

Picturing the changes among China's last gun tribe



A villager fires his gun to welcome visitors as part of a show held in the village.

Kuang Huimin, from Hengshan, Hunan province, is a documentary photographer who focuses on topics such as environmental protection and social change.

Since 1989, the 52-year-old has been visiting a village in Southwest China's Guizhou province, where he has taken more than 80,000 photos for his book *Changes in Biasha*.

The 2,500-plus inhabitants of Biasha, 7.5 kilometers from Congjiang, the county seat, are of the Miao ethnic group and are known as China's last gun tribe.

For hundreds of years, they have held on to their unique traditions – using guns in ceremonies and to practice their marksmanship.

“Bia” means a “place with lush trees and grass” in the Miao language.

During the past 27 years, Kuang has traveled back and forth to Biasha more than 40 times, staying there for between seven and 15 days.

Before 2005, he stayed in villagers' homes, but now uses guesthouses. “The villagers were all very nice to me, but I didn't want to bother them all the time,” he said.

With the development of tourism, more guesthouses were built. "It is much more convenient for travelers and photographers like me," he added.

Biasha has been transformed from a quiet, tranquil village into a well-known tourist spot, and the rapid rate of change has been the subject of many of Kuang's photos.

He believes that Biasha is in the grip of a generation gap: "The elders still preserve the traditional lifestyles. I've asked some older men how they feel about the changes in Biasha, and they told me they had nothing to do with them."

The younger generation, meanwhile, has been influenced by modernization. Since 2004, an increasing number of young people have moved away to become migrant workers in large cities. "Sometimes I have seen them getting together and chatting animatedly about their experiences and stories," Kuang said.

When he had dinner with his family during Spring Festival in 2009, Wu Jie, a young man from Biasha, told his brothers that the biggest benefit of migrating was learning to compose music and sing at a music training institute. Kuang captured the scene.

He has also noticed that married villagers would rather live by working the land at home, especially if they have more than two children to care for. In 1998, Gun Lashui went to work in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. He came home to get married in 2002 and has never set foot outside Biasha since.

It was once a tradition in Biasha that when girls married outsiders they were not allowed to return home. But now things are different. Kuang noticed that a girl who married a man in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, came back to see her family: "She returned with a refrigerator and a color television. The economic condition of her family was totally changed."

The Lusheng Festival – the most important celebration among people of the Miao ethnic group – is celebrated on the 19th day of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar. The villagers dress up for the day, worshipping their ancestors in traditional ways, and the men play the lusheng, a type of reed pipe, and tell stories and the history of Biasha.

"Now, villagers play the lusheng for visitors every day, and some of the women have even joined the performance team," Kuang said.

He planned to conclude his project in 2014, but he found it difficult: "Biasha is changing all the time. Every time I went there, I saw new things."

Last year, the villagers began to build a reservoir in Zaizhang.

"Just within a few months, the wooden bridges and trees that I had photographed were gone. The changes have occurred too quickly, really," he said.

Kuang considers Biasha to be a microcosm of Chinese villages. "It is more than just a small village. It reflects a picture of the whole society. My

photography project about Biasha may never end.”

[China moves to develop rural tourism in battling poverty](#)

China on Wednesday announced favorable measures to develop tourism for rural areas in poverty.

The move is part of the country’s strategy to eradicate poverty by 2020 through the use of targeted and precise relief measures.

The National Tourism Administration signed agreements with the Agricultural Development Bank of China and the China Citic Bank to provide financial credit for impoverished counties to build tourist attractions.

In the 2016-2020 period, poor counties with scenic areas will have updated infrastructure and public service facilities with the help of the banks.

China Citic Bank will lend 200 billion yuan (29.4 billion U.S. dollars) to fund key projects featuring construction of distinctive scenic attractions for rural areas in poverty.

China beat its annual target by lifting 12.4 million people out of poverty in 2016, the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development said Tuesday.

