Greg Girard
Ian Lambot

City of Darkness

Life in Kowloon Walled City

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About this book

I cannot remember, now, when I first heard about the Kowloon Walled City. It must have been in late 1979, shortly after I arrived in Hong Kong. It was still considered a dangerous place to visit at that time, and I clearly remember the strong feeling of being unwelcome. I survived my brief forays then, and the few that followed over the years. It was always on my mind that I should photograph the City, but the opportunity never seemed to arise. And then, in 1987, the clearance was announced. It was now or never.

Other commitments intervened, but in the autumn of 1988 I started visiting the City regularly. At a Christmas party that year, a friend introduced me to Greg Girard who, it turned out, was doing just the same. A book was born.

To capture the flavour of the Walled City on the printed page has been an interesting challenge. Its density, its unexpectedness, its smells, its sounds and changing textures are difficult, if not impossible, to convey. The decision to use interviews was an early one. It always struck me that it was the people who lived and worked there who were the key to its extraordinary nature, as much as the place itself. The other contributions fell into place later as a way of rounding out the story.

In designing the book, I have tried to reproduce the 'spirit' of the City. Like the City, the book is crowded and has no real order. Certain themes have been brought together, but otherwise you can dive in anywhere and wander whichever way you choose. Every spread tells its own story, just as every door in the City opened to reveal its own slice of life. And there was no telling what would follow next. One could only explore, and each visit brought fresh rewards. I hope that the book is as enjoyable to 'explore' as it has been to put together.

Ian Lambot, Hong Kong, August 1993

Greg Girard
Ian Lambot

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Life in Kowloon Walled City

with contributions by

Charles Goddard
Leung Ping Kwan
Peter Popham
Julia Wilkinson

Watermark

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Introduction
by Peter Popham

Peter Popham grew up in London, and studied at the University of Leeds. Following graduation, he left for Japan in 1977 to practise Zen meditation in the Buddhist temples of Kamakura, later turning to journalism. As a Tokyo-based writer specialising in architecture, his feature articles have appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines around the world, including The Sunday Times *and* Geo. *The author of several books, his exploration of the social genesis of Japan's urban architecture in* Tokyo: The City at the End of the World *(Kodansha, 1985) was published to considerable critical acclaim. He is currently a feature writer for* The Independent Magazine, *and lives in London. This article was first published in* The Independent Magazine *in May 1990.*

Hak Nam, "the City of Darkness", the old Walled City of Kowloon has come down. Many people in Hong Kong, both Chinese and foreign, for whom it was never more than a disgusting rumour, believed it went years ago. Not so. Almost to the end it retained its seedy magnificence. It had never looked more impudent, more desperate, more evil to some eyes, more weirdly beautiful to others.

For many years its limits were blurred by a dense undergrowth of squatters' shacks that spread outward from it. As the first step towards clearing the whole site, these were swept away and replaced on two of the City's four sides by a dusty park where the landscaping is only now taking hold. The City reared up abruptly from the bare ground, 10, 12, in places as many as 14 storeys high, and there was no mistaking it: six-and-a-half acres of solid building, home to 33,000 people, the biggest slum in the world. It was also, arguably, the closest thing to a truly self-regulating, self-sufficient, self-determining modern city that has ever been built.

For a long time the Walled City was synonymous with all that was darkest and most threatening in China: opium dens, warring Triad gangs, huge rats and terrible drains. But during its final years, when proper policing meant that foreign intruders and inquisitive strangers no longer risked having their cameras smashed or their throats slit, it became possible to look at it in a different, more detached light.

What is a city in essence? How do we arrive at one that really works, that satisfies the deep emotional as well as the everyday needs of the people who live in it, to the same degree as the ideal sort of village? For all its squalor and its legacy of vice, Kowloon's Walled City offered some intriguing answers.

The City in its final, massive high-rise form went back barely 20 years. In origin, however, it was much the oldest part of Hong Kong, and one of the few areas in Kowloon populated in 1898 when the British acquired their 99-year lease on the New Territories. Hong Kong, the island, in the famously dismissive words of its first British governor, was no more than *"a barren rock"*. By contrast, a settlement had existed on the site of the Walled City since 1668, and the 'city' itself was built in the mid-nineteenth century.

It was a proper Chinese town, laid out with painstaking attention to eternal principles; the Chinese believed that a town should face south and overlook water, with hills and mountains to the north. Given such conditions, the Yin elements (from the water) and the Yang (from the mountains) combine in such a way as to bless the lives of the inhabitants with harmony. The Walled City was in these terms very happily placed, with the great Lion Rock just to the north of it, and Kowloon Bay immediately to the south.

What the geomantic sages could not control were the infringements of the barbarians: first, marauding anti-dynastic rebels, and second, and far more devastating, the British. Under the terms of the 99-year lease, it was agreed that the Chinese would keep this, their ancient toehold on the peninsula, and would continue to exercise jurisdiction there until – or so the British believed – the colonial administration for the area had been established. This condition was never resolved, however, and the situation rapidly became irksome to the British. After military skirmishes between British and Chinese troops, they issued an Order in Council announcing that British jurisdiction was to be extended over the Walled City as well.

But the Order in Council remained unilateral, and a diplomatic stalemate ensued which was only ended in 1984 in the Thatcher-Deng agreement on the colony's future. Throughout the century of British rule, the Walled City has been an anomaly: within British domain, yet outside British control. Chinese officials left for good in 1899, but whenever the colonial authority tried to impose its will, the residents threatened to turn the attempt into a diplomatic incident. Until the Second World War the Walled City kept much of its old character, and offered a popular glimpse into the world of Old Cathay for foreign tourists.

The first body-blow to the place was delivered by the invading Japanese: they tore down the huge granite ashlar walls and used them to build Kai Tak Airport (the nucleus of which is still the colony's airport) on artificial land created in the shallows of Kowloon Bay. The former harmony was destroyed: the creation of the airport drove away the Yin spirit, which had been provided by the water. The City was abandoned. And with both walls and residents gone, effectively it ceased to exist.

What remained, however, was its status as a diplomatic black hole, and in the chaos of the War's aftermath it provided the perfect place of asylum for the great waves of refugees pouring south to escape famine, civil war and political persecution. Hong Kong remains to this day a territory peopled almost entirely by refugees and their descendants, which is the underlying reason for the universal uncertainty about reversion to China in 1997.

Even today illegal immigrants sneak across the border all the time, though many are booted straight out again. For many thousands of those who arrived in the 1940s and '50s, the City, surrounded now only by walls of political inhibition, was the place where they got their breath back: where they could live as Chinese among other Chinese, untaxed, uncounted, untormented by governments of any kind. Here the rents were mercifully low and no colonial busybodies snooped around asking questions about visas or licences, or working conditions or wages, or anything else.

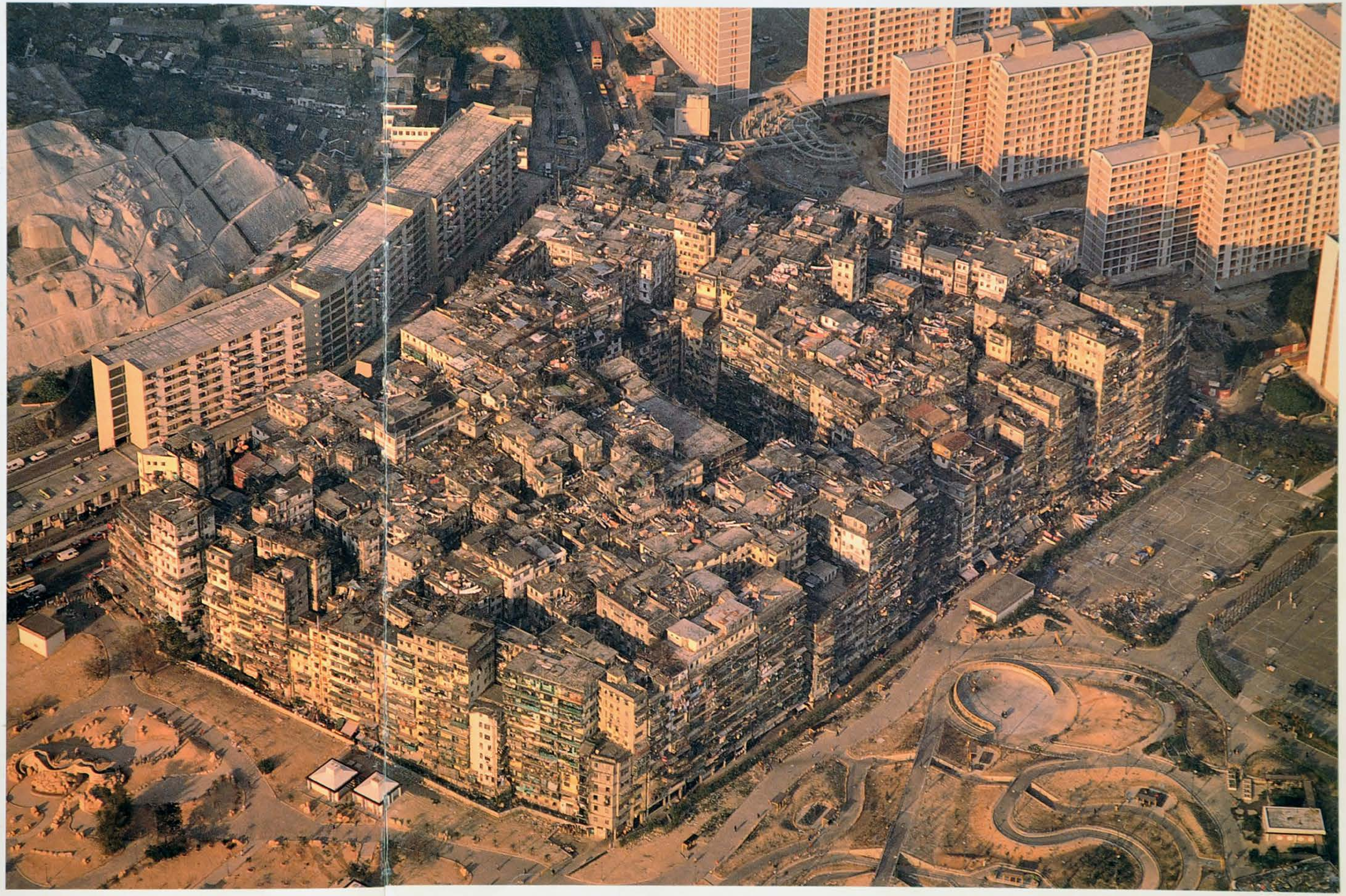
The Walled City became that rarest of things, a working model of the anarchist society. Inevitably, it bred all the vices that the enemies of anarchism denounce. Crime flourished. The Triad gangs made the place their stronghold, and amassed fortunes operating their brothels and opium 'divans' and gambling dens. Undoubtedly, they kept many residents in a state of fear and subjection, which is the reason why, until very recently, outsiders trying to penetrate were given the coldest of shoulders.

