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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover photograph Portrait of Hedda Morrison by Adolph Lazi, Stuttgart, 1931–32  
(reproduced courtesy of Franz Lazi)

The Editorial Board would like to express  
their most appreciative thanks to Mr Alastair Morrison  
for his generous help with the production costs of this issue.

## IN HER VIEW : HEDDA MORRISON'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF PEKING, 1933–46

 Claire Roberts

Throughout her life, Hedda Morrison carefully and methodically recorded a 'diary' of images composed through the viewfinder of her camera. The public has only been given limited access to these photographs, in particular those that she took in China from 1933 to 1946. Of the 10,000-odd negatives she produced there,<sup>1</sup> less than 1,000 have been printed and published. Access to her photographic prints has primarily been through publications.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the two major books of her China photographs, *A Photographer in Old Peking*<sup>3</sup> and *Travels of a Photographer in China 1933–46*,<sup>4</sup> her photographs also appeared as illustrations for Alfred Hoffman's *Nanking*, George Kates' *Chinese Household Furniture*, and Wolfram Eberhard's *Hua Shan—Taoist Mountain in China*.<sup>5</sup>

Among the articles and personal papers left by Hedda Morrison following her death in 1991 were two horoscopes, two graphologist's reports, a German passport, some work references, and a bundle of photographic negatives labelled "Trachtenfest [folk festival], Stuttgart 1931."<sup>6</sup> These items accompanied her throughout what was to be an extraordinary life of travel. That they have been preserved for some sixty years, carried from Germany through Asia to Australia, suggests they had a particular significance for her.

Hedda Hammer's horoscope for 1931–32 comprises two typewritten pages and seems to have been composed in response to specific questions. The report presages a long voyage that will take her overseas. Hedda is advised not to spend her birthday in Stuttgart, her place of birth, and told that she will lead a more productive and rewarding life if she leaves Germany.

It is interesting to note that by her twenty-fourth birthday, on 13 December 1932, Hedda Hammer had already left Stuttgart. She was in Hamburg working as an assistant for the photographer Olga Linckelmann.<sup>7</sup> She

The author would like to thank the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, for their generous permission to reproduce the photographs in this article.

The reader is also referred to Claire Roberts, "Travels of a photographer," *In her view: the photographs of Hedda Morrison in China and Sarawak 1933–67* (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 1993), an abbreviated version of this present article which includes, in addition, a section on Morrison's life and work in Sarawak.

<sup>1</sup> Now housed in the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.

<sup>2</sup> There have also been numerous exhibitions of Hedda Morrison's China photographs: Central Park, Peking, c.1940; the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; the Royal Photographic Society of Canada; "Photographs by Hedda Morrison," Brooklyn Museum, 1949; Singapore in the 1950s; "Peking 1933–46, a photographic impression," Menzies Library, Australian National University, 1967; "An Asian experience, 1933–67," Fisher Library, University of Sydney, 1986; and "Travels of an extraordinary photographer," Link Gallery, Canberra Theatre Centre, 1990; "In her view: photographs by Hedda Morrison in China and Sarawak 1933–67," Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Published by Oxford University Press, 1985. The manuscript for this book was originally prepared in 1946 (a month after her marriage) and sent to Faber & Faber, but the unstable political situation in China prevented it from being published. A second manuscript sent to England was also lost. Rewritten and taken up by Oxford University Press in 1985, the book was produced in collaboration by Hedda and her husband Alastair Morrison, the photographs being Hedda's and the text largely by Alastair. Given that the majority of Hedda's photographs appear in books published after her marriage, Alastair seems to have filled the role of guide and support, assisting Hedda

had been issued a passport on 20 August 1932, and secured an exit visa for Yugoslavia on 10 July 1933. That visa was later cancelled in favour of one for China, issued on 4 August 1933. Having answered an advertisement in a German photographic journal for a woman, preferably Swabian and knowing English and French, to manage a photographic studio in Peking, Hedda Hammer secured the job and set sail for China. The China sojourn, which was to take her away from Germany permanently, was not made on the basis of the horoscope alone. The horoscope merely confirmed what she perceived to be her destiny.<sup>8</sup>

The collapse of Wall Street in 1929 had a devastating effect on the German economy. Many of the American loans that had flooded into Germany after the establishment of the Weimar Republic were withdrawn, exports dropped dramatically, and bankruptcies and unemployment soared. It was in such a depressed social and economic environment that the National Socialist Workers (Nazi) Party assumed power. In fear of impending Nazism, thousands of artists and intellectuals fled Germany and sought to establish new lives elsewhere. For Hedda, who knew very little about China in 1933, the offer of work in a distant land was highly attractive.

### Figure 1

*Hedda Hammer's graduation certificate from the National Institute of Photography in Munich (photograph courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*

**Abschluß-  
Prüfungszeugnis**

*Hedda Hammer*

geboren am *19. Sept. 1908* zu *Stuttgart*

hat die Bayer. Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen in München

vom *9. Sept. 1929* bis *15. Juli 1931*

mit *Lebensworte* Fleiße besucht und während dieser Zeit ein  
*hervorragendes* Verhalten gepflogen.

Der diesjährigen Abschlußprüfung hat er sich mit Erfolg unterzogen.

Im Einzelnen wurden die erzielten Leistungen folgendermaßen beurteilt:

a) Theoretische Fächer:		b) Praktische Fächer:	
Photochemie . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Aufnahmetechnik u. Auffassung . . . . .	<i>2</i>
Photooptik . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Negativretusche . . . . .	<i>2</i>
Elektrizitätslehre . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Positivretusche . . . . .	<i>2</i>
Gewerbl. Gesetzkunde . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Kopierverfahren . . . . .	<i>2</i>
Kaufm. Betriebslehre . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Vergrößern . . . . .	<i>2</i>
<del>Verständlichkeitsprüfung</del> . . . . .	<i>3</i>	Zeichnen . . . . .	<i>3</i>

**Gesamtnote:** *2,34* d. h. *Lebenswert*

Dieses Zeugnis hat die Wirkung der Zeugnisse über das Bestehen der Gehilfenprüfung.

Bemerkungen: *Sehr gut. Tadeln für sehr gute Leistungen in "Kaufm. Betriebslehre".*  
*Das kann sich durchsetzen in die M. Prüfung.*  
Aufdrucken in Abtlig. Ingegnieur.

München 23. den *15. Juli* 1931.

Clarusstraße 33

Die Direktion der  
Bayer. Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen  
in München

Notengrade:  
I = hervorragend  
II = lebenswert  
III = entsprechend  
IV = mangelhaft  
V = ungenügend

Gebühr 3 Mark.

### Early years in Germany

Hedda Hammer was born in Stuttgart in 1908.<sup>9</sup> Her father worked for a publishing company and the family lived in a large house which occupied a fine position overlooking the city. A younger brother, Siegfried, was her only sibling. He and Hedda had a complicated relationship for he was the favourite child, much indulged by his parents. The children's mother was formidable. Whilst she cared for Hedda, especially in regard to matters of health, she did little to encourage her personal development. Family life was not always happy. The parents quarrelled. They were disciplinarians, and Hedda was often beaten for petty misdemeanors.

Hedda contracted polio during an epidemic in 1911–12 and a lifetime of health complaints followed. During her teenage years she underwent a major operation which restored her mobility, but left her with a right leg shorter than the left. Shoes had to be specially made and she walked with a limp. But rather than inhibit or curtail her movement, this handicap seemed to fire her determination to travel.

At the age of eleven Hedda acquired her first camera—a Box Brownie—and in it she found both solace and a friend. After completing her secondary education at the Königen-Katharina-Stift Gymnasium für Mädchen (Queen Katherine Convent) in Stuttgart in 1929, she was sent to the University of Innsbruck in Austria to study medicine. At secondary school Hedda had not excelled at Maths, Biology, Physics or Chemistry and she had no interest in becoming a medical practitioner; photography was her love. After extended protests she persuaded her parents to allow her to attend photography school instead.

### *Photography in Germany*

In September 1929 Hedda enrolled at the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen in München (National Institute for Photography in Munich). This Institute was established in 1900 and was the first photographic school

/to place her photographs in a written context and thus enable them to reach a wider audience.