“The progress was partly due to large financial resources, amounting to more than 230 billion yuan, earmarked by the central and local budgets,” said Su Guoxia, spokesperson with the agency.

[Shanghai implements stricter smoking ban](#)

A stricter smoking ban took effect on Wednesday in Shanghai, banning smoking in indoor public places, workplaces and public transport.

The new regulation bans smoking in indoor areas of hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, as well as airports, and train and port stations.

It also prohibits smoking outdoors at certain public venues visited by

children, including schools, after-school educational institutions and children's hospitals. Outdoor auditoriums in stadiums are also subject to the ban.

The ban was passed by the municipal legislature in November. It is an amendment to the city's tobacco control rule implemented in 2010.

A recent survey showed 23.3 percent of adults in Shanghai were smokers, about 4.89 million people.

Individual violators of the new ban can be fined 50 to 200 yuan (7.2 to 29 U.S.dollars), and venue operators violating the ban face fines up to 30,000 yuan.

Shanghai has distributed 1.5 million smoking ban signs and 3.2 million smoking control posters.

"Smoking control needs legislation. But what is more important is implementation," said Chi Liming, a Shanghai resident.

However, people often ignore the ban.

"Sometimes even if we ask our guests to stop smoking, they may find another place and smoke stealthily," said Guo Yifeng, deputy general manager of the Shanghai International Convention Center.

China has 316 million smokers, with a further 740 million exposed to second-hand smoke.

Nearly 20 Chinese cities have passed their own tobacco control rules. Beijing, the national capital and home to more than 4 million adult smokers, implemented the strictest smoking ban in the city's history on June 1, 2015, prohibiting smoking in indoor public places, workplaces and public transport.

"A national regulation banning smoking in public places is undergoing legislative process," said Mao Qun'an, an official with the National Health and Family Planning Commission, in November.

3 candidates qualified to run for HK's 5th chief executive

The nomination period for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)'s fifth term chief executive election ended on Wednesday, with altogether three candidates qualified to run for the vote to be held late March.

During the nomination period starting from Feb. 14, the Returning Officer at the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has received nomination forms

from Tsang Chun-wah, former Financial Secretary of the SAR government, Woo Kwok-hing, a retired justice, and Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, former Chief Secretary of the SAR government. Their nomination forms are ruled valid by the Returning Officer, making the number of candidates in the election three.

Ip Lau Suk-yea, a lawmaker, declared that she will end her campaign to run in the chief executive election as she was not able to get enough nominations from the Election Committee.

According to Hong Kong Basic Law and other related laws, a Chinese citizen of no less than 40 years of age who is a permanent resident of Hong Kong SAR with no right of abode in any foreign country and has ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for a continuous period of no less than 20 years, is eligible to be nominated as a candidate.

A candidate must submit the nomination form subscribed by no less than 150 members of the Election Committee and each member can nominate only one candidate.

The election will be held on March 26, when the Election Committee composed of nearly 1,200 members elects by secret ballot the Hong Kong SAR's fifth chief executive to be appointed by the central government.

Press release: PM meeting with King Abdullah of Jordan: 1 March 2017

The Prime Minister met His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan at Downing Street today.

They both welcomed the historic and strong ties between the UK and Jordan and the close partnership we have developed over many years on areas such as security and defence.

On Syria, they noted the importance of securing a lasting ceasefire, and reiterated that political talks are essential to reaching a settlement that can bring about a long-term solution to the conflict.

They also discussed the vital regional role Jordan is playing in hosting Syrian refugees. The Prime Minister assured King Abdullah that the UK will continue to support Jordan in these efforts and encourage others to do the same, including through the Brussels Conference in April.

On wider regional issues, the Prime Minister reinforced the UK's commitment to working with all parties to bring about a two state solution in the Middle East, and they agreed on the need for inclusive political settlements in Iraq and in Yemen as the only way to ensure long-term stability. They also

discussed progress in the wider campaign to defeat Daesh.

They ended by committing to further deepen the bilateral partnership for mutual benefit, for example on intelligence and counter-radicalisation.