

# BRUSH TALKS

Vol. 4 No. 2 Summer/Fall 2019

*A Journal of China*



*Special Issue ~ Tom Hutchins: China Photographs, 1956*

# Brush Talks: A Journal of China

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*Brush Talks* publishes compelling nonfiction, along with photographs and occasional poetry, about China. We publish two issues per year and accept unsolicited submissions on a rolling basis. For more information, please visit [brushtalks.com](http://brushtalks.com).

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*Brush Talks* is set in Garamond and produced in Adobe InDesign.

Cover image: © Tom Hutchins Images Ltd. (Hankou, today part of Wuhan)

*Because I had only my writing brush and ink slab  
to converse with, I call it Brush Talks.*

SHEN KUO 沈括

(1031-1095)

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## Editor's Note

Welcome to the second issue of *Brush Talks* for 2019 and our first of several planned special issues. These focus on a theme or examine a topic in depth, and here we provide a visual glimpse into China in the mid-twentieth century.

In the early 1950s, Western journalists were scarce in mainland China, as the United States' support for the Republic of China and its involvement in the Korean War made Americans and their allies largely unwelcome. Toward the end of the decade, a few photojournalists began to visit. Among them was New Zealand photographer Tom Hutchins, who arrived in 1956. The timing proved auspicious. China was in the midst of its First Five-Year Plan, which was generally considered a success, particularly in terms of industrial output. Dissent did exist, and would soon intensify, but the convulsions of later years had not yet begun. The Hundred Flowers Campaign, which precipitated a backlash by Mao in 1957, began at the end of 1956, after Hutchins had already left. Other photojournalists, including Henri Cartier-Bresson and Marc Riboud, would come in the year or two that followed, but Hutchins's photographs provide us with a snapshot both of leaders and of average people on the street, at home, at work, and at play before the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution forever changed the landscape of Chinese society. The year 1956 was thus a pivotal moment. We are grateful to John B. Turner, projects manager of Tom Hutchins Images Ltd., for allowing us to share these images with our readers.

We also continue our vicarious travels with Jacob Rawson on his journey to China's sacred mountains. This installment takes us north to Mount Tai in Shandong Province. The poetry for this issue is by Cameron Morse, who casts a keen eye on family relationships across three generations. And Martin San presents a series of illustrated haikus reflecting on the expat life in Shanghai. As we prepare to enter our fifth year with the next issue, our thanks go to them and all our past contributors for their fine work and support of *Brush Talks*.

Brian Kuhl

## Contributors

**R. D. (Tom) Hutchins** (1921–2007) was a photojournalist and teacher of photography from New Zealand. He was a member of the Black Star picture agency and worked for the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Auckland Star* before becoming a longtime teacher of photography and film at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland.

**Brian Kuhl** is the editor of *Brush Talks* and an occasional contributor.

**Cameron Morse** has lived in China intermittently since his family moved there in 2004. He and his wife Lili currently reside with their two children in Blue Springs, Missouri. His website is [cameronmorsepoems.wordpress.com](http://cameronmorsepoems.wordpress.com).

**Jacob Rawson** is coauthor of the book *Invisible China: A Journey Through Ethnic Borderlands*. After completing a master's degree in Chinese Linguistics at the University of Washington, he set out to climb the nine sacred peaks of China in 2010. His writings on South Korea have appeared in *Fulbright Korea Infusion*. He lives in Washington State with his wife and daughter.

**Martin San** is a writer and illustrator based in Amsterdam. She lived in Shanghai for five years, where she contributed to the local comic magazine *Shaving in the Dark*. You can find more about her work on [www.martinsan.net](http://www.martinsan.net).

**John B. Turner** is a photographer, historian of photography, and photography teacher, retired from the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts. In 1974, he founded *PhotoForum* magazine and continues to serve today as co-editor. He has curated a number of exhibitions and has authored and edited several books, mostly recently *Tē Atatu Me: Photographs of an Urban New Zealand Village*, published in 2015. More information, as well as a selection of his photographs and more of Hutchins's photographs from China, can be found at [www.jbt.photoshelter.com](http://www.jbt.photoshelter.com).





## The Hermit's Woods

by Jacob Rawson

*and Mt Taishan is faint as the wraith of my first friend*

*who comes talking ceramics;*

*mist glaze over mountain*

何

*"How is it far, if you think of it?"*

遠

— Ezra Pound (1885–1972), from *Cantos LXXVII*

Jackie Chan and Korean actress Kim Hee-sun croon a bilingual love ballad through tinny loudspeakers as I climb the gangplank of a long steel vessel that will take me from the island of Mount Putuo to the Shanghai mainland. At each level of the ship's interior I show my fourth-class ticket, and at each level another crewman points down an unlit staircase until I find my cabin in the foul-smelling bowels of the ship where the wall of the cabin curves in sharply with the hull and the engine room next door emits a ceaseless and tired groan.

I fill a paper bowl of instant beef noodles with boiling water in the ship's galley and delicately carry it, scampering between trough and swell of each wave, to the covered stern deck where a pair of businessmen from Beijing offer me a swig of grain liquor from a clear bottle with no label and engage me on the topic of American transgressions.

"I like the United States. I like the free spirit of Americans. But their media bias against China is pathetic." The taller of the two men drops a mouthful of vowels in the Beijing dialect, leaving me to mentally reassemble them while the other man counters.

"They have a free press, so of course they will be critical of China. A free press means all opinions are printable. Some valid, some not so much."

A third businessman appears, seemingly a colleague of the other two, and picks up the bottle. “They look at news stories from different angles. There’s some value to that!”

The taller Beijinger is not impressed. He turns out to the open water and shouts, “Hu Jintao can go to hell!” A startled fisherman looks up from the transom of a small outboard skiff with a puzzled look. “See? We couldn’t say that thirty years ago. They would have called me a counterrevolutionary. But we too are gaining more freedoms.”

\* \* \* \*

The pinhole lights of the Shanghai skyline emerge like constellations in the thick dawn vapors. A coal-black freight barge, rudder creaking in the tidal swell, cuts between a procession of half-laden tankers spewing a plume of inky exhaust. Above me, first-class passengers crawl out of their sleeping cabins and throw empty drink containers and instant noodle wrappers out of the upper deck portholes. The refuse falls past the lower deck passengers and swirls into the oily currents of the East China Sea. The vessel veers to the port side and into the brackish Yangtze River estuary and then the turbid mouth of the Huangpu River. A crew of young women, wearing pantsuits and handkerchiefs the color of cooked eggplant, side-tie our vessel to the concrete jetty and wheel out a portable stairway.

In a sleek Shanghai municipal subway car, middle schoolers are dressed smartly in wool cardigans and pressed neckties. They flip through French verb conjugation charts and Japanese comic books and do not seem to notice when a handsome white moth flutters through the silent car.

From Shanghai Railway Station I will take a thirteen-hour ride in the “hard seat” class to the next sacred mountain. The passenger booths now have benches that are padded and soft, but the train aisles and intercar compartments are filled with riders who have standing-room-only tickets, making it all but impossible to move through the carriage or use the restroom. The density of bodies along with a broken air-conditioning system push the temperature to an unbearable high. I

struggle with my booth mates to pull open a window, but find that it has been welded shut in an effort to lock down the (now dysfunctional) cooling system.

Despite the general discomfort, four middle-school-aged girls in the adjacent booth pass around a steel-string guitar with a well-worn fretboard, fingerpicking pop ballads as they giggle and chomp bubble gum.

A woman from Nanjing extols the tenets of Buddhism and the temples of Mount Putuo, passing around a book of sutras for anyone willing to look and listen. “I visit Putuo twice a year and leave incense at each altar . . .” Once her stop comes and she exits the train, my compartment mates exhale and express their relief to be done with the tiresome lectures.

A friendly auto parts salesman sitting next to me has been to San Francisco and raves about his experiences abroad as I take in the bucolic Shandong countryside. “Americans are so civilized. They throw their garbage into trash cans and don’t spit in public!”