<sup>4</sup> Published by Oxford University Press, 1987.

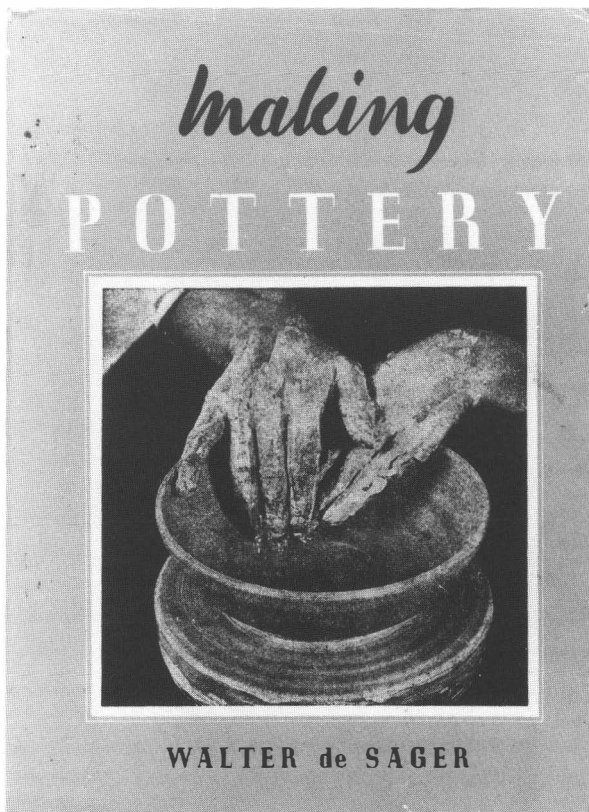
<sup>5</sup> A. Hoffman, *Nanking* (Shanghai: Verlag von Max Noessler & Co., 1945); G. Kates, *Chinese household furniture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948); W. Eberhard, *Hua Shan—the Taoist sacred mountain in west China* (Hong Kong: Vetch & Lee, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> These items are now in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> A work reference dated 3 April 1933 documents that Hedda Hammer was employed by Olga Linckelmann from 1 November 1932.

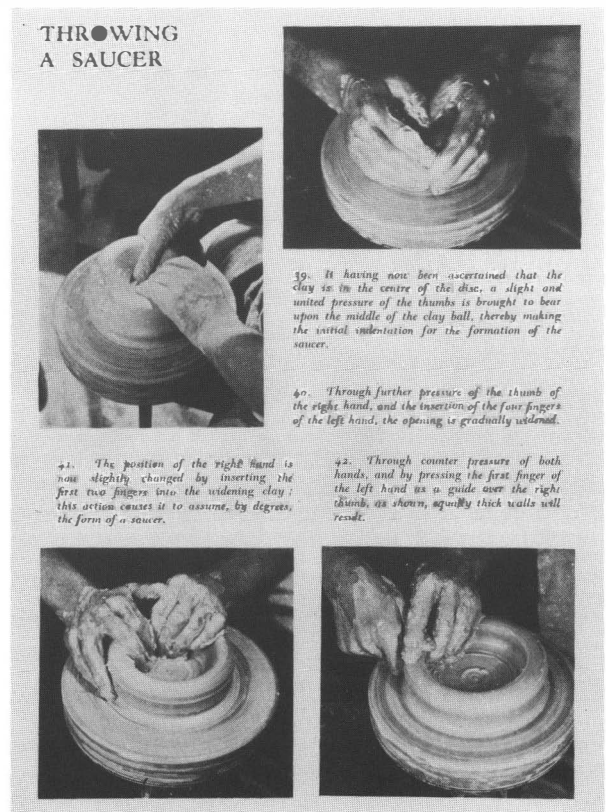
**Figure 2**

*Cover of the book Making Pottery for which Hedda Hammer took the photographs (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



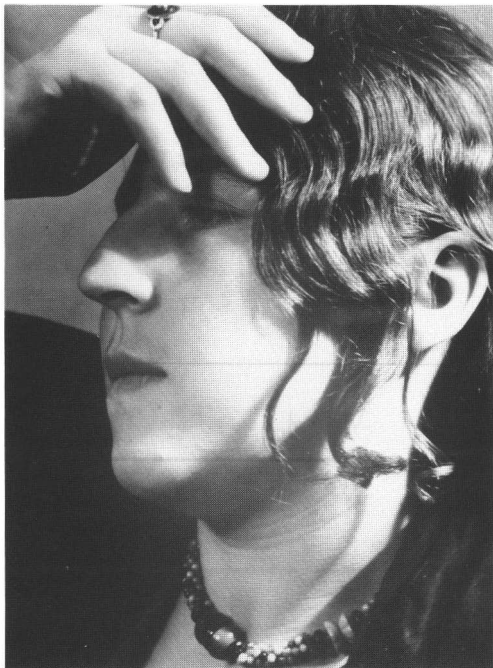
**Figure 3**

*A page from Making Pottery (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



**Figure 4**

*Portrait of Hedda Hammer*  
by Adolph Lazi, Stuttgart, 1931–32  
(reproduced courtesy of Franz Lazi)



<sup>8</sup> In the late 1920s there was great interest in Germany in horoscopes, graphology and psychoanalysis. See "Graphologiegegen Arbeitnehmer," *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* 8.1 (1929), p.6. This article refers to graphology as "the successor of psychoanalysis and the latest fad amongst the constantly sensation-seeking public."

<sup>9</sup> Due to a lack of written material concerning Hedda Morrison's personal life, discussion with her husband has informed much of this article.

<sup>10</sup> Heinz Gebhardt, *Königlich Bayerische photographie 1838–1918* (München, 1978), pp.279–82.

<sup>11</sup> In 1929 a department of photography was established at the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, which linked photography with advertising, graphic design and print media. By the late 1920s photography had shed its image of being a pseudo-art that imitated painting and was taken up by the German

to open in Germany.<sup>10</sup> It offered students a solid education in the craft of photography and prepared them to operate a commercial studio. The two-year course involved the study of professional law, business management, drawing, photo-chemistry, photo-optics, photo-technique, negative and positive retouching, and enlarging.<sup>11</sup> The certificate for her final examination notes that she was awarded a "diploma for very good outdoor photography and third prize in a student competition"<sup>12</sup> (Figure 1).

Whilst a student at the photography school, Hedda was given an assignment to take photographs for a book entitled *Making Pottery* by Walter de Sager<sup>13</sup> (Figures 2–3). The photographs provide a step-by-step guide to making utilitarian pottery. Many of the photographs are close-up shots showing the craftman's hands at various stages of the production process. They are immediate, engaging and informative. Despite the 'contract' nature of this assignment, there are strong parallels between this work, the 'new realist' interest in the close-up view, and some of the photographs that she was to take in China and Sarawak—notably her interest in detail, process, and in people making things.

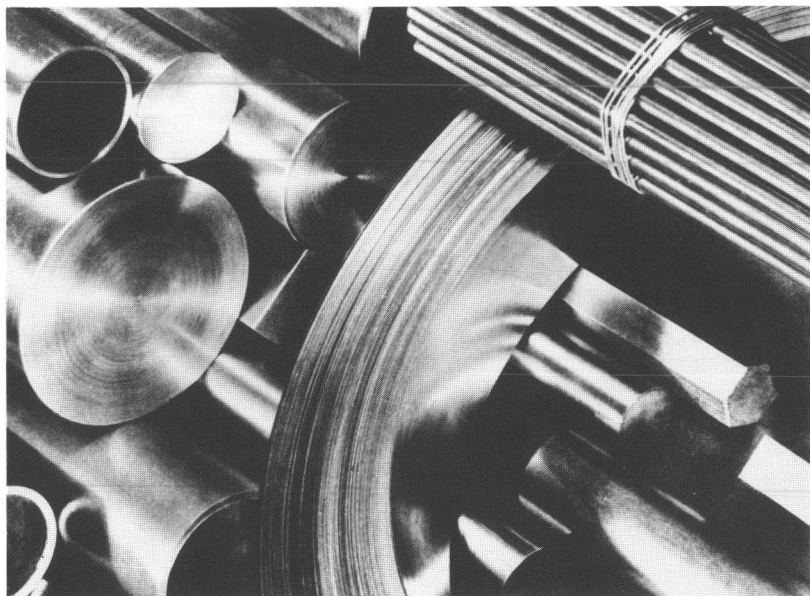
During the Depression years paid jobs were extremely difficult to find, especially for young graduates. Hedda found voluntary work in the studio of Adolf Lazi (1884–1955) in her home town of Stuttgart. In 1931–32 the studio was primarily engaged in architectural, portrait, landscape and advertising photography.<sup>14</sup>

Adolf Lazi's photographs from that period reflect an interest in 'new realism' and Modernist formalism, and are typical of work produced by commercial photographic studios at the time (Figure 5).