But the City's economic activity was not restricted to vice. Many legitimate businesses flourished too, albeit in conditions of great squalor and exploitation. Refugees, who did not dare leave the place for fear of being picked up by the colonial police, lived there in a state of virtual slavery, penned up in cages when they were not sweating in the factories. The Walled City housed some of the colony's most prosperous textile factories, as well as plants turning out toys, sweets, metallic bits of this and that such as watch straps, and huge amounts of food. It was, for example, the principal source of that *sine qua non* of Hong Kong gourmandise, the fish ball.

Gruesome though these factories are up close, it is the presence of the legitimate businesses in the City which enables us to get a clearer perspective on the place. For a long time images of lurid evil dominated public perception of it. This satisfied the prurient, and often quite racist, curiosity with Chinese low-life, but obscured the Walled City's many positive achievements — some of which were really quite astounding, and might even lend new credibility to that old anarchist model.

Here you had a totally self-contained, land-locked, extra-legal community of tens of thousands of people crammed into a tiny space, each with one idea in mind: survival. Their needs were no different from anyone else's: water, light, food and space. Of these, water was the most indispensable. The only way to get it was to go down, and so that's what they did, just as they had back in the old ancestral village, sinking 77 wells in all around the City, to a depth of some 300 feet. Electric pumps shot water up to great tanks on the roof-tops, from where it descended via an *ad hoc* forest of narrow pipes to the homes of subscribers. Plumbing was created in the same pragmatic fashion, though not to a standard that would satisfy any rational authority. (What is amazing is that the sewers and the water supply did not get mixed up.)

To run the pumps and to light up the City's alleys required electricity, and this challenge was tackled in typically robust fashion: they stole it from the mains. Only in the



Seemingly a single organic block, the 350 or so buildings of the Kowloon Walled City appeared as a rough parallelogram when seen from the air. Enclosing 2.7 hectares — or nearly 7 acres — the perimeter of the City followed the line of the old fort's former wall. As this could no longer be accurately pinpointed, the City had undoubtedly grown or receded in places. Taken in 1989, this aerial view shows the new park laid out on the site of the Sai Tau Tsuen squatter settlement which once mushroomed from the southern and western edges of the City.

1970s, after a serious fire (much the most terrifying hazard in the City), were the electricity authorities allowed in with their meters.

Thus was the substructure of urban life banged roughly but workably into shape. And on top of this a crude – and, from our elevated standpoint, no doubt a dingy, seedy and undesirable – sort of society came to flourish. As already mentioned, there was industry of every description. There were also several schools and kindergartens, some of them run by organisations such as the Salvation Army.

Medical and dental care were no problem at all: many of the residents were doctors and dentists with Chinese qualifications and years of experience but lacking the expensive pieces of paper required to practise in the colony. They set up their neat little clinics in the City, oases of cleanliness and order, and charged their patients a fraction of what they would pay outside.

For the moments of relief from toil there were many restaurants on the City's fringes. Embedded deep in its heart, one of the few physical relics of the past was a temple, and there was a church as well. A born-again Christian English woman called Jackie Pullinger, who arrived in the 1960s, was quick to spot the potential harvest of souls to be had among the addicts and the downtrodden, and since then has been weaning addicts in the City off heroin with amazing passion and success. For the many residents who retained their poise and pride despite the living conditions, the City offered opportunities for relaxation too. Every afternoon the alleys were alive with the clacking of mahjong tiles. Up on the roof, in cages not much smaller than some of the City's homes, cooed hundreds of racing pigeons. A part-time Chinese orchestra got together twice a week, and the melancholic, sinuous notes of the old instruments filtered up and down the alleys.

Lo Yan Street, one of four major alleys that crossed the City from north to south.

For anyone who has wandered, enchanted and appalled, through the working-class back streets of Hong Kong or Macau, Greg Girard and Ian Lambot's pictures will readily evoke the feel – and more particularly the smell – of the interior of the Walled City. But no images can do full justice to the experience of having been there.

There were no thoroughfares in the City – and no vehicles except the odd bicycle – only hundreds of alleys, each different. From the innocuous, neutral outside you plunged in. The space was often no more than four feet wide. Immediately, it dipped and twisted, the safe world outside vanished, and the Walled City swallowed you up.

It was dark and incredibly dank. It was impossible to stand upright because the roof of the alley was lined with a confusion of plastic pipes carrying water, many of them dripping. Immediately you were in, the symphony of stinks commenced: the damp, first of all, and underlying all the others; then, as you progressed, smells of incense – burned outside the homes – or charcoal, of putrefying pig's guts, of sweet-and-sour cooking, of raw and probably rotting fish, of burning plastic from a factory, of some sort of polish, of incense again, of mildew.

The light was dingy at best, deep green; there was the endless spatter of water leaking on to stone. One particularly ghastly little ginnel – spongily wet underfoot, a big rat hopping off – brought you to the gate of the Tin Hau temple. Its courtyard had been shielded from the rubbish routinely heaved out of upstairs windows by wire netting which, as a result, was liberally spotted with bits of ancient filth, through which some real light occasionally filtered down, just like the light which dapples through leaves in a forest.

All this intensity of random human effort and activity, vice and sloth and industry, exempted from all the controls we take for granted, resulted in an environment as richly varied and as sensual as anything in the heart of the tropical rainforest. The only drawback is that it was obviously toxic.

We climbed and climbed the steps of an apartment block. Who would have been a postman in such a place? Yet there was a postal service, and because the alleys and blocks often had no names or numbers, the postmen had devised their own system, roughly daubing complicated numbers on each door to guide them.

We kept on climbing and slowly it got a little better. The smells were diluted. Something like oxygen made its presence felt. The light brightened. We emerged finally at roof level, the only part of the Walled City where there was any space to spare. From there the awesome size of the place, which was essentially a single lump of building, became apparent.

A typical section of external facade, horizontally uneven and animated with balcony life. Overleaf: *In this photograph of 1990, the south side of the Walled City is seen facing on to the new public park, its formal greenery yet to take hold.*

The blocks were built at different times, of different heights and materials. Some were quite sophisticated: one of the largest, for example, was a copy of an early Hong Kong municipal housing block, designed by housing authority architects in their spare time. Some had home-made annexes of brick or iron or plastic fastened on to the roofs, but all were jammed up flush against each other so that an agile cat could circle the place at roof level without difficulty. The roof had various functions. One of the municipal services which the Walled City never really got to grips with was rubbish collection. Somehow or other they disposed of the organic, but the inorganic – old television sets, broken furniture, worn-out clothes, bedsprings and the like – they lugged up to the roof and abandoned. In among these unaesthetic piles of junk, village life continued.

Washing was strung up between the thousand television aerials. Small children played something like hopscotch under the eyes of old ladies. Pigeons cooed sonorously. And every 10 minutes or so another jumbo jet descended on Kai Tak Airport – heading straight for the Walled City and, skimming so low, it was surprising that it did not make its final descent festooned in laundry.

What fascinates about the Walled City is that, for all its horrible shortcomings, its builders and residents succeeded in creating what modern architects, with all their resources of money and expertise, have failed to: the city as 'organic megastructure', not set rigidly for a lifetime but continually responsive to the changing requirements of its users, fulfilling every need from water supply to religion, yet providing also the warmth and intimacy of a single huge household.

As the sun finally sets on this vast slum, there is perhaps cause enough to don rose-coloured spectacles and praise it.

仁德牙科

Yau Lap Cheong lived near the City continuously from 1928 – the year he first arrived from Chiu Yeung, in China, at the age of 20 – until the day he moved out in 1990, during the first phase of the clearance.

When I first arrived 62 years ago, there was no one living here. There was just a church and an old people's home. Three cannons guarded the entrance to the Walled City.

The Japanese arrived after I'd been here a dozen years or more. Those bastards demanded they be saluted wherever you saw them. They could be anywhere and often you just wouldn't notice them in time. Then, suddenly, they might shout an order for you to stop and they'd make you stand to attention on the spot for one or even two days. The slightest resistance could mean you might be cut to pieces.

I've been around the City for some 30 or 40 years. We took over the store for $13,000, though this included several thousand dollars' worth of stock in cigarettes and about a $1000 worth of medicine. A friend of mine was selling cigarettes to the people frequenting the gambling dens nearby. He decided it was too much work for him, so he handed me the business. Before I opened the store I worked as a foreman in a clothing factory.