I step off the train in the small city of Tai’an during a heat wave, and spend the next afternoon eluding the throbbing humidity under a patched umbrella in a narrow alleyway where a tired vendor sells Mount Tai Beer by the kilogram from a stack of dented aluminum kegs. Next door, a mother spoon-feeds sautéed eggplant to her six-year-old son while he attacks mosquitoes with an electric fly swatter. Each time he catches one the swatter emits a satisfying *zap!*, and he squeals and spits up a mouthful of half-chewed eggplant onto the cracked concrete floor. A gang of neighborhood primary schoolers glides by on electric scooters, throwing bottle caps at me while an old Hui Muslim couple watches from a ramen shop across the alley. One plate of cucumber–pig snout stir-fry and 750 grams of draft beer later, I mumble something that appears to be unintelligible to the vendor (either my Chinese is failing or the beer is succeeding) and lumber back to my simple lodgings that smell of tobacco smoke and roast duck.

\* \* \* \*

Tai’an sits at the base of Mount Tai, the eastern Daoist peak and the most renowned of all the nine sacred mountains throughout Chinese history. For three

millennia Mount Tai has attracted feudal lords and emperors to its summit, where they performed ritualistic sacrifices to gain the graces of heaven. Qin Shi Huang, regarded as the first emperor of China, held a ceremony on the summit of Mount Tai in 219 BCE to declare his unified empire. The Qin emperor was not alone in his ambitions, and early historical records indicate that more than seventy emperors performed the imperial rites on Mount Tai before the Common Era.

Sima Qian, commonly known as the father of Chinese historiography, wrote in the first century BCE, “Though death comes to all, it may be weightier than Mount Tai or lighter than a goose feather.” Mao Zedong drew upon the historian’s words in a 1944 speech to the Central Committee of the Communist Party when he said, “To die for the people is weightier than Mount Tai, but to work for the fascists and die for the exploiters and oppressors is lighter than a feather.” In recent decades, “weightier than Mount Tai” has become a staple of institutional slogans, and neon-lit billboards across the cities of eastern China show examples such as “Railroad Safety Is Weightier Than Mount Tai” and “Affordable Life Insurance Is Weightier Than Mount Tai.”

The mountain is also remarkable as perhaps the only sacred Chinese peak to have earned some degree of fame outside of East Asia. The expatriate American poet and Confucian disciple Ezra Pound was imprisoned by the Allies in an outdoor steel cage for airing his fascist sympathies on an Italian radio station in the 1940s when he looked out on the hilly Pisan countryside and evoked the image of Mount Tai throughout the Pisan section of his unfinished epic poem *The Cantos*. In the 1980s, Canadian progressive rock band Rush released a song called “Tai Shan” (“Mount Tai”) that recounted drummer Neil Peart’s ascent of the sacred peak. In the 1990s, American rock band Rage Against the Machine sang the lyric, “So I’m goin’ out heavy sorta like Mount Tai,” in reference to Sima Qian’s quote from more than two millennia earlier.

Perhaps fittingly, Mount Tai was the first Chinese mountain to enter my own awareness, when my interest in sacred mountains began early on with a bit of a linguistic misunderstanding. As a college junior studying in Beijing, I read in a

guidebook's entry on Mount Tai that the Tai'an locals carry torches to light their way up the mountain at night. Consumed by romantic images of medieval flame-lit processions, I covered my dormitory walls with maps and train schedules and hastily drawn plans to conquer the nine sacred peaks. It was only years later I learned that the book was written by a Brit, and that a "torch" is a flashlight.

As I begin ascending the seven thousand ancient stone steps that lead up the mountain, I am struck by the contrast between the visitors to this site and to others. At the four peaks I climbed previously, there had always been a decidedly religious air, with many of my fellow hikers dressed in pilgrim smocks and grass sandals, or carrying backpacks full of incense sticks and stacks of prayer papers. Here at Mount Tai, the climbers are unabashed tourists: local Shandong school groups making a case study of the historical sites, weekend trippers from nearby provinces out to see the imperial splendor with disinterested children in tow, and young honeymooners from the metropolises testing out shiny new single-lens reflex cameras to a backdrop of pine-filled ravines, trinket vendors, and municipal park rangers. In this novel context, tourists can surely be regarded as the pilgrims of the modern era, leaving their sacrifices of folded bills and card swipes while performing the (if not ascetic, then certainly) transformational photographic rites.

As the steps rise up the valley floor, conifer branches curl over the footpath with a thickness that serves to partially shroud the sky. A boulder carved with the characters "Cypress Cave" marks the ancient poetic association of this section. A family of three twirls matching pine walking sticks and hums a revolutionary requiem, all the while taking care to secure footing on steps worn slick by the crowds.

All around the procession of hikers, stone formations and structures merge the natural with the manufactured in a continuum so smooth that the two categories are rendered all but indistinguishable. Slick sedimentary slopes cascade onto blocky gneiss parapets. That one was formed by Cambrian Period earth forces and the other by a workman's chisel is lost in the gentle balance of the ravine's clean contours.

As the steps wind through steep groves of bushy junipers and squat Siberian elms, a library of inscriptions chiseled into the valley's stone walls comes into sharp focus. Many inscriptions take the form of a brief poetic musing, and are unattributed and undated. Others carefully document improvements to the path—a Qing dynasty vassal (“In the 17th year of the Guangxu emperor’s reign . . .”) replaced broken steps here, a Republican-era official demolished stone obstructions there. Set apart from these natural cliff-face inscriptions, the names of Communist revolutionary martyrs are carved into a polygonal granite monolith. Its ornate modern pedestal suggests that this is the installation most worthy of acclaim.

On a small rocky projection, Mao Zedong’s best-known poem is etched into a flattened stone wall. The famous verses are now plastered onto billboards, in subway cars, and in elementary school textbooks across China, and young families pause to recite their memorized couplets as they ascend.

*A north country scene:  
One thousand li locked in ice,  
Ten thousand li of whirling snow.  
Inside and outside the Great Wall,  
One single white immensity.*

One cunning entrepreneur has added her own inscription to the landscape. Next to a small portable stone tablet inscription is a cardboard sign: “The two characters ‘Mount Tai’ were carved by me. One yuan per photo.”

I sit under a gazebo-like granite pavilion and begin to jot down the more lyrical of the classical Chinese stone inscriptions into a small notepad.

BRAVELY ASCEND TO THE REALM OF THE IMMORTALS

A WINDY PATH TRAVERSES SECLUDED SPOTS,  
LINKED PEAKS STRETCH TO THE SEA

FLYING SPRINGS HANG FROM AZURE PEAKS

A couple of high school boys wearing school-issue warm-up suits stop to take my picture. “What a rare surprise to see an Englishman here.”

A fatigued man catches his breath, then points at me and schools his young child, “Look at that. That’s a Russian.” The girl nods with intrigue.

Two middle-aged men peek over my shoulder to inspect my jottings.

“He has nice penmanship.”

“I think he may have understood when you said he had nice penmanship.”

“But how could he understand Chinese?”

“He’s writing in Chinese.”

“But surely he doesn’t understand it.”

I am content to let them continue the debate as I slog on up the mountain, step by sweaty step. At the vertiginous final approach to the summit, vendors use mountain spring water to cool cucumbers, watermelons, and apples. One of them peels the cucumbers with a knife, then picks the skins out of a wicker basket and rubs them one by one in a circular motion on her cheeks and forehead. “It’s a facial cleanser,” she explains when she catches my curious stare.

Three young backpackers with tents and sleeping bags tell me they are from the provincial capital of Jinan. I ask about their unique cargo, the first of the kind I have seen on a sacred mountain. “There’s good camping on top,” they grunt and push on. An elderly couple wrapped in matching North Face jackets counts steps in Cantonese between giggles, their graphite-tipped walking sticks clicking out the count as they ascend past me.

The summit area is a small village of trinket vendors, restaurateurs, and temple caretakers. Plump magpies dart in and out of the warren of small wooden structures, and then down across the cliff faces, finally dropping out of frame and disappearing into the high altitude cerulean expanse. A gentle haze embraces the lower hills beyond, and somewhere down below these foothills the city of Tai’an waits silently just out of sight.

Outside the arched stone entrance to the Temple of the Jade Emperor, the twenty-foot-tall Wordless Stele stands blank and mysterious. According to legend, some two millennia ago a poet was conscripted to chisel his impressions into the face of the tablet, but was struck dumb by the splendor of the mountain and rendered incapable of leaving a verse. I kick myself for not dreaming up this excuse on middle-school creative writing assignments.

