (2025), enlarged. See pp. 12-13 for painting details.

Letter from the Director

Lien-Hang T. Nguyen

Director, Weatherhead East Asian Institute; Dorothy Borg Associate Professor in the History of the United States and East Asia, Department of History

Hello and welcome to *The Reed*, the annual student journal of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute. This year I'm especially pleased to reintroduce the publication after its hiatus in 2024, even more so because we've reconceived it in a format intended to showcase our students' contributions to best advantage.

Our prompt for this year's issue went in what we hoped was a counterintuitive direction:

> "What is something that embodies the dynamism and drive of today's East, Southeast, or Inner Asia that more people should know about? Write about a person or people, a trend, or some other source of inspiration that has arguably been overlooked or underappreciated in the rest of the world."

Our intent was to offer a counter to the kind of reflexive pessimism that is becoming—with some justification—a default mode for many people today no matter where they live in the world. We also hoped that throwing out this question to young people might lead us to reconsider some of our own assumptions and, just maybe, learn something new.

As it turns out, this year's first-prize winner and the runner-up in our formal essay category both pushed back on the above prompt in intellectually stimulating ways. **Jayin Sihm** critiques the homogenizing tendency implicit in a call for anything that could embody a region as large and diverse as "East Asia." Her essay then celebrates the South Koreans from widely divergent backgrounds who set

aside differences to rally for their common rights after the failed imposition of martial law last December.

South Korea is also the focus of runner-up **Kaitlyn Jeon**'s piece, which examines the phenomenon of microorganism compost machines, a high-tech innovation that may be unfamiliar to non-Korean readers. While these household appliances are a technological marvel by almost any standard, Jeon contends that they also herald worrisome social and demographic developments.

A very different type of household object is the subject of our runner-up in the visual essay category. The photography project by **Siyang Dai** and her collaborator Zijun Zhao centers on a modest piece of furniture, the *dundun* stool, which the residents of a displaced rural community in Henan Province, China, create from found materials. In Dai's telling, these humble objects serve as both a vessel for memory and a subtle form of resistance to the totalizing market forces that have upended a traditional way of life.

The winner in the visual essay category graces the cover of this year's *Reed*. *Echoes of Devotion* is a digital painting by **Yuhan Zhang** '26, who found her inspiration in the June 2022 ordination, in Bhutan, of 144 nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. That ceremony marked the first time nuns could access full ordination status in Bhutan, making it a landmark event in a religious tradition extending back to the seventh century CE—and very much the kind of under-recognized "source of inspiration" we hoped to uncover with this year's prompt.

Happy reading, from all of us at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute.

Sincerely,

Lien-Hang T. Nguyen
Director, Weatherhead East Asian Institute

Winner, Written Essay Category

Solidarity at Namtaeryeong

By Jayin Sihm (CC '26)

What is something that embodies the dynamism and drive of today's East, Southeast, or Inner Asia that more people should know about? Write about a person or people, a trend, or some other source of inspiration that has arguably been overlooked or underappreciated in the rest of the world.

To speak of something that embodies an entire region is already to simplify it. This simplification often dominates conversations about East Asia—a region frequently flattened into tidy narratives for global consumption. Rather than embracing the region's complexities and contradictions, outside observers often search for easily digestible symbols or single events, inevitably shaping the area's vast diversity into neat, manageable stereotypes.

But true dynamism defies simplification. It exists not in singular icons or narratives but in fleeting convergences of diverse experiences. Perhaps nowhere recently has this complexity and dynamism manifested more vividly yet remained so overlooked internationally than in South Korea's Namtaeryeong protest of December 2024.

