

VII



## Rice Farmers

A barefoot farmer guides an ox-drawn plow through a muddy rice field. The farmer orders the animal to turn when it reaches the edge of the plot, and the animal turns.

Another farmer watches his progress from the narrow bank of uncultivated land that divides the plots.

Blue-winged swallows weave in erratic patterns across the fields, their wings flashing in the late-day light.

The farmer working the plow says it takes about three hours to plow the rice paddy.

It's not very difficult work for me but it's hard for the animals, he says, the plowing really tires them out.

He says the hard work for other farmers and him starts a few weeks later when they transplant rice seedlings from an adjacent field to the plot he's plowing now.

They replant the seedlings a few weeks after Qing Ming, the day the villagers visit the village cemetery to pay respects to their deceased ancestors. Celebrated on a day determined by the lunar calendar Qing Ming generally falls in early April.

Transplanting the seedlings is probably the most difficult work the farmers will do all year, the farmer says. Your back and sides ache from bending so long over the plants.

This year the farmers are also worried about the weather. A drought this spring has forced them to postpone planting the sugarcane crop. The ground hasn't been moist enough to plant the small pieces of cane that will grow into new sugarcane plants.

Every day the farmers wake up to look and wait for the rain but the rain doesn't come.

The farmer says he's not worried about the rice fields because the lowland fields are always moist.

But if they can't plant the sugarcane by Qing Ming, the plants won't have enough time to grow properly, he says.

At this time of year the farmers work in the fields eight to 10 hours a day. Other times of the year farmers can slow down a bit, but not now, the farmer says.

The planting and the harvest times are the most demanding and critical for people who live off the land.

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The lowland fields stretch like a long riverbed between the village houses on one side and the highland fields on the other.

The highland fields, the farmers say, are not as fertile as the lowland fields.

The villagers are assigned plots in both the lowland and highland fields. The plots each family receives are determined by lottery.

The government leases the land to the farmers, who plant rice twice a year on much of it. The farmers pay a portion of the harvested rice as a tax and sell a portion to the government at a below-market rate.

The rice that remains belongs to the farmers. Families generally consume most of this, but they also have the option to sell some of it in the local market for cash.

To earn cash the farmers generally rely on their sugarcane crop, which is sold to the government and is the farmers' most profitable commodity.

Sweet potatoes grown by the farmers are fed to the animals, eaten by the villagers, or sold in the market.

A family of five that grows 2,000 jin of rice gives the government about 325 jin as a tax and

sells another 325 jin to the government at a below-market rate.

Each farmer must sell or give the government a total of about 130 jin of rice for each share of land he uses.

Most village families earn between 800 and 1,000 yuan a year. The farmers say overhead expenses eat away at their earnings, especially costly items such as a water buffalo and a cart.

A water buffalo costs about 1,500 yuan and a cart - used to transport produce, equipment, and people - costs about 600 yuan. For the villagers these are substantial sums.

A farmer says a water buffalo can work for about a decade before tiring. When the animal gets too old, the farmers sell it to a butcher for 800 to 900 yuan.

During the animal's lifetime the farmers set aside a portion of their earnings to finance the purchase of a new animal once their current one is too old to work.

The only tools the villagers need to cultivate the land are simple farming implements such as hoes and sickles.

The farmers have relied on these tools for hundreds of years, using no costly farm machinery to grow their crops.

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A woman stops by the side of the road to talk about the frustrations of earning a living as a farmer.

The farmers use fertilizer, cow manure, and human waste to fertilize their fields, she says.

Fertilizer can be bought in the Xiang store for about 120 yuan a year and lasts about a year. But the price keeps rising, she says.

The farmers also use insecticide to protect their crops from pests. Farmers whose fields aren't close to other plots sometimes don't have to use insecticide, but most of them use it and purchase it from the government.

If insects are going to be a problem in the area the government warns the farmers, she says.

Farming expenses keep rising and the government continues to raise the rice tax, she says.

The government has been paying the farmers more for their sugarcane crop but the villagers' rising profits have been offset by the higher rice tax.

The villagers are getting angry but they have no place to air their grievances, she says.

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It's not a question of liking or disliking the work, says a 36-year-old farmer. I was born to do this work.

He stands beside a threshing machine under a blistering July sun as members of his family harvest rice nearby.

It will take four days to harvest the rice, he says. They will harvest about 1,500 kilograms, which is a moderately good harvest.

The best crop would have been about 2,000 kilograms, he says. If his family had more workers, they could produce more rice and earn more money.

The farmer has four children and earns just enough to live on  $\frac{3}{4}$  neither more nor less.

He says he woke up today at 4 a.m. and will likely work until about 8 or 9 p.m. It's the busiest time of year so he needs to work long hours. His only break will be to take a lunch break at noon.

He says he wants his children to study hard in school so they can someday leave the countryside and find better-paying jobs in the city.

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Liang He Weng and his brother work steadily under the burning sun, feeding freshly cut rice plants into a foot-operated thresher.

Their sisters work nearby, harvesting the rice crop with small machetes, their backs bent low to the ground, their faces expressionless.

In one swift motion they slice the plants at the base and place them in a pile beside the threshing machine.

Up and down, up and down, cut and pile, cut and pile, their rhythm is steady, relentless.

The boys pick up the plants a bunch at a time and place them head first in the thresher, their fuzzy yellow heads shining in the sun. The archaic-looking machine shakes out the grain and collects it in a bag attached to the side.

The boys press a foot pedal and twist their torsos from side to side to help shake the grain out of the plant, moving like dancers in rhythm with the steady drone of the machine.

The brothers and sisters work non-stop, the girls slicing the plants and the boys threshing.

They work silently, intent on their task, locked inside their closed-in world, surrounded by a blinding light.

Liang He Weng wears a straw hat and a short jacket to protect his face and arms from the sun.

The work doesn't seem to tire him. He seems aloof, almost forgetful, as he labors under the burning sun.

It's not a question of liking or not liking the work, he says, it's just what we need to do to make a living.

We would like to leave the village to work in the city, he says, but the money must be good enough. There's no need to leave the village if the money isn't good enough.

Liang thinks he could find a job in the city, but he doesn't know what kind of job it would be. It wouldn't be worth leaving his family and the security of the village for life in a strange new city if the pay is too low, he says.

In the village, a farmer is his own boss. If the money isn't good enough, I'd rather stay in the village where I'm free to work when I want to, he says.

Our parents would be content to have just enough food to eat, he says, but we young people want to make more money and have a better future.

If it were possible, he and his brother would prefer to work as businessmen in the city, he says. Many of the village's young people feel the same way.

Some of the young people succeed in doing this, finding jobs and a place to live in the city, but others aren't so fortunate.

Some of the older people support their children's ambitions, but others just want them to remain in the village and work the land as they did.

Liang, who has 10 years of schooling, dropped out of school before the last stage of middle school.

He says he didn't do well enough to continue. Of the eight children in his family, one brother and three married sisters live outside the village now, he says.

Like their brothers, the two sisters also have dreams of a better life somewhere else.

No, I don't like the work, says the older sister, who is 24 now. The work is tiring. If I had a choice I wouldn't stay in the countryside - but I don't have many choices.

She says she has 10 years of schooling and no skills other than farming. I was born in the countryside and so must remain here, she says.

Her younger sister is even less optimistic. I want to have a good life, she says, but I think it's impossible.

I don't want to tell you my ideas because I don't think they will ever come true, she says.