I circle the summit stone that marks the mountain's apex at 1,545 meters, then ask around at the vendors' booths for lodgings, and find my way inside a jumble of wood plank corridors to a simple inn with a windowless and musty room and a light switch that is in the outer hallway and is flipped on and off by drunken workmen through the night.

At four o'clock the innkeeper interrupts the predawn respite, side-punching the door and shouting "Sunrise! Up for the sunrise!"

Sleepy throngs emerge from hidden guesthouses and funnel into the main walkway, marching in unison up the stone steps in rented Soviet-style trench coats. For the first time in weeks I hear English spoken and turn to see a young man with a prickly shaved head who introduces himself as Grant from Scotland. He carries a bowl of instant beef noodles and makes a delicate project of keeping the boiling water contained in the paper bowl as we hike the remaining steps to the eastern extremity of the summit, known as the Sun-Viewing Terrace.

Grant relates to me his impressions of Mount Tai between rock hops and skips. "It's fookin' murder on the legs. Then aye see these fat ladies hobblin' up. Shite, man!" He vaults down to a lower boulder ledge, somehow keeping the noodles contained. "Wanted to light up a fag, but knew it would take half an hour for my lungs to recover. The kicker is that these Chinese guys are all puffin' away!"

A few hundred onlookers jostle to find standing room along the steep boulder face, and as the sky brightens they peer out toward the eastern horizon.

"Busier than a Sunday in Glasgow," Grant sings out.

To much camera-fare, the sun emerges as a hazy ripe peach, muted and dulled by a dirty beige backdrop. A legend claims that Confucius looked out from this spot and could see white horses entering the gates of the kingdom of Wu,



some three hundred miles to the south. The Qin emperor, not to be outdone, proclaimed that he could see the kingdom of Yue, hundreds of miles further. My vision is decidedly inferior, as I can only see the haze above Tai'an in the soupy dawn glow.

I leave by the back side of the mountain, through a narrow valley called Peach Blossom Glen. The backpackers from the day before are breaking down their orange dome tent under a cypress tree, and just below the summit a grove of pink crabapple blossoms frames the ridgeline vista in gentle juxtaposition.

Down the trail, an old man beckons from the doorway of a simple gray-brick hut and invites me in to show off his one-room habitation. He lives a life of modern hermitude, telling me that he was hired by the local municipal government to watch for smokers on the trail and to help prevent forest fires. The tiny space has little more than a wok and water jugs. He says that he hikes to the summit each week to procure a bag of rice, but he does not elaborate and seems more comfortable with silence. After the pause, his only other words are, "It's lonely here." When I hoist my pack on and return to the trail, he offers a parting grin that reveals two missing teeth and a kind twinkle of contentment.

This UNESCO World Heritage Site receives more than six million visitors each year, but few seem to find their way to the back side of the mountain. Perhaps they are deterred by the lack of imperial curiosities, or perhaps by the very things that have drawn me to this secluded valley: the confluence of cool wind and silence and the comfort of momentary loneliness.

I linger in the hermit's woods where a dirt path disappears into tall grasses and short pines, then a slow gait carries me down the mountain. ☺

**Co-Sleeping**  
by Cameron Morse

---

The only way it becomes possible for us to sleep him  
with afternoon sun in the curtains is to lay  
our bodies in the same bed. Even then he climbs  
the headboard. Nowhere to go but up.

With my eyes closed, I listen for his breathing to drop  
into a deep and regular pattern, for the faint  
squeak of his binkie to stop. My mother-in-law Youqiong  
describes sleeping at the right angles with Yilin

during his fourth and final illness, their heads touching  
where the two wings met. Yilin fell several times  
before he died. Swinging his legs over the edge,  
he would land between sectional and coffee table.

I listen to the buses bellowing below our balcony window,  
those giant caterpillars of plastic and glass crawling  
past paint shops, toilets and light fixtures. Theo slaps my head.  
Grabs Lili's hair. A tile saw squeals.

Farther off, passenger trains clatter over Nine Dragon Road.

Our boy finishes by playing with his own hands.  
Quietly closes his eyes. At the end,  
Yilin's entire family gathered. But it was only when a nephew  
promised to take him home to Langdai that he went.

## **After the Revolution**

by Cameron Morse

---

Age 89, Lili's maternal grandfather  
presses a copy of Xi Jinping  
Thought on Socialism with Chinese  
Characteristics for a New Era  
into my hands. We draw our flight path  
on his weathered world map.

The window behind him carries a little cloud  
light into the musty room.  
Whiskers of cigarette smoke graze his fur hat,  
black overcoat of the man who served  
a five-year prison sentence  
during the Cultural Revolution. Glasses of oolong  
curl above the potbellied stove.

Outside his little house, pinched  
like a splinter between apartment blocks,  
buses jostle onto Culture Road. Cheeks jiggle,  
arm fat. Below mountain mist,  
China's younger revolutionaries sashay,  
sidestepping hawked loogies on smartphones.

Middle schoolers in tracksuits linger  
over smoking grills and pineapple barrows.  
Folding tables proffer sweaters, socks, leggings.  
After the visit, our giant glass  
rectangular fist slams into the market  
bustle of boomboxes.



## Portfolio: China Photographs, 1956

Tom Hutchins

**R. D. (Tom) HUTCHINS** was a photojournalist and photography teacher born in Australia in 1921. When he was an infant, his family moved to New Zealand, where he lived the rest of his life. In the 1950s, he was the chief photographer at the Auckland Star when he got an opportunity to travel for several months on a photography trip to mainland China. Despite losing his job over it (this was the height of the Cold War, and travel to China was discouraged), he opted to go, becoming one of a handful of Western photojournalists to visit China during this era.

Hutchins entered China from Hong Kong, passing through Shenzhen Railway Station on May 9, 1956. He took a total of roughly 6,000 photographs in just over four months spent in China, traveling to major cities like Shanghai and Beijing but also to less visited regions like the northeast and Xinjiang in the northwest. Life magazine, which had informally sponsored his trip, ran twenty-odd images in a piece entitled “Red China on the March” in early 1957. Although Hutchins wanted to publish his photographs in book form, he was unable to interest a publisher in the project, and after the 1960s they sat in storage at his home.

In 1965, he became the first full-time lecturer of photography and film at the Elam School of Fine Arts, part of the University of Auckland, a position he held until 1980. In 1989, his junior colleague and friend John B. Turner decided to investigate Hutchins’s China photographs and helped him locate the various prints and negatives stored at his house. For the better part of thirty years, Turner collected, catalogued, and created archival prints of the material. Hutchins died in 2007, at age eighty-five. In 2016, sixty years after they were taken, a selection of the photographs went on exhibit at the Pingyao International Photography Festival in Shanxi Province.

More information can be found in an interview the Asia Society conducted with Turner in 2016, at <https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/25-remarkable-images-provide-rare-glimpse-1956-china>.

**All images in this portfolio are copyright Tom Hutchins Images Ltd., New Zealand, and appear here courtesy of their projects manager, John B. Turner.**





Woman with baby  
and large baskets.  
Shenzhen Station,  
Guangzhou.







Receptionist.  
Border at Shenzhen  
Station, Guangzhou.



Woman and child on bus. Guangzhou.