My elder and younger brothers also joined in, and I rented the space – which was about 70 square feet – for $6 a month. There was a dance hall, gambling dens, and many opium dens and 'red pill' parlours on the same street. Business was good but the customers were a mixed bunch, pretty rough. Outside the City you could sell orange juice for only $1 a glass; here we could sell the same for $2. We sold peeled water chestnuts at $5 for five or $10 for 10, when a whole box only cost us slightly more than $20! We also sold pineapple slices for $4 or $5 which really cost 10 to 20 cents! And people paid; they never bargained! We made good money – about $5000 to $6000 a month.

We bought our goods, our dried food and rice and so on, from Nam Pak Hong over on Hong Kong side. We had to buy in bulk then. We were one of the few stores in the City. People would call around for protection money. I didn't pay, because if you paid once then that was it. Of course, they had their eyes and ears open and they learnt of our connections. I knew one of the top policemen, Leung. He was a good friend. He came around on Sundays, usually with 10 or so of his mates to eat noodles.

The biggest Triad organisation was the Sun Yee On. There was also the 14K, of course, many of whose soldiers came from Guangzhou. The so-called 'big brothers' around here were the toughs who'd made it without being chopped to death! There were loads of gangs; in fact, wherever youngsters gathered, there was a gang! The gang leaders were usually the guys who had been involved in fights and had got injured. Their blood had been let and they were regarded as brave. In those days, of course, people didn't fight to kill. Once blood was drawn, the fight stopped.

This street was once extremely rough. A foreign reporter was killed outside the dance hall near here. No one was particularly concerned about murders in the Walled City then. In the same way, there was often dog meat hung up along the street as if it was pork. No one really bothered. People engaged in all kinds of illegal businesses. Outside the City you'd hear people say: "Don't go into the Walled City. You'll be slaughtered!" For many years people didn't dare enter!

While I was running the store, I fell ill and had to go into hospital. It took a year or so to get well again. When I went back to the store, though, I found I had to work 18 hours a day. My younger brother and I were supposed to take 12-hour shifts, but he'd be playing mahjong and would refuse to take over. We were open 24 hours a day then, because the dance hall and all the other places were also open day and night. There was no electricity; we had to use gaslights.

My younger brother was a gambler; once he started he just couldn't stop. He always lost. He became a heroin dealer. I told him that he shouldn't be doing that, and I warned him that I'd inform the police. He stopped eventually. Actually, next to our stall was a manufacturer. Heroin cost just 20 cents a packet – and a big packet too!

At one stage, the drug dens were all closed down. There was a warning system. The telephone inside was connected to one outside. One call would be a warning. If there was a call and the place was still raided, the 'company' in charge of the phone would give compensation.

The whole street was full of heroin dealers. There was a makeshift building nearby from which heroin was sold; it paid out protection money of anything up to $10,000 a day. There'd be no arrests at that stall – only people from outside the City were arrested.

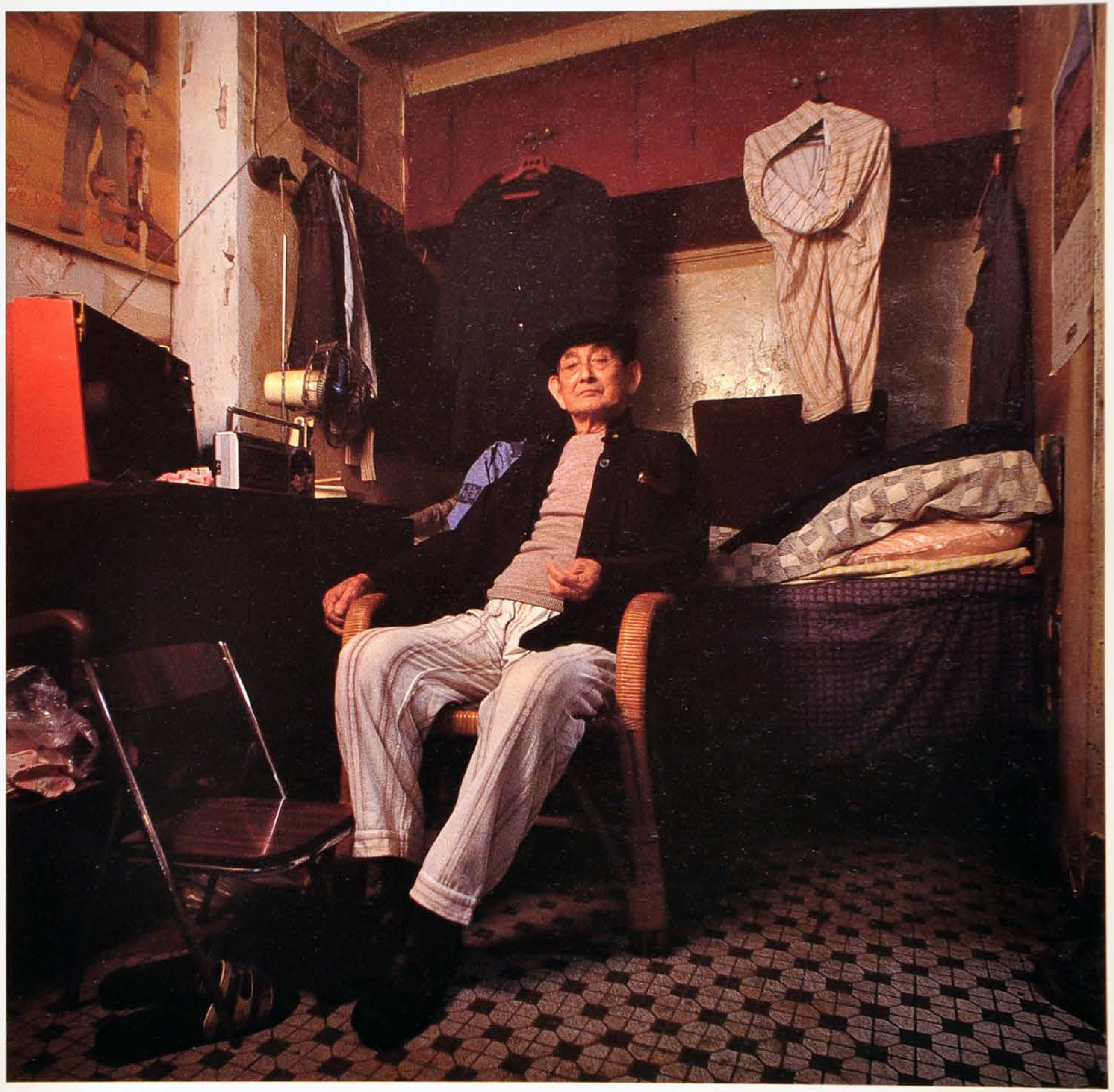
There were lots of buyers as well. Some resorted to injecting; an addict could look worse than someone whose flesh had been fried in oil. Things were so bad that the police eventually came to sweep the area clean. Then the dens moved upstairs. When the police first began signing their duty books on Tai Chang Street, these businesses were severely affected. This happened not so long ago.

You could not roam around in the Walled City, as you do now, until just a few years back. Now you can walk about with gold jewellery and no one will turn their head. There used to be a time, on Tai Yau Street, when a gold necklace was an invitation to be robbed.

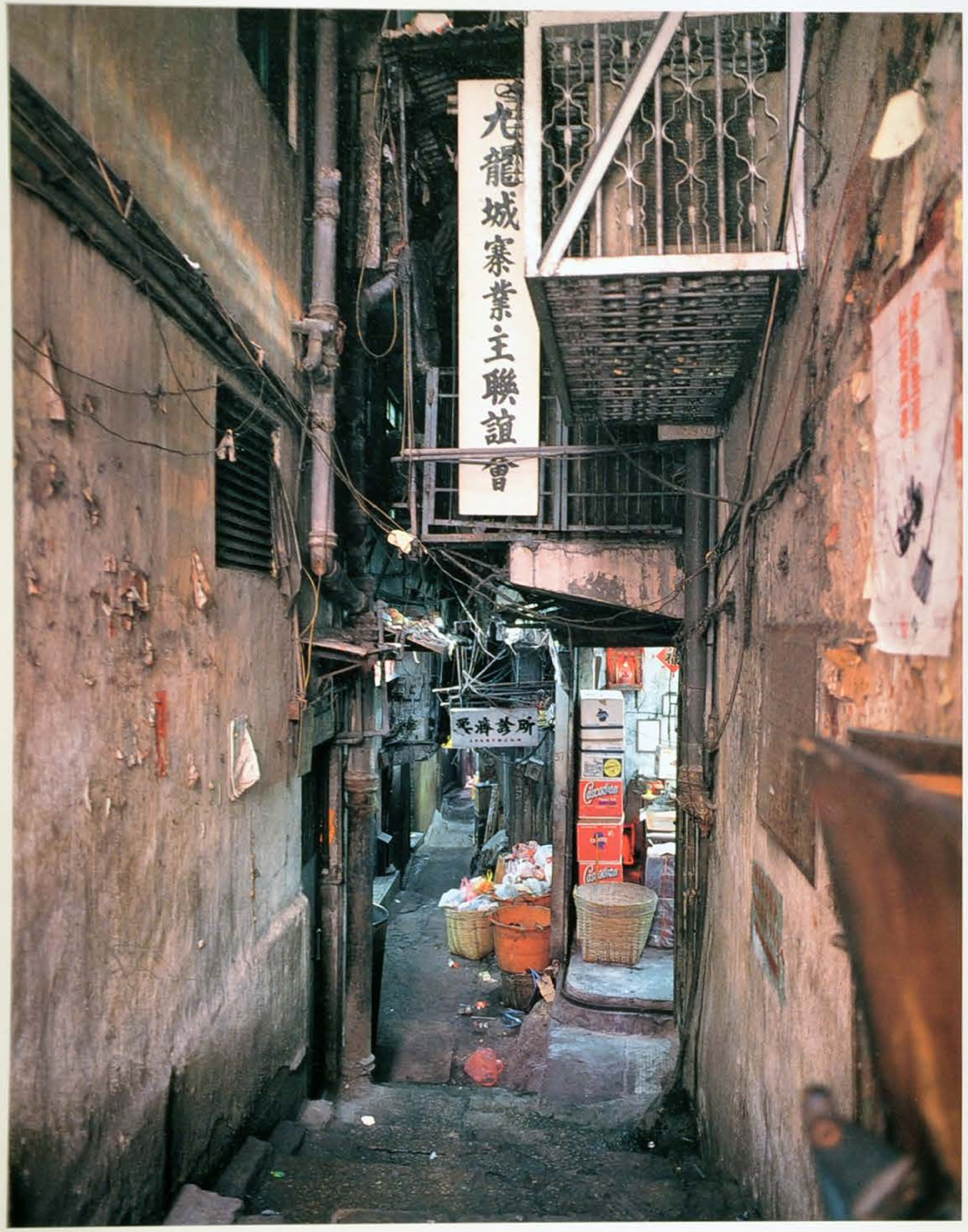
There is a lot less prostitution now. Just opposite this place there used to be a number of whorehouses. You can only see a couple of prostitutes left nowadays. There were once so many – in one house alone there'd be 10 or even more.