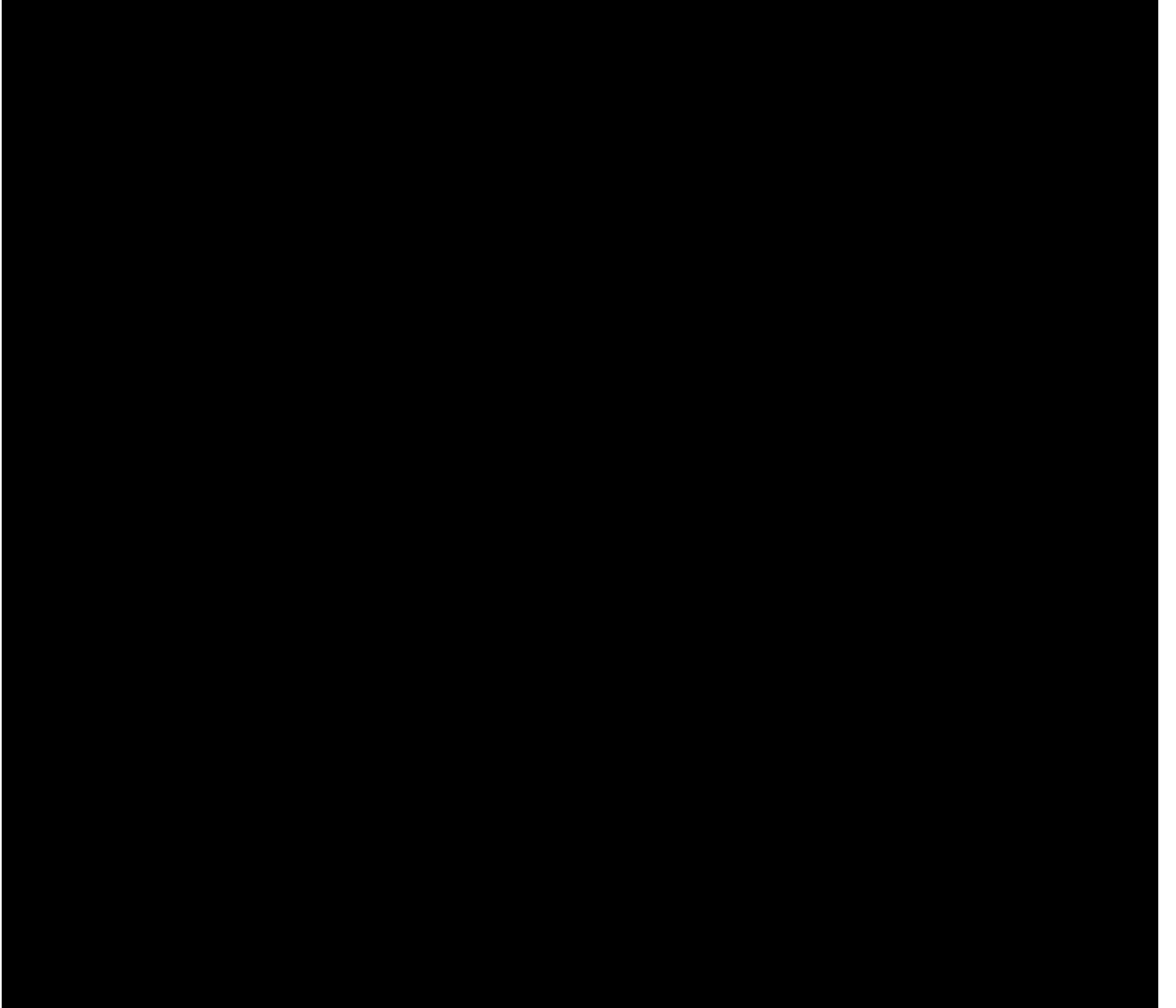








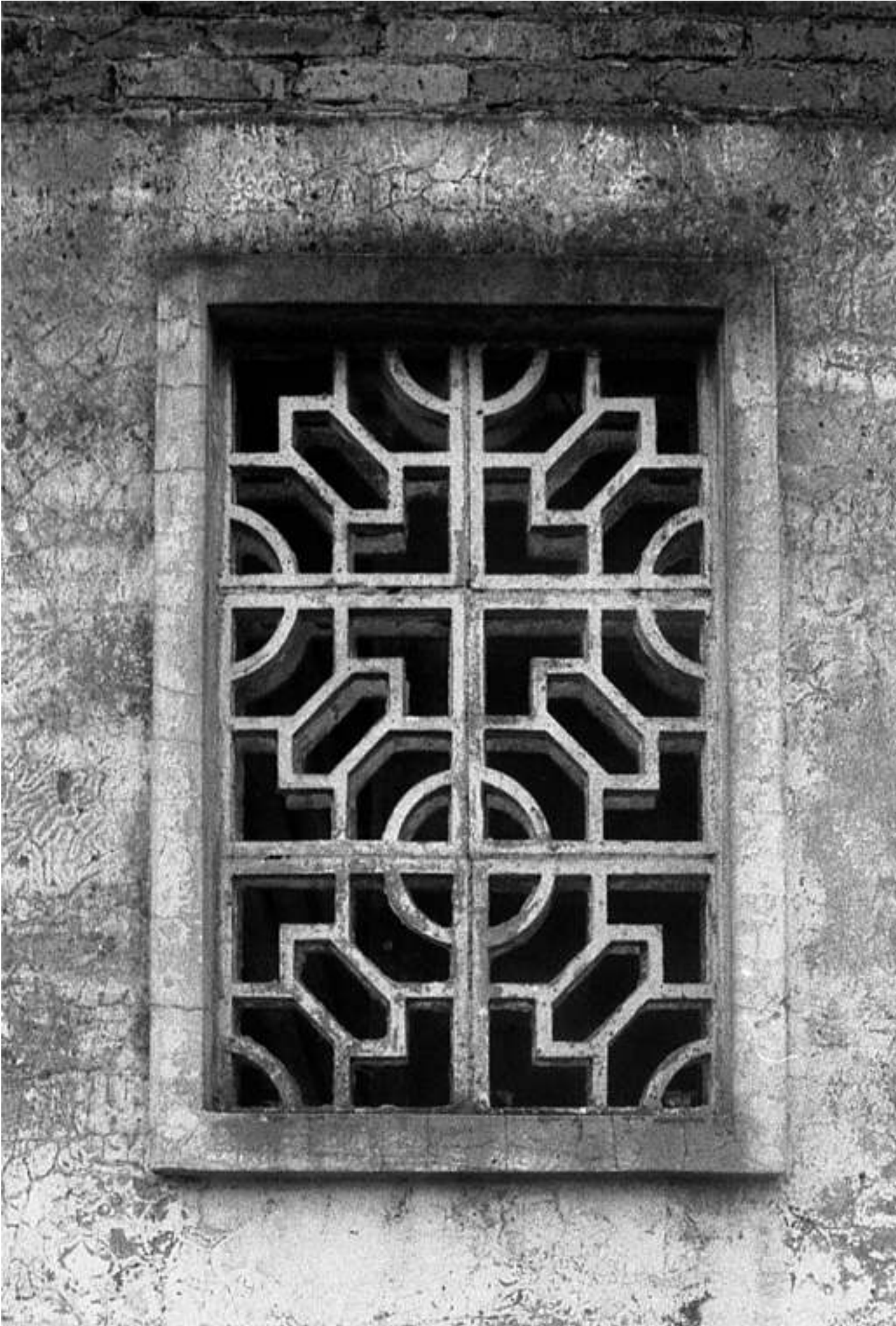


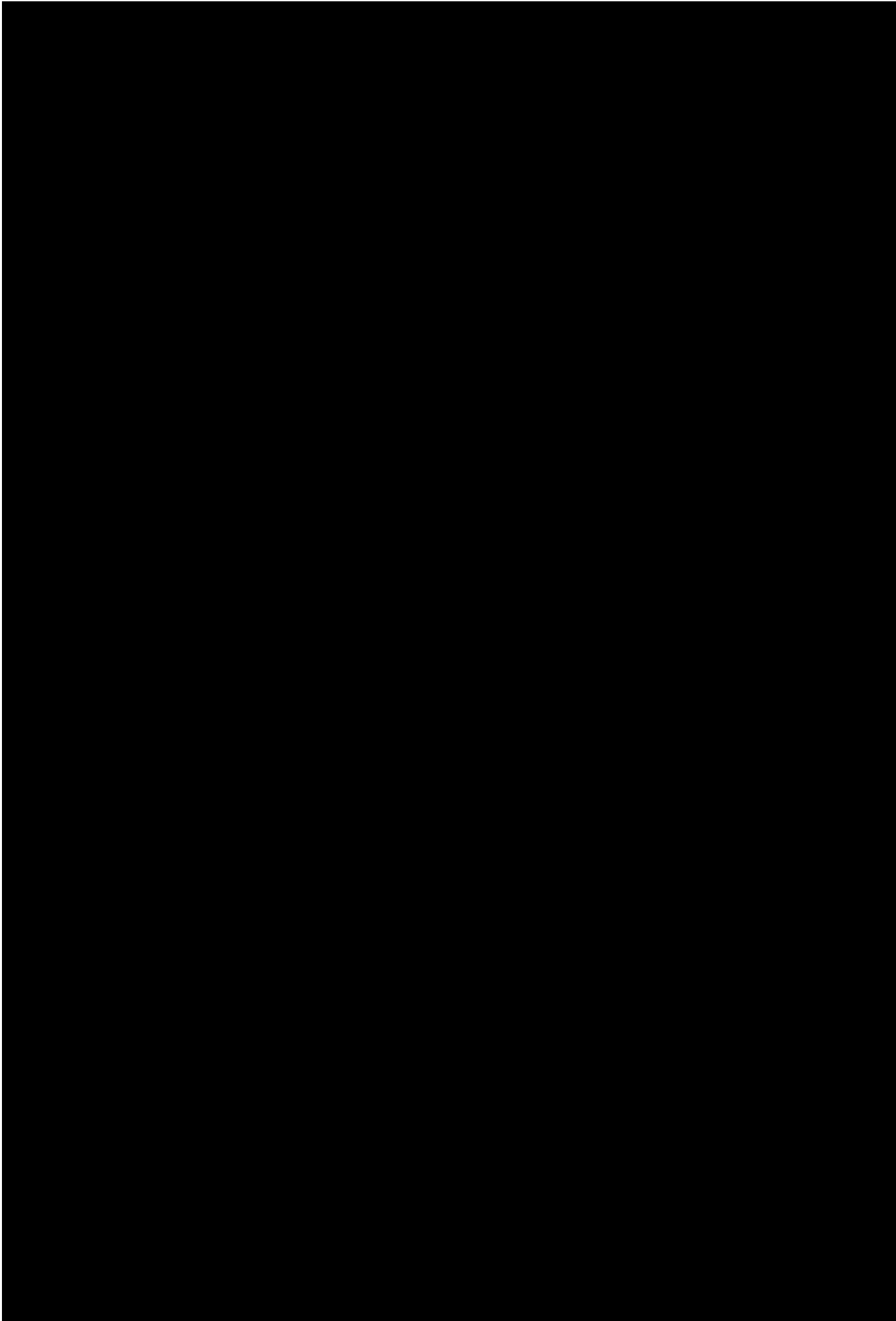














VIII



## Making Ends Meet

It's late afternoon and the living room of Liang Nan Tai's village house slowly falls into shadow. His small son and granddaughter play on the floor beside him.

As in most village houses, the living room is crowded with tables, chairs, farm tools, and bicycles. A bin filled with rice rests in the corner.

Family pictures and images clipped from outdated calendars cover the wall. There are landscapes, portraits of attractive women, and a collection of family snapshots inside a glass frame. Chickens roam freely through the house.

Two bedrooms branch off from the living room. The rooms are dark and crowded. Piles of clothes are scattered across the beds. Paper and cloth cover the room's small windows.

As you can see, he says, this house is old and I need to build a new one. I am building one not far from here. The total cost of the house will be 10,000 yuan.

He says he has saved about 7,000 yuan to build the house and will borrow the remaining 3,000 yuan from relatives.

His old house is so crowded that three of his sons must sleep every night at a neighbor's house, he says.

Liang Nan Tai has a big family: a wife, six sons (three are stepsons from his wife's first marriage), a daughter-in-law, and several granddaughters.

He says he must provide shelter for all of them in a house with a living room, a small kitchen, and two bedrooms.

When his neighbors began to complain about his sons staying in their house too long, he had no choice but to build a new house. He is hoping that building it will make it easier for him to find wives for at least some of his sons. One of his sons has a mental illness and won't be able to marry, he says.

Liang says he is always trying to find ways to earn more income. His son's wife, he says, often complains that the family doesn't have enough money.

One recent scheme to bring in extra money involved filling a metal tank with frozen fruit pops, strapping the tank to the back of his bicycle, and traveling through the countryside to sell his treats to children. He says his business earns him about three yuan a day.

He points to the tall bin of rice in the corner and says that having it there is more important to him than anything else.

Every night when I come home, I look at it and feel happy that we have enough rice to eat, he says.

Liang says his family eats mostly rice and sweet potatoes, but twice a week they also eat meat or fish.

A good life, he says, means having three good meals a day.

Village life is always precarious. In recent weeks the villagers have been worried about the drought that has hit Guangdong Province.

The sugarcane plants need a lot of rain in the early stages but there hasn't been much this month, Liang says. We don't know if we'll have a harvest in the fall because it hasn't rained for almost two months.

He says some of the sugarcane hasn't been planted yet because the farmers are afraid the land is too dry for it to grow.

He says the drought has created tension in the village. Farmers are arguing about the use of water from a village spring  $\frac{3}{4}$  arguing about who will take the water first.

Sometimes there isn't enough water and people fight over it, he says. Even brother has been arguing with brother.

Money is the greatest cause of turmoil for families in the village, Liang says. People are always arguing about how the family will spend it, whether they have enough money to buy what they need, and who is to blame if there isn't enough to support the family.

Sometimes family members get upset if other families have something they don't have, he says.

They immediately want what their neighbors have. It could be a TV, it could be new clothes.

He says he has a hard time satisfying his daughter-in-law, who constantly complains that the family doesn't have enough money.

To earn more money he recently tried to sell some of his sugarcane in Zhanjiang instead of Shuixi County. The Zhanjiang price is higher, he says, but the government requires Long Wan farmers to take their sugarcane to Shuixi.

The government officials caught him trying to sell it in Zhanjiang and ordered him to take it to Shuixi instead.

It's not easy making money in the countryside, he says. His sons know this and want to find work outside the village.

One son wanted to attend college but failed the college entrance exam. Attending college is one way to escape from the village, but most students don't do well enough in school to pass the exam.

If his son had passed the entrance exam, the government would have paid for his college education. If his son wants to go to college now he must pay for it himself.

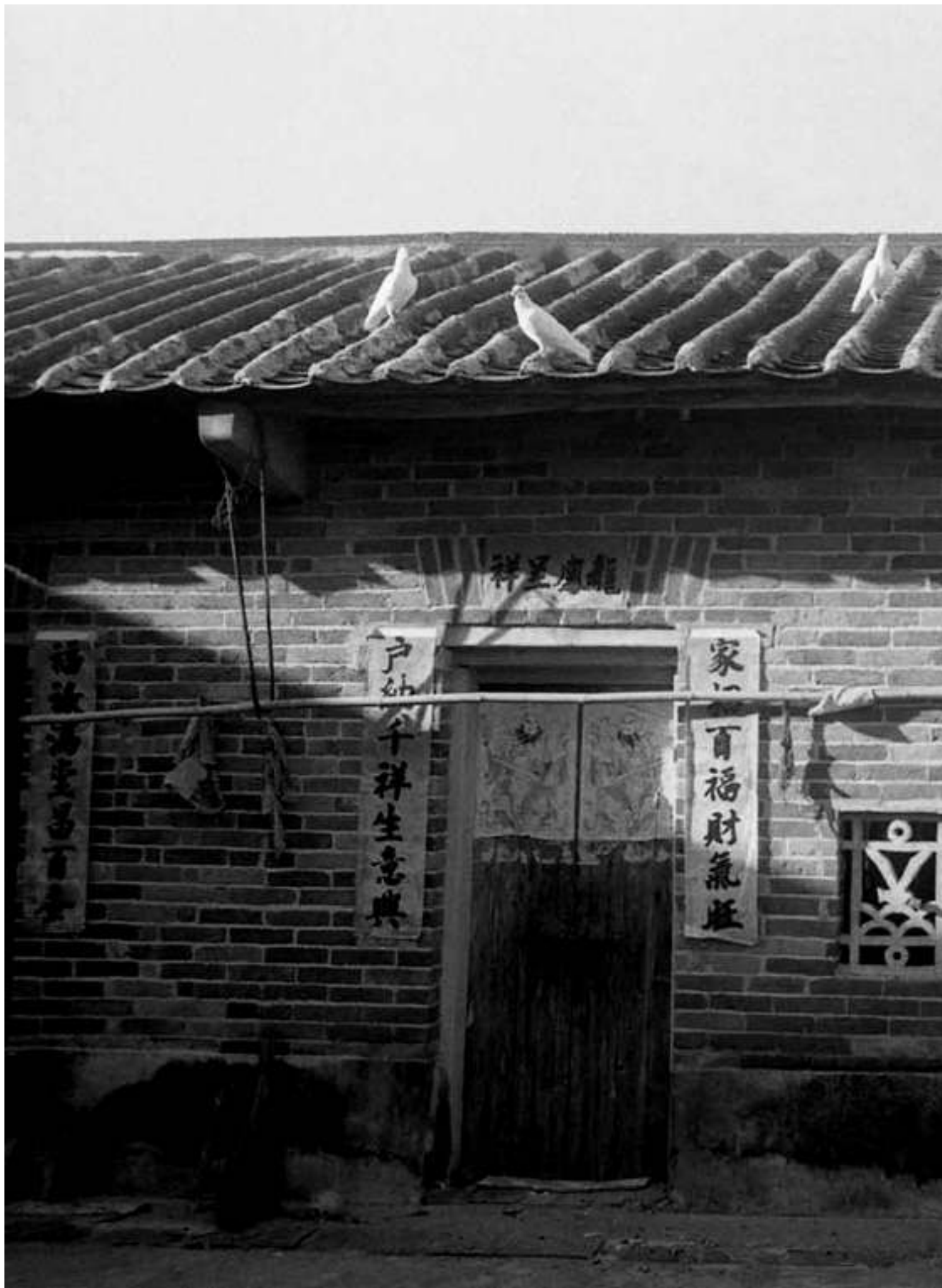
It would cost 2,000 yuan a year for three years to send his son to college, he says. I could build another house with that much money.

Liang Nan Tai says that overall his life hasn't been a happy one. His mother died when he was eight years old, and his father died two years later. Soon after his parents died his oldest brother came down with the measles and died.

Orphaned at an early age, Liang was very young when he started working in the fields and looking after the animals. He never attended school and can neither read nor write.

He had four brothers but all of them have died. He feels very alone in Long Wan now. Life in the village is complex, he says. I don't have anyone to defend me. The other villagers look down on me, so how can I be happy?