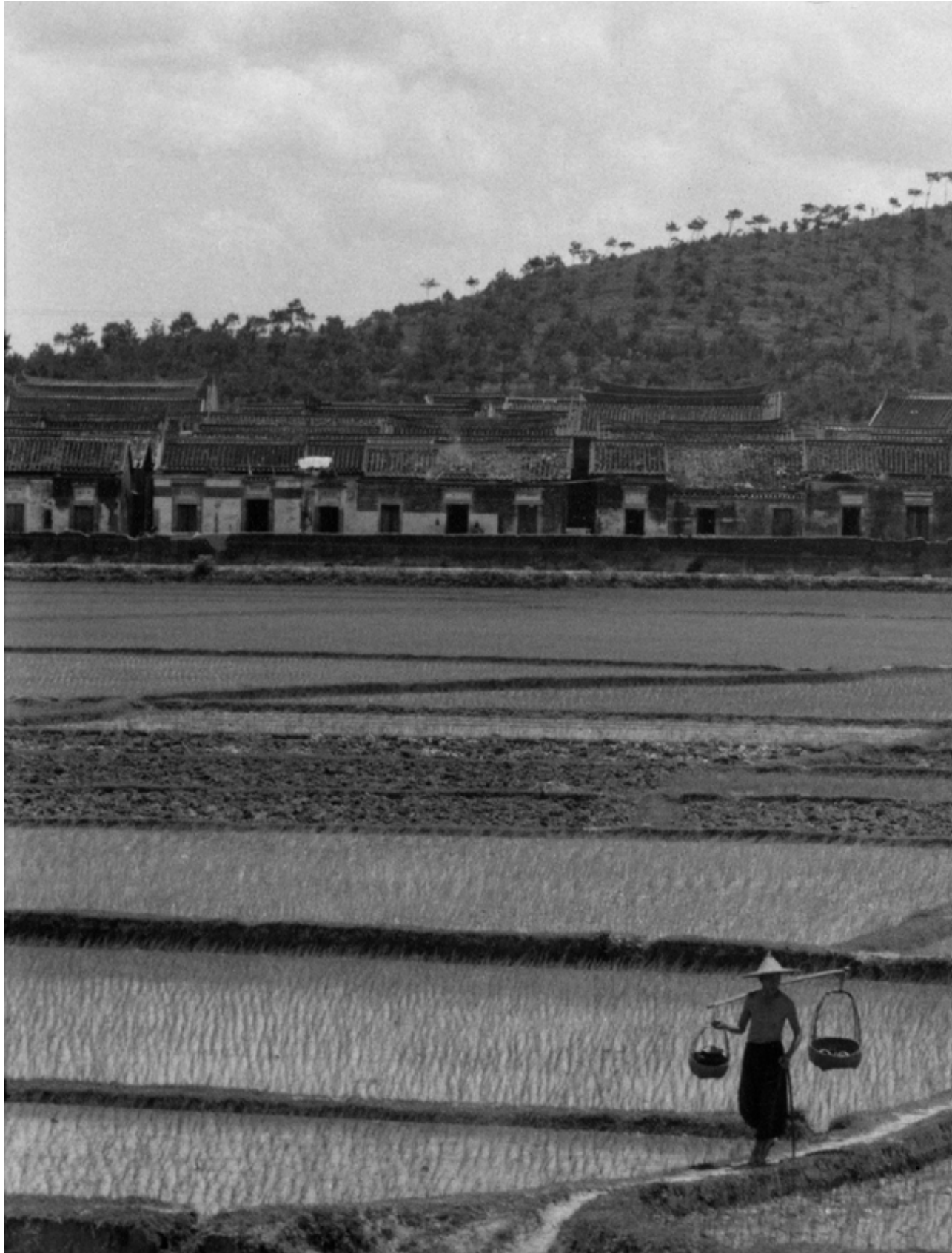
Shy man and small child. Guangzhou.



City street from car interior. Guangzhou.



Vegetable vendor in rain. Guangzhou.





Peasant with baskets  
on shoulder.  
Guangxi.







Peasant, porter, and  
Russians at  
railway station.  
Hunan.





People embarking on  
and disembarking  
from ferry.  
Hunan.





Peace [statue], Soviet  
Exhibition.  
Hankou (today  
part of Wuhan).



Old man with sugar cane and toffee apples. Hankou (today part of Wuhan).



Woman and child standing in doorway, boy sitting with baskets. Probably Hankou (today part of Wuhan).



Street view from pedicab. Beijing.



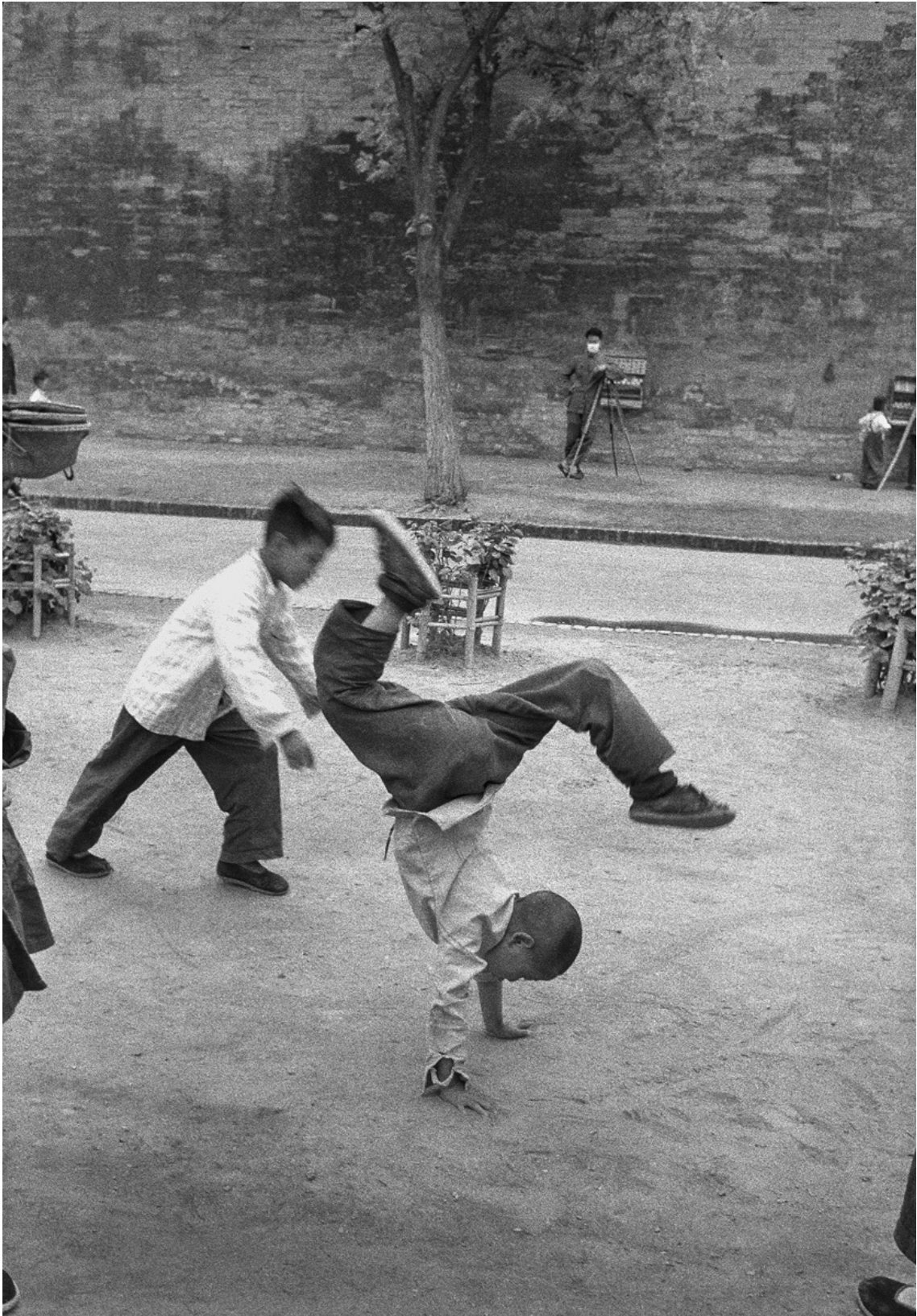


Jia Aimie (Amy), translator. Beijing.