I quit running the store five or six years ago. My brother couldn't shake his gambling; he would just watch TV when he was there and things would be stolen or disappear. I didn't want my nephew or niece to get stuck with that, so for their own good I told them they had to go out and find jobs. I've survived these past few years on money given to me by my nephew and niece. I still own a flat on the fifth floor too, and that pays me $1000 in rent each month. I don't need a lot of money.

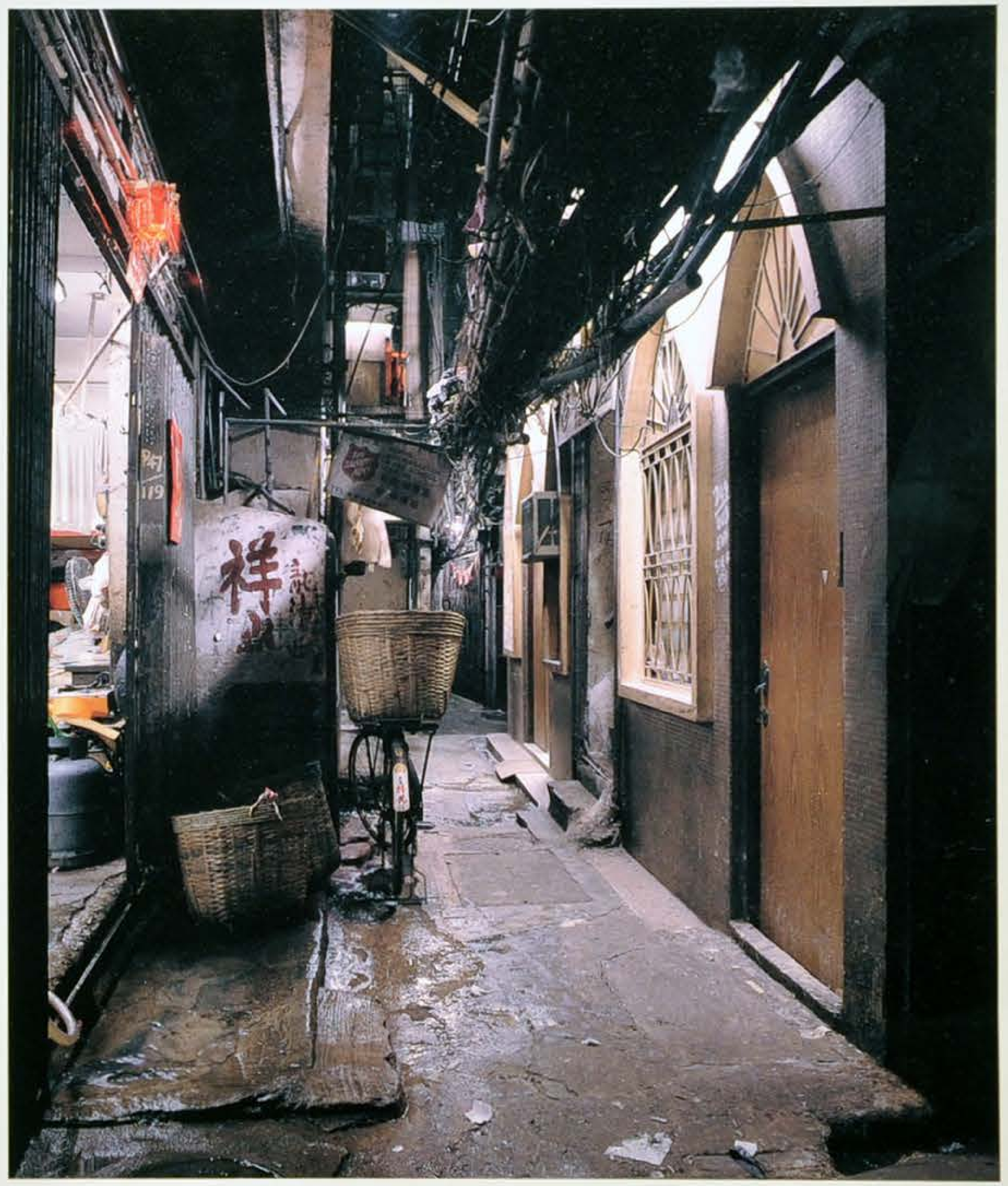
Over the past six or seven years I've spent most of my time in this room. I don't go out; I don't know anyone now. I don't care. Anyway, going out means spending money. I often listen to the radio. For a while, I couldn't get Radio 5 and I lost my Cantonese opera, so I spent a few hundred dollars on a new one. Five or six months ago, I applied for admission to an old people's home with the help of a social welfare agency. I think the timing is just right.

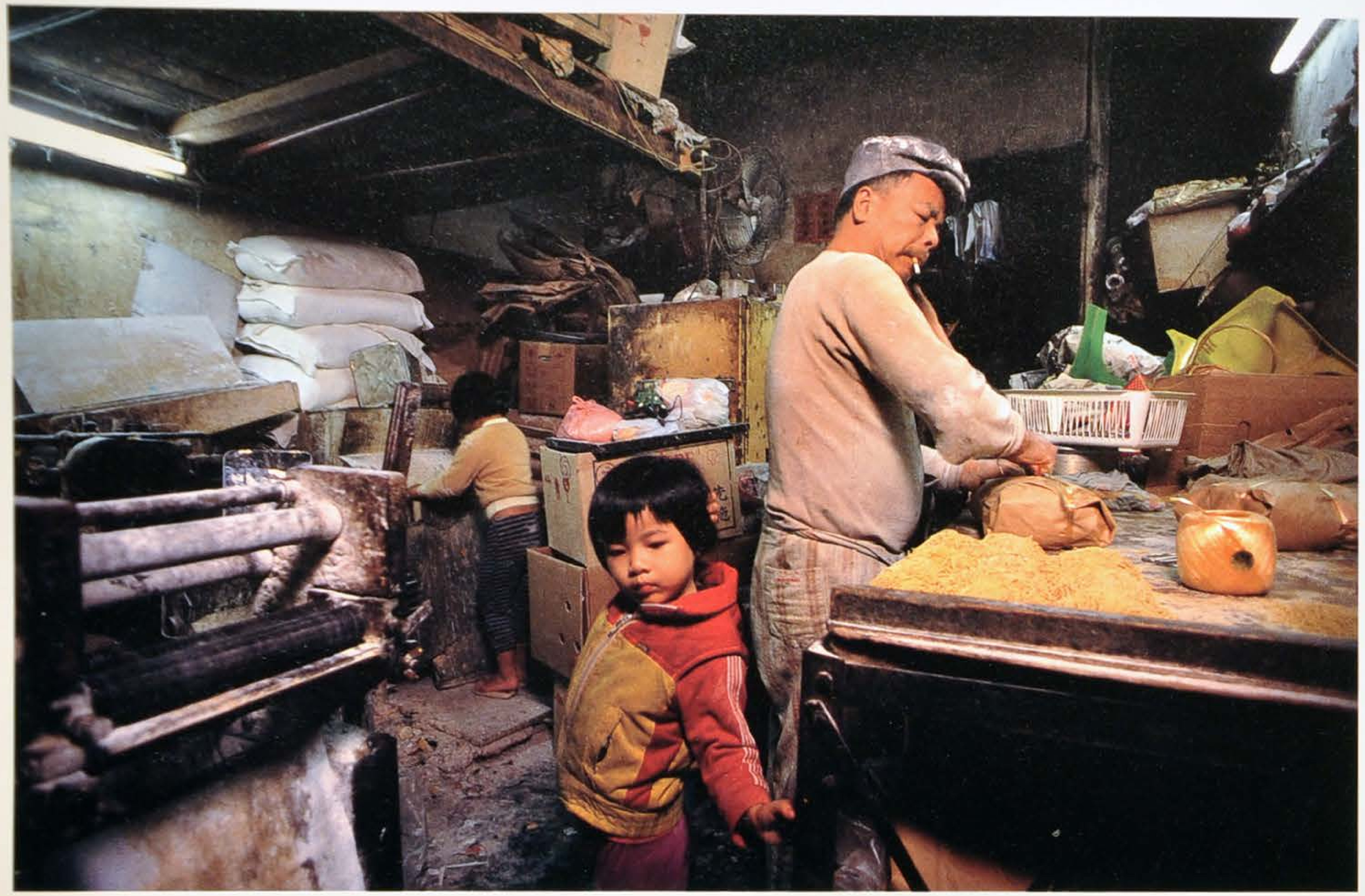


You Lap Cheong spent most of his retirement in a single room, no larger than seven feet by 12 and without natural light. His self-imposed isolation was broken only by the Cantonese opera on the radio. A poster carrying the ironic message 'Feel The Spirit of Freedom' masked a window that had long ago been bricked over by the wall of an adjacent building.