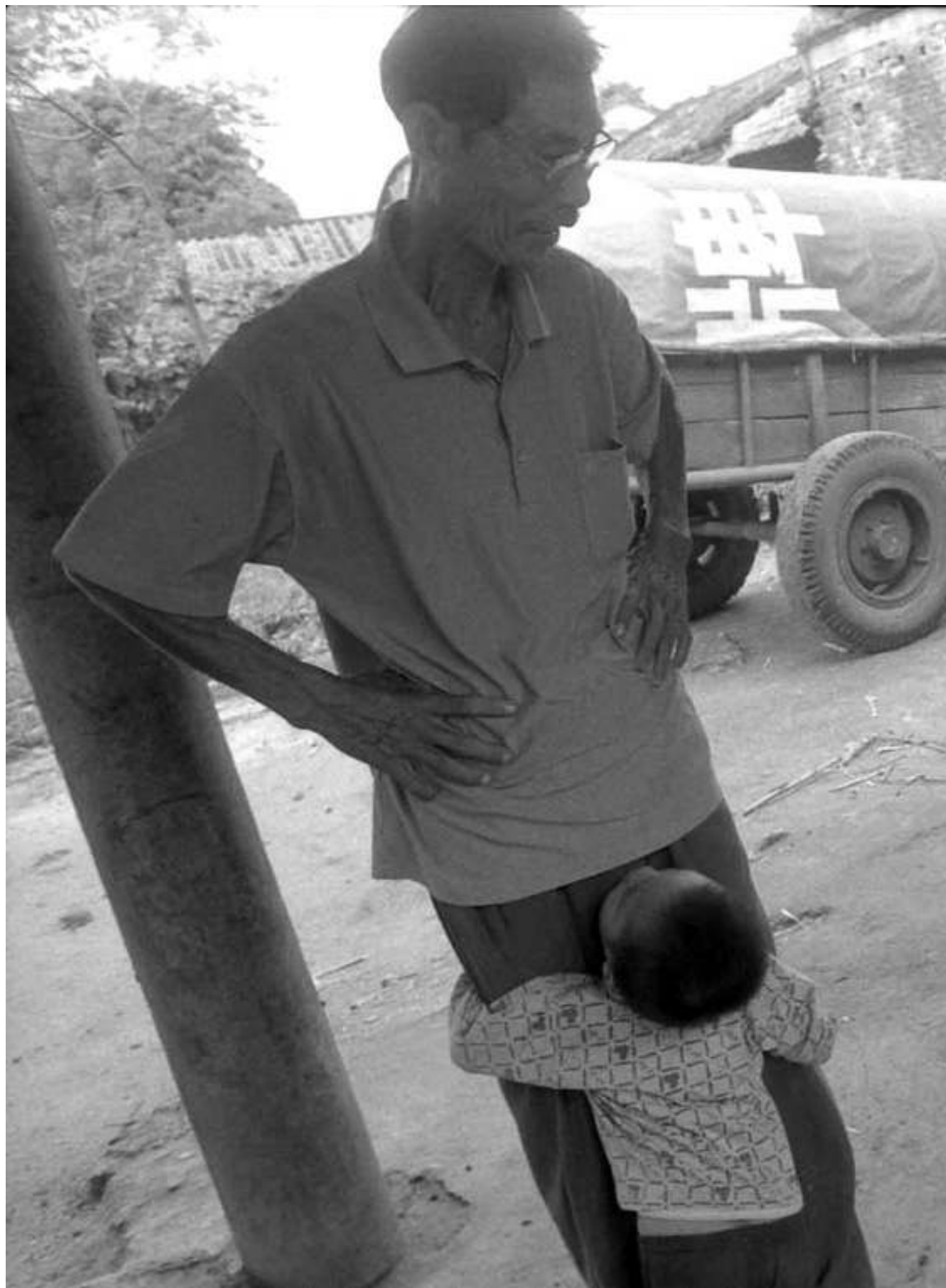
祥呈慶龍

家  
百福財氣旺

戶  
幼千祥生意興

福  
源萬室昌百壽

















好旧岁人財並

接新年富貴齊





新春吉庆

庆云叠叠腾空

喜事重重进宅来

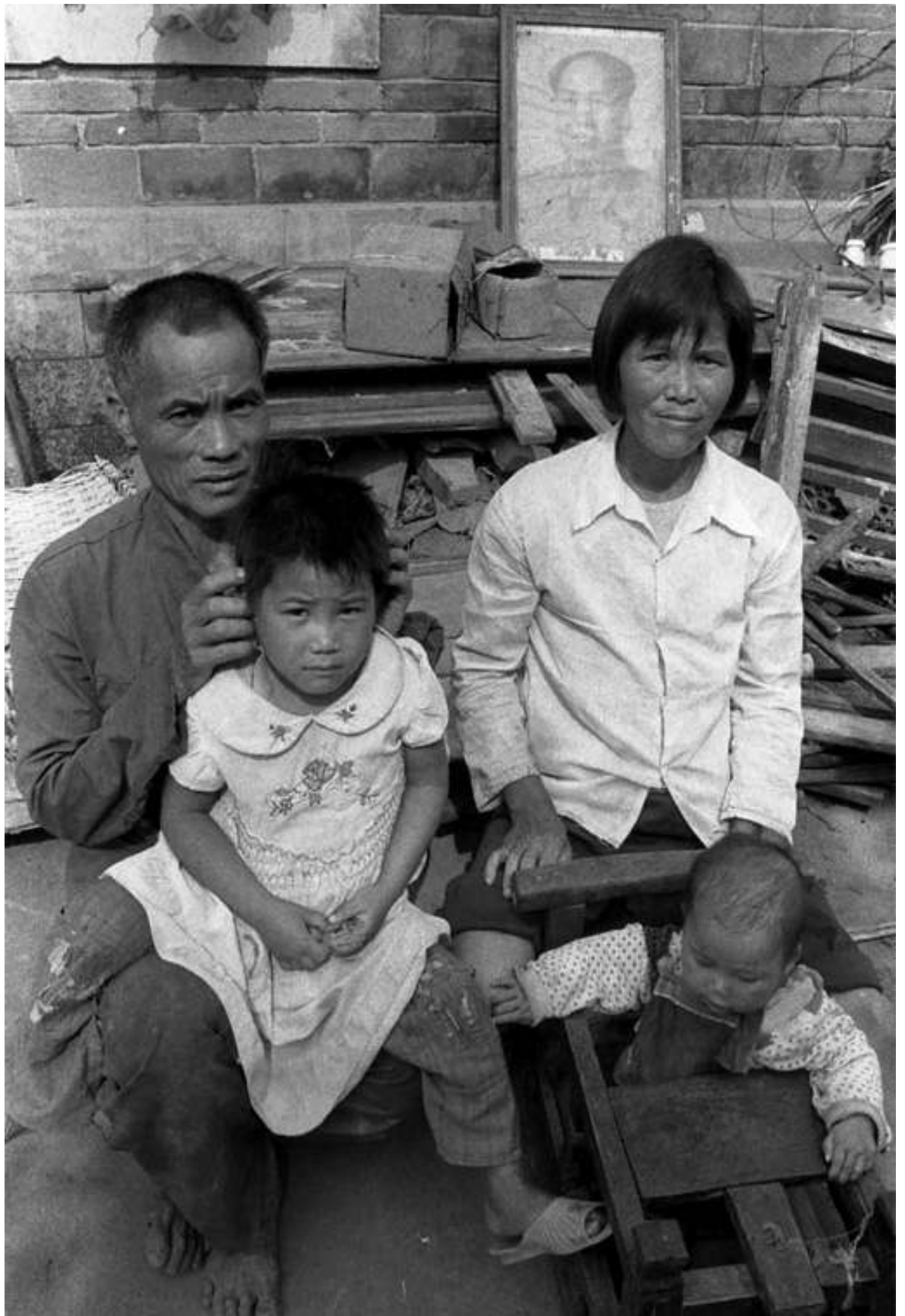








IX



## A Raid on Long Wan

A middle-aged villager walks his bicycle down a narrow village lane. He's eager to talk with someone about what happened in Long Wan last night.

While the villagers were sleeping, carloads of cadres  $\frac{3}{4}$  some carrying guns  $\frac{3}{4}$  made a surprise raid on the village. The cadres came to seize men and women who had violated the country's one-child-per-family birth-control policy.

The villager says about 40 people were detained by the authorities last night. No one knows where the villagers were taken, but many believe that at least some of the captured people will be forced to have a sterilization operation.

The villagers were angry when the cadres entered the village, but they didn't try to stop them. In nearby Mao Village, the farmers threw stones at the cadres, but in Long Wan no one lifted a finger against them.

The villager says that farmers seized by the authorities are usually not allowed to return to the village for a week. He is especially concerned this time because his nephew was seized in the raid.

He is also worried about the fate of his son, whose wife has given birth to two daughters but has yet to bear a son.

Although he is eager to tell his story, a neighbor warns him that talking about what happened last night - especially with a foreigner - could get him into trouble with the authorities.

But the farmer says, No, it's important for people outside China to know what is happening in Long Wan.

He says the needs of the villagers are never taken into account when the officials try to enforce the country's birth-control policy.

Having children, he says, is what the villagers live for and one of the few events that bring real joy to their otherwise harsh lives.

Look at the pigs, he says, even the pigs like to have a lot of babies, the more babies the better.

In a nearby house, last night's raid still resonates. A child sobs as his mother quietly tries to calm him. The child's uncle says he's crying because he misses his father, who was detained by the cadres last night.

The child was in the house when the officials arrived and was frightened by what happened. The boy's father already has three children, so the officials will force him to have an operation, the uncle says.

When the cadres came to the village last night, they took away people who had three children. In the past the villagers have been allowed to have at least two children, the uncle says.

When the cadres identify a family with too many children, the husband or the wife must have an operation; in this family, it was the husband who agreed to leave with the cadres.

The uncle says that although his older brother was lucky and already has two sons, he still wanted a daughter. If he had a daughter, he could someday trade her to another family to get a wife for his son.

The recently married uncle is bitter about last night's raid because he too would like to have three or four children.

If a farmer has only daughters, the uncle says, who will take care of him when he grows old? When the parents grow old they rely on their children for support. The daughter will live with her husband's family in another village, but the son and his wife will live in his parents' home to help care for them.

What would happen, he says, if he had only one son and his son's wife hadn't any brothers? His son would have to care for four elderly people  $\frac{3}{4}$  his parents and his wife's parents. This would be too great a burden for one couple.

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She walks through the fields with a set of panniers hanging from her shoulders. The reed baskets at either end of the long pole are filled with vegetables harvested from the lowland fields.

The woman is taller than other village women and strikingly attractive. She hasn't the worn out look many farmers have from spending long hours working under the fierce southern sun.

She enters her courtyard and fills a basin with water. She picks up her children's soiled clothing and starts to scrub them. A portrait of Chairman Mao gazes down from the wall behind her as she works.

Her life so far has been a good one, she says. She has a hardworking husband who seldom needs her to help him out in the fields. Most of her life now is spent at home cooking and cleaning for her children. Raising her three boys and a girl has been the focus of her life, she says.

Although she would like to have more children, it's impossible now. The cadres ordered her to have a sterilization operation and she agreed to their request. She can no longer have children even though she still wants to have them.

She says her childbearing years started off auspiciously because her first child was a boy, which is what most villagers hope for when they start to have children.

But after the birth of her second child, which was also a boy, the cadres ordered her to use an IUD to prevent additional pregnancies. She says the birth control device worked effectively, but she still felt the need to have more children.

When her sons went off to school the house was suddenly quiet...too quiet, she says. She missed having a house filled with children.

Then, one day she was walking in Zhanjiang when by chance she found a baby girl on the street. The child's parents had apparently abandoned her because they wanted to have a son rather than a daughter.

She picked up the child and took her home. At about the same time, her birth control device failed and she mysteriously became pregnant again. After giving birth to a third son, the authorities stepped in and forced her to have a sterilization operation.

She says she feels no bitterness toward the cadres for forcing her to have the operation. If it were possible she would continue to have children, but she knows it's out of the question now.

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Liang Zhe bends over a basin scrubbing clothes in her village home. Her granddaughter lies wrapped and sleeping in a harness on her back.

Watching over her and the family from the living room wall is a portrait of Mao Zedong. Mao is like a god, she says. Having his picture on the wall will bring the family good luck.

Liang Zhe says she was 17 years old when she married her husband and arrived in Long Wan. It was before Liberation when the village was very poor. She had wanted to marry a city man but wasn't beautiful enough to attract one, she says.

Instead she married a Long Wan farmer and very quickly began to have children. There was never enough food but there were more than enough children, she says.

Daughter followed daughter until she had five of them. On her sixth attempt she finally gave birth to a son, the father of the child sleeping on her back today.

Liang Zhe says she understands why villagers prefer to have sons rather than daughters. Sons are always there to help their parents with the farm work. When sons marry, they remain in the village and continue to live with their parents, just as her son does now. A daughter marries outside and moves to another town or village.

Sons make a family feel more secure, she says. If there is trouble in the village, a son will be there to protect the family. If a family has sons, other villagers will be less likely to take advantage of them.

Liang Zhe says that ideally she would have preferred to have two sons and two daughters. She says it's unlikely that anyone in the village could have such a family now. If they try to have more than two children they will get into trouble with the local authorities, she says.

Just the other day the cadres raided the village to collect people who had violated the country's birth-control policy, she says. They came in the middle of the night and dragged off "half-naked" people.

The people were so angry, she says. The cadres didn't even give them a chance to dress. They went to the home of one young man who lived alone with his mother. When they knocked on his door and nobody answered, they broke down the door and seized him.

He said: Why did you do that? What does this have to do with me? They said they didn't like his attitude and dragged him away with the others.

They are just like emperors, she says, they do what they want and you can't stop them.

She says she's sure the Central Committee in Beijing wouldn't have approved of their behavior if they had known about it.

This is not the way government officials are supposed to act towards the people, she says. She believes that some members of the raiding party were from Huang Lue, a nearby village. The people in that village are murderers, she says.

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Fines, abortions, and forced sterilization are the most common methods used by the government to control families who have violated the country's one-child-per-family birth-control policy.

One villager says fines for bearing an extra child are at least 1,000 yuan <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> a sum that most farmers barely earn in a year from their work.

One 15-year-old girl complains that she was forced to leave school to help her family out at home in part because of a 1,000-yuan fine imposed on her parents for having an additional child.