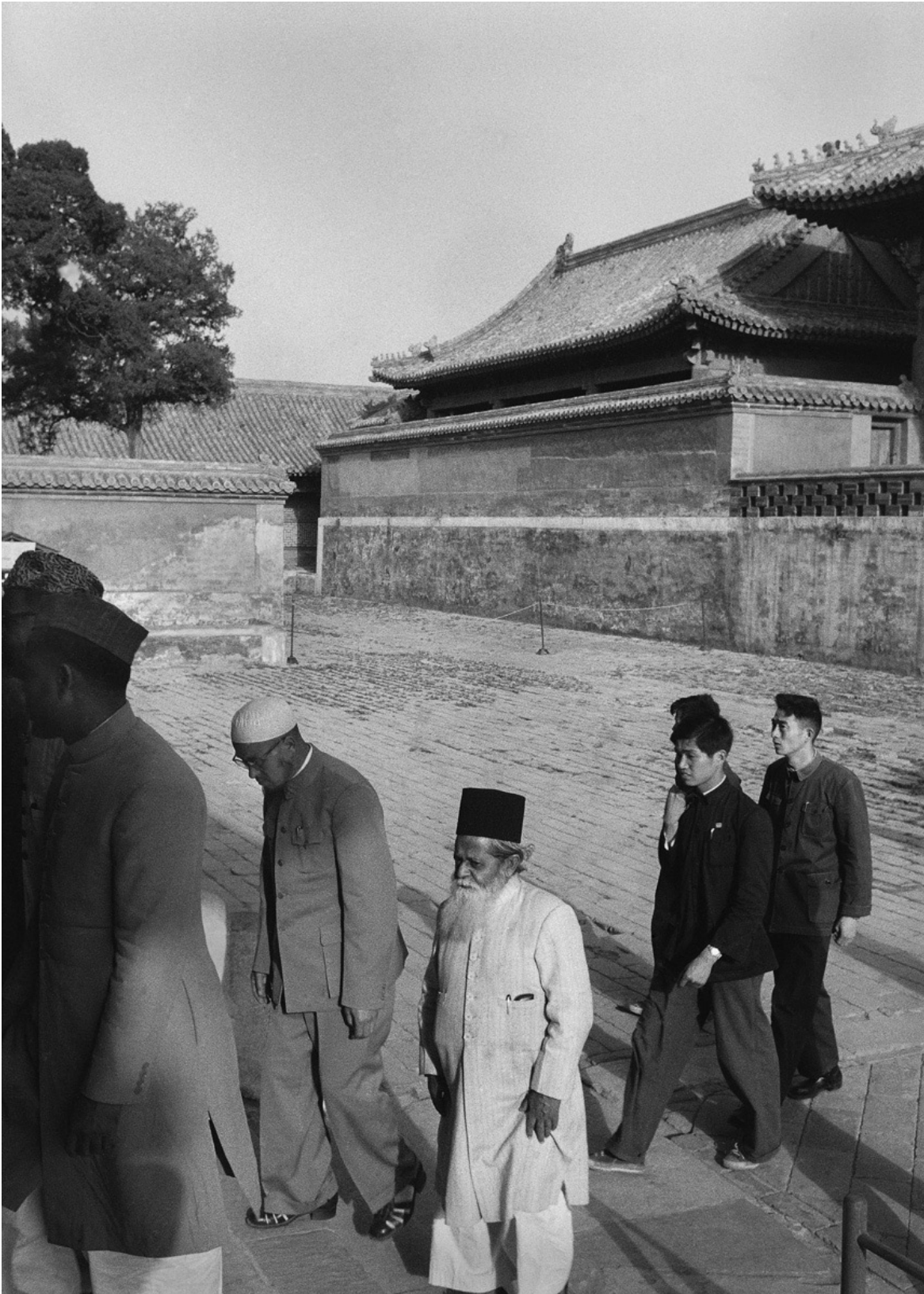




Woman in doorway  
and street vendor  
with barrow.  
Beijing.



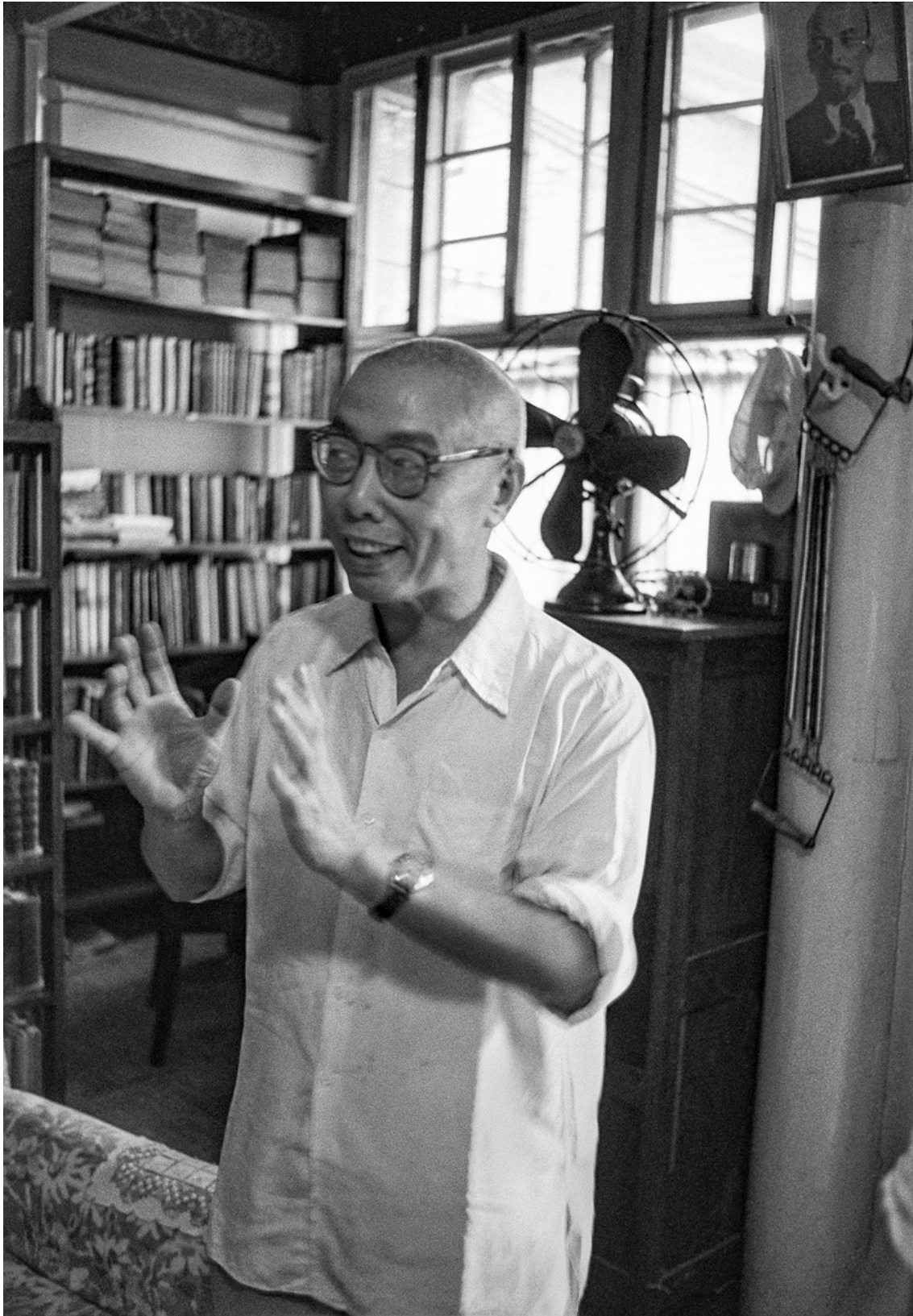
Kids playing and showing off [to Tom] in park just outside Forbidden City wall. Beijing.



Pakistani visitors, Forbidden City. Beijing.



Elderly man selling ice blocks. Wangfujing, Beijing.



Tian Han, playwright and propagandist, with chest expander and Lenin portrait on wall. Beijing.







Kids on rooftop of No.  
5 Middle School, with  
Beijing skyline.  
Beijing.





Mrs. Wu, artist.  
Beijing.





Peasant at modern  
history exhibition.  
Forbidden City,  
Beijing.





Outdoor class, seen  
from train going west to  
Yumen, Gansu.







Men taking oil sample.  
Yumen oil field, Gansu.





Hui peasants with  
sickles showing the way  
to Kazak village,  
Tian Shan ranges.  
Xinjiang.



Face of great Buddha carved in cliff. Dunhuang, Gansu.



Woman at hairdresser's shop and photographer's reflection. Urumqi, Xinjiang.





Uighur man on  
cooperative farm.  
Outskirts of Urumqi,  
Xinjiang.







Sawing wood for  
house repairs.  
Urumqi back street,  
Xinjiang.





Woman working at a  
milling machine in a  
truck assembly  
and repair plant.  
Urumqi, Xinjiang.





Coal miners,  
2,500 feet deep.  
Fushun, Liaoning.



Anshan steel mill. Liaoning.



Woman working at an oil-seed press. Army farm, west of Urumqi, Xinjiang.







Foreman Wang and  
worker watch furnaces.  
Anshan, Liaoning.





Model steel worker  
Foreman Wang and  
family on kang in flat.  
Anshan, Liaoning.