Initially sparked by agricultural discontent, the discontent against President Yoon Seokyul traced back to his controversial veto of an amendment to the Grain Management Act in April 2023, the first presidential veto in seven years.[1] The proposed legislation aimed to safeguard rice farmers from market volatility by obliging government intervention when rice prices fell below a certain level.[2]

Tensions escalated after the declaration of

emergency martial law in early December 2024, as protests spread nationwide demanding the resignation and arrest of President Yoon and his collaborators. Among the most galvanized were farmers—long ignored by mainstream politics—who organized a tractor march into Seoul to express their outrage and make their voices heard. The Jeon Bong-jun Struggle Group—named after the leader of Korea's historic Donghak Peasant Revolution—mobilized on December 16. Comprising the Korean Peasant's League (Jeon Nong) and the National Women Peasant Association (Jeon Yeo-nong), the coalition organized a tractor march toward Seoul from the contrasting rural strongholds of Jinju and Muan, representing the historically divided regions of Yeongnam and Honam, respectively.[3] Symbolically powerful, the convoy transcended entrenched regionalism to confront rural marginalization and revive a legacy of resistance against state repression. When acting President Han Duck-soo reaffirmed Yoon's veto on December 19—amid growing unrest following the December 3 martial law declaration—farmers perceived it not merely as economic neglect but as a calculated affront to their livelihoods and dignity.[4]

On December 21st, after nearly a week of slow procession, their march came to an abrupt halt at Namtaeryeong Pass, a crucial gateway into Seoul from the suburb of Gwacheon. Police buses barricaded the road under the pretense of safety, though tractors posed no legal threat under existing traffic laws. A standoff ensued. Tensions escalated quickly when police violence broke out, injuring a farmer and further inflaming public anger.[5]

This was not unprecedented. Police brutality against farmers has a painful history in South Korea. In 2016, farmer Baek Nam-gi was killed by a police water cannon while protesting for better rice prices—a tragedy that spurred the creation of the Jeon Bong-jun Struggle Group.[6] In 2005, Jeon Yong-cheol and Hong Deok-pyo died from police beatings during a similar Jeon Nong-organized

demonstration.[7]

Within hours, a resonant appeal circulated rapidly online: "Citizens! Today, Namtaeryeong is our Ugeumchi"—evoking a historic battlefield where Donghak rebels once bravely faced defeat. "We must overcome this barrier together."[8] The message captured the imaginations across demographic lines in the face of impending violent police suppression. What happened next transformed an isolated protest into something remarkable.

Young people in Seoul, especially women in their 20s and 30s who had recently mobilized around feminist and democratic movements, rushed to the scene. Drawn by empathy and indignation shared over social media, thousands joined farmers on that bitterly cold winter solstice. Many had already been demonstrating in Seoul against President Yoon's anti-democratic maneuvers; others were moved purely by spontaneous solidarity.[9]

The ensuing scene was both chaotic and profound. Participants endured freezing temperatures overnight with minimal amenities. Songs filled the air—traditional farmer anthems interwoven with contemporary protest ballads and K-pop songs, each group learning and teaching their cultural expressions to one another. A woman from Gwangju spoke tearfully about linguistic marginalization; a queer activist addressed gender discrimination; young farmers criticized agricultural policies.[10] What began as a standoff became a 28-hour open forum: part protest, part school, part communion.

Such an organic blending of diverse grievances illustrated a profound shift in how solidarity can function in contemporary Asia. Rather than rallying behind a singular leader, the Namtaeryeong protest thrived precisely because it refused coherence. Unity emerged not from uniformity but from the explicit acknowledgment and embrace of difference and solidarity. It showed the strength possible when diverse groups recognize shared oppression without losing sight of their unique struggles.

By sunrise, news of the standoff had spread widely online, spurring further public support. Donations poured in, sending hot food, blankets, and medical supplies. The protests garnered enough momentum and visibility that political leaders intervened, negotiating a partial concession from authorities. Eventually, after 28 hours, ten tractors were allowed into Seoul, symbolizing a collective victory celebrated as proof of the power of the people.[11]

Reflecting on these events, former National Assembly Chairman Ha Won-oh described Namtaeryeong as a moment when those typically excluded—women, sexual minorities, farmers, and foreigners—asserted their place in history. This protest had not merely opposed a political injustice; it had challenged deeply rooted cultural prejudices and power structures.[12]

The significance of Namtaeryeong lies in its explicit demonstration of solidarity across gender, generation, class, and region. It wasn't a monolithic coalition without fissures or contradictions—rather, it thrived precisely because it made space for difference. Participants stood not despite their disparities but precisely because recognizing these differences empowered deeper, more resilient alliances.