The forty-four photographic negatives labelled "Trachtenfest, Stuttgart 1931" are the only other known photographs that Hedda produced in Germany. They are primarily portraits. Some were taken out-of-doors and others in a studio. They are carefully composed and the play of light and shadow features prominently. In many instances the sitter has been placed squarely or diagonally in the pictorial frame creating a strong composition of intersecting lines.<sup>15</sup> Today the photographs read as documents of individual personalities, figure types, and exotic costumes and dress accessories. In Modernist terms they are not particularly innovative. The portraits indicate a solid but rather traditional photographic education in which contemporary formalist principles of Modernism have influenced rather than determined the nature of the images (Figure 7–11).

The decision to photograph folk culture and folk costume may be viewed as a reaction against urban and industrial values. Folk subjects and their strong links with nature and the landscape represented the antithesis of avant-garde photographic interests. Folk culture was related to the broader





**Figure 5**

Adolf Lazi : Besteck advertising photograph, 1932 (reproduced courtesy Franz Lazi)

concept of the *Volk*, which embodied the spirit and aspirations of the German people. The *Volk* was part of a retreat into rural nostalgia that carried with it a quest for Germanic roots and a determination to establish racial purity. It had origins in the romantic movement of the nineteenth century in Europe and was co-opted by the National Socialist Workers Party. After Hitler's ascension to power in 1933 the ideology of the *Volk* occupied a central platform of the Nazi world view.<sup>16</sup>

The 'storm-trooper' hats that can be seen in the background of one of Hedda Morrison's more casually composed festival photographs, together with the apparently incidental Nazi badge pinned to the lapel of an old man's blazer (Figure 10), suggest the strong association between the significance of celebration of *Volk* and the Nazi Party in Stuttgart in 1931.

The *German Annual of Photography*, published in Berlin from 1927 to 1938, reproduced what its editors regarded as the best of German photography. The *Annual* included works by both established and unknown photographers from various groups and schools. Images of folk subjects do not feature prominently before 1934, when they appear to illustrate the principles outlined in the foreword, "In Eigener Sache" (To each his own), by Adolf Hitler.<sup>17</sup>

Hedda's photographs of the folk festival seem to have been a personal project undertaken after her completion of photographic studies in Munich. Her motivation for taking them seems to have been an interest in folk as subject. She carefully recorded the detail of folk costumes, the shape and texture of hats and the beauty of elaborate headdresses, jewellery and smoking pipes. These photographs project an interest in discovering the

/avant-garde. The avant-garde shunned 'pictorial' and landscape photography and sought new ways to picture familiar objects, industrial and scientific forms, and everyday life. The close-up view, extreme vantage points, aerial views, unusual combinations of objects, photo-montage, photo-journalism, X-rays, astro-photography, photograms, negative pictures and micro-photography were all associated with what was called the 'new realism'. Photography was regarded as a democratic medium. As cameras and film became cheaper most people had access to photography. Photography was perceived to be everything that painting was not: mechanical, technological and industrial. It ignored conventional fine art hierarchies and could bring images into direct contact with social, economic, political and cultural issues. The new realism was a largely urban phenomenon, dominated by 'asphalt' rather than rural subject-matter.

<sup>12</sup> Hedda Morrison Collection, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

<sup>13</sup> Walter de Sager, *Making pottery* (London: Studio Publications, 1934). Whilst Hedda Hammer took these photographs, her contribution was not acknowledged in the publication, the photographs being attributed to Professor Spoerl.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence with Franz Lazi, 6 and 15 February 1993.

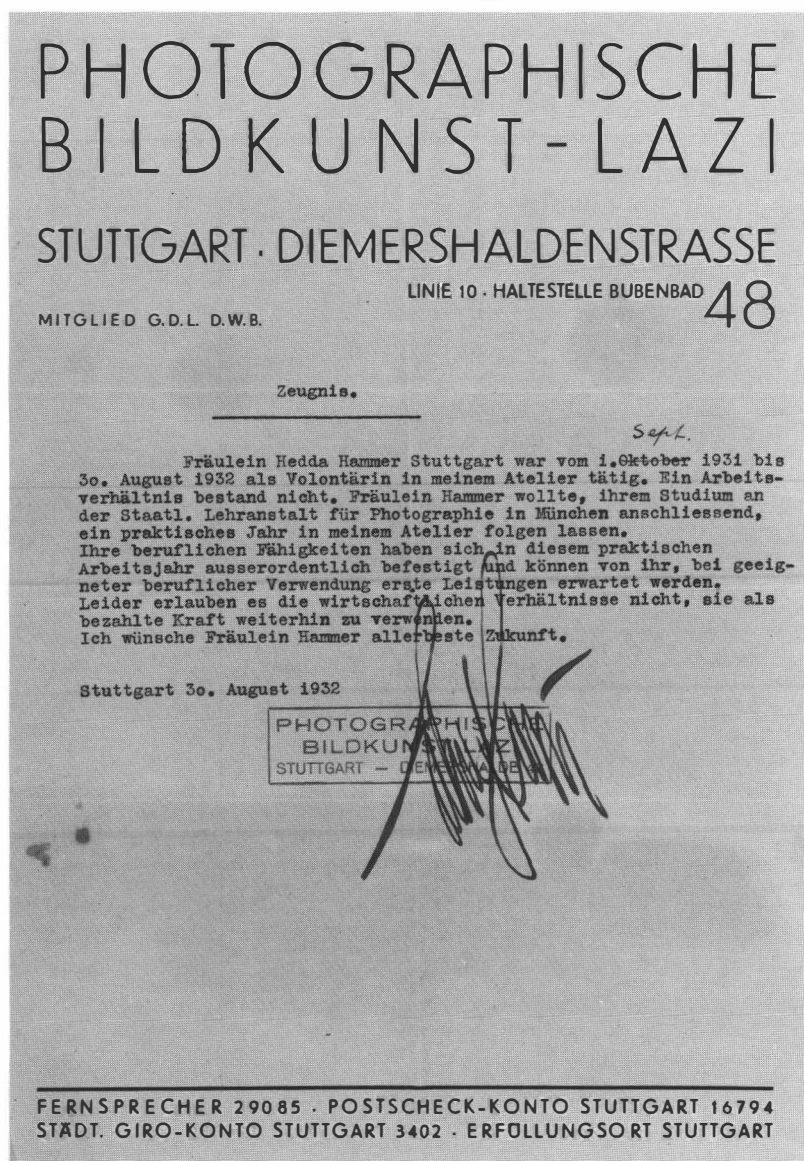
<sup>15</sup> It seems likely that she would have been familiar with Auguste Sander's documentary photographs of German people published in 1929 (by Transmaue, Munich & Berlin) under the title *Antlitz der Zeit* [The face of our time].

<sup>16</sup> For background to the concept of the *Volk*, see George L. Mosse, *The crisis in German ideology—intellectual origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964), pp.13–30.

<sup>17</sup> *Das Deutsche Lichtbild* (Berlin: Bruno Schultz Verlag) (1933 volume not sighted).

**Figure 6**

*Work reference from the studio  
of Adolph Lazi, Stuttgart, 1932  
(reproduced courtesy  
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*

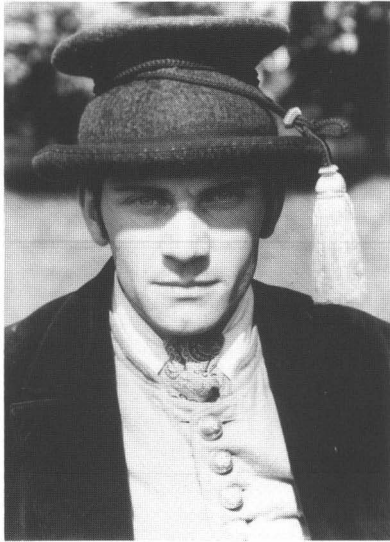


exotic within her own culture, an awareness contrary to the politicization of the folk as a cultural source or nom.