The villagers say that farmers who have two or more children are detained in the twice-annual raids. The villagers say the cadres arrive with a list of people they plan to detain and order violators to provide documents certifying that they have been sterilized or are using birth-control devices. Those in danger of being detained often flee when the cadres arrive.

In addition to the cadres, people from area work units (banks, offices, and government departments, for example) also take part in the raids - many unwillingly, says one city resident. One woman in Long Wan says farmers from other villages also participate in the raids.

The villagers are taken to an undisclosed location and given lectures on the benefits of the birth-control policy. The officials try to persuade them that a sterilization operation or an abortion is the best choice for them.

The villagers are not allowed to return home until either the husband or the wife has agreed to an operation or an abortion, though they are not - in theory at least - forced to have the procedures.

One woman says that cadres advise couples with a girl and a boy to stop having children and to practice some form of birth control. They don't force anyone in the family to have an operation but may urge the woman to use an intrauterine device.

If a couple has two boys and neither partner is practicing birth control, the husband or wife may be a candidate for an operation. If a man and woman have three children - regardless of the combination of boys and girls - and aren't practicing birth control, they may also be targeted for an operation.

The Chinese government believes its birth control program is in the best interests of the Chinese people given the country's bloated 1.2 billion population.

Many educated city-dwellers believe that a birth control policy is necessary in a country with the world's largest population, but even they think couples should at least be able to have two children.

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A village woman sits in a neighbor's courtyard nursing her son. A fierce tropical wind blows in from the sea but the wind doesn't disturb her.

She seems happy and content today, not worried about life the way so many villagers often are.

The child she holds to her breast is her third child, she says, and it will be her last. After the child was born the cadres came to her home and told her she would have to go to the hospital to have a sterilization operation.

She accepted their decision and had the operation. She says she doesn't regret it as some women do.

Three children are enough, she says. It's not healthy for a woman to have too many children. Childbearing takes its toll on a woman's body.

But some village women believe that a sterilization operation harms the body.

Women who have been sterilized are incapable of doing heavy work in the fields, says Zheng Yu Mei, a middle aged farmer. Many women don't want to have the procedure because of this.

If you want to do the farm work, the family needs at least two sons, she says. The government shouldn't be forcing the villagers to be sterilized, especially if they can support the children they have.

She says many women flee from the village and hide in a city or another village to avoid having an operation.

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A young woman stands in the doorway of her father's village house. She lives with her husband and children in a nearby village but has returned to her hometown to escape from the authorities.

She says the cadres in her husband's village have ordered her to have a sterilization operation to keep her from giving birth to another child.

She says she is determined to have one and has refused to follow their order.

She says she has already given birth to two children and both were sons, which is what most villagers hope for.

But she still wants a daughter.

As the mother of two sons, she knew it was only a matter of time before the authorities would pressure her to be sterilized. Her only option was to flee from the village before they caught her, she says.

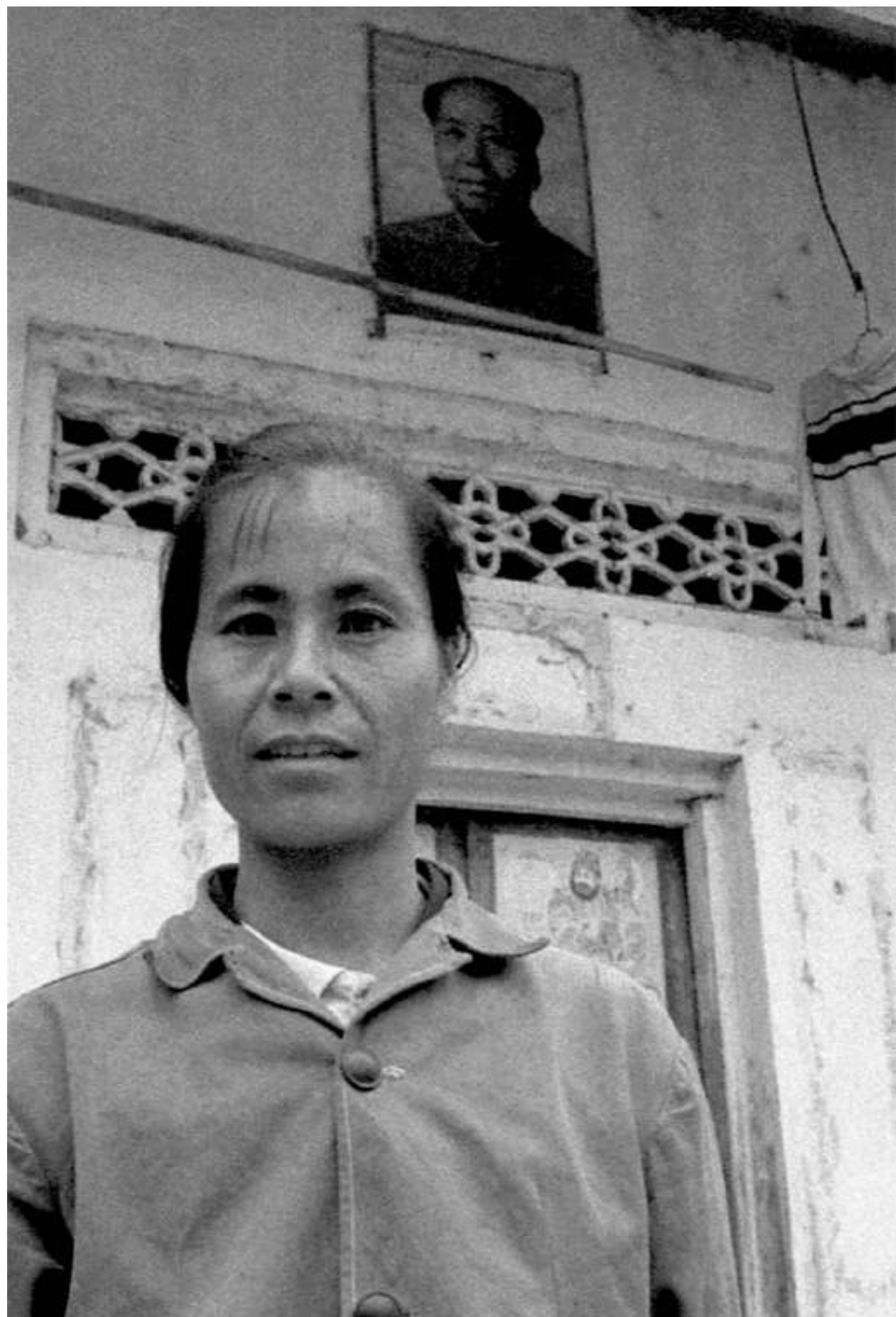
When the authorities finally came knocking on her door, the couple had already left the village.

She says they knew the authorities were going to force one of them to have an operation, but neither of them was willing to have one.

She says her only hope now is to elude the authorities long enough to give birth to a daughter.

If the cadres catch up with her, she'll have no choice but to go through with the operation, she says. She will accept her fate and give up her dream of having a daughter.