Looking forward, this approach offers a blueprint for contemporary Asian movements: It asks activists and observers alike to abandon the search for singular symbols

or saviors. Change arises instead from the messy, imperfect alliances formed when marginalized groups recognize interconnected struggles.

Large-scale protests and counterdemonstrations have continued weekly in the lead-up to the Constitutional Court's decision on whether to remove President Yoon from office. On March 25, 2025, Namtaeryeong once again became a frontline of resistance as the Seoul Metropolitan Police deployed 1,700 officers to block tractors driven by Jeon Nong farmers demanding Yoon's removal. Alongside the flags of the farmers, people waved rainbow flags in support of queer communities, while people from Seoul joined in solidarity.[13] The convergence of these diverse groups—farmers, queer activists, women, urban workers—revealed a powerful collective resolve against repression. That same resolve was vindicated when the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled to remove President Yoon for "violating the principles of the rule of law and democracy."[14] The victory belongs not only to Yoon's political opposition, but to the people—the ordinary citizens who stood with the farmers that December day in Namtaeryeong, to those who once blocked the special forces soldiers at the National Assembly on the night emergency martial law was declared.[15]

The events at Namtaeryeong were the product of long-suppressed frustration colliding with spontaneous collective action. Namtaeryeong proves that meaningful change in whatever sense does not require perfect unity or a singularity; it requires only the persistent willingness of disparate communities to stand side by side. Its power lay in the rejection of imposed divisions—regional, generational, gendered, or otherwise—and in the messy, uncoordinated solidarity of people who recognized, if only briefly, that they shared common ground. Change begins when those relegated to the margins refuse to stay invisible. Far from embodying the whole region, the events at Namtaeryeong instead capture a crucial truth: genuine dynamism in Asia lies in what springs from these moments of imperfect alignments, each forged moment by moment, in solidarity with one another.

Jayin Sihm (CC '26) is a philosophy and history major at Columbia University. Born in Korea and raised in the United States, she hopes to see a reunified Korea in her lifetime. After graduation, she plans to pursue either law school or graduate studies in history.

Notes

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in-south-korea-dies-of-injuries-from-police-water-cannon.html.

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[8]Lee, "남태령은 '학교'."

[9]Oh Dong-uk. "2030여성은 왜 남태령 대첩에 모였나." *Kyunghyang Shinmun*. December 23, 2024. https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202412231632001.

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11 Go Han-sol. "'트랙터 투쟁단' 22시간 넘는 대치에…야당 의원들도 남태령행." *Hankyoreh*, December 22, 2024. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/assembly/1174355.html.

12 Lee, "남태령은 '학교'."

13 Park Go-eun. "남태령에 다시 모인 트랙터…"윤석열 파면 급해서 올라왔다"." *Hankyoreh*, March 26, 2025. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/1188836.html.

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Images

P. 5, p. 6, p. 9: Protesters in Seoul, early December 2024. (rema_green1917via Unsplash)

This page: Yeouido-dong, Yeongdeungpo District, Seoul, December 2024. (insungpandora via Unsplash)

Notes on "Echoes of Devotion" By Yuhan Zhang '26

Echoes of Devotion illustrates the lives of Tibetan Buddhist nuns from various traditions in the Himalayan region and aims to show the variety and vitality within their communities. It is inspired by the full ordination ceremony of the *bhikṣuṇīs* (fully ordained nuns) in Bhutan in June 2022. For the first time in history, Tibetan Buddhist nuns in Bhutan were allowed to pursue a higher level of ordination, enabling them to engage in higher monastic orders and attain Geshe (or Geshema) degrees (a prestigious Tibetan Buddhist degree similar to a Ph.D.).