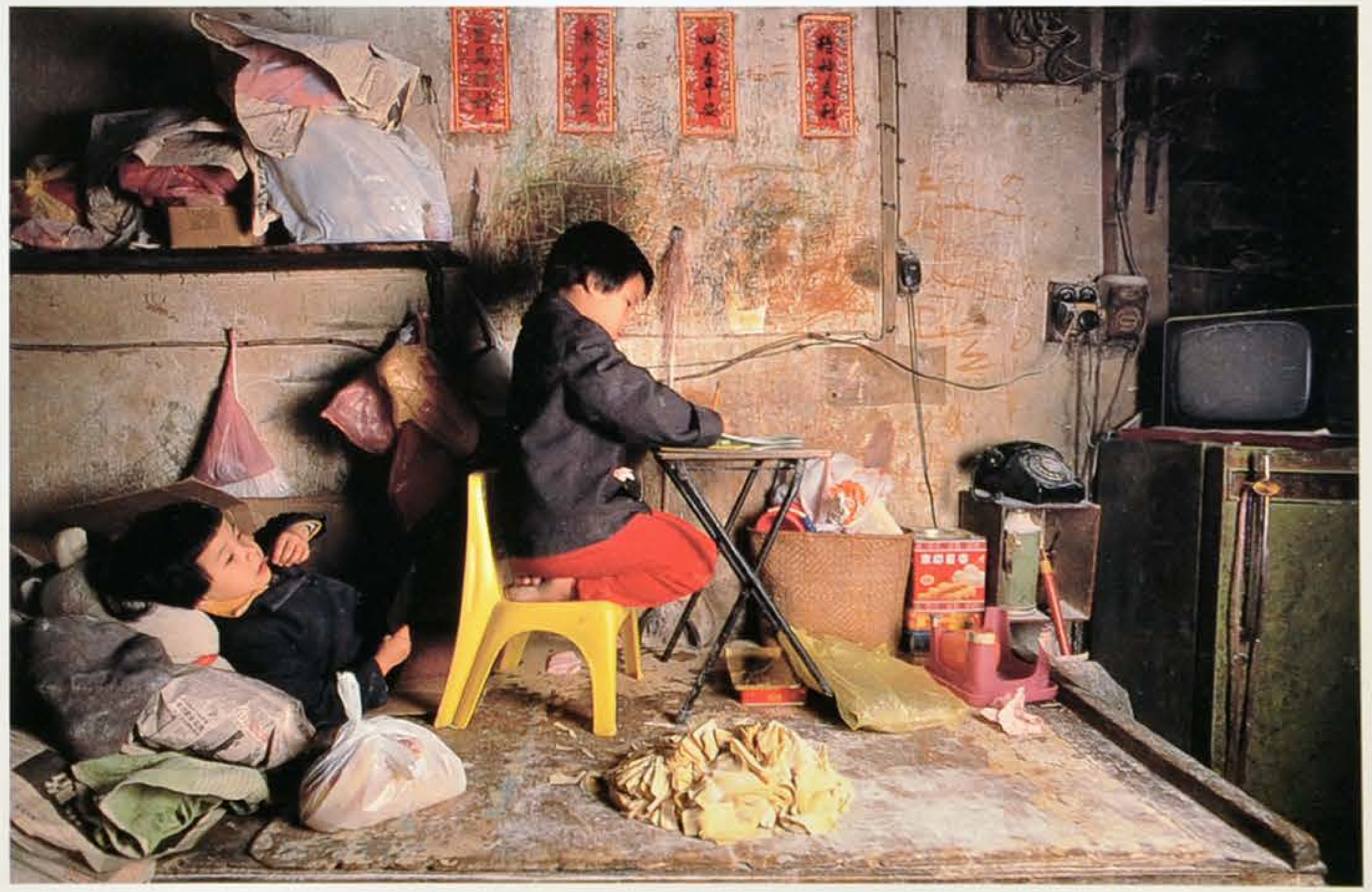


An entrance to the labyrinth [left], *looking down Lo Yan (Old People's) Street from Tung Tau Tsuen Road, the road which defined the northern perimeter of the Walled City. Since it was built on a slope, the City dropped four storeys at ground level between here and Lung Chun Road, which marked its southern boundary. One of four main alleys that ran north to south across the City, Lo Yan Street opened out to daylight where it passed the central courtyard of the old* yamen, *making it the only street in the City to have some degree of natural lighting along its course. Intersecting Lo Yan Street was Lung Chun Back Road* [right], *which ran parallel to the southern outer perimeter, Lung Chun Road. A fishball factory can be seen on the left, opposite the Salvation Army premises* [see page 126].





A workplace during the day became a living room at night, when Hui Tung Choy's wife and two young daughters joined him at his noodle business – normal working hours often extended late into the evening. The children's play and homework space was a flour-encrusted work bench.



Hui Tung Choy opened his noodle factory at the back of 2 Kwong Ming Street in 1965. He is married with two young daughters.

I came to live with my aunt in Hong Kong in 1947; I was 16 and my parents had died. I was brought up in Sun Hui [Guangdong] and I'd only ever been to primary school.

After I arrived, I didn't do much of anything for a while, until I began working with my cousin making noodles. I then opened my own noodle-making place with a friend. We needed a little capital to buy the machines, but flour was supplied to us on credit. One person can make about five or six packs of noodles a day, which is around 300 individual 'discs'. It's crowded here and tough work. We used to employ five people when the business was at its height in 1980; we were producing around 1000 discs a day then. We also employed two young lads to deliver to customers: one in the morning, the other in the afternoon. But young people today don't want to work in a place like this. So I'm working on my own. My partner fell sick and he and his wife decided he should drop out. I'm just about able to scrape by; I don't seem to worry any more about working from the moment I wake.

We chose the Walled City because rents were low and you didn't need a licence. To set up outside you'd have to go through various Government departments – labour, health, fire services and so forth. The City was Chinese territory so no one took much notice of what was going on here.

I've been around the City for the past 25 years. Actually, we used to be in Sai Tau village [the adjoining 'squatter' settlement pulled down in 1985]. When we first moved here the rent was a little over $100 a month; now it's about $1300. This building used to be a three-storey block until it was rebuilt. During the redevelopment we moved next door for eight or nine months.

We have a flat up above but we cook and take our showers here. My kids also do their homework here. All the people around here know us. There hasn't been any trouble over the years. The only problem now is that as more people have moved away there are more rats and cockroaches everywhere.

Grocery-store owner Chan Pak, happily oblivious to current fashions in shop display, in his tiny idiosyncratic shop on Lung Chun Back Road. Regular customers would drop by for string, cooking oil, soap, soya sauce or beer, or possibly just for a chat; the black-and-white television was invariably on in the background. Chan Pak's particular passion was for cats, of which he had seven at the time of this portrait. Though one of the more reticent of the City's storekeepers, 60-year-old Chan nevertheless expressed anger over the clearance and demolition plans, having had an enjoyable life in the City, in a neighbourhood he very much liked.

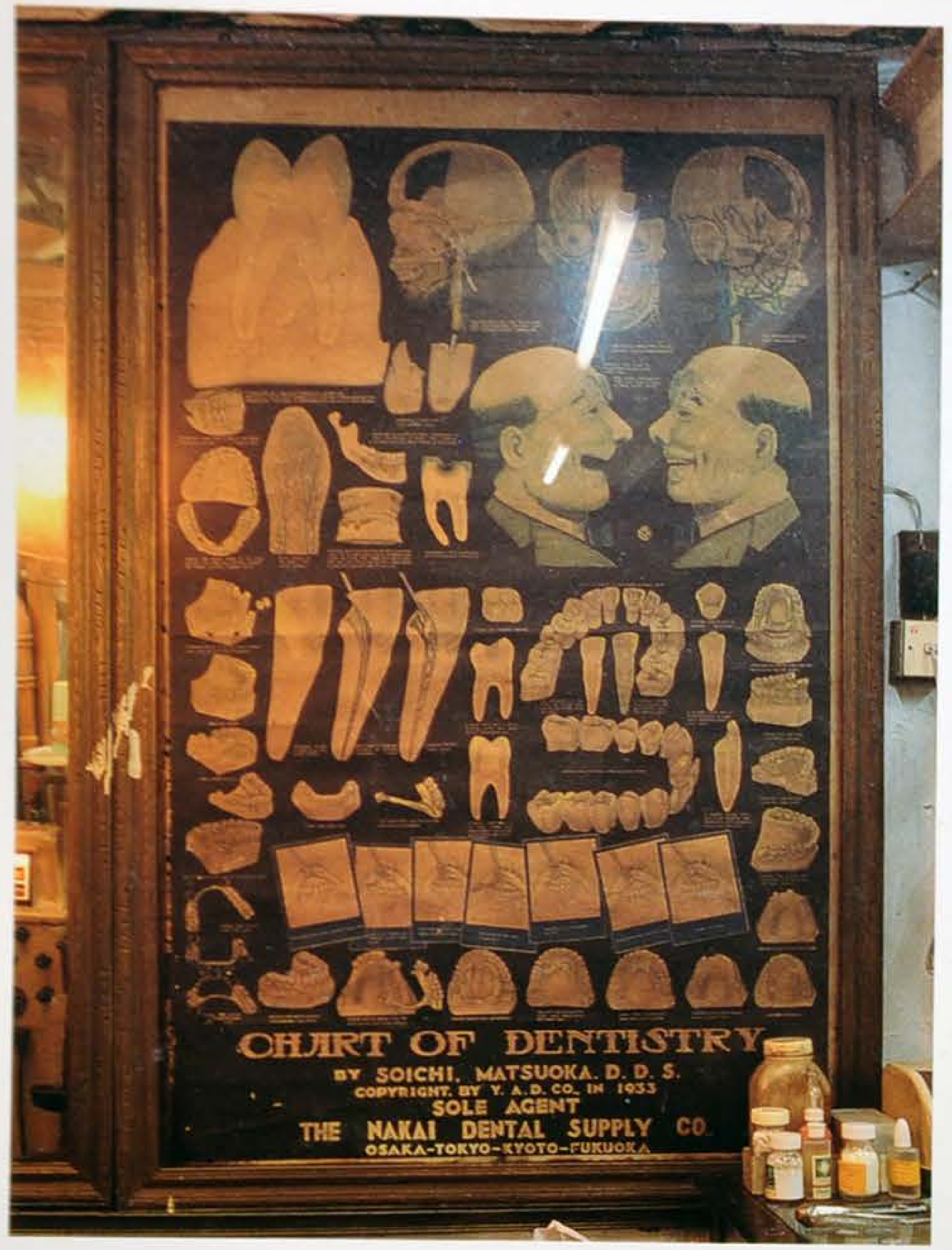


CHART OF DENTISTRY
BY SOICHI MATSUOKA, D. D. S.
COPYRIGHT BY Y. A. D. CO. IN 1933
SOLE AGENT
THE NAKAI DENTAL SUPPLY CO.
OSAKA-TOKYO-KYOTO-FUKUOKA