Saturday night dance.  
Changchun, Jilin.





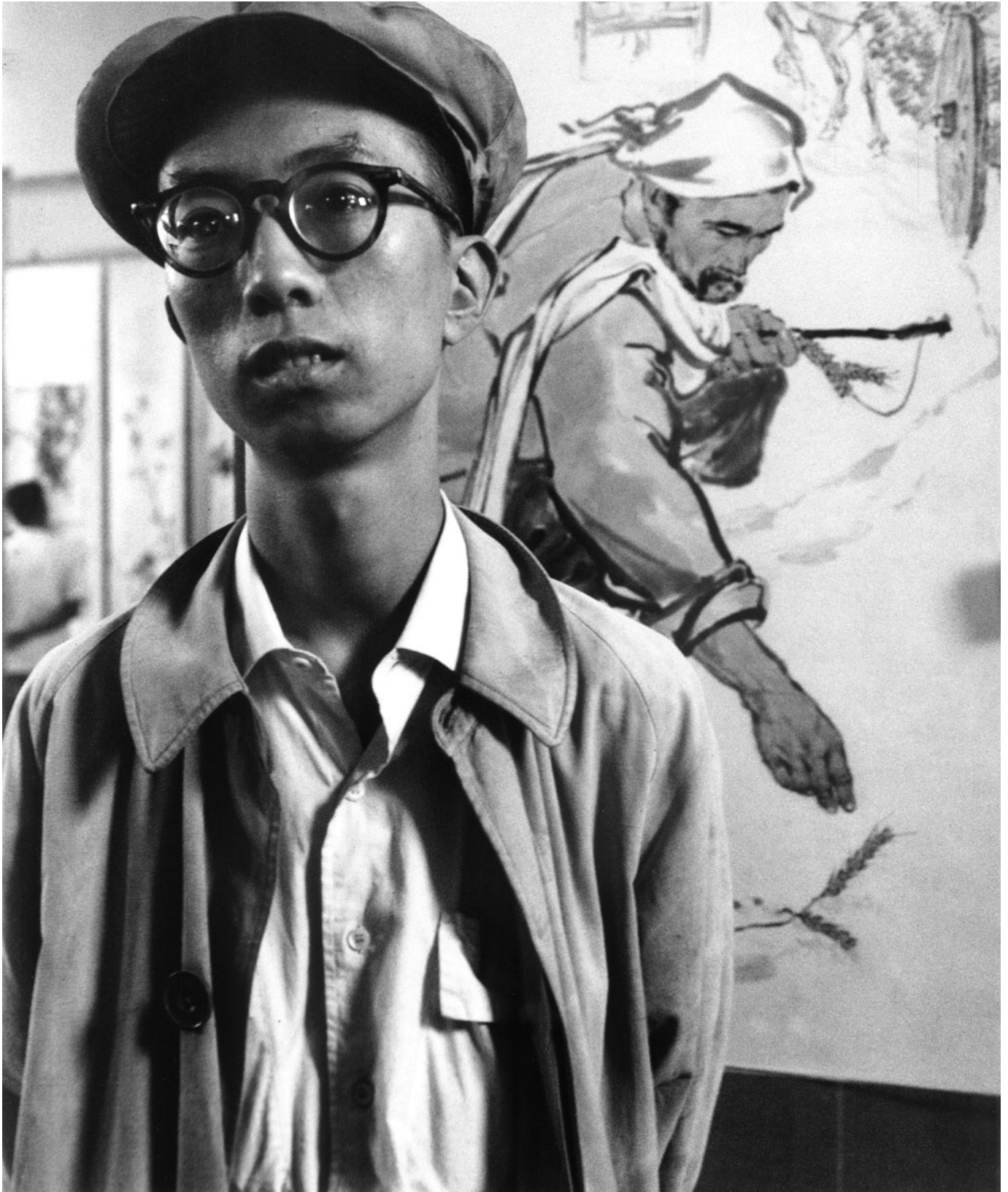
Buying sweaters at  
Zhangye, Gansu,  
between Yumen  
and Wuwei on the  
way to Lanzhou.



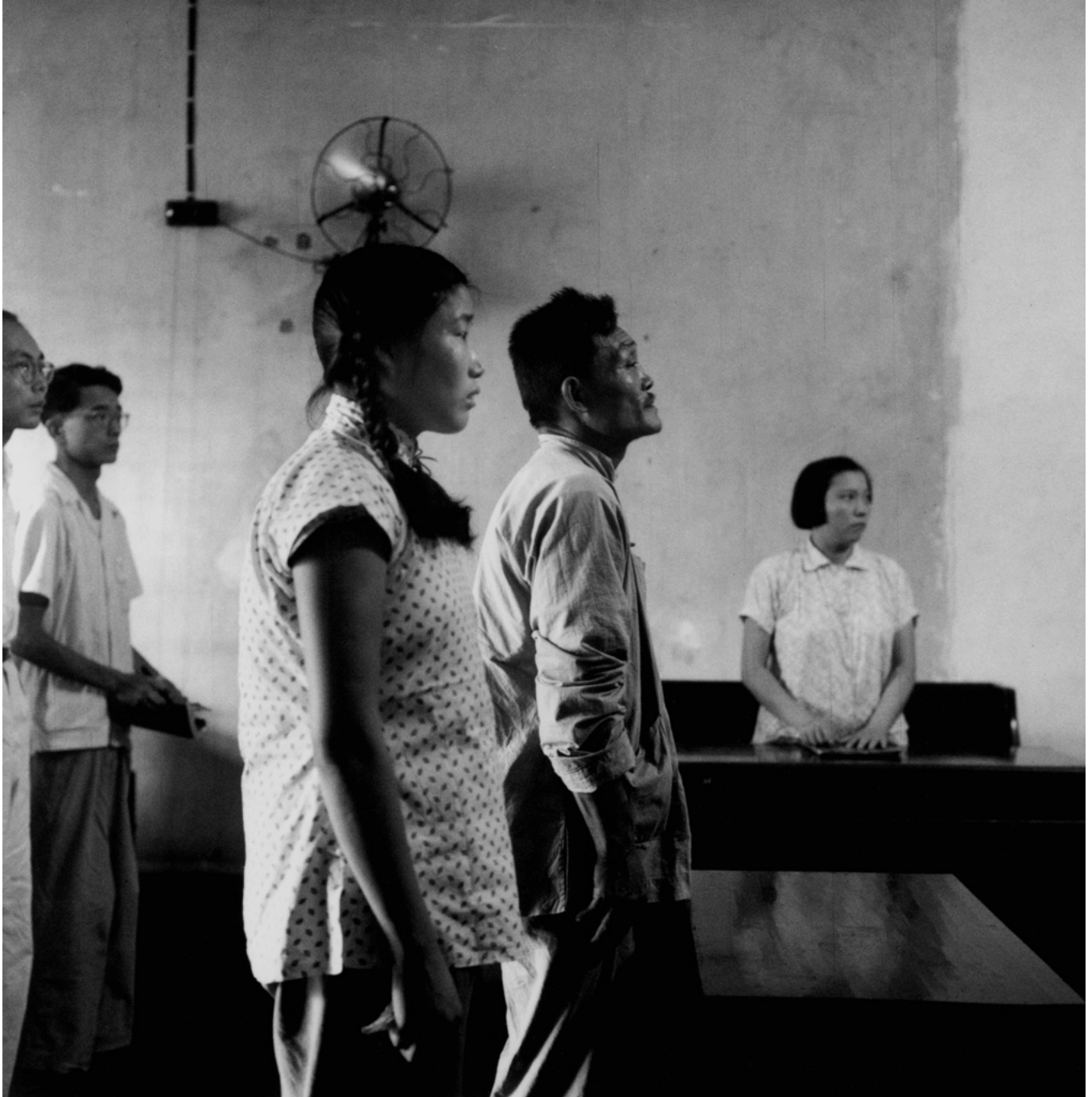




Rabbit being injected.  
Shanghai.



Clerk looking at peasant pictures in an art exhibition. Shanghai.



Plaintiffs in court case regarding a house sale dispute. Shanghai.





Judges in court case  
regarding a house sale  
dispute. Shanghai.



Suzhou Creek at dusk. Shanghai.