At the forefront of *Echoes* stands a *bhikṣuṇī* from the Drukpa Kagyu lineage, the dominant school in Bhutan. She wears a yellow *namjar* robe, reserved for ceremonial occasions, and carries a *pātra*, a wooden or copper alms bowl used to receive offerings and symbolize her detachment from material desires. Lining up behind her are *śrāmaṇeris*, novice nuns from the Nyingma, Geluk, and Sakya lineages. They are chanting, debating, reading, or spinning a prayer wheel. Given the diverse geographical and climatic conditions across the Himalayan region, some of the nuns wear additional garments under or over their *dhonka* (shirt with cap sleeves), *shemdap* (maroon skirt), and *zen* (everyday robe), including *thulba* or *dagam* (heavy woolen cloak) for warmth during long meditation sessions in colder weather. Other popular attire worn by nuns and depicted in this piece include *gompa* boots (made of leather or wool, suitable for all seasons), long-sleeved shirts with stand-up collars (only worn outside the monastery), a downward-fan-shaped sunhat (worn mainly by Nyingma practitioners), and a winter hat made of *phrug*, thick Tibetan woolen cloth.

The landscape elements in the background draw inspiration from the landscape aesthetic of the Karma Gardri tradition of *thangka* painting; established by the 8th Karmapa, Mikyö Dorjé (1507–1554), it has been popular since the 16th century, and since the 10th Karmapa, Chöying Dorjé (1604–1674), the Karma Gardri tradition has combined the technique and style of Chinese blue and green landscape (*Qīng-Lǜ Shān-Shuǐ*) paintings.[1] Vine patterns reflect the decorative elements of Newari-style *thangkas*, which were more widespread before the 16th century. By combining older and more recent elements of *thangka* styles, this piece aims to create a scene that evokes nuns emerging in a solemn procession, traveling along a scroll painting from the past to the present day.

The nuns' commitment to revitalizing the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage could be seen as a form of spiritual empowerment rather than passive obedience to a system that has continued for a thousand years. Within this contested terrain for exercising nuns' agency, their collaborations extend beyond the Himalayan region to a global network, revealing a powerful and moving vitality. Hence, understanding this dynamic may require moving beyond the gender perspective: Reattaining the *bhikṣuṇī* identity is not only a gendered issue but inter-

Yuhan Zhang, *Echoes of Devotion* (2025)
Digital painting
6742 × 4187 pixels (22.5 × 13.9 in. at 300 dpi)

twined with class, ethnicity, and geopolitical struggles. It is also essential to avoid reducing nuns to "victims" or "rebels" in a single narrative, as I found that each nun may have a different understanding of the *Vinaya* (codes of monastic conduct).

Through portraying nuns' daily lives and diverse expressions, I would like to share the vibrancy, diversity, and resilience within their monastic worlds. In a position where past and present converge in quiet strength, Tibetan Buddhist nuns today continually negotiate the boundaries of gender, religion, and authority via both their observance and reinterpretation of monastic disciplines. Restoring the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage is not a mere repetition of tradition but a living act of continuity and reimagination, where devotion becomes a vehicle for reclaiming authority, redefining belonging, and revisioning the future.

Yuhan Zhang (General Studies '26) is in the Dual BA program between Columbia University and City University of Hong Kong. A junior majoring in East Asian Studies, she was motivated to take Tibetan Studies classes to explore the multi-ethnic heritage of her family, and was recently accepted into a Tibetan-language study program at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Note

[1] *Qīng-Lǜ Shān-Shuǐ* appeared during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties period (ca. 220–589), became a mature artistic style around the Tang dynasty (618–690, 705–907), and evolved into the classic *Shān-Shuǐ* (landscape painting) style in the following centuries.

Runner-up, Written Essay Category

The Macro in the Micro

By Kaitlyn Jeon ('25)

"We even gave it a name! It's 'Mimi.' Both my husband and I, when we're done eating, we ask each other, 'Did you feed Mimi today?'"

