

Review: Going Home by Muge

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Without knowing whether Muge's *Going Home* would be realized as a photobook, I was looking forward to seeing it ([order here](#)). I had an inkling it would arrive eventually. And it did, somewhat out of the blue, late last year. So there then was the first book that I penciled in for my list of favourite books to be published almost a year later.

I always give people a hard time when they describe photographs as poetic. I'm actually OK with that description as long as it becomes clear that photographs aren't like poems, but that they can evoke feelings in ways somewhat similar to how poems do it. The photographic artifice is unlike poetry's, and photography's language is quite unlike poetry's. But there appears to be something about poetry that invites these kinds of comparisons.

I suppose it has something to do with preciousness. The pictures in Muge's *Going Home* feel very precious, even though what they depict for the most part isn't precious at all. There is a tenderness in the photographer's gaze that translates into the pictures. You cannot, after all, make these kinds of photographs if you don't have that tenderness, that empathy not just for people, but also for the land.

And the land is tied to home, to the idea of home, the concept, the feelings that are connected to whatever is evoked in one's mind upon hearing the term "home." However much we sometimes like to pretend it isn't so, that's one of those powerful words, home, and "going home" is even better.

It's almost as if you had a package that said "comfort" on it, you pour the content, a dry powder, into a mug, add hot water, and, voila!, you got instant comfort. Not to belittle the idea of home or comfort at all – it's just that it works in such a simple, straightforward way.

Going Home is also filled with melancholy, with the feeling that something has been lost already, and more will be lost with the passage of time. In a literal way, photographing along China's Yangtze River will almost inevitably deal with transformations, caused by the The Gorges Dam. But if it were just that, then *Going Home* would be like all those other projects that dealt with the issue.

There was more at stake for Muge. And you can see that. You can feel that.

You can't force having something at stake for yourself all the time, often enough it just isn't the case. But when there is something at stake for a photographer, when there is a friction, under however many layers it might be buried, when there is a passion, glowing deeply, then it's likely you will also see that, feel that in the pictures. Such as in this case.

Recommended.

Going Home; photographs by Muge; essays by Louise Clements, Liang-Pin Tsao; 112 pages; Jiazazhi press ([order link](#))

Rating: Photography 4.5, Book Concept 4, Edit 3, Production 4 – Overall 4

(ratings explained [here](#))