Tom Hutchins self-portrait. Fushun mine, Liaoning.

**Food Fight**  
by Cameron Morse

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Theo's rice bowl drops  
at the height of the argument

about him eating rice  
when Youqiong calls Lili rigid

for refusing to serve him  
rice and has her brother steam it

for him anyway. I airlift Theo  
out of the room in his yellow frog

apron and green rubber bib,  
crumb catcher still cradling

grains of the forbidden  
starch he fills up on

to the exclusion of all else.  
Later, Grandma's blood

smears the tile  
where porcelain split

into white daggers she grasped,  
jumping in with bare hands.



Uncle leaves his appetite  
at the coffee table

after only a couple bites  
of stir-fried celtuce, opting

instead to squat in the bedroom  
with his tablet.

**Visiting the Tomb**  
by Cameron Morse

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We travel seven thousand miles, ascend  
into fog, the near total whiteout  
of mountain mist, whisk

through blink-of-an-eye villages and resorts,  
rag-dolling break-neck  
passes above the unseeable valley floor.

Without seat belts, we hold our son  
between our knees.  
Yilin's tomb squats above terraced,

cow-pathed fields of rapeseed, and a flock  
of white buildings the village  
in which Lili passed the first years of her life.

When the time comes, I thumb crumbly  
yellow sheets of joss paper  
and chuck them at a smoldering heap.

Lili tells me to pray for good fortune, good health.  
We stop by a liquor store on the road  
to the tomb and buy price spirits for the venerable

grandfather, the hated old man who introduced  
a tender boy to the rotgut that would become as necessary  
to him as the organs it corrodes.

## Loser Back Home

by Martin San

*Loser Back Home is a collection of linocut prints and haikus reflecting on the Shanghai expat experience.*



HASHTAG WANDERLUST : I CAME HERE LOOKING / FOR THE  
EXOTIC, THE UNKNOWN - NOW I BRUNCH



NIGHTCLUB PRIVILEGE : AT THE CLUB WEARING / JEANS, SNEAKERS, A  
PLAIN WHITE T / AND MY PLAIN WHITE FACE.



A MATTER POSTPONED : MONDAY MORNING SMOG / NO NEED TO QUIT  
SMOKING / JUST YET.

马泉山



NETWORKING BLUES: USEFUL CONNECTIONS / DON'T FIND ME  
USEFUL AT ALL - I DRINK IN SILENCE.

## Elephant in the Jungle: A Typhoon in Four Acts

by Brian Kuhl

### I.

One Sunday evening late that September, I checked my e-mail and a subject line jumped out at me: “Typhoon!!!!!!” The message, from one of my students, read, “Brian, Have anyone told you that there will be typhoon at midnight and tomorrow? Look out for it! Have a good evening!”

I was seven months into teaching English at a university in rural Hainan, my own private Peace Corps. The early days had not been easy; I hadn’t studied the language and knew very little about the culture. I practiced my Chinese in the market, mostly numbers and the names of vegetables. And Chinese practiced their English on me, especially local teens and kids shouting the ubiquitous “Helloooo?!” It had seemed like a taunt somehow, reminiscent of Maugham’s line from his travels in China: “Rude boys cry out at the foreigner in a shrill and scornful voice.” But were they really being rude? It was hard to tell. And was I supposed to reply each time? Ignoring it felt impolite, so I usually just nodded. I only liked hearing it from my neighbor, Liang Yifan, who emphasized the first syllable (“HELL-o!”) and to whom I always returned the greeting with a smile. He was four and lived next door with his grandparents.

I had already heard of the storm from a colleague. Alice, an outgoing Brit who called our campus outpost “the bloody jungle,” had phoned to tell me the university would be closed the next day. Our supervisor had told her to get any necessary provisions that night, as businesses throughout our little campus village would be closed as well. Alice, who loved nothing so much as a crisis, declared that the campus was “in lockdown.” She was off to the small supermarket nearby and would come round with some water for me later. Arriving about ten-thirty, in a state of mild excitement, she explained that she had the new teachers at her apartment for the night.

“I’m better than George W.!” she exclaimed, referring to Hurricane Katrina, which had hit New Orleans just weeks earlier. The new teachers were an older couple from New Zealand who had been staying temporarily at the campus guesthouse since they’d arrived. They had no cooking facilities and the water would be turned off, so Alice had invited them to her place. She advised me to draw a few buckets from the tap for washing and flushing the toilet later. I offered her some of my food, but she said they had everything they needed. They’d be all right—she had picked up several cartons of cigarettes and lots of beer. “It will probably last us tonight,” she said, laughing. “Well, back to the refugee center!”

Alone again, I went online to search for news. The typhoon’s name was Damrey, a Khmer word meaning “elephant,” and was the most powerful storm in thirty years. It would make landfall overnight on the eastern coast of the island and charge west toward us all the next day. Flights had been canceled, seaborne trade stopped, all fishermen ordered back to port, I read. Then the apartment went dark. Only my laptop screen, on battery power, provided a faint glow. I shut down the computer and prepared for bed. In the bathroom, I discovered that the water had already been cut off, and I hadn’t yet drawn any buckets of water. I was caught a bit unawares; the storm was not any worse than our normal tropical storms at that point, yet things felt different, even disorienting. It was not yet midnight.

## II.

I WOKE UP AT EIGHT, made coffee, and sat down with a book. It was eerily peaceful, even with the howling wind. The only other sound was faint piano music from one of the apartments below. I was productive in the quiet morning and had the whole day ahead of me. After finishing my coffee, I surveyed the situation a bit from my windows. The ground floor apartment on the corner had the most damage. The thick skin of a metal awning had broken free in the middle, crashing up and down like a cymbal. When I looked out later, it was gone. And a papaya tree by the walkway had snapped in half, its top end lying across the entrance to our building. Damrey was now shaping up to be a bit more destructive.



My friend Lily, a Chinese teacher in the English Department, called mid-morning to see if I had heard about classes. I asked if she had enough food, and when I learned she had only some cookies and bananas, I invited her to dinner. She hesitated, but we agreed to talk again that afternoon. Before we hung up, I asked her how to say “Do you need water?” in Chinese so I could check on Yifan’s family across the hall. “He calls me his foreign uncle, so I should look after them.”

Just before noon, I went across to my neighbors’ door. I put two large bottles of water in my open doorway in plain view and pointing range. I set my package of candles on the arm of the wooden sofa just inside. And I took my dictionary in hand as a security blanket. The inside door was closed, and so was the outer metal gate, behind which a sheet acted as a curtain. I reached in around the sheet and gently knocked; the thin door rattled a bit on its hinges. No answer. I knocked again, louder this time. Yifan’s grandfather soon appeared.

*Ni hao*, we greeted each other.

*You mei you shui?* I began, forgetting Lily’s suggestion. I had asked the more general question “Do you have water?” He turned to his wife, and I instantly feared he thought I was asking them for water instead of offering it. I reached for my bottles and the grandmother came to the entrance. “Do you want some?” I asked in Chinese.

She shook her head and put up her hand to indicate no. *You shui*, she said. “We have water.”

*Bu yao?* I made sure, trying to employ the polite insistence I had observed in the Chinese. I produced my package of candles. Again she said she had them. *Xie xie*, she said, as she gave me the polite fist-in-hand gesture of thanks.

I tried to say what I had practiced, my equivalent of “If you need it, I have it.” But I confused *yao* (need) and *you* (have)—and stopped abruptly. During that first year in China, I often forgot what little Chinese I knew when forced to use it in the moment. I felt foolish. But we had understood each other more or less. We each said *xie xie* and she closed the door. Strangely, little Yifan had not appeared like he usually did, and I missed his cheery “HELL-o!”

III.

I SPENT THE AFTERNOON reading, drinking tea, and going over my students' work for class the next day while I had the daylight. The rain had let up at times, but the wind was a constant. Things were still rattling around under my window. The first-floor neighbors who lost their awning had tracked it down, and it now lay on the ground of their small courtyard under a heavy circular object, to prevent it from taking flight once again. In mid-afternoon, the noise outside stopped. It became still. Eerily still. I thought the typhoon might be winding down early, but half an hour later it was howling once again. Perhaps the eye of the storm had passed. The wind lashed more fiercely than ever, and the lychee trees along the road behind my building bowed and bent this way and that, their tops swirling violently as if in a blender.