Japanese and Chinese dental charts, some dating from before the War, were all part of the package of 'professionalism' that Lam Mei Kwong felt would reassure his mostly working-class clientele.

Born in Shantou, China, in 1912, Lam Mei Kwong moved to Hong Kong shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1949, he opened his first clinic at 4A Lung Shing Road where, despite subsequent redevelopment, he was to remain for the next 42 years, only moving out under the terms of the clearance in 1991.

I learnt how to fix teeth in Shantou as an apprentice to a master. I came to Hong Kong to earn a living with my wife. We were here during the Japanese occupation and I moved around fixing teeth for people in their homes.

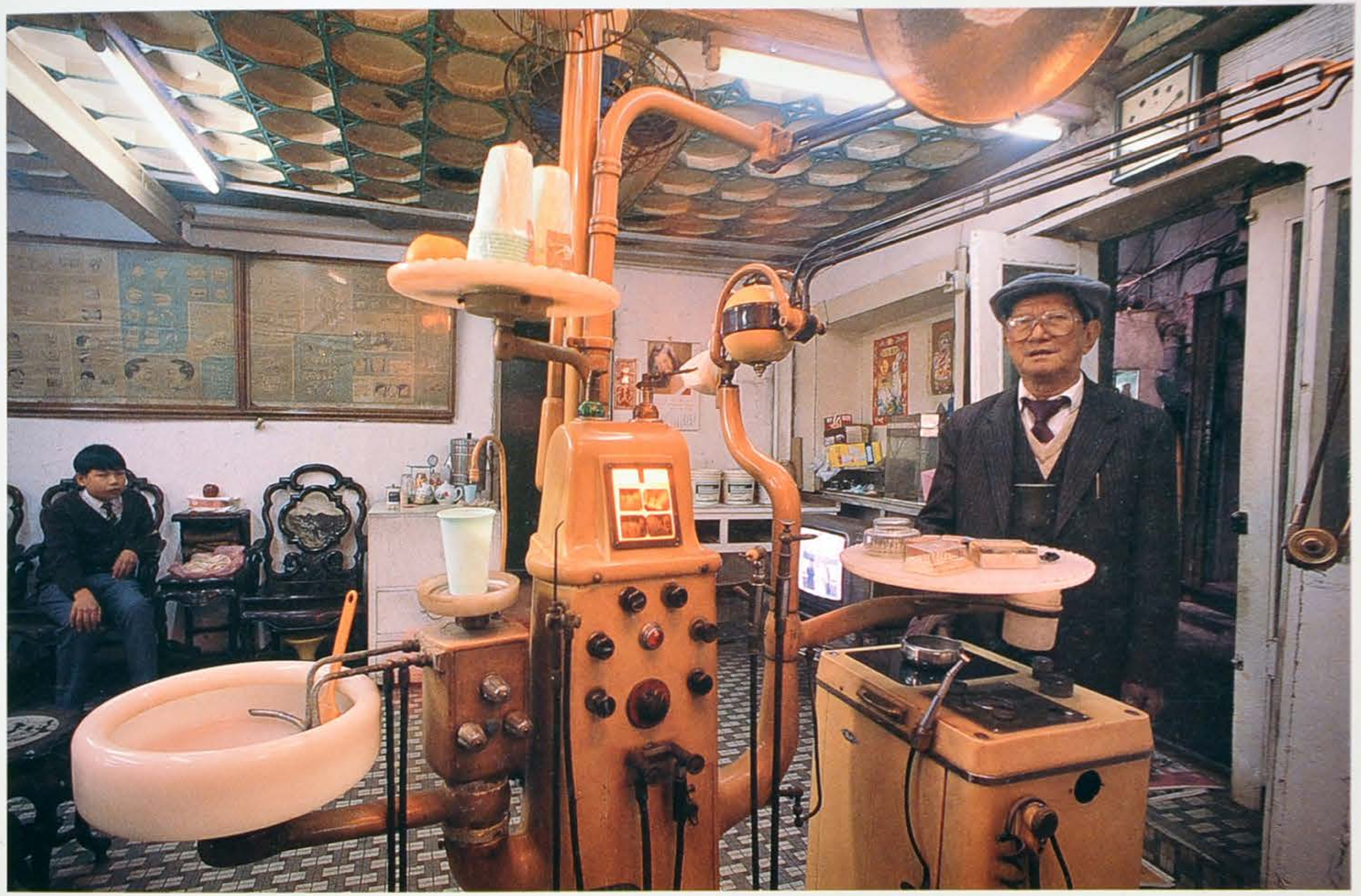
Then, 40 years ago, I started my practice here, in this clinic. At the beginning, I rented the premises, then later I bought them. This used to be known as East Gate Street, but was renamed Lung Shing Road. There were no houses across from here then, and there were very few people around.

In those days it only cost $3 to have a tooth taken out; nowadays, you would have to pay at least $200 and sometimes much more, maybe as much as $700. My clients were all different types: mainly Chinese, but some Indians used to come by too.

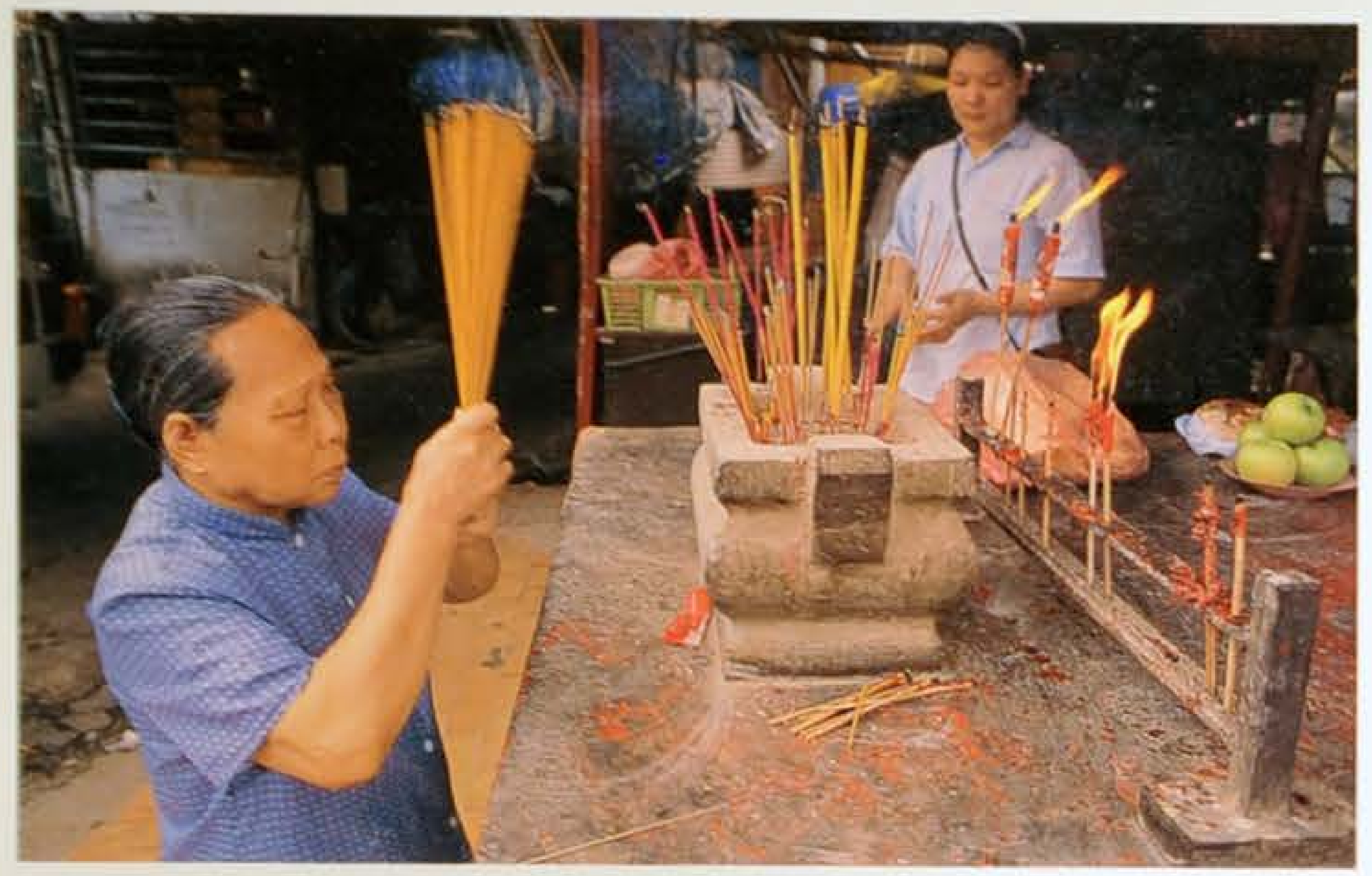
We built a place across the alley. I bought a wooden hut for about $3000 and then, about 20 years ago, I asked a contractor to build a 10-storey building to replace it. It cost more than $100,000. Each storey was about 500 square feet. We kept four for ourselves and sold the rest for $30,000 each. It took several months to build. The architectural plans were drawn up by the contractor, and he arranged the electricity and water supplies as well.