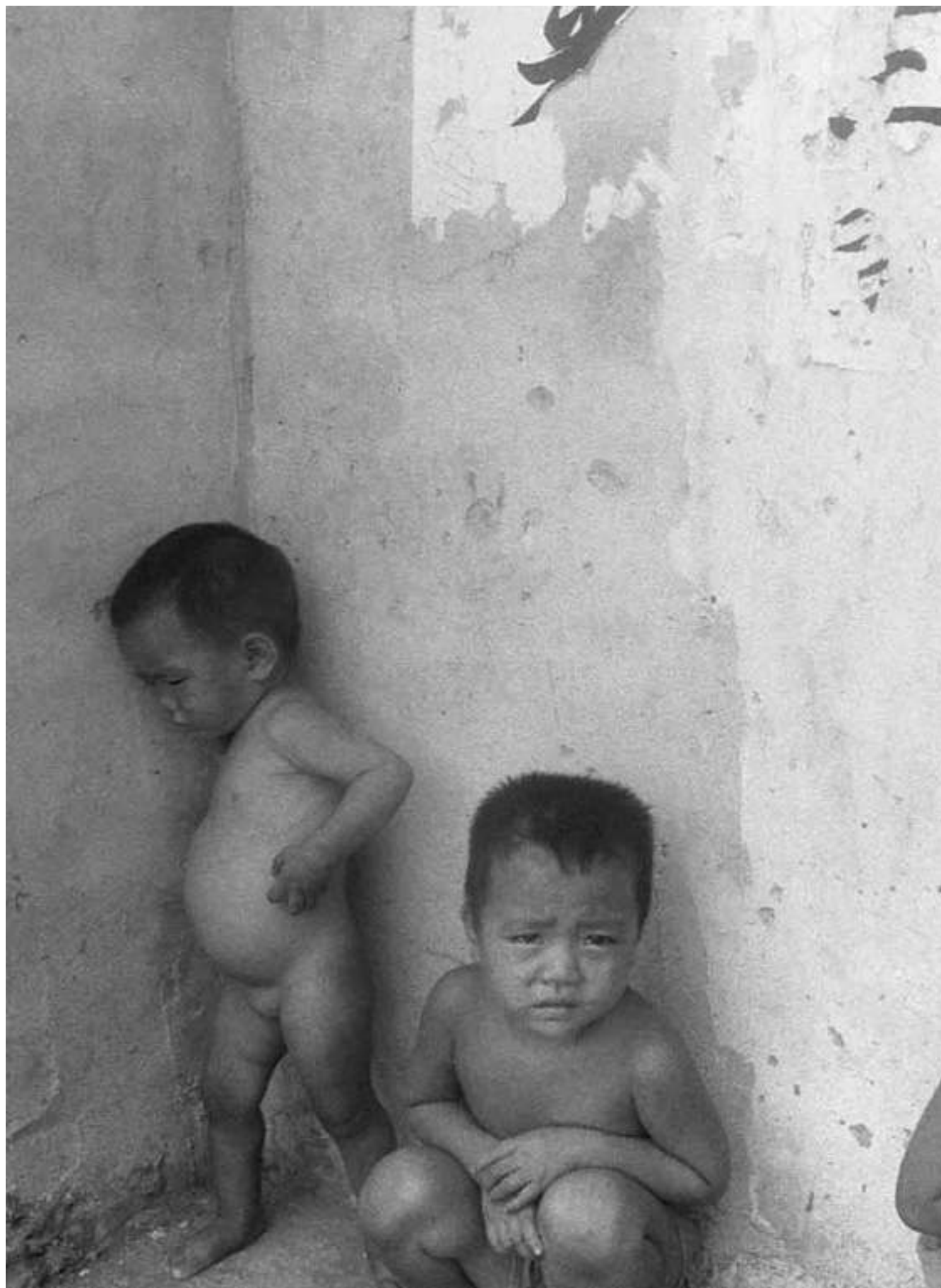




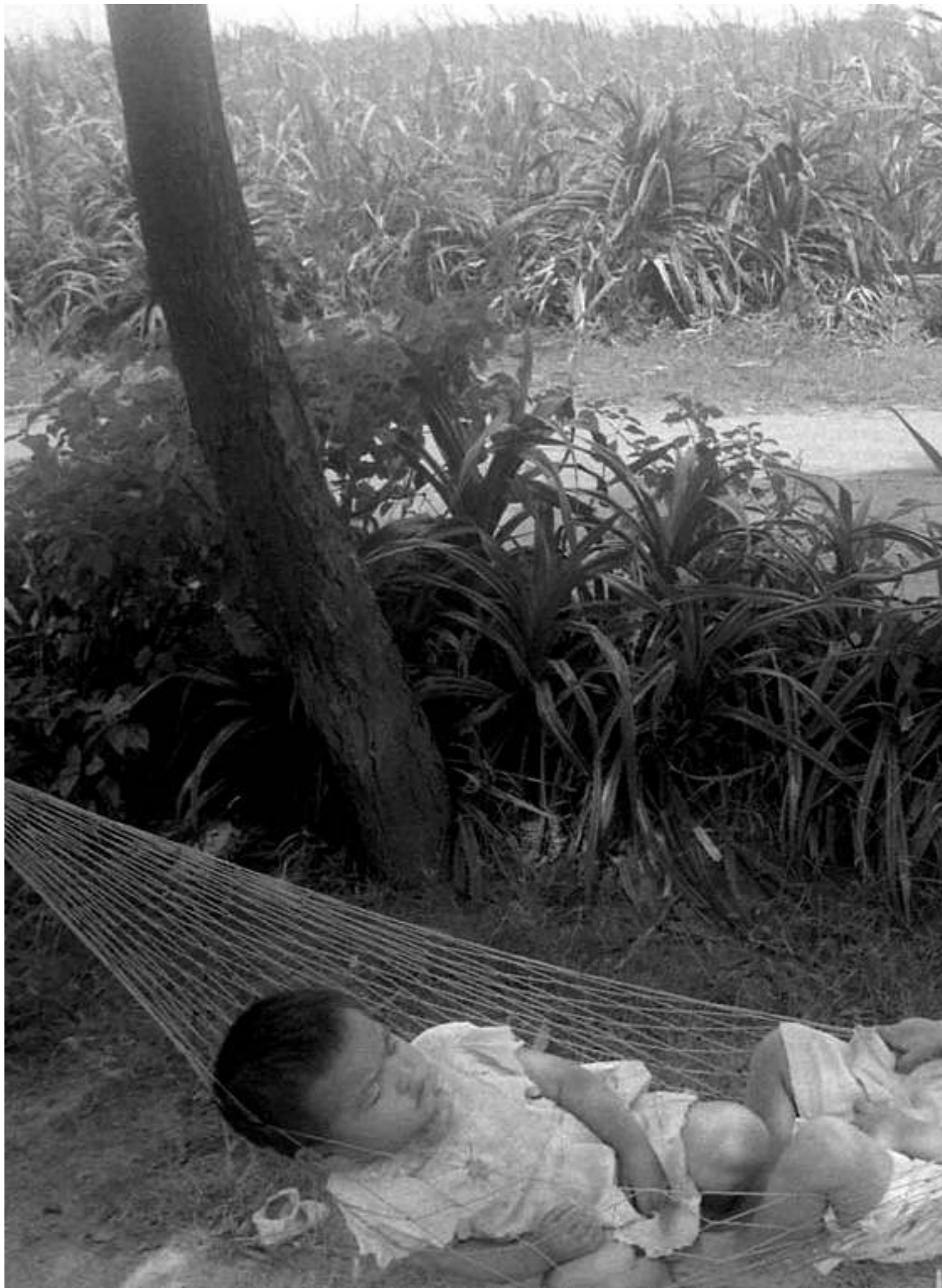














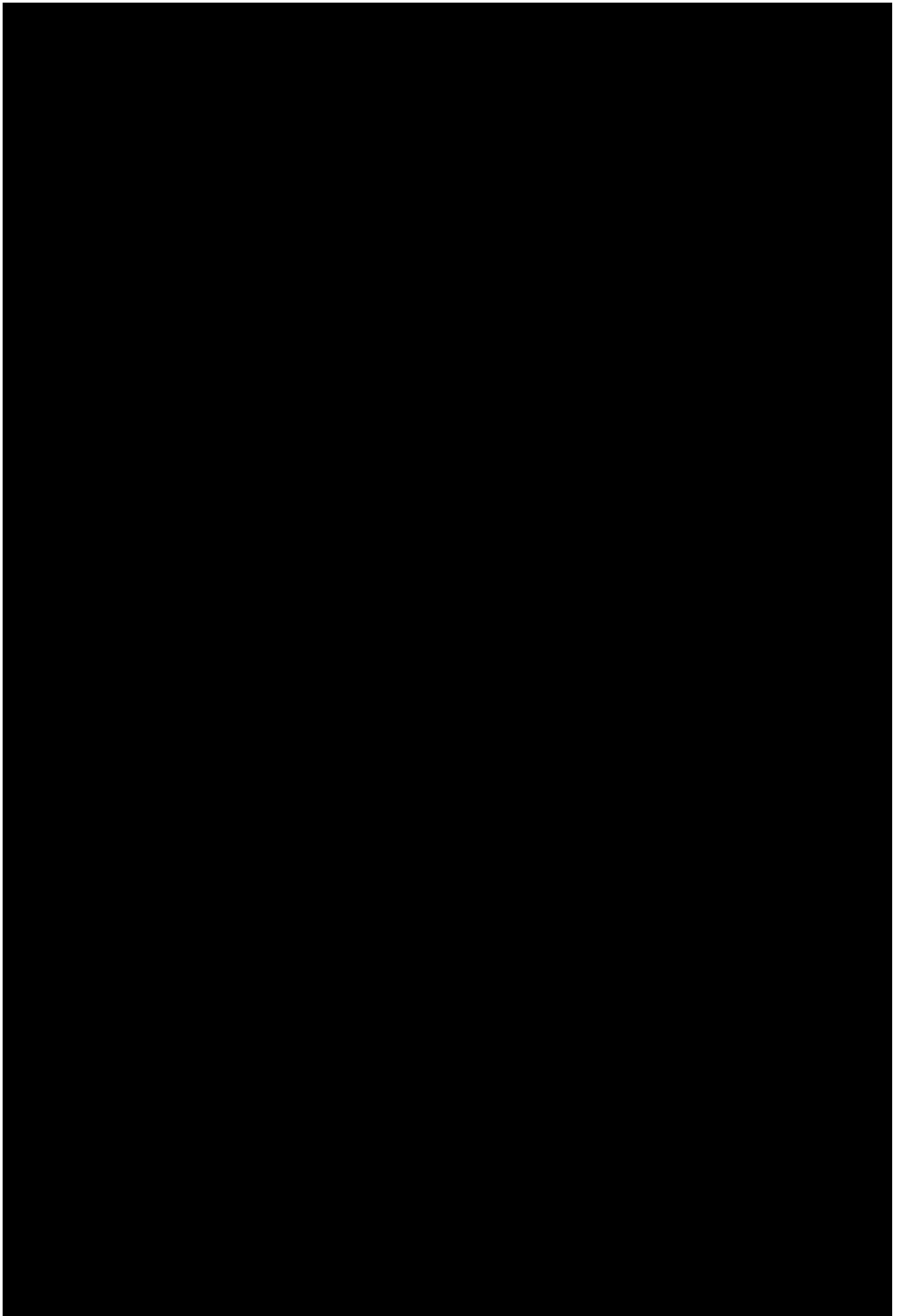












X





# The Village House

A typical village house is made of brick and stucco. From a distance, its reddish brown color blends almost seamlessly into the landscape.

In earlier times village homes were made of adobe and thatch, but only a handful of old-style houses remain.

A village house generally has four rooms: a living room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen. The front door is made of wood and opens onto the living room, which is the most lived-in room of the house.

The villagers often attach long strips of red paper printed with large black Chinese characters to the exterior walls of their homes.

Attached either above or on either side of the door, these scroll-shaped writings are called New Year's couplets and express the family's hopes for the coming year. Every New Year, the villagers replace last year's couplets with new ones.

The couplets express hope for wealth and health - especially for children  $\frac{3}{4}$  in the coming year.

Also attached to the exterior of the front door is a picture of Guang Gong, a famous Chinese general who lived about 1,000 years ago.

Guang Gong is a symbol of strength and virtue. The villagers attach his image to the front door to protect the house from intruders.

The living room is perhaps the most important room of the house. Members of the family rest and receive visitors, eat and watch television there.

In 1990, only about 20 families in Long Wan were able to afford the 2,000 yuan cost of a television, which is more than many villagers earn in a year.

The television is a cherished possession for villagers lucky enough to have one. It is placed in a highly visible position in the room and is usually protected by a cloth cover when not in use.

The villagers put much effort into effectively displaying their televisions, almost turning them into shrines.

The living rooms of many village houses are disorderly, crowded with tables, chairs, bicycles, cabinets, loose vegetables, and bins of rice.

The walls are covered with pictures clipped from old calendars, usually pictures of stylish women or Chinese opera performers dressed in brightly colored costumes.

There are also landscapes and pictures of soldiers and animals. A collection of family snapshots is often placed in a picture frame hung on the wall.

One of the most popular wall decorations in the living rooms of village homes is a portrait of Mao Zedong. Many villagers believe that Mao's presence on the wall brings good luck. Like Guang Gong's picture on the front door, Mao's god-like image protects the family from evil influences.

Many villagers also attach small octagonal mirrors with brightly colored frames above the front door. Like the pictures of the heroic figures attached to the door and walls, the mirrors are meant to ward off evil influences.

If a family lives close to a family that has recently experienced bad luck or if the feng shui (wind-water) conditions around the house are considered inauspicious, the mirror will help keep unwholesome influences out of the house.

The bedrooms are on either side of the living room and are often unlit and a little disheveled;

clothing is often piled on the beds or hanging from the walls and doors.

The villagers sleep on wooden beds with rattan mats instead of mattresses. Mattresses are expensive and uncomfortable on warm Lei Zhou nights.

Children often sleep with their parents until they are six or seven years old  $\frac{3}{4}$  in some cases into their teens.

Where the children sleep often depends on how much room the family has in the house. Brothers often share beds with brothers, sisters with sisters.

The kitchen is usually a small room attached at a 90-degree angle to the house. Some of the kitchens are detached from the main body of the house.

Like the bedrooms, kitchens tend to be dark and a little disorderly. Soot and mildew cover the walls.

Cooking is done on a simple stove - usually a concrete platform that holds a wok or cooking pan. Cooking fuel is positioned at the base of the concrete platform. The fuel is usually dry leaves and the stalks of sugarcane and other crops.

Hanging from the kitchen walls are large reed pan covers used to steam food.

The villagers don't expend much effort trying to keep the kitchen clean because they don't spend much time there.

The villagers wash themselves in the kitchen but they don't eat there.

Some houses have a separate dining room, but most do not. People generally eat at a table in the living room.

The courtyard — the open space at the front of the house — is one of the most heavily used parts of a village house.

New houses sometimes have a wall enclosing the house and courtyard but older houses do not.

The courtyard is often the center of family activities. In the courtyard, children play with their friends, parents sit on small stools and chairs to chat with neighbors, and mothers and grandmothers wash clothes and vegetables.

Although some villagers still use a rope and pail to draw water from a village well, most get their water from a faucet in the courtyard. Long Wan's running water is drawn from a well in nearby Mao village.

Village houses do not have bathrooms. To use the toilet the villagers walk to public lavatories in a building along the lane.

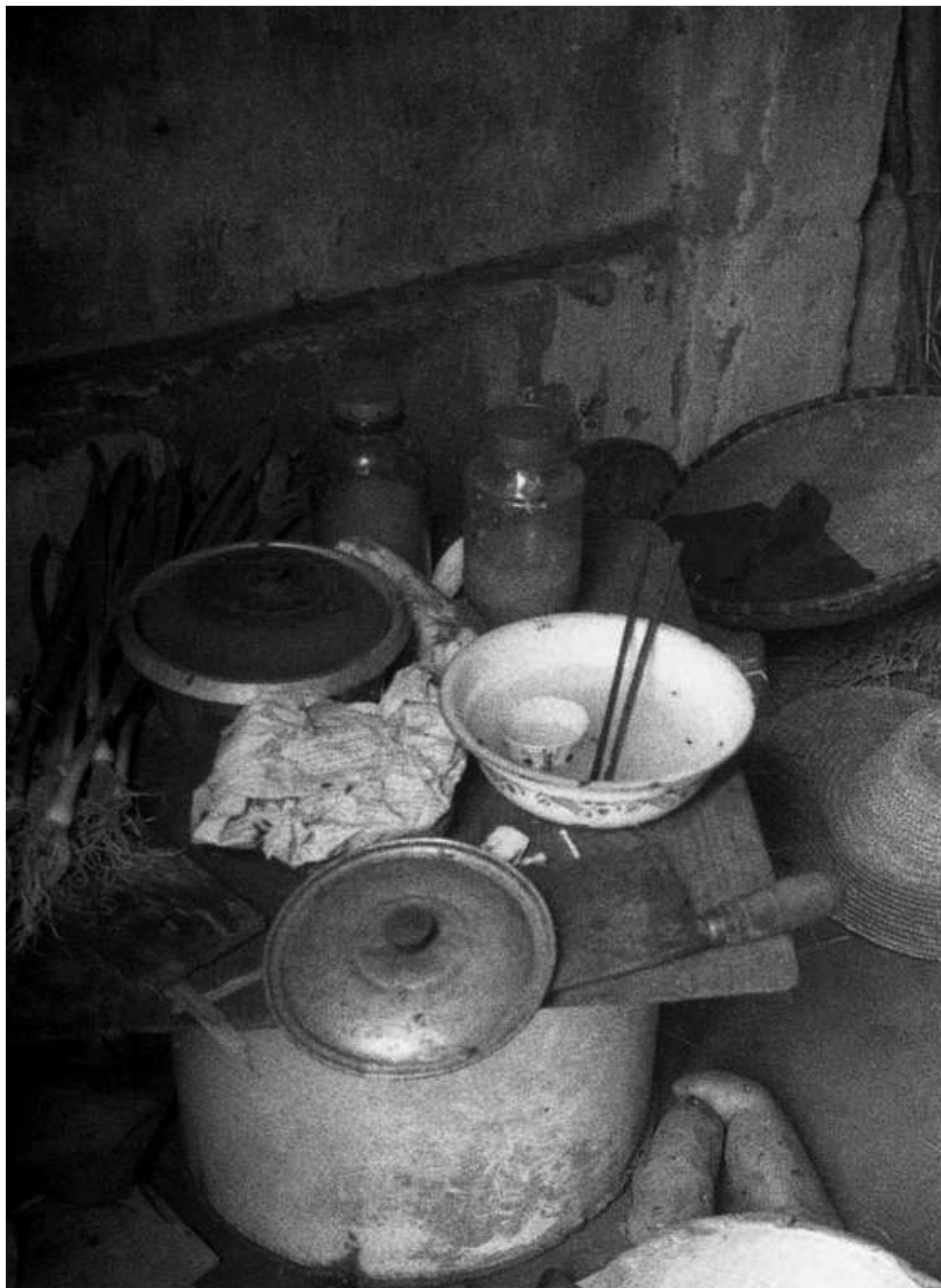
Villagers take turns cleaning these outhouses and use the waste as fertilizer in village fields.