After a five-month stay in Hamburg working in a paid capacity as a photographic assistant, Hedda made plans to leave. Germany was coming increasingly under Nazi control. She chose to travel to Yugoslavia, a country that she had visited previously, but these plans were suddenly changed after she secured a job in Peking.

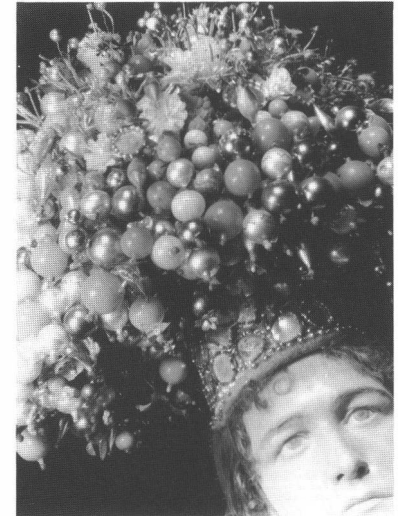
Hedda is said to have had little knowledge of China prior to her arrival in 1933. Her decision to travel to a distant and unknown land was impetuous, but not surprising. Her wish to leave Nazi Germany was given added impetus by the offer of a job and the desire to lead an independent life. In the late 1920s and early 1930s few mainstream German photographers chose to photograph non-European or Asian subjects.<sup>18</sup> Their interests lay primarily within the modern Western world.

<sup>18</sup> See *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*, 1927–34.



**Figures 7–11**

*Hedda Hammer :*  
*Folk Festival, Stuttgart, c.1931*  
(reproduced courtesy  
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)



## *China*

Hedda's arrival in China marked the beginning of a thirteen-year stay and her addition to the 'family' of photographers and intrepid travellers who had been lured there to play a role in imaging China for Western audiences.

For centuries China has intrigued the Western imagination. A vast body of literature has been produced by explorers, traders, missionaries, diplomats, military personnel and travellers whose 'mission' it has been to describe and 'explain' China. Before the advent of photography, written descriptions of the land and people, supported by painted or engraved illustrations, helped to create a picture of 'China' in the minds of readers. Image and text worked in tandem to convey impressions of the country and its people.

### *Western Photographers in China*

<sup>19</sup> See Isobel Crombie, "China, 1860: a photographic album by Felice Beato," *History of photography* (Jan.–March 1987), pp. 25–37.

<sup>20</sup> John Thomson, *China and its people* (London: Sampson Low, Marston Low & Searle, 1874), Introduction.

By the 1860s photography had superseded painting and engraving in the documentation of war. In 1860 Felice Beato, a commercial photographer, travelled from India to China to document the British involvement in the Second Opium War. In addition to 'war photographs' he took many scenic photographs, including popular stereoscopic views that sold well. First purchased by the military as souvenirs, his photographs were later deposited in a number of Hong Kong studios where travellers could readily order souvenir prints. Though only a transient photographer, the photographs that he took in 1860 in Peking are the first major body of photographs to document the city walls of Peking and the Old Summer Palace, the Yuanmingyuan 圓明園, before it was sacked by the allied forces.<sup>19</sup>

John Thomson, one of the best-known photographers to have worked in China, went to the 'Far East' in 1862 at the age of twenty-five. He travelled extensively in South-east Asia and India before arriving in Hong Kong in 1867. He spent the following five years in Hong Kong and China taking the photographs which form the basis of his epic four-volume work, *China and its People. A Series of 200 Photographs with Letter Press Descriptive of the Places and People Represented*, published in London in 1874. In the introduction to the book he states:

My design in the accompanying work is to present a series of pictures of China and its people, such as shall convey an accurate impression of the country I traversed as well as of the arts, usages and manners which prevail in different provinces of the Empire. With this intention I made the camera the constant companion of my wanderings and to it I am indebted for the faithful reproduction of the scenes I visited, and of the types of race with which I came into contact.<sup>20</sup>

During the late nineteenth century the directness and apparent reality of photography made it an attractive medium for social scientists, travellers and

governments. At the time it was felt that photography, a mechanical process whereby an image could be reproduced 'through the interaction of chemistry and light', could deliver a 'truthful' vision and a 'faithful' record of people and places. The process guaranteed multiple images and, by its nature, revolutionized the publishing industry. Thomson's work may be viewed in the context of nineteenth-century 'scientific' and ethnographic photography. The relative ease and accuracy with which the photograph recorded empirical facts reinforced the European conception of knowledge as materially based and empirically verifiable. Up until the 1900s photography was the preferred medium used by anthropologists and social scientists to gather data which was amassed and analysed 'for the common scientific good'.<sup>21</sup>

The image of China projected by Thomson through his photographs is, however, shaped by his foreignness. He was a commercial photographer who travelled in exotic lands recording subjects he felt were suitable to photograph and for which there was a market. Those subjects included anthropological studies, such as "Four heads, types of the labouring class," "Male heads, Chinese and Mongolian," and "Street amusements and occupations, Peking," picturesque views, such as "Ruins of the Porcelain Tower, Nanking," and those that confirmed the 'otherness' of China which was curiously attractive but also repelling, such as "The cage punishment" and "A whiff of the opium pipe at home." Subjects were chosen which accorded with mind-images of China. Thomson utilized Western pictorial conventions to present exotic subject-matter to an audience intrigued by the idea of China. The most powerful illustration of this principle is the photograph entitled "Fruits of China" in which an array of exotic fruit has been photographed in the manner of a seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting, complete with a crystal wine-glass. The subject is filtered through a 'foreign eye' and presented in a form accessible to Western viewers.

Hedda Morrison's photographs of Peking from 1933 to 1946 complement those of Felice Beato, John Thomson and the countless other professional and amateur photographers who have contributed to the large body of historical images taken by Westerners in the period before the establishment of the Peoples' Republic of China.<sup>22</sup> The photographs represent thin slices of space and time which have come to be viewed as a collective memory.<sup>23</sup> But rather than re-creating the past, the photographers, through their choice and presentation of subject-matter, were manufacturing their own vision of China.

### *Hedda Morrison in China*

From 1933 to 1938 Hedda Morrison managed Hartung's, a German-owned photographic shop in Peking. Hartung's was a commercial studio with seventeen Chinese staff and a German proprietor. It had a well-

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between anthropology and photography see Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Roslyn Poignant suggests that it was around 1900 that photography began to lose credibility as a medium that could provide primary data for British anthropologists (pp.63-4).

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Western photography of China see Clark Worswick and Jonathon Spence, *Imperial China photographs, 1850-1912* (New York: Penwick Crown, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Susan Sontag, *On photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973). pp. 22-3.