I don't have to pay rent here, so if the Walled City wasn't coming down I would stay here until the end of my life. Now, I have to worry about where to move.

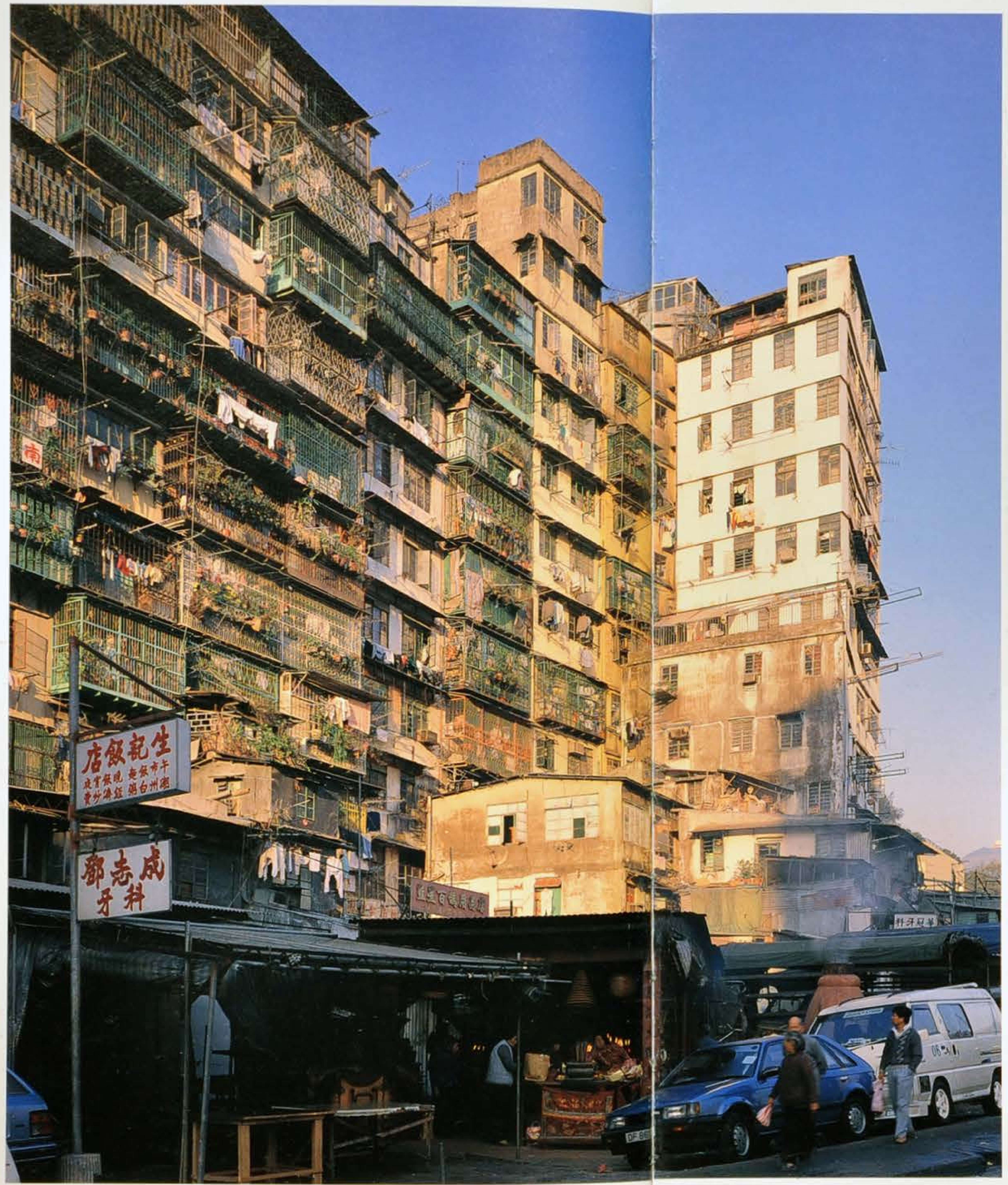
Before and after fixing a full dentures.
HONG KONG
DENTAL HYGENE



A spacious and well-furnished clinic, with relatively modern equipment – probably made in China or imported second-hand from Japan – revealed Lam Mei Kwong to be one of the City's more successful dentists.



A woman prays before the neighbourhood god at the Fuk Tak Temple, bowing three times with lit joss-sticks while silently making her supplications. Food offerings to the local gods were commonplace at such shrines, where Buddhist, Taoist and animist traditions coexisted without irony.



According to folklore, the Fuk Tak Temple – in fact, no more than a shrine – was erected by a Sung Dynasty emperor who brought the statue of the god from the capital of China to Hong Kong. The original site of the temple was on Tung Tau Tsuen Road, on the City's northern edge, before it was moved here to the eastern side and squeezed among the row of temporary structures housing dai pai dongs (streetside restaurants) and dentists. The shrine was especially popular with local Chiu Chow residents – both within and outside the City. A minor deity, common throughout Hong Kong, Fuk Tak is said to give protection and good fortune to residents in the locality. Women comprised the majority of visitors, coming perhaps to pray for simple favours or fortune in their daily lives – a mother might have prayed for her son to pass his school exams, for example, or for a small operation to proceed smoothly. The row of low-rise structures in which the shrine was located was technically a no-man's-land, since the exact boundary of the City's former wall was unclear. For practical purposes, however, it was regarded as part of the Walled City, and the residents and businesses located there received the same compensation and re-housing package.

Hui Kwong – one of a group of friends who joined forces to form the Chiu Chow Music Club – on a yeung kum, a Chinese xylophone played with short bamboo sticks.

Though 75 at the time of the interview (in 1991), Hui Kwong was still an active member of the Chiu Chow Music Club. He had lived in the City since 1961 and had served as financial secretary of the Kai Fong Association there for many years.

I come originally from Malaya. Like many overseas Chinese, I was very concerned about the Japanese invasion of China. We were told at school of the invasion of Manchuria and the Marco Polo Bridge incident. Our teachers urged us to support China. Donations were collected to buy arms to help the Chinese war effort. I got involved in theatre work to raise money. Actually, I left high school before I graduated and went back to China to fight in the war. I received some military training, but mostly I assisted in activities organised by the Kuomintang in the south. I did not fight on the front line.

The Japanese surrendered in 1945, and a couple of years later I came to Hong Kong. I didn't agree with the civil war between the Communists and the Kuomintang. I'd only wanted to support the fight against the Japanese. So I set out to go back to Malaya, but when I arrived in Hong Kong I found I no longer held a valid passport. There was no work here in Hong Kong, so I went back to Shenzhen for a while. But there was nothing much to do there either, so I went to Guangzhou and started up a travel agency. Business was quite good for a while. Indonesia was expelling a lot of Chinese people, and overseas Chinese elsewhere were returning to China in their droves [to help with the revolutionary effort]. My speciality was receiving and taking care of these people. I also got married then. I was 30. It was really pretty good during the Liu Shaoqi years. [Liu became President of the People's Republic in 1959.]

But then along came the policy of the 'general' line or whatever, which meant the closing down of all private businesses. We were accused of smuggling and so on, and some of us were imprisoned and others left the country. I got out to Macau where I became involved in helping others get into Hong Kong illegally; I acted as a middle-man. In those days very few people who made it to Macau had valid permits to go on to Hong Kong.

I brought my family – my wife and my daughter – to Hong Kong in 1965. Life was hard then and we ended up finding a place in the Walled City. It was cheaper here. Luckily I'd learnt how to operate a machine making plastic goods, so that's where I worked during the '70s. I was paid $120 a month. I had three kids by then, but in those days $1 was quite enough to buy a day's food for the family. So I managed to survive and bring up the children.

I seldom ventured deep into the Walled City. It was all prostitution, drugs and gambling inside. All kinds of goings-on! But we were a poor lot really and so had little to fear. There was no running water in the City at that time; we had to fetch our own water from the taps in the street outside. We hired night-soil collectors to take away our waste.

The Kai Fong Association was formed to stand up to the Hong Kong Government. This was when they first tried to pull the Walled City down. It was a matter of life and death for us – where would we have gone if the City had been demolished? Our chairman was actually arrested and jailed for his protests; he was accused of attacking the police or some such thing.

Once the Association was up and running, it began to take care of sanitation and other welfare problems in the Walled City. It also began endorsing property deals by attaching the Association's stamp on sale agreements. Each transaction would be entered into a register which was kept at the Association office. This was done so that buyers couldn't be cheated. Of course, the Association charged a fee of $200 for the service; that income amounted to $2000 or $3000 a month.

I was a voluntary member of the standing committee of the Kai Fong to begin with, but then I took up a position as a part-time member of staff. The Association was generally regarded as an organisation of leftists. Of course, there were other factions and sects in the City – the rightists and Triads, for example. Our policy, though, was that we never interfered in other people's business. You'd do your business dealing in drugs or organising gambling; we'd stick to welfare, sanitation and ensuring the drains and trenches were not blocked. As the Association generated more money, it began to take care of the pavements, street lighting and so on. We also established good relationships with other Kai Fongs.