Alice called about this time to check in. They were all fine, she said, just going stir-crazy. She told me she'd call our supervisor in the English Department later to ask about the next day's classes. If I didn't hear from her, we'd be having class. I then called Lily just after four o'clock to ask about dinner. She hadn't thought much about it. The little takeout place near her had opened briefly for lunch, she said, but ran out of food. I asked her again if she wanted to come over. "Will I trouble you?" she asked. No. We then went round a bit over my wanting to come pick her up, but I said I'd be there in half an hour.

Lily had been coming to my literature class that semester, as she planned to take the entrance exam for a graduate program in English. Back at my place, she pulled out that week's reading—William Carlos Williams's short story "The Use of Force"—from her coat pocket and we reviewed the questions she had. Then we started dinner, my version of a Chinese stir-fry. It wasn't very authentic, but Lily was game to see what this foreigner would come up with. The natural light was dimming by this time, and I lit two candles to cook by. Lily stood at the wall by the sink, and we chatted about food in our respective cultures as I chopped and prepared.

It was quite dark by the time everything was ready. We brought the candles into the living room and talked some more as we ate. In the past, Lily said, it was polite for guests not to finish the dishes but to leave leftovers. People were poor and it was not right to eat all they had. But that was changing, as people had more money these days. I asked about Spring Festival and, while we ate the last of my Dove dark chocolate, she told me how her family typically spent the holiday. When she finished, the sound of the wind filled the apartment. She looked out the window at the moving shadows and said, "I think the trees must be sad." Then, after a pause, "I must go now. It's dark."

Again Lily didn't want me to accompany her, but I did. It was a bit hairier out in the dark, and debris covered the roads. I left her at the gate to her building, under the watchful eye of the guard in the little office, who was still there despite the storm. Back home, I sat down to do some writing. My shortwave radio provided a little news on CRI English and Radio Singapore before I changed the station to one with a child singing softly in Chinese. I wrote for a while by candlelight and then turned in. Damrey raged on.

#### IV.

MORNING LIGHT CAME GRADUALLY, through dreary gray skies. Lying in bed on this tropical island, I felt just as I had on long-ago winter mornings back in New England when I knew it hadn't snowed quite enough to cancel school. Since Alice never called, I assumed there were classes. I only had one morning class, but my lesson called for something I hadn't been able to print out. I got up and checked: still no power or water.

I rode my bike to class, passing lots of downed branches and debris, as well as several trees that looked as if they had been trampled. But the road behind my house had already been cleared and swept mostly clean, which surprised me. My students arrived on time or just a few minutes late. I think most were glad to get out of the dorms, and only a couple were absent. I told them I had broken my first rule of teaching: Never go to class in the morning without taking a shower. Then

I taught them the word *grungy*. We had most of my planned lesson, but instead of the activity I couldn't print out, I asked them to write a journal entry in response to two questions. *What did you do during the typhoon? How did you feel?*

After class, I dropped off my bag, grabbed my camera, and headed back out for a quick tour of campus on my bike. The morning had been cool, but toward noon the sun poked through and warmth began to return. Everyone was out cleaning up—workers, students, local residents. The last group might have been most effective, old men and women who regularly scoured every surface for firewood before most storms even ended, squirreling it away in storage units or under tarps on the roof. They bundled up twigs and shouldered limbs to shuffle home with. Turns out the bloody jungle was bloody efficient.

Back home, I had more coffee and began reading my students' journal entries. I worked all afternoon, stopping only for a lunch of noodles. Some students wrote about being bored all day in the dorms, while others were excited to have a break from classes. Most struggled a bit to express themselves in the mysteries of English grammar, but the meaning came through. The boredom of being cooped up trumped the boredom of classes for one girl, who concluded, "During the typhoon, I realized that go for classes is not boring but a happiness thing, and life is the most important thing on the world." They played cards, read books, listened to music, and sang with their classmates. A Lakers fan who had adopted the name Kobe for English class wrote, "The storm was crying loudly. I felt that all the things in the room were trembling. Is [it] that they're frightened like us?"

Some thought of the local villagers and the larger meaning of the storm. A boy called Jarry wrote about himself and his classmates, "We were happy on typhoon coming, but peasants were crying. They [had] no water, no food, and their house might had been damaged. We didn't offer help to them but laughing. What we had learnt in university? Did we just to get scores and take certificates?" A girl called Sweet wrote that she had gained courage from her roommates during the worst of the storm and resolved to be less timid in the future: "Yesterday it was my first time to undergo the typhoon. I hate the bad weather, but on the other hand, I had learnt something that not included in books."

This is what had kept me going during the difficult early months there: my students. From the start, they had been kind, curious, responsible, and enthusiastic. They looked after me in a sense, helping to translate and showing me the best places to shop. In class, they could be formal, applying the rigid and rote ways of learning they were used to. It was in the journals I used for my writing classes that they let their guard down a bit and I came to see them as individuals. Yet their entries about the typhoon could have been written by young people anywhere: a blend of bold and fearful, inspired and reflective. Above all, they had banded together to get through it.

One of my more cerebral students was Enze, a name he invented from the given names of two Chinese leaders he admired, [Zhou] Enlai and [Mao] Zedong. His journal entry pondered the power behind the storm:

During the typhoon, I was recording the time in my diary. It's the first time I met it. So I was excited. It made me know of Nature. I was writing my feelings. In my opinion, the typhoon was the symbol of strength. It was terrible and so perfect. He destroyed everything just for giving a birth to everything. He blowed so strongly that it seems horrible. I liked it and I laughed and I screamed. I sang in high voice in order to honour it. In my opinion, life could lost in it, but we can't only have bittery [bitterness]. We should think of human's behavior. What we can do is not to defeat the nature, but is cooperating with it.

After dinner that evening, I went back out on my bike as dusk came on. The air was fresh and cool as I rode down past the little supermarket and along East Lake to the village center. People gathered in restaurants that had generators, eating a late dinner or just having a snack. It looked cozy and full of camaraderie. I returned home to quiet and darkness and was in bed by eight. I knew it was too early, that I wasn't really tired, but I wanted to just lie there in the darkness until I fell asleep.

With no electronic distractions, my mind seemed unusually active. I lay awake for a long time, thinking about the past months and all I had experienced. Things were improving: I had a good friend in my fellow expat Alice, a least one

Chinese friend in Lily, and great students. And who knows? Maybe the shouts of “Helloooo!” had no meaning, but were just an example of the goofy Chinese humor I had caught glimpses of. Maybe I had been applying what Lin Yutang called the “stupid honesty” of Westerners, taking everything too literally. I did not know then that I would spend nearly seven more years in China—and it would change my life—but I did feel as if I had somehow turned a corner.

The middle school not far from me held night classes, though without electricity little studying could be done this night. Instead the students sang together in the dark, their voices drifting through my windows. I had just dozed off when I heard my refrigerator kick on and saw a glow on the wall from outside. The boy who lived on the first floor let out a whoop. And just as quickly we were plunged back into darkness. Groans followed. Ten minutes later, the power came back for good. The students in the school cheered and applauded like mad. I got up and stood at the window to listen to them, as lights in the building opposite slowly flickered on and burned blue through the tinted glass. ☯

## Morning Departure

by Cameron Morse

---

Roosters croak on the morning  
of our departure. Youqiong wears her hair wet  
in the new wrap, feet in rain

boots with drawstrings, an oriole perched  
in chrysanthemums on the scroll  
beside the door we close for the last time.

Only a few lights on in the window casements  
on the morning of our departure,  
only a few souls awake. Roosters hoarsen

in the gunmetal sky, taciturn mountain  
streets, shopfront where Lili slurps her last bowl  
of rice noodles in battery acid.

At the Six Plates of Water airport,  
I hold Theo's hand and walk him down the stairs,  
his two steps per stair equaling my one.

Reaching the bottom, we lurch between the up  
escalator's rolling rubber handrails. I pull him  
by the arm onto the step that lifts below us.

Again and again, we ride the escalator.  
We run circles around the store  
where shop girls stock shelves with bowls

of instant noodle, jars of pickled pepper.

Afterwards, I trade places with Lili and guard the carry-ons.

I take my seat among the waiting dead

who yawn at their smartphones and examine boarding passes,

while Theo's screams resound

in the marble concourse.