於今展闢殖民地

衣冠交杯



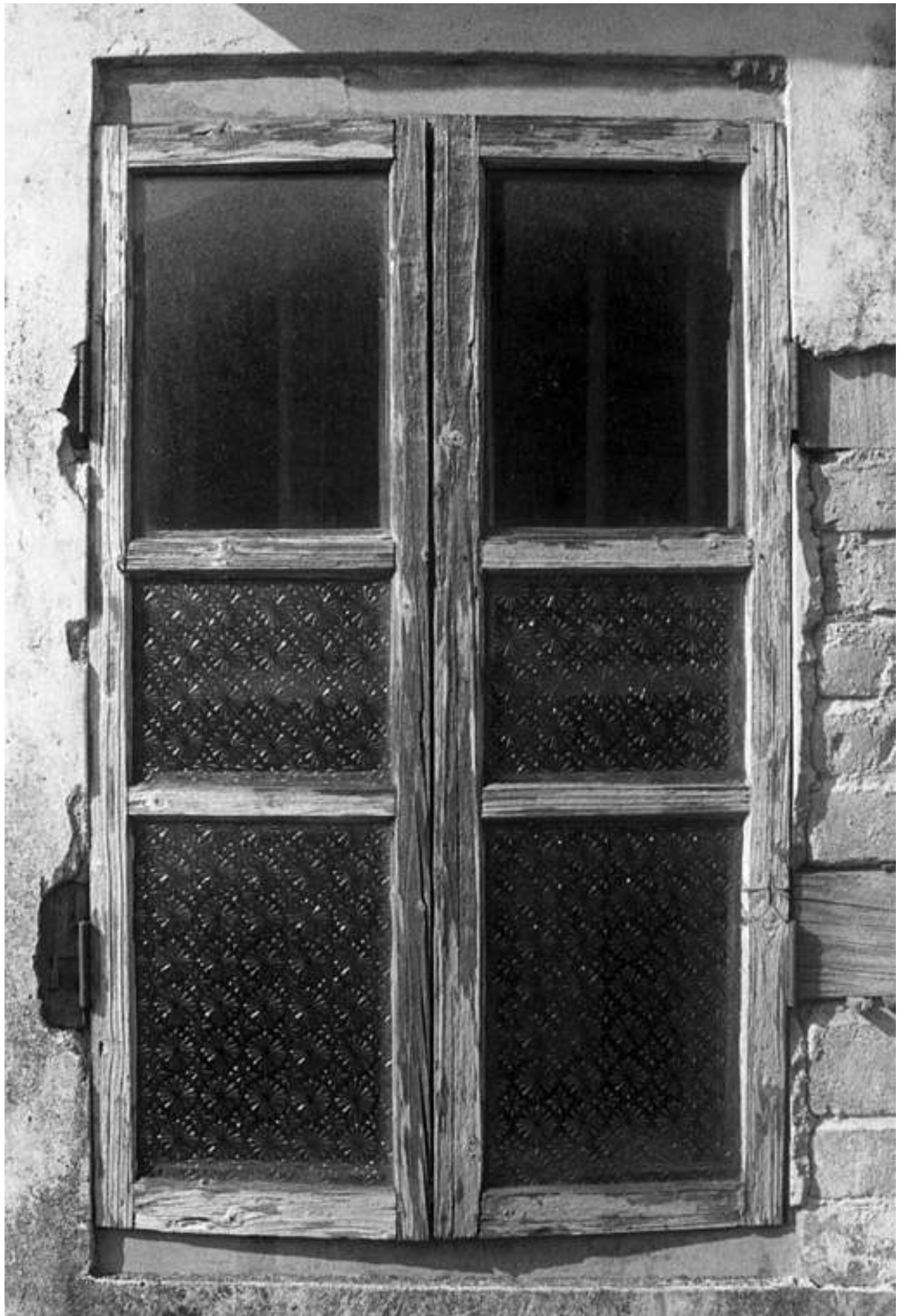
垂後遙開自由花

























Calligraphy scroll with large characters, likely a name or a phrase.









XI



## They Do What They Want

The villagers have little say in the matters that have the greatest impact on their lives. Important decisions about village life are made by the central government in Beijing. The chain of leadership begins with officials in Beijing and ends with the local cadres.

In China there are provincial, city, and county leaders, and below that there are Zhen (town), Xiang (area), and village leaders.

The village leaders are at the bottom rung of the leadership hierarchy and have little power. Their job is to inform the villagers of the policies handed down by the Xiang, the leadership level a tier above them.

A Xiang is made up of a number of villages. Before the 1980s, the Xiang was the government of the local People's Commune, which was made up of a number of villages.

Village leaders support the Xiang leaders by ensuring that residents pay their taxes. They also settle whatever local disputes arise, including arguments over land and water.

The Xiang has the greatest influence on the day-to-day life of the farmers. City people have a danwei, or work unit that controls many aspects of their lives, but the villagers have the Xiang.

Long Wan's Xiang is at Mao village, which borders Long Wan. People go to the Xiang office to address legal and other issues, including marriage requests.

They also go to the Xiang to pay their rice tax and to buy fertilizer and insecticide.

If a villager wants to work in the city, the Xiang officials must certify that the person hasn't violated the country's birth-control policy.

The villagers also go to the Xiang to register births. The Xiang keeps records of how many children each family has and who must be sterilized for having too many.

\*

The villagers complain that the farmers have little control over what goes on in the countryside.

In Long Wan, there are no real elections, says one villager.

The villagers choose from a list of candidates drawn up by the cadres when they vote for village and Xiang leaders.

They call them elections but they aren't real elections, he says. It's the Xiang cadres who have the real power and make the important decisions.

The village leaders elected by the farmers have little power because the Xiang leaders tell them what to do, he says.

Occasionally the village leaders go to the Xiang to work with the officials there, but mostly they work as farmers like everyone else.

The only difference between the village leaders and other farmers is that the leaders receive a wage and special benefits, such as the opportunity to buy fertilizer from the government at a discount, the farmer says.

Village and Xiang leaders tend to be members of the Communist Party, though nonmembers can also become leaders. One current Long Wan leader is not a party member.

The villagers have little say about the decisions the cadres make about their lives.

They do what they want, one farmer says of the leaders. They don't even care what the people say about them.

\*

Liang Zhen Hai has been chosen village leader three times since 1980. Elected from a list of candidates selected by the Communist Party, he serves as a go-between in conflicts that arise within the village and between Long Wan residents and Xiang (area-government) officials.

He says he is often called on to settle disputes over water rights and land boundaries.

Liang says he has watched the village go through many changes in the course of his lifetime. In the days before liberation, his family worked for a landlord but maintained their own small plot for growing vegetables. Liang says he began working in the fields when he was 12 years old.

Despite the recent reforms, some villagers see few opportunities to create a better life for themselves in Long Wan.

He says his own children have left the village to find new opportunities in the city. His son lives and works in Zhanjiang and his daughter lives in the coastal city of Shenzhen.

There's a gold-rush fever spreading across China, driving many people to migrate to growing cities like Shenzhen where work is plentiful.

Many villagers have left Long Wan to seek their fortunes in Shenzhen.

\*

A young villager sits in the living room of his family's house on a summer afternoon.

When the Chinese government used force to remove student demonstrators from Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, it was big news in the village. Everyone in Long Wan was talking about it, says the young villager.

But the Tiananmen event was just another piece of news to the farmers in Long Wan, he says. They thought the students were foolish to stick their necks out like that and were sure to fail.

Most of the villagers don't have strong political feelings about the incident or about the Communist Party, says the villager, who was a college student at the time of the protests.

Most of simply accept life as it is and try their best to improve their situation, he says.

They obey the leaders because they think it's impossible to stop the government from doing what it wants, he says. They don't really care which party or group leads them as long as their policies provide them with a better life.

Even if a government is unacceptable to them the farmers believe there's little they can do to change it.

The student says that even though he took part in the student demonstrations in Zhanjiang in 1989 he still wants to join the Communist Party.

A person can advance more quickly in society by joining the party, he says, the party has power and the people must obey it.

Although the young man is willing to talk about political issues in the privacy of his village house, he is careful not to say too much about it when outsiders are listening - especially a foreigner.

The political tensions that grew out of the Beijing demonstrations are still in the air a year after the event.

Most villagers refrain from openly discussing political issues with a stranger.

\*

A family sits in a crowded village house on a warm summer afternoon. A small boy, no more than nine or 10 years old, sits on a couch puffing on a cigarette.

In China, men often say you can't be a man if you don't know how to smoke.

A grandmother carrying a child on her back stands among the children, smiling and laughing.

The children's mother sits nearby, cutting paper into shapes with a pair of scissors.

Many people in the village want to join the Communist Party, including him, says the father. It's good to be a party member because Party members are always the first to know when something important happens in the village, he says, but the party is selective about who can become a member.

There are about 20 party members in the village now, he says, and other than attending meetings, party members live like other village farmers.

The father speaks openly for a few minutes but, like most villagers, is wary of talking too much about politics with a foreigner.

Eventually he stops talking, unwilling to answer any more questions.

\*

A villager sits with his small son on the living room floor of his house.

He is one of the few farmers who are unafraid to complain about the leaders in front of a stranger.

The leaders have little respect for him and he has little respect for them, he says.

The system for electing leaders isn't genuinely democratic because the villagers have little control over who gets nominated.

The Xiang cadres in Mao village make all of the big decisions for the villagers, he says. The villagers choose their local leaders from a list of nominees selected by the cadres, but they can't nominate their own candidates.

The leaders are just out for themselves, says the farmer. I know they will never help me.

He says he once sought redress from country officials after being struck by a truck while riding his bicycle in Shuixi County. The officials urged him to drop the matter, but he refused. Only after he offered them a bribe did they agree to help him.

He says he eventually decided not to pursue the matter because he realized that most of the redress money would end up in the pocket of an official as a bribe.

The leaders are no good, he says. They wait until the rice is harvested before scheduling birth-control raids. They're afraid they won't have enough rice if they make a raid before it has been harvested.

When a villager is fined for violating the country's birth control policy, he and other villagers believe the local cadres receive a share of the fine.

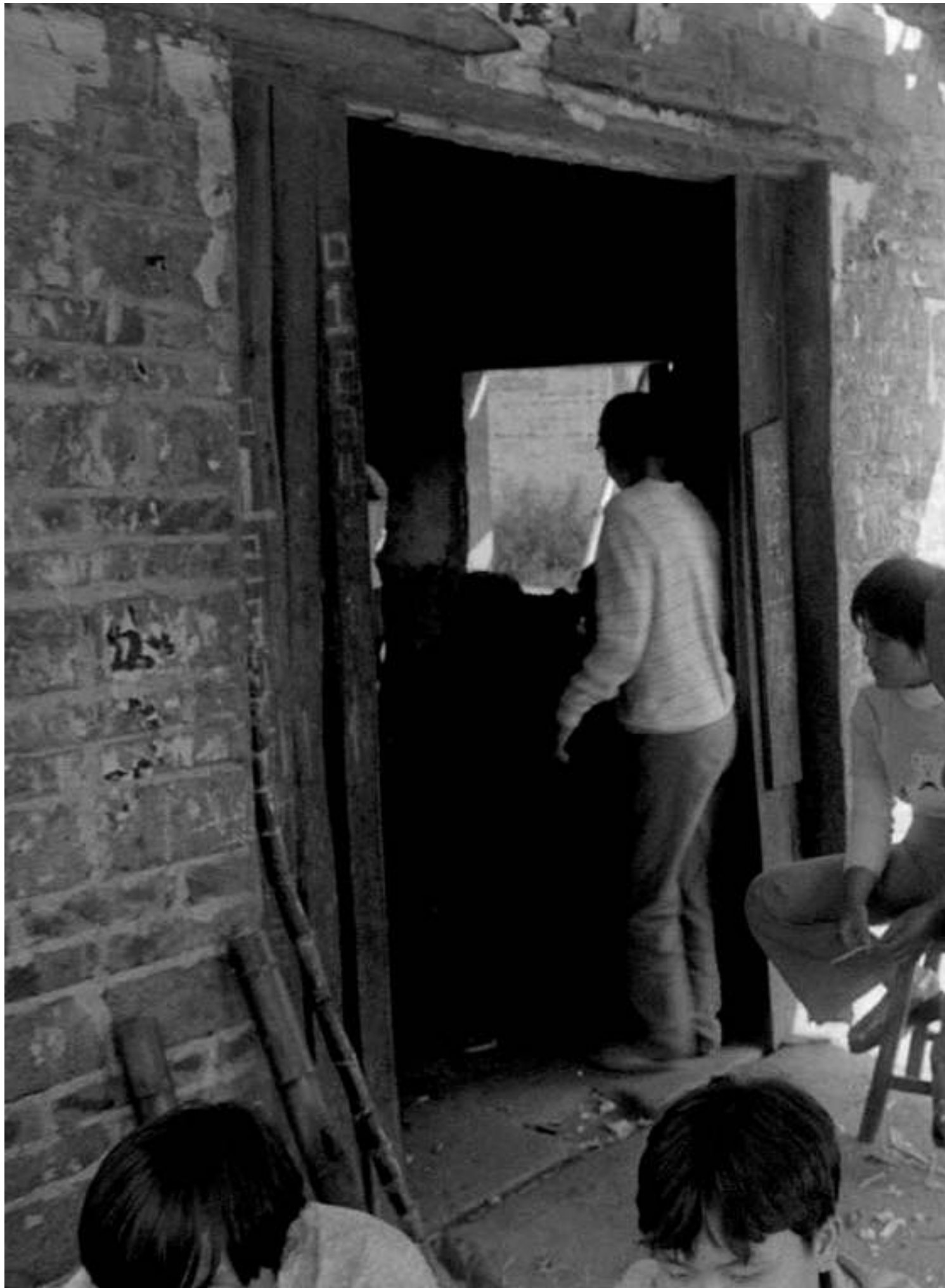
The cadres, he says contemptuously, only want to make money at the expense of the people. He claims the Xiang cadres in Mao village are collecting more taxes than is allowed by the central government in Beijing.

The Communist Party is worse than the Kuomintang, he says sarcastically. Many people hate them. They always think up new ways to get more out of the farmers.

The Xiang leaders do what they want, he says. They sit in their office and do nothing while the farmers do all the work.

If you regularly go to a leader's house to talk with him, he will be more willing to help you, he says. If you don't talk with the leaders or if you talk badly about them, they will ignore you.

The leaders are like emperors, he says, they hate me because I always talk bad about them.