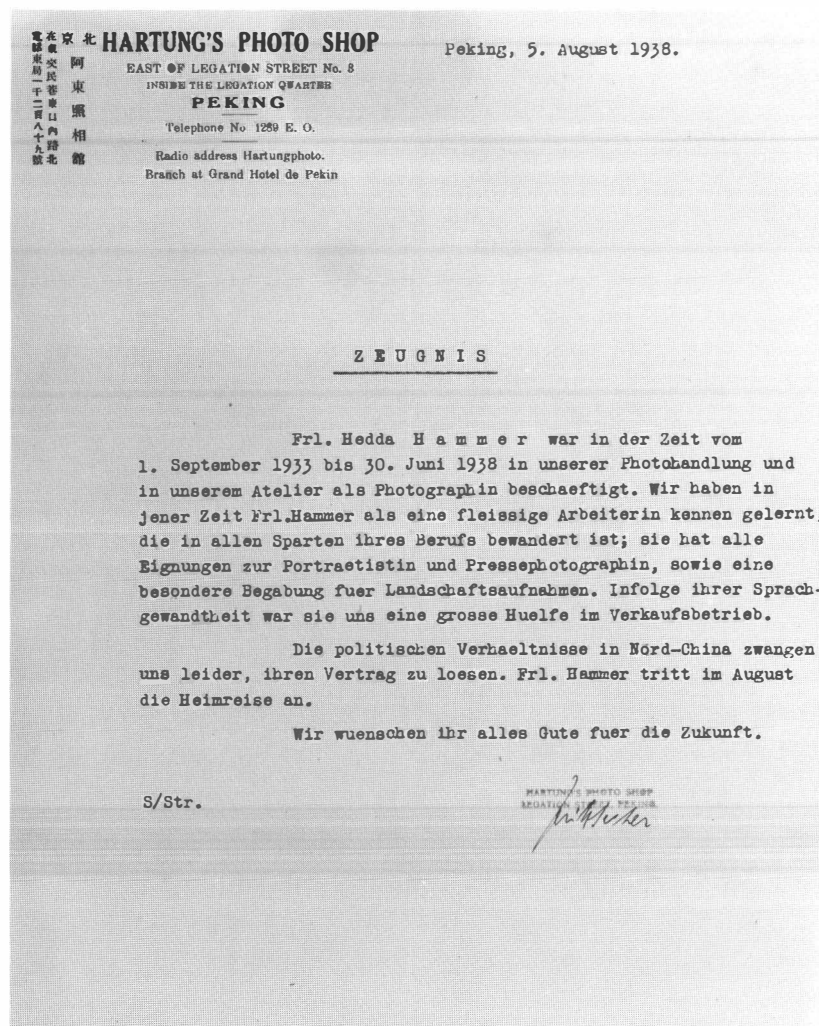
<sup>24</sup> Hu Zhichuan, ed., *Zhongguosheyingshi, 1840-1937* [A history of Chinese photography, 1840-1937] (Taipei: Photographer Publications, 1990), p.73.

established clientele of diplomats and resident foreigners and occupied a two-storey building at No. 3, Legation Street East, inside the Legation Quarter. There were a number of other foreign-owned studios in Peking, including one run by a Russian, Serge Vargassoff, and another by a Japanese, S. Yamamoto.

Photography was also popular with Chinese amateur and professional photographers. Peking's first photographic studio, Feng Tai 丰泰照相馆, is said to have opened in 1892. The manager, Mr Ren Jingfeng 任景丰, had observed the commercial success of photography studios in Japan and established the business on his return. Feng Tai employed some ten staff. They commissioned photographs, produced postcards and sold camera equipment. By the 1930s there were many studios operating in Beijing, most of them concentrated in the Liulichang 琉璃厂 and Tudisi 土地寺 area.<sup>24</sup>

### Figure 12

*Hedda Hammer: work reference from Hartung's Photo Shop, Peking, 1938 (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



In addition to studio portraiture and commissions, Hartung's also produced hand-coloured postcards which were extremely popular with residents and tourists. These photographs, together with the standard Peking views, functioned as tourist currency.

After Hedda's contract at Hartung's expired in 1938, she continued to work as a freelance photographer. She worked from a small darkroom in her home in Nanchang Street 南长街 and, following the model of Hartung's, she prepared thematic albums of her photographs to present to clients. The themes included "Handicrafts" (two volumes), "Forbidden City, Temples, Hills—Ming," "Summer Palace, Jade Mountain, Hills, Temples," and "Lost Tribes."<sup>25</sup> Potential buyers had the option of ordering single photographs or an entire album composed of photographs of their choice. Hedda's photographs of Peking were well known and she sold many prints and albums to wealthy overseas visitors as souvenirs.

From 1938 to 1940 Hedda was also employed by Caroline Francis Bieber, a well-to-do British woman. Bieber lived in Beiheyuan 北河沿 and operated as a dealer, seeking out Chinese arts and crafts objects that could be adapted for Western consumption and purchasing Chinese paintings, costumes, textiles, dress accessories and other decorative arts objects on behalf of the Brooklyn Museum in New York.<sup>26</sup>

Hedda's local knowledge and her ability to negotiate with Chinese vendors and craftspeople in Chinese were useful and her work with Bieber provided further contacts for her photographic studies. Through Bieber Hedda came to know an American woman, Beatrice Kates. Together, Bieber, Kates and Morrison initiated a project to record "the best furniture they saw in the houses of their friends, other 'foreigners'."<sup>27</sup> The photographs were taken by Hedda Morrison in 1937–38, and an explanatory text was written by Beatrice's brother, George Kates, who was then Curator of Oriental Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. *Chinese Household Furniture* was published in New York in 1948 and has become a minor classic.

### *Between Documentary and Travel Photography*

In her two major books of China photographs, the images are grouped in chapters which reflect either the subject of the photograph or the place where it was taken. Her photographs of Peking record city walls, palaces and parks, temples and *pailou* 牌楼 (commemorative archways), street life, shops and markets, food and entertainment, arts and crafts, and sights outside Peking.<sup>28</sup> The library-style subject index system of organization reflects the themes that she established for her commercial albums and is repeated in the catalogue of her negatives.<sup>29</sup> It is straightforward and consistent with a documentary approach to photography.

It is interesting to note that Hedda Morrison chose not to photograph many of the uglier or controversial sides of Peking life: the Japanese occupation, social conflict, civil unrest, abject poverty, the Legation Quarter

<sup>25</sup> Titles given to five of the thirteen albums of Hedda Morrison's photographs now in the collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library.

<sup>26</sup> See letters from George Kates, Curator of Oriental Art, to Caroline Francis Bieber dated 21.10.36, 17.12.36, 26.2.37, 1.6.38, 7.3.38, 9.41, Brooklyn Museum Archives, ASI 263, ASI 299.

<sup>27</sup> Kates, *Chinese household furniture*, reprint ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p.ix.

<sup>28</sup> See Morrison, *Photographer in old Peking*, table of contents.

<sup>29</sup> "Catalogue of China photographs by Hedda Morrison taken while resident in Peking, 1933–1946." (See Appendix to the following article, pp.115–18.)



<sup>30</sup> Ibid., S8362, S8009–8010, S8363–8371.

<sup>31</sup> See Morrison, *Photographer in old Peking*, pp.100, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Pinney, "The parallel histories of anthropology and photography," in Edwards, *Anthropology and photography*, pp.76–82.

<sup>33</sup> Morrison, "Catalogue," M9235, L6045–6051, S8000–8001, S8372–8374, S8428, S8688–8702, M9138–9145.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and photography*, p.10.

<sup>35</sup> J. Bredon, *Peking—a history and intimate description of its chief places of interest* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1922); L. C. Arlington and William Lewisohn, *In search of old Peking* (Peking: Henri Vetch, French Bookstore, 1935; reprint ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Bredon, *Peking*, p.viii.

<sup>37</sup> Arlington and Lewisohn. *In search of old Peking*. Foreword.

and the lives of Westerners in Peking. Her catalogue of negatives records one image of Chiang Kai-shek taken in 1946, one of "French flood relief in Tientsin" and eight photographs of the Japanese surrender.<sup>30</sup> *A Photographer in Old Peking* includes one image of a beggar and her child and another of a young boy collecting paper and rags.<sup>31</sup> In neither case is the viewer confronted with the plight of the individuals. The young boy's head is downcast and we view him from above, and the beggar woman and child stand stiffly averting their gaze from the camera. Rather than expose the plight of the people pictured, the photographs are imbued with an aestheticizing air of the picturesque.

Like other Westerners in China, Hedda Morrison was attracted to that which was different. She found beauty in the unfamiliar and the everyday. Whilst she did not set out to record life in China with the eye of a social scientist, many of her photographs display an ethnographic approach to photography. The 'field' that she chose to work in and document represented the antithesis of her own society; it was foreign and situated in a remote zone of the European imagination. Similarly her photographs project a desire to achieve a purity of cultural expression. The presence of the photographer and her life is concealed from the viewer's gaze.<sup>32</sup> Her catalogue lists only one photograph of the entrance of the Legation Quarter and only twenty-five that describe the homes or lives of Europeans who were known to her.<sup>33</sup> Her vision was selective. That Hedda Morrison did not focus on expatriot life in Peking serves to emphasize her interest in recording what she, as a foreigner, perceived as the 'Chineseness' of China.