"I named mine 'Choonshik.' When you happen to walk back and forth, he opens automatically. So when I walk past it and it opens up, I say to it [affectionately,] 'I don't have anything for you now, but I'll give you some in a bit!' I find myself talking to the machine."

—Excerpts from SUBUSUNEWS interviews with microorganism compost machine users (하다하다 '반려 미생물'까지 키우는 사람들 / 스브스뉴스)

Thanks to a nationwide, legally mandated, and strictly regulated composting scheme, South Korea produces close to zero food waste—a statistic that it proudly boasts at the global scale. Its strict regulations have meant that all households and individuals are required to purchase specifically authorized yellow food waste trash bags and properly organize all of their waste to avoid heavy fines. In search of a more convenient solution to bypass the time-consuming inconvenience of separately purchasing these bags, unpleasant smells and textures of waste sorting, bothersome back and forth to dispose of the bags at their proper disposal point, and accruing costs of this process, many have enthusiastically welcomed a newly popularly available technology, microorganism compost machines, into their homes. Intriguingly, these small, largely inconspicuous, box-shaped machines have morphed into much more than their intended function as people began to form unexpected, strange relationships with them.

The image of South Korea that we popularly imagine is one that surrounds stories

of miraculous economic and technological development, dazzling pop culture, and an incredible rise from poverty to global economic, political, and cultural relevance. The formal discourse is firmly rooted in said fascination with Korea's rise, a grand narrative of redemption and prosperity being crafted in the global public's imagination. However, rarely do these realms of discourse seem to come close to what a humble microorganism compost machine extensively and profoundly reveals about contemporary Korean society. These inconspicuous boxes, no bigger than 12x13x20", hidden away in a corner in the household's kitchen, densely compact an astonishing multitude of layers. A close reading of this seemingly insignificant object opens up a world of underlying cultural structures.

Microorganism compost machines have come to occupy a unique space in the psyche of the Korean household. Personified and viewed as an animate object, it is endowed with a degree of subjectivity—compelling people to speak to it as they would to a child or a pet. "Owners" of such machines report that even if newer, more efficient models were released, they would not replace their current machine. "Owners" have grown intimately attached, viewing the machine as a loved member of the family—replacing them simply because an improved, more efficient version was released would be unfathomably cold and cruel.

One may ask, why are these relationships of sincere affection being formed in the first place? The oddly intimate relationships that people are forming with microorganism compost machines are a manifestation of a hidden devastating development in recent Korean history—the loneliness epidemic caused by and perpetuated by a decline in marriages and child rearing along with a rise in single-person households and cynicism towards genuine relationships and love. Both sides of this coin can be traced back to increasing economic difficulties, growing socioeconomic gaps, declining opportunities for social mobility, and a malignant culture surrounding education. With the record-breaking lowest birth rate in the world, South Korean adults are filling the vacuum of community, love, and care by placing a box in its gap. For many Koreans,

the loss of traditional family structures in favor of solitary paths has left a gaping hole in place of where they wish to direct their love and affection. With this profound absence of a receptor of affection, they are directed towards the nearest object in the hierarchy that can be personified.

This context is especially striking to consider when further examining the types of interactions "owners" are having with the machine. Many report learning the "preferences" of the machines over time—noting what they "like" and "don't like" based on how long they take to break down the waste provided. Intriguingly, they note the "baby"-like preferences of the machine—"enjoying" carbohydrates and struggling with spicy foods like kimchi, as a living, human baby typically would. The machine fulfills the desire to nurture, filling the emotional void left by familial structures. This frustration finds an outlet in these machines, which demand regular care, feeding, attention, and observation—behaviors that strikingly mimic rhythms and routines of childcare. Users describe the process of "feeding" the machines as an act of responsibility and devotion, so much so that out of fear of their microorganisms dying of starvation while they go on vacation, they have shared online that they are taking taxis to take their machines to their "mom's place" so that they can keep getting fed—a sense of motherly love and nurture is elucidated.