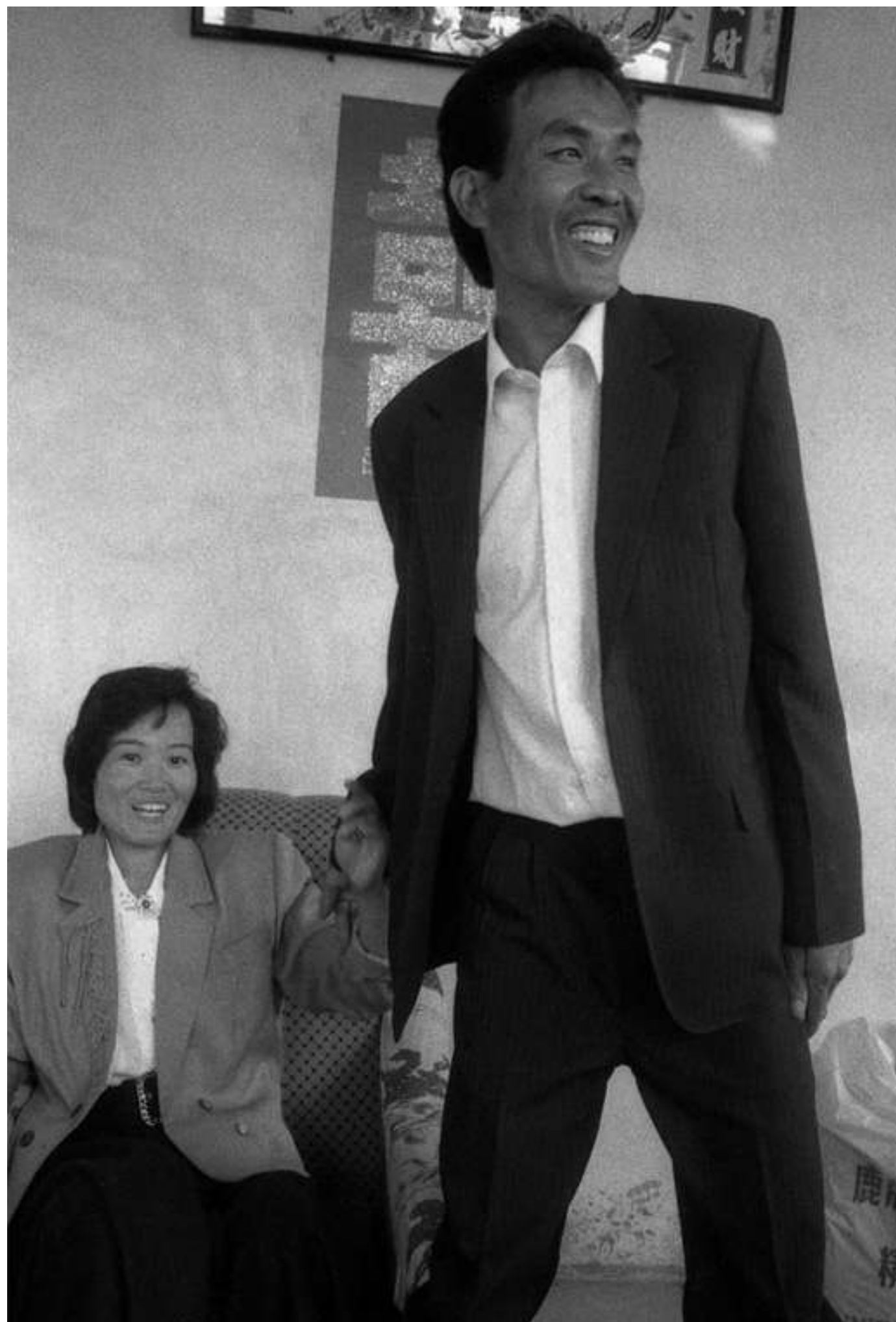








XII





## Xu Guo Finds a Wife

Xu Tan sits in his dimly lit house on a busy village lane. A farmer with close-cropped hair and a face burned brown from long hours under the sun, Xu stands proudly beside the new furniture he recently purchased for his son and the woman he will marry next week.

He bought the couple a new bed with a canopy, a dresser, a small couch, and two chairs.

His son and future daughter in law will live with Xu and his wife in the family's home in Long Wan. After marriage, a village son usually lives with his parents while a daughter departs to live with her husband's family.

In the last few weeks, Xu has been busy preparing for the wedding feast. After the couple completes the paperwork at the county marriage office, they will return to the family's Long Wan home for the marriage celebration, he says. Family members and neighbors will be invited to the daylong event.

The bride, Chen Mei Ying, is 23 years old and comes from a village about 20 kilometers from Long Wan. The groom, Xu Guo, is a 23-year-old farmer.

Long Wan men generally seek wives from nearby villages. In the Chinese countryside, marrying a woman from the same village is considered unhealthy and a form of inbreeding.

Xu says a friend of his introduced the two young people to each other. After their introduction, they began to meet to see how well they could get along.

Not long after they met, Xu asked his son if he wanted to marry Chen Mei Ying, and his son said he wanted to marry her.

Xu says he didn't want his son to marry her just to please him. It was up to his son to make the decision, he says.

The family also asked an astrologer if the boy and girl were compatible. The astrologer reviewed their date and time of birth and concluded they were.

Once his son agreed to the marriage, Xu immediately began to make preparations for the wedding.

While Xu allowed his son to decide if he wanted to marry Chen Mei Ying, Xu would decide when the wedding would take place.

He and the girl's parents met to work out the details of the marriage. Using the lunar calendar to select a day, they decided on May 11 (June 8 by the solar calendar) because an astrologer from a nearby village determined it would be an auspicious day.

When Xu Tan met with Chen Mei Ying's parents they discussed other details of the marriage, such as the need for the couple to go to the Xiang office to fill out the appropriate documents.

A marriage counselor there would make sure that neither had been married before and that both were old enough to get married (a woman must be at least 20 years old and a man at least 22). The couple would also need to go to the hospital to have a physical exam.

Finally, the families needed to work out the details of the marriage feast, including what the guests would eat and drink and who would attend.

About 300 family members and neighbors would be invited to the daylong event at the home of the groom's family. The festivities would start at noon and end at about midnight.

Each table would have 10 plates and cost the father about 100 yuan. The food would cost about 3,000 yuan.

This is a huge sum for a village family, whose annual income is generally only a few thousand yuan.

The couple's new furniture adds to the expense, raising the total cost of the wedding for Xu Tan to about 10,000 yuan, which is roughly the cost of building a new house.

Xu Tan says he is using money he has saved or borrowed to finance his son's wedding.

Village weddings are becoming increasingly expensive, imposing new pressures on boys whose families may not be able to afford elaborate weddings.

A woman's parents will search for a husband who can provide their daughter with a decent wedding and a comfortable living situation.

Unlike a Western-style wedding in which religion plays an important role, the village wedding does not include a religious ceremony.

Xu says he may send someone to the village ancestral temple to pray for the couple's good luck, but that will be the extent of it.

When Chen Mei Ying woke up on the morning of her wedding, her family gave her special attention. Her sister brought her water for washing and helped her get dressed.

Last night her mother took her aside and spoke to her about marriage. She told her to always obey her husband's parents and try hard to avoid quarrelling with other members of her husband's family. She told me how to live a happy life, Chen Mei Ying says.

By the time she finished dressing, her future husband and two of his friends had arrived at the house in a car they'd hired in Zhanjiang. Then they all rode together in the car to Long Wan for the wedding feast.

Her mother and father did not go to Long Wan with her to attend the wedding feast. Three days later, Chen Mei Ying and her husband will return to her home village with a cake and a live chicken to attend a second feast for the woman's family.

It's a warm June day and the lane to Xu Tan's house is bustling. Cooks labor busily over huge steaming woks set up on the grass along the lane, furiously stir-frying meat, fish, and vegetable dishes.

Firecrackers explode near the entrance to the courtyard, enveloping the house in a cloud of smoke.

The boom of firecrackers is meant to scare away any mischievous ghosts that may have followed the bride to Long Wan.

Slowly the wedding guests start to arrive and fill up the tables set up in the courtyard of the Xu family home. Dishes are prepared outside the house and carried to the guests seated at the tables. Soon the battered old wooden tables are covered with brightly colored Cantonese-style dishes. The men drink strong rice wine or beer while the women drink a sweet beer that contains no alcohol.

When the guests have finished eating one dish, another arrives to replace it. Every half hour or so the bride and bridegroom leave their seats and walk from table to table to distribute candy and cigarettes to the guests.

After a couple of hours the first phase of the dinner is over and the tables are cleared.

But the celebration doesn't end there. A few hours later the banquet revives as new courses are offered to the guests.

After the first round of the banquet, close-family guests go inside to escape from the fierce afternoon sun. Surrounded by whirring fans, guests seated on chairs and couches talk quietly amongst themselves.

A group of men - the bridegroom among them - plays cards at a table in the living room. Most of the men smoke cigarettes as they play.

One bold girl sits on a couch and also puffs on a cigarette. It's a surprising sight because few women smoke openly in Zhanjiang.

Smoking is considered to be a man's habit and is generally frowned upon for women.

Each guest attending the wedding has brought a gift for the married couple. Some bring red envelopes stuffed with money; others bring a blanket, a quilt, or some other useful household item.

Everyone is in high spirits today, including Chen Mei Ying. She says her one hope is that life will be kind to her in the days ahead.

I just want to have a better life, she says. I want to have better food to eat and better clothes to wear. This is what I want for the future.

\*

It's one of the largest houses in the village. It has three stories and rises above the nearby houses.

In the fields surrounding the house, ripening rows of sugarcane sway and hiss in a strong afternoon wind.

A small crowd has gathered around the tables set up outside the house to celebrate the wedding of the villager who lives here.

Most Long Wan men search outside the village for a wife, but the groom today is marrying a woman from Long Wan  $\frac{3}{4}$  someone he has known for many years.

Although the Liang family is richer than the Xu family, the wedding feasts given by the two families are nearly identical.

Outside the house, cooks hover over steaming woks. When a dish is completed it is carried to one of the guest tables arranged in the courtyard.

A sharp fall light etches long shadows across the yard. To escape from the wind, many guests retreat to additional tables set up inside the house.

In a room on the second floor, the bride and groom greet a steady stream of guests.

The groom is dressed in a black suit and his wife is wearing a new red dress. Every few minutes, the couple moves through the house to distribute candy and cigarettes to the guests.

The groom, whose family name is Liang, says he is one of five brothers who contributed money to build the family's impressive new house.

He says his father died when he was very young and his mother raised the family alone.

Liang says he and his siblings have earned much of their money in the special economic zone of Shenzhen, a fast-growing open city near Hong Kong. He says a friend helped him find a construction job there.

The money in Shenzhen is good, he says, good enough to build this 30,000-yuan house.

Liang says he wouldn't have been able to afford to build such a large house if he had stayed in Long Wan and relied only on farming to make a living.

Liang says all of his brothers are ambitious and have developed successful sidelines to complement the family's farm income.

One brother, for example, raises fish in the village; another is a driver in Zhanjiang.

When Liang travels to Shenzhen to work, his brothers stay behind to do the farm work. Someone has to stay behind to raise the rice and pay the government rice tax, he says.

Liang says he has been making at least 6,000 yuan a year working in Shenzhen, compared with the 1,000 yuan he would earn as a farmer in Long Wan.

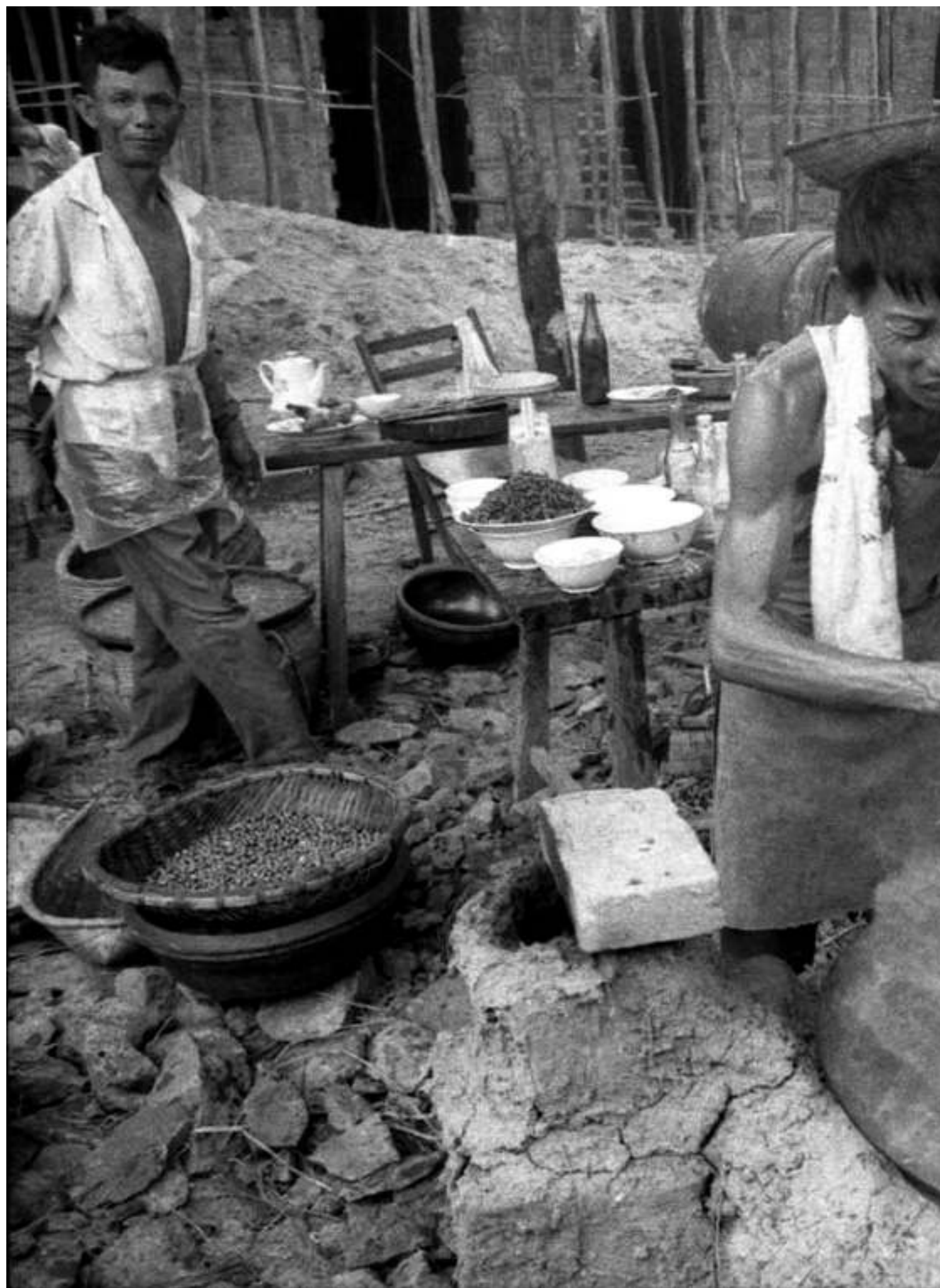
Now that he is married he says he wants to have children  $\frac{3}{4}$  at least one son, though two sons and a daughter would be best.