Through her photographs of architecture, streetscapes, craftsmen, street vendors and customs, Morrison creates her own image of China. By focusing on labour-intensive traditional crafts and skills, old buildings, religious sites and ancient rites and practices she chooses to record the life and look of 'Old Peking'. In much the same way that she chose to photograph the German folk festival, in China Morrison chose to focus on 'traditional' Chinese life and values rather than those of a 'modern', changing world. She was motivated to record aspects of a foreign culture which she felt was threatened by development.<sup>34</sup>

In many respects Hedda Morrison's photographs may be read as visual companions to classic Western guide-books on Peking such as Juliet Bredon's *Peking—A History and Intimate Description of its Chief Places of Interest* (1922), and Arlington and Lewisohn's *In Search of Old Peking* (1935).<sup>35</sup> The former was conceived "to play the part of a friend to a resident and visitor alike—a friend to take you by the arm for a stroll through the city and its suburbs,"<sup>36</sup> whereas the latter is an authoritative guide which describes "'Old Peking' ... not only buildings that can be seen today, but also those that have disappeared completely."<sup>37</sup>

In the introduction to her own book of Peking photographs Hedda Morrison recalls:

The Peking that I came to ... was in the twilight of its days as a centre of old China ... in 1933 the great walled city, its gateways and the outer moat, were



still largely intact ... some temples were in poor repair and some had seriously deteriorated, but most were open to the public ...<sup>38</sup>

In 1934 Arlington and Lewisohn were appalled by the "loss by vandalism and utter neglect of historical monuments and the numbers of buildings that have been destroyed by official orders."<sup>39</sup>

Forty years later Simon Leys wrote an impassioned account of the destruction of the city of Peking which he identifies as a legacy of Maoist rule: "The destruction of Peking started in the 1950s, when all the *pailous* that spanned the main thoroughfares of the old city were eliminated ... . In the obliteration of Peking, the next step was to demolish the city walls. Here it must be noted that Peking was not an ordinary city born of the meeting of various economic, demographic and geographical factors. It was also the projection in stone of a spiritual vision: its walls were, therefore, not so much a medieval defense apparatus as a depiction of a cosmic geometry, a graphic of the universal order."<sup>40</sup> Leys continues:

For those who knew it in the past, Peking now appears a murdered town. The body is still there, the soul has gone. The *life* of Peking, which created never-ending theatre in its streets and squares, the noisy and enjoyable life of the city has gone, leaving only the physical presence of a mute and monochromatic crowd, oppressed by a silence broken only by the tinkle of bicycle bells.<sup>41</sup>

Hedda Morrison's photographs capture something of the soul of 'Old Peking' that was savoured by expatriates and described by Bredon, Arlington, Lewisohn and, more recently, Leys. For those who lament the destruction of the old city of Peking, and with it the disappearance of the quality of life that could be enjoyed there by Westerners, Hedda Morrison's photographs provide a warm and poetic memory. Whilst her primary interest lay in portraying traditional cultures which were in the process of disappearing, a thread that runs from German folk-culture to Old Peking and the indigenous people of Sarawak, many of her photographs include disrupting elements from the present. Details such as the Nazi badge pinned to the lapel of the old man at the folk festival in Stuttgart, the tram-tracks in the funeral scene in Peking, or the Western-style hats worn by male onlookers in the photograph of the young child acrobat at Tianqiao, place these images firmly in the early to mid-twentieth century, and a world experiencing the edges of change, disintegration and violence.

Hedda Morrison's German photographic education emphasized the traditional craft of photography and a formalist approach to the construction of the pictorial surface. These skills she applied admirably to create her own ordered and controlled vision of China. The photographs are composed according to conventions that have their roots in a curious combination of the picturesque and modernism. But Hedda Morrison's idiosyncratic interests and her unique personal journey always seem to hint at the broader social contexts beyond the picture-frame, making her work a rich archive of visual material that is at once artistic and documentary in its significance.

<sup>38</sup> Morrison, *Photographer in old Peking*, pp.1-3.

<sup>39</sup> Arlington and Lewisohn, *In search of old Peking*. The city walls were demolished between the years 1950 and 1962 and demolition work began on the city gates in 1967/68. During the Cultural Revolution, destruction of cultural sites was officially sanctioned by the government and promoted under the slogan "destroy the old to establish the new." Today, many of the parks that characterized Peking are closed to the public and occupied by government instrumentalities.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Leys, *Chinese shadows* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), pp.53-5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

## CHINA PHOTOGRAPHS

**Figure 13**

*Hedda Morrison : Rickshaw Pullers, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



⌘ Taken from a high vantage-point, this memorable photograph of 'Old Peking' is one of Morrison's most striking. The strong composition created by the diagonal positioning of the rickshaws and shadows is counterbalanced by the figures of a mother and child. Morrison's European training is evident in the tightly controlled bird's-eye view, which has been cropped to enhance the power of the image.

In the extended caption which accompanies the image in her book of Peking photographs (plate 107) Morrison states: *"The woman and the child had been bargaining with the rickshaw men in the foreground. As part of the bargaining process she turns to walk away but will be called back by the man who accepts the fare offered. It was arduous work for the pullers who suffered especially during the bitterly harsh north China winter."*

If viewed in isolation this photograph does not convey the hardship of the rickshaw-puller's life. The high vantage point and the play of light casting strong shadows on the road encourages a removed, picturesque and formal interpretation. As viewers, we are dependent on the written word to appreciate the small drama which is played out in the image.



**Figure 14**

*Hedda Morrison : Shoe Street, Peking, 1933-46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*

史 Morrison took this photograph in Dashala 大栅栏, looking east down Xianyukou Street 鲜鱼口街 in the Chinese city.

The decorative banners, neon and electric lights, and hand-painted and carved wooden signs are the primary subject

matter of this photograph. The Chinese-character signs, suspended horizontally and vertically, create a layered image which is graphically pleasing and exudes an air of 'Chineseness'. By angling her camera slightly upwards, Morrison has focused on the look of the street rather than on street life.

**Figure 15**

*Hedda Morrison : Wooden Shop-Signs, Peking, 1933-46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



⚡ In this photograph Morrison focuses on carved wooden signs hanging from the eaves of a shop in the Qianmen area of Peking. The hangings comprise medallions carved with an openwork design of the attributes of the Eight Daoist Immortals. Each medallion frames a character and together they read “*baiguo yougao* 百果油糕,” which signifies a cake-shop.

The shop-signs are elaborately carved and stand as beautiful subjects in their own

right. The high degree of craftsman-ship and the distinctive way in which traditional symbolism and advertising are combined make them an unusual and novel subject of study. In this photograph, silhouetted against the sky, they create a pleasing and rather abstract image based on positive and negative space. Whilst the photograph conveys information of interest to a social historian, the cropping serves to heighten Morrison’s interest in the formal qualities of her subject.



**Figure 16**

*Hedda Morrison : Child Acrobat, Tianqiao, Peking, 1933-46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*

史 In this photograph Morrison captures the routine of a child acrobat at a critical moment of contortion and control. Performances like this were held at Tianqiao 天桥 and attracted large crowds. Visitors and locals would ogle at freaks, animals, strong-men, and people performing extraordinary feats.

The caption in *A Photographer in Old Peking* reads: "Nowadays Chinese acrobatics and juggling are world famous but they are descended from an ancient form of popular entertainment which was always to be seen at Tien Ch'ao (Tianqiao) during

holidays and festivals. Children started to train in these skills almost as soon as they could walk."

In a book entitled *Peking's Old Tianqiao* (Beijing Chubanshe, 1990), many of Hedda Morrison's photographs are reproduced without acknowledgment, interspersed with photographs of similar subjects taken by other unidentified photographers. A hallmark of Morrison's style and a legacy of her German photographic training was her ability to focus on a significant event and create graphic order from the chaos and complexity of everyday life.

This photograph may also be considered in the context of nineteenth-century images of China, created by Westerners, which emphasized the sensational and the bizarre. To their intended audiences such images were at once entertaining, educational and shocking. They conveyed, with uncompromising directness, the exotic 'otherness' of Chinese society.