An additional phenomenon crucial to understanding Koreans' astonishing ability to love a machine is the intense presence of advanced technology in the country's modern landscape. Not only is Korea technologically advanced, but it is notably technologically *integrated*. With advanced digital interfaces replacing almost every human interaction possible (ordering coffee, buying train tickets,

Social media user: "On my way with the microorganism compost machine on the taxi's passenger seat... Reason: I'm going on a month-long trip starting tomorrow and since microorganisms in the food waste compost machine are also living they will die if they starve for a month so I'm taking them to my mom's place."

paying at convenience stores, obtaining government documents, etc.) Koreans can navigate life with far less human interaction than most other people around the world. Not only has this made Koreans lonelier, but it has also increased their comfort levels around technology—feeling no real instinct of rejection or threat towards greater integration of technology into their daily routines. This has set a key, unique foundation for allowing Koreans to open their hearts to machines—a phenomenon that would hardly be possible elsewhere in the world. The transference of intimacy and affection towards what would typically be perceived as sterile and far removed from humanity, faces no conventional emotional or psychological barriers that those in other countries and cultures may have.

The intimate relationships that are being formed between humans and boxes is only made possible and facilitated by all these cultural phenomena serving as a foundation. Without Korea's hypertechnologized landscape and the blanket of loneliness—stitched by fibers of economic hardship, toxic cultures surrounding education, and more—engulf-

ing Korean society today, boxes would not replace and become people's "babies." The boxes reveal the defining, darker spirit of ordinary, overlooked Korean contemporary culture.

The microorganism compost machine box is a material anchor for the immaterial—a physical representation of the invisible microorganisms within, just as it represents the unseen currents of social change. By focusing on this humble object, we uncover a narrative that diverges from the typical portrayal of South Korea. Instead, we see a society grappling with the unintended consequences of rapid modernization, where a box designed for waste reduction becomes a surrogate for human connection. The microorganism compost box thus affirms that material culture offers a nuanced understanding of a culture's underlying structures and sensibilities—ones that would otherwise have remained invisible, or microscopically illegible.

Images

P. 15: Officials from the Korea Consumer Agency share quality and safety test results for nine household food waste composting machines at the Fair Trade Commission in the Sejong Government Complex in Sejong City in January. (News 1)

P. 16: Food waste in a microbial food waste disposer at a home in Gangnam-gu, Seoul, in September 2024. (Director Dong-gil Yoon / Studio Adapter)

P. 17: X post by @jiha_33, August 16, 2024.

Kaitlyn Seryang Jeon is a senior in the Dual BA Program between Sciences Po Paris and Columbia University, majoring in Political Humanities and Anthropology. In her studies and professional pursuits, she has been guided by her passion for Korean cultural diplomacy and education—though her broader personal mission is rooted in taking the unassuming seriously, firmly believing that they unearth our cultural blind spots hiding in plain sight. When she is not at work, she is probably chasing the best baguette in town (with her own butter in hand), taking too many photos of cool book covers at local bookstores, and *still* talking about her anthro classes.

Runner-Up, Visual Essay Category

Introducing Dundun: Seat of a Community

By Siyang Dai
Photographs by Zijun Zhao

In the summer of 2024, we encountered a unique homemade stool, known colloquially as *dundun*, in the Dameng community of Henan Province, China. Dameng is a resettlement housing complex built for residents displaced by demolition. These people have been stripped of their homelands, their former villages redeveloped into luxury residences, theme parks, and shopping complexes. Stark, six-story apartment blocks have replaced familiar villages and tilled fields. New life in these blocks has become alien and unsettling, marked by a pervasive sense of detachment.

Amid the debris and the wind, the residents gather discarded thermal insulation foam from the construction sites where their villages used to be. They carry it back to their new homes and wrap it in old fabrics, transforming this remnant from their homeland into dunduns. Some of these fabrics were wedding-bed sheets, some were fluffy sofa covers, some were sacks that once held rice and flour, and some were fabrics woven by hand in the village twenty years ago.