He says he doesn't worry about being punished by the government for violating the country's birth-control policy.

If I have to I will escape from this village, he says. No one can catch me. Children are like insurance. There's nothing better than to have children.











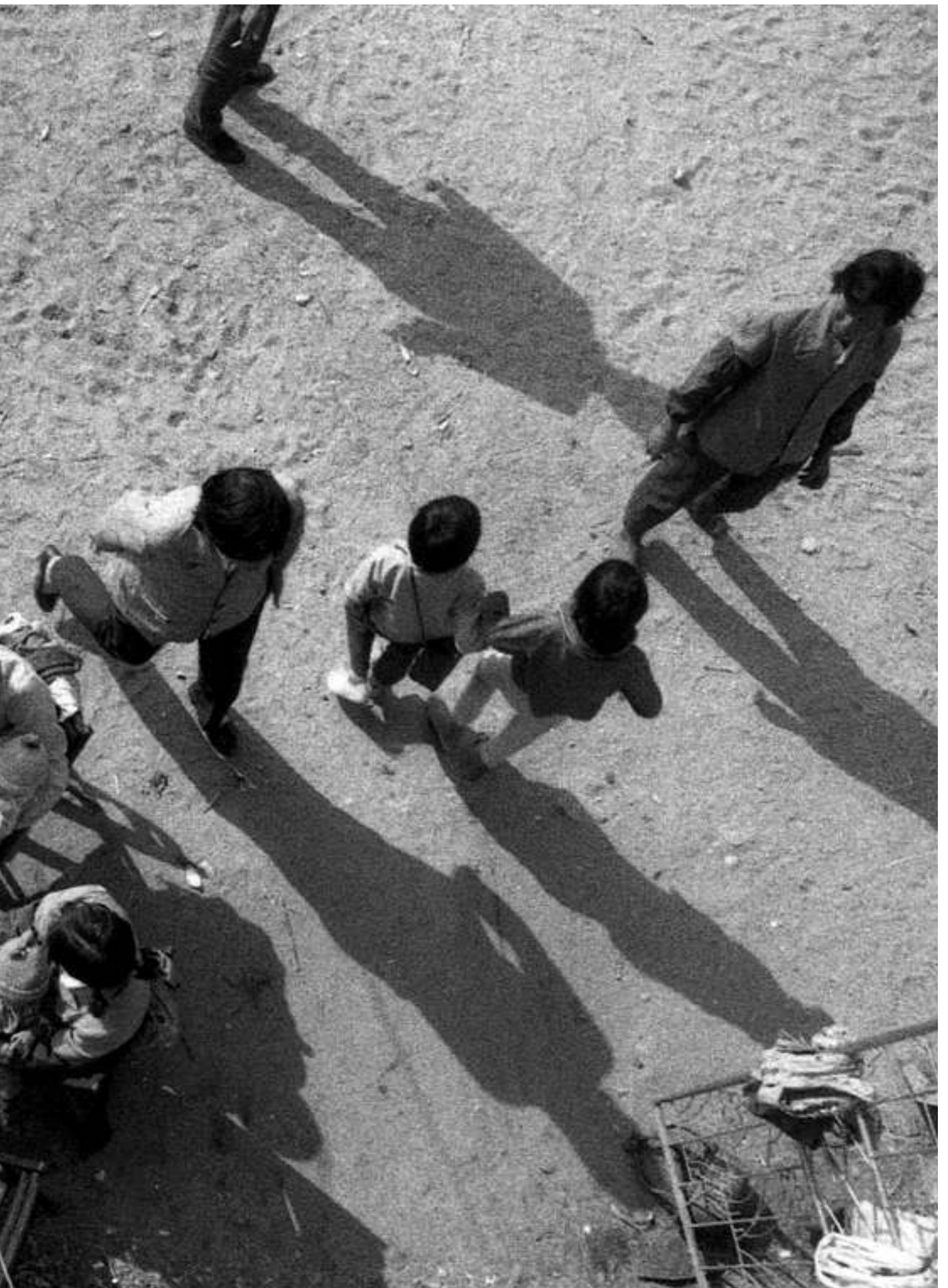


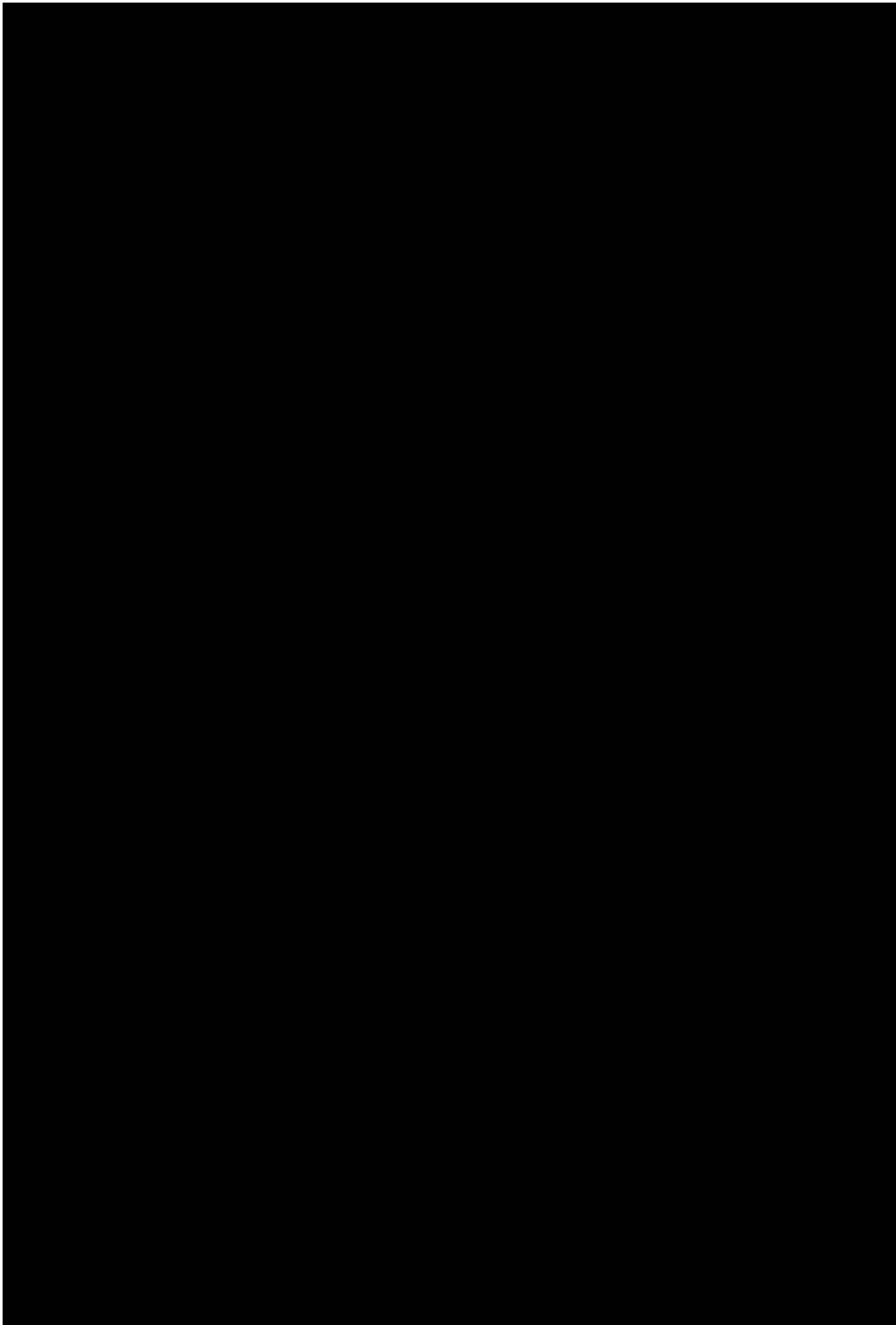












XIII





## The Visitor

*The villagers often ask me why I am always visiting Long Wan to ask them questions and take their photographs. They ask me if I am going to put their picture in a newspaper.*

*I tell them I'm not going to put their pictures in the newspaper. I tell them I am doing research and want to let American people know how people live in a Chinese village.*

*Almost always when I stop in front of their homes and ask them to answer my questions they smile and invite me into the courtyard.*

*Come in, sit down, do you want something to eat?*

*They like it that I single them out and value their opinion. I doubt that anyone before has asked them for their opinion and written it down on a piece of paper.*

*They generally invite me to sit on a small stool in the courtyard and then carefully answer my questions.*

*They are as curious about me as I am about them. They invite me into their homes in part to see me up close and hear me speak.*

*I am the first foreigner most of them have seen, a messenger from a distant place that few villagers will ever visit.*

*They always say: America is very rich; we are very poor. They say: the Americans who see our pictures will think we are very poor.*

*When they finish answering my questions, I ask them if I can take their picture. They almost always say, yes, what do you want me to do?*

*Often they want to pose formally for the camera, asking me to wait a moment so they can put on their best shirt and pants.*

*Most of the time I try to snap their pictures while they are talking or moving around the house or courtyard.*

*I want to record them when they are not too aware of the camera...when they are doing what they always do when I am not there to see them.*

## Trouble in the Countryside

Many people in the village have been talking about it. Even in the nearby city of Zhanjiang, people have heard about it.

It wasn't reported in the newspaper or on television but the story is circulating by word of mouth.

The story goes something like this: Two men from nearby villages - one from Wen Che and the other from Huang Lue <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> were playing Chinese chess in Wen Che.

When the game ended there was a dispute over who had won. It's possible for a game of Chinese chess to end without a clear winner, but in this case one of the men believed he was the winner.

Each man had wagered 20 yuan on the game, so it was important to know who had won. An argument erupted that soon escalated into a fight.

People say the man from Wen Che, who was a butcher, picked up his butcher's knife and chopped off two of his opponent's fingers.

The severely injured man returned to Huang Lue and told the farmers there what happened.

The injured farmer decided to return to Wen Che with his friends to find the butcher and seek revenge. They arrived in Wen Che and indiscriminately started to attack villagers. Unable to find the butcher, they returned to Huang Lue.

Not long after this first incursion, the Huang Lue villagers returned to Wen Che a second time to look for the butcher.

But this time the Wen Che villagers were waiting for them, and the two groups fought. By the end of the encounter two men from Huang Lue were dead.

The Huang Lue men carried their dead friends back to their village. They also went to a nearby sugarcane factory and forced the authorities there to give them guns.

Although they managed to get the guns, they were unable to use them because a part that made the gun operable was missing. Undeterred, they made the part themselves and managed to fire the guns.

When government officials learned of these events, they sent police and soldiers to Huang Lue. Two people had been killed, guns had been stolen, and the government didn't want the conflict to escalate further.

When the police and soldiers arrived in Huang Lue, the villagers were shooting at Wen Che village from a distance - apparently aiming their guns at the village school.

People said the Huang Lue villagers had also seized a truckload of pigs traveling down the road and were attacking anyone from Wen Che they saw in the countryside or in the nearby city of Zhanjiang.

People said two Wen Che villagers had been captured and locked in a room with the corpses of the two Huang Lue men who died in the fighting.

Some people said the Huang Lue villagers wanted to kill two Wen Che men to revenge the death of those who had died in the earlier fighting.

When the soldiers arrived in Huang Lue they tried to negotiate with the villagers. Worried that the villagers might start shooting at them, the soldiers tried to persuade them to hand over their guns. The villagers refused and ended up abducting some of the government officials.

The standoff came to an end when some of the villagers persuaded their neighbors to allow the police and soldiers to enter the village.

By the time the officials entered Huang Lue, the men responsible for the shooting had managed to escape. The Wen Che men who had killed the two Huang Lue men had also escaped.

People in the area say that fighting between local villages isn't unusual. Residents of a village are like members of the same family. Many share the same ancestors and family name. These families have lived side by side for generations.

Although two men from Huang Lue died in the feuding, the people of Long Wan appeared to side with the residents of Wen Che. Several villagers say that people from Huang Lue are famous for fighting and troublemaking.