It is interesting to note that the gaze of many of the onlookers is directed at the photographer who, in their view, was more extraordinary than the child contortionist.

**Figure 17**

*Hedda Morrison : Feather-Duster Vendor, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



史 The documentation of itinerant traders was one of Hedda Morrison's primary interests. She photographed a wide variety of street-vendors, including fortune-tellers, reed-toymakers, rose-hip vendors, barbers, and old men selling thread.

This close-up photograph of a feather-duster seller was probably cropped to

achieve a greater sense of containment and intimacy. Framed by his cock-feather dusters and a cement pole, we focus on him rather than the people immediately behind, or the crowd of people in the distance who have been distracted by the photographer's presence.

It is interesting to compare this portrait



**Figure 18**

*Thomas Child : Peking – Street Life (120), 1871– c.1889*

*Postcard, George Ernest Morrison Collection*

*(reproduced courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)*



with a photograph of a similar subject thought to have been taken by Thomas Child, a gas engineer and amateur photographer who lived in Peking from 1871 to around 1889 (see Figure 18). Child produced a series of 192 photographs entitled "Peking and its Vicinity," which later appeared as postcards. Whilst Child's photographs were

taken forty to fifty years earlier, street life had changed little in that time. Child's photograph is casually composed and describes the streets in which the feather-duster seller operated. It shows interaction between vendor and customer and appears to have been taken without the knowledge of the subjects. In contrast, Morrison's

photograph is a carefully composed portrait which reveals something of the personality of the trader and the curious rapport between him and the photographer. The vendor's face is gentle and enlivened by an enquiring and curious half-smile. Morrison did not use a telephoto lens for portraits.

**Figure 19**

*Hedda Morrison: Women Assembling Glass Grapes, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



<sup>1</sup> Morrison compiled two photograph albums entitled "Handicrafts," which now form part of the collection in the Harvard-Yenching Library.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Sang Ye 桑叶.

史 Photography is by nature serial, and generally photographers take numerous images of a single subject. If exhibiting or publishing work, one picture is invariably selected which best represents the photographer's ideal.

This photograph, part of a large series of images documenting Chinese arts and crafts,<sup>1</sup> shows two young women assembling hand-blown glass grapes. The deli-

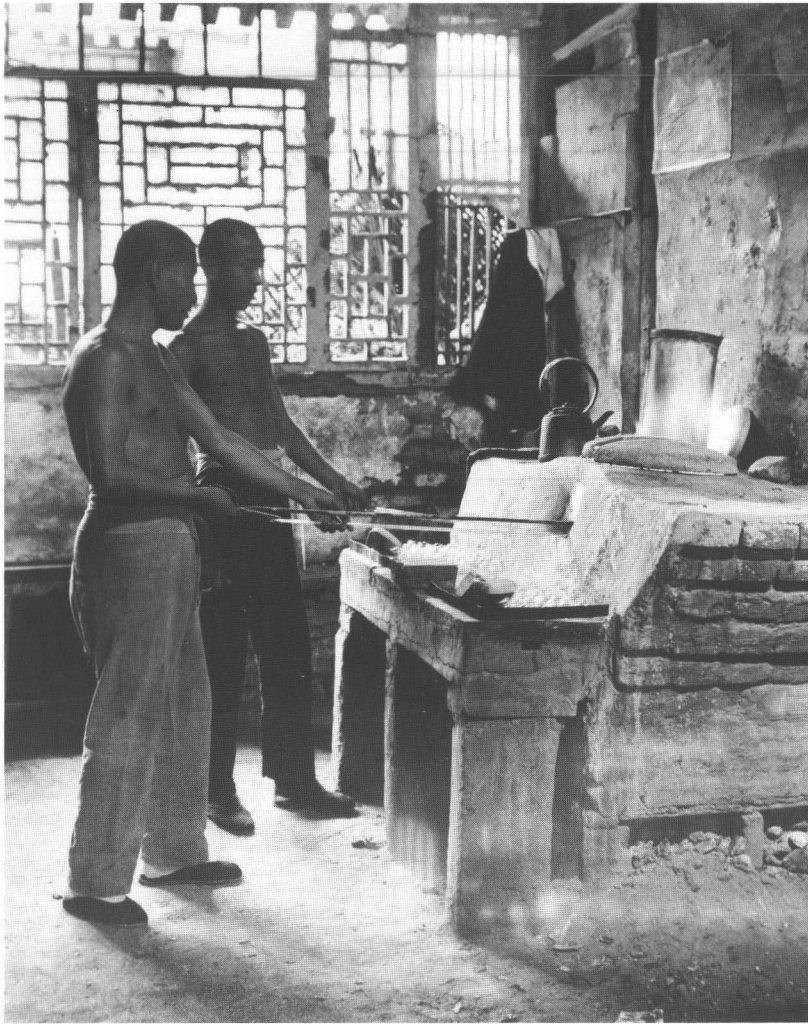
cacy of the work involved affirms the Western perception of the technical virtuosity and diligence of Chinese craftworkers. The caption in the book reads: "*Making artificial fruit, an ancient craft derived from glass-blowing which had largely become an export business.*"

The glass-grape factory is a family business established by the Chang 常 family in Peking in the late Qing dynasty.<sup>2</sup> Initially these ornaments were purchased by well-

to-do Chinese officials, but today they are primarily sold to foreign visitors through the chain of Friendship Stores.

Morrison utilizes the natural daylight to highlight the glass balls so that they look as ephemeral as soap bubbles. However, the women, with eyes downcast and holding their bunches of grapes as if working, look rather static, for the photograph required a long exposure and the co-operation of the sitters.





**Figure 20**

*Hedda Morrison : Making Glass Grapes, Peking, 1933-46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*

✧ This photograph of youngmen making glass balls relates to the previous one. When placed side by side these images describe the process of making bunches of ornamental glass grapes. The men stand heating glass rods from which the glass balls will be blown. A metal tray placed in front of the furnace carries the product of their labour.

Morrison took many photographs of people making things. This interest may be traced back to her training in Germany and the photographs she took for the book *Making Pottery*.

In her quest to photograph workshop production, particularly of art and craft objects, Hedda hired a Chinese man to assist her with introductions. She paid him a fee to arrange visits to craft work-shops and small businesses.

**Figure 21**

*Hedda Morrison : Funeral Procession, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



✧ In this photograph a funeral procession passes in front of the Zhengyangmen 正阳门, the southern central gate of the Tartar city. Morrison captures the moment when the discs of paper money have been thrown into the air.

In pictorial terms the image is carefully balanced, the figure in the lower-right foreground being counterbalanced by the funeral procession, and the arcs of the tram-tracks (constructed in 1909) contrast with the strong geometric lines of the Zhengyangmen (rebuilt with allied assistance in 1905–06 after having been destroyed during the Boxer Uprising in 1900). Superimposed over these structures are the flutter of paper money and the