Carrying dunduns, sitting on them, and chatting with old friends in the new neighborhood, villagers try to maintain the rhythms of their previous lives.

The material used to make dunduns is white thermal insulation foam (above). These small pieces of foam, having lost their practical value, were discarded in trash heaps.

Next to the community stand unfinished, abandoned buildings, which are significant sources of the insulation foam used to make dunduns.

We have brought several dunduns across oceans to New York City. Carrying the memory of the earlier Dameng community, they embody the residents' deep connection to their homeland and crystallize the stories of their lived experiences. We want to make sure this "loss" is not forgotten. We seek to bring more attention not only to urbanization and gentrification in China but also to the losses that accompany the modernization that happens in every corner of this world.

Text on these pages is edited and adapted from the copy for Siyang Dai and Zijun Zhao's "Rehoming Dundun" adoption project, a collaboration with the New York City alternative outlets Bungee Space and Chinatown Basketball Club that includes a zine, a photography book, and exhibitions.

For more information:
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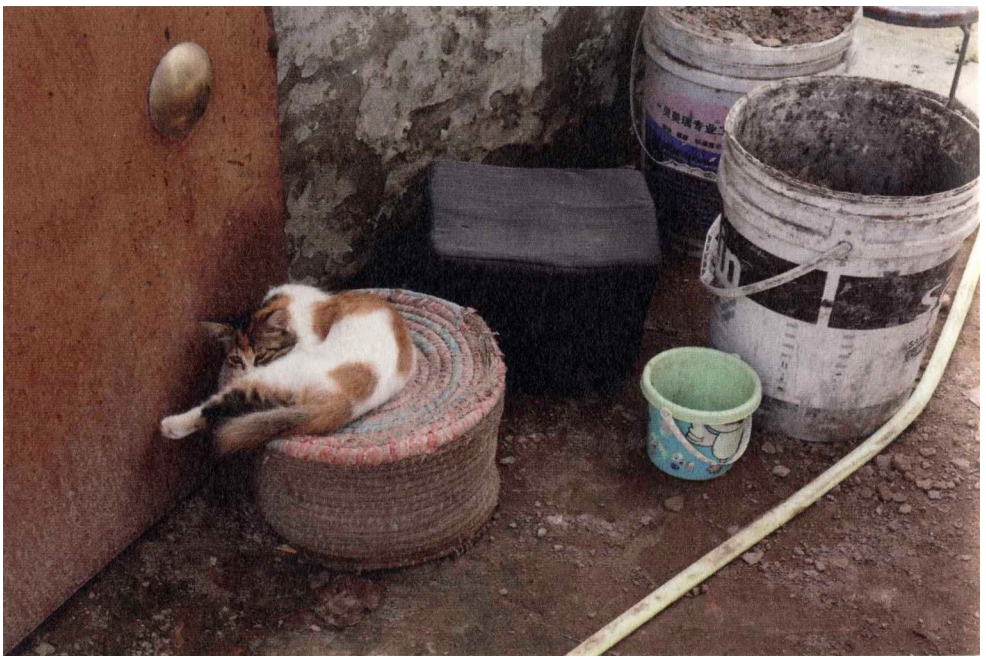
Siyang Dai is a graduate student at Columbia University, specializing in Museum Anthropology. Her work explores applied anthropology, with a focus on vernacular and material culture in contemporary China. Through anthropological research and artistic practice, she examines how mundane objects such as dunduns reflect and sustain relationships and meanings, while also seeking to imagine new ways of museum exhibition.

Zijun Zhao's work explores the intersections of furniture design, architecture, and social engagement. Challenging conventional definitions of furniture, he investigates its role as a mediator between people and space, creating objects and environments that reshape human interactions. In the dundun project, documenting handmade stools, Zhao highlights spontaneous design as a form of resilience and as a vessel for collective memory.



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