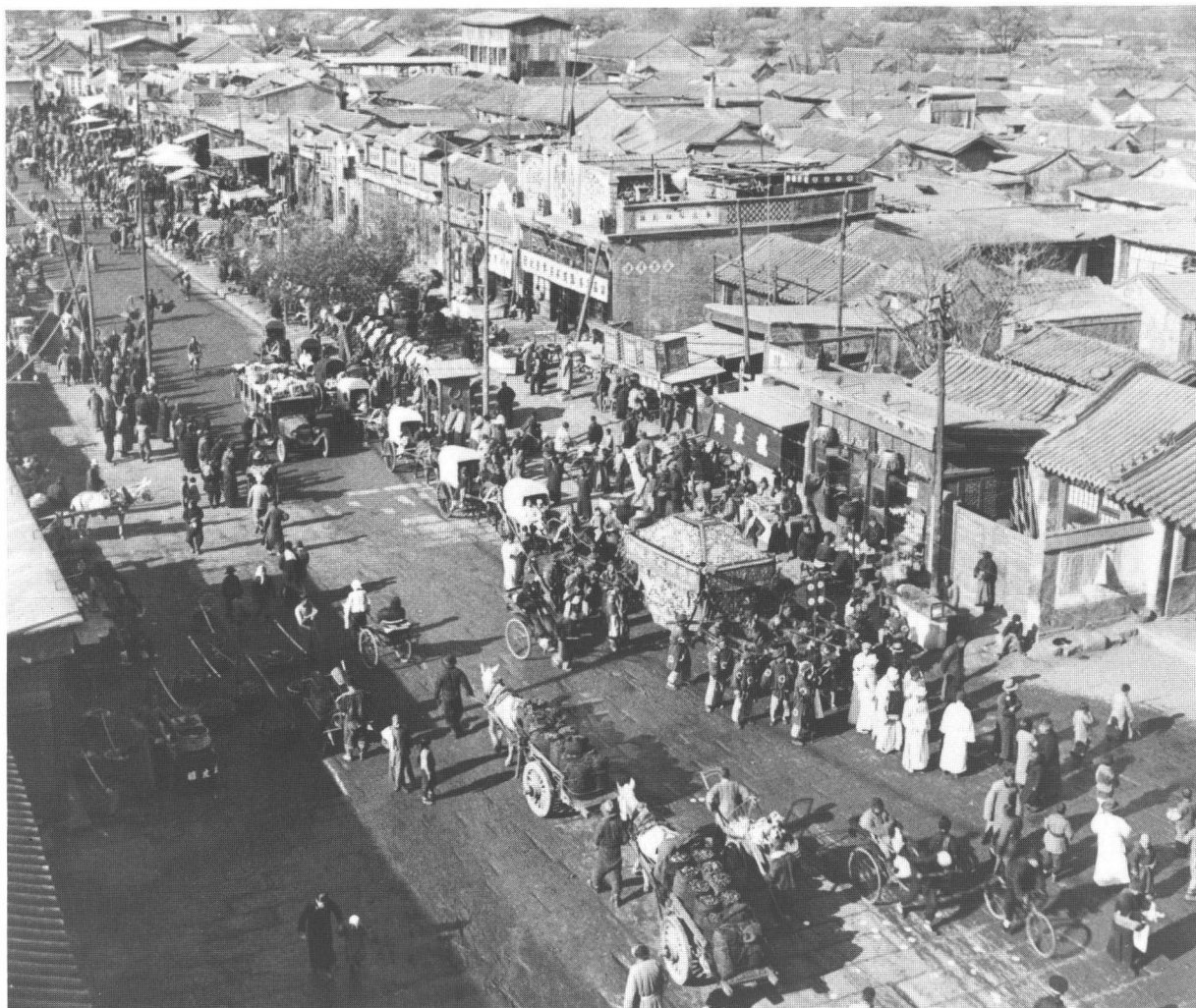
web of lines created by the tramway's overhead wires. The money, a powerful social and cultural symbol, doubles as a potent pictorial device.

The caption in Morrison's book reads: *"White was the colour of mourning, worn by both members of the family and by funeral functionaries, here throwing paper money into the air to appease the spirits. Paper money was also burned as it was believed that in the hereafter it would be miraculously converted into real currency."*

Like most Western travel photographers, Hedda Morrison was intrigued by local customs and street life. Having identified her subject, the primary concern was its artistic translation.

**Figure 22**

*Hedda Morrison: Funeral, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph  
(reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



史 In contrast to the preceding image, which documented a funeral procession at close range, this photograph provides an urban context for this spectacular rite of passage. Morrison has taken the photograph from the top of the city wall. The bird's-eye view was a modernist device which served to accentuate distance, physically and metaphorically, from the

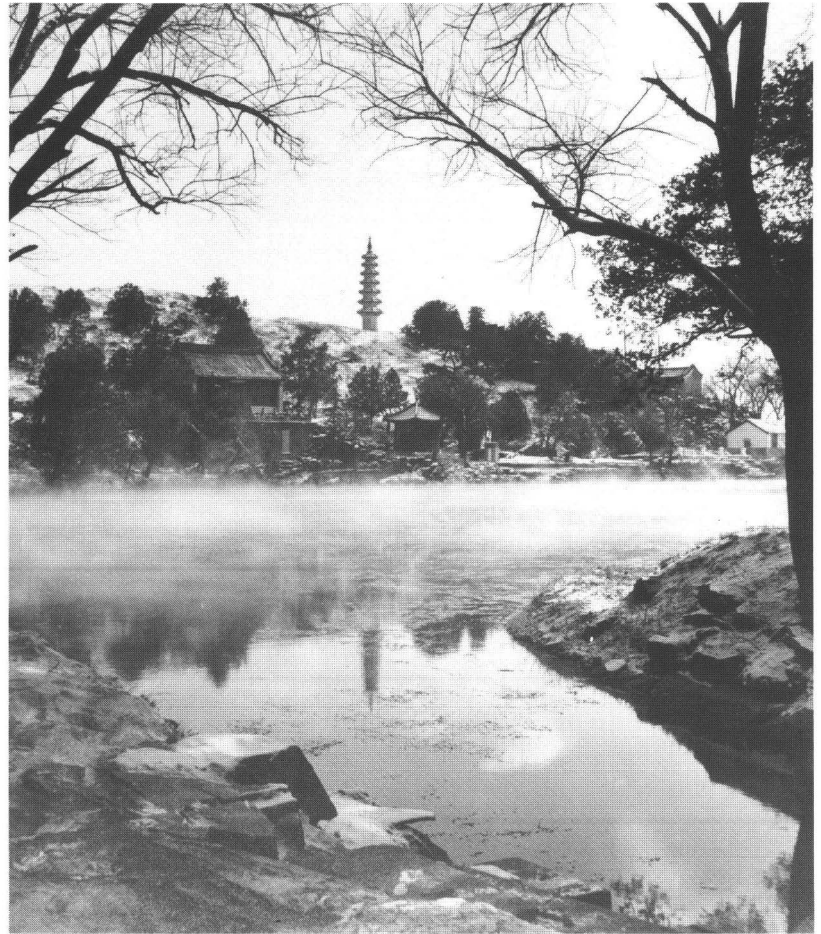
subject. In pictorial terms, a high vantage-point accentuates perspectival space and in so doing creates strong diagonal compositional lines which help to order the complexity of the subject.

Chongwenmen Xidajie 崇文门西大街, paved with stone slabs, is lined with shops and traders' stands. This is one of the few

of Morrison's printed photographs which provide an expansive view of Peking's urban landscape. Today, this view has changed dramatically. The right-hand side of the road is now the site of the Beijing Public Security Bureau, the buildings of which obscure the view across to the Qipanjie 棋盘街.

**Figure 23**

*Hedda Morrison : Jade Fountain, Peking, 1933–46, gelatin silver photograph (reproduced courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)*



<sup>1</sup> Arlington and Lewisohn, *In search of old Peking*, pp.293–5.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation with Sang Ye.

<sup>3</sup> Geremie Barmé, Introduction to Arlington and Lewisohn, *In search of old Peking*, p.ix.

史 Morrison took many photographs of temples, parks and gardens in and around Peking. Between 1912 and 1949 many of the former imperial and religious sites were open to the public. The Jade Fountain (*Yuquanshan* 玉泉山), situated to the west of the Summer Palace (*Yibeyuan* 颐和园), one of the 'eight famous

sights of Peking', was an imperial retreat and pleasure-ground. The Jade Peak Pagoda (*Yufengta* 玉峰塔), pictured, was built during the Ming dynasty.<sup>1</sup> In addition to providing water to the surrounding lakes and paddyfields, the Jade Fountain supplied the Empress-Dowager with fresh spring drinking water.<sup>2</sup>

In pictorial terms this photograph has been composed according to artistic conventions of the picturesque. A zig-zag line leads the eye from the lower-right bank of the pool diagonally across to the pavilions on the far bank and up the hill to the primary subject—the Jade Peak Pagoda. Trees on either side of the image frame the

landscape and contain the viewer's gaze. The blanket of mist hovering over the pool and the reflections of the pagoda heighten the sense of the picturesque.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Jade Fountain was chosen as the site for a convalescent home for high-ranking Communist Party officials. The myth that water from this spring had special curative powers perhaps influenced this decision. Today the Jade Fountain is a restricted area surrounded by a high wall. It is occupied by the airforce and used by high-level military leaders as a summer retreat.<sup>3</sup>

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