There was never any contact between us and representatives of the Chinese Government though. Every now and then a 'reporter' [an employee of the New China News Agency] would come nosing around, suggesting this and that. That was all.

I spent 10 years with the Kai Fong. When I became the treasurer, there was a balance of just $700 in the account, but by the time I handed over, the surplus was well over $200,000. During my term we managed to widen the source of income and restrict unnecessary spending. The accounting also became less muddled. Of course, the huge number of properties bought and sold in the City during that time also brought in large revenues to the Association.

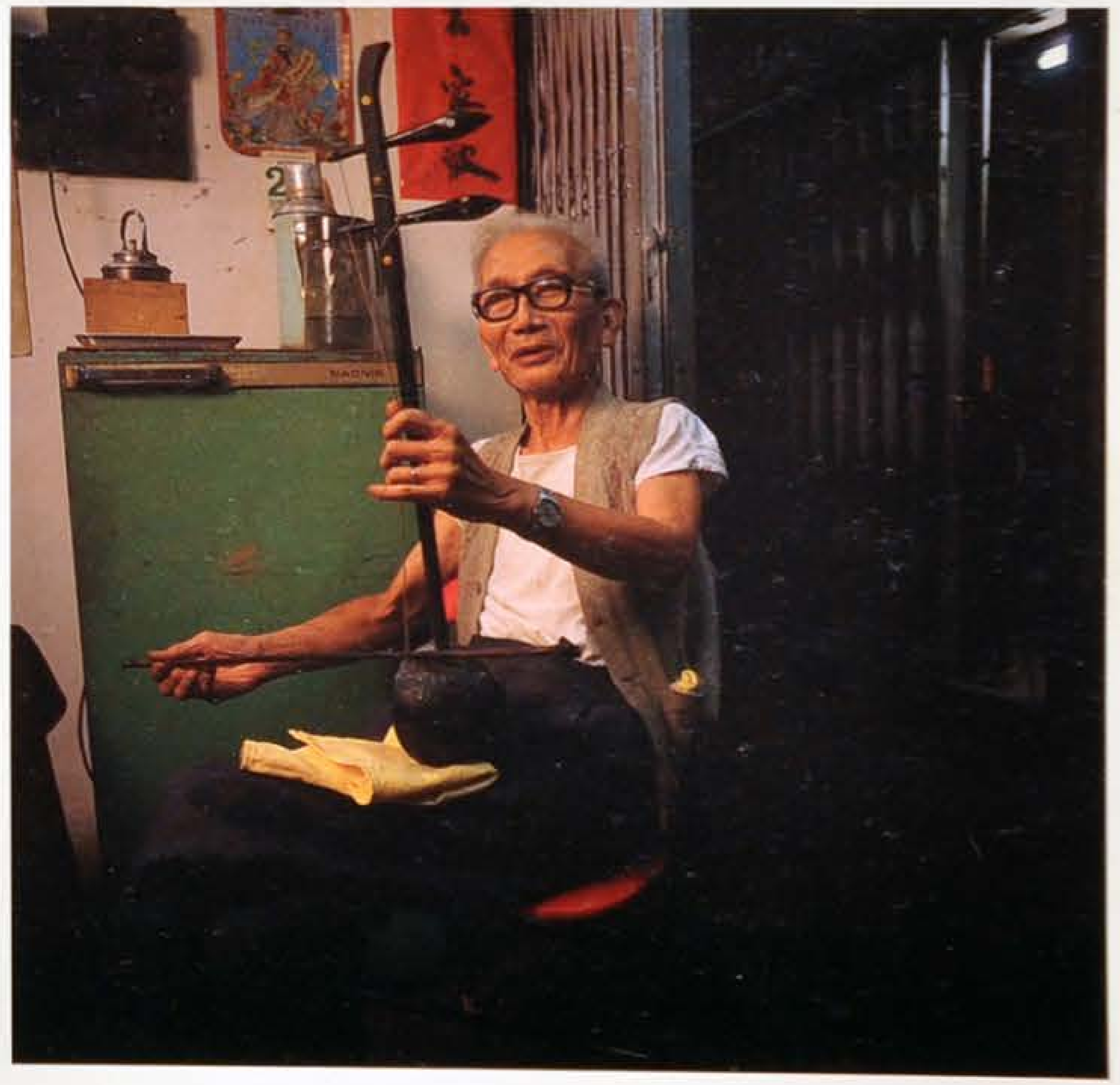
I decided to leave the Association because of the squabbles there. In any case, my eldest daughter had just married and I was planning to open up a café in Kwai Chung with my son-in-law. As it turned out, that didn't come off, but I left the Kai Fong all the same. And then, just a few months later, it was announced that the Walled City was to be pulled down.

In fact, there was a number of clear signs that the City would eventually be demolished. We should have known in 1984 [when the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed] that China was unlikely to see any further value in the Walled City after it resumed sovereignty in 1997. Of course, it's true the City created some wealth and quite a few capitalists: there have been few, if any, restrictions on businesses here – no licences or business registration fees were required, no rules or regulations, no taxes, and electricity and water were cheap. It also suited us, the lower classes. But it had reached the stage where it had to come down. There are just too many people here. And the buildings are really dangerous – they are almost falling down on their own.

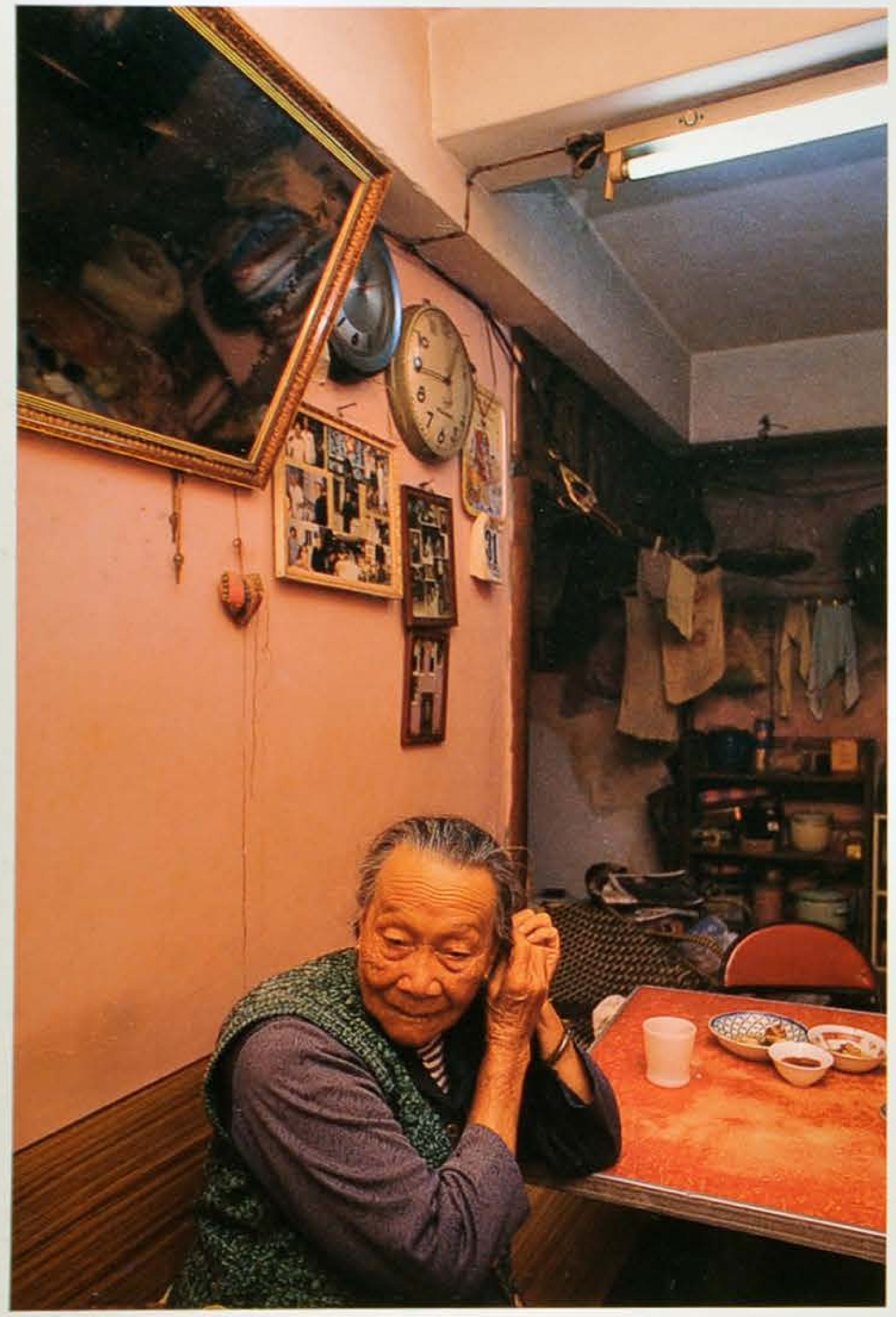
Actually a lot of people have struck it rich since the announcement. Those who built flats which they were unable to sell because they were too dark or whatever – even they are being well compensated! No, I raise no objections to the demolition. I would say 90 per cent of the people here feel the same. The remaining 10 per cent are those with businesses. Personally, I don't want to be rich. All I want is to spend the rest of my life peacefully and comfortably.

When China resumes sovereignty, the Hong Kong people will be their own masters. Young people here have never really had any national consciousness. They lack any real political awareness; the British have always tried to keep them docile and submissive. Here in the City, there is a large number of Chiu Chows; we Chiu Chows stick together because we need to survive. To be united is to be powerful and strong. Then you can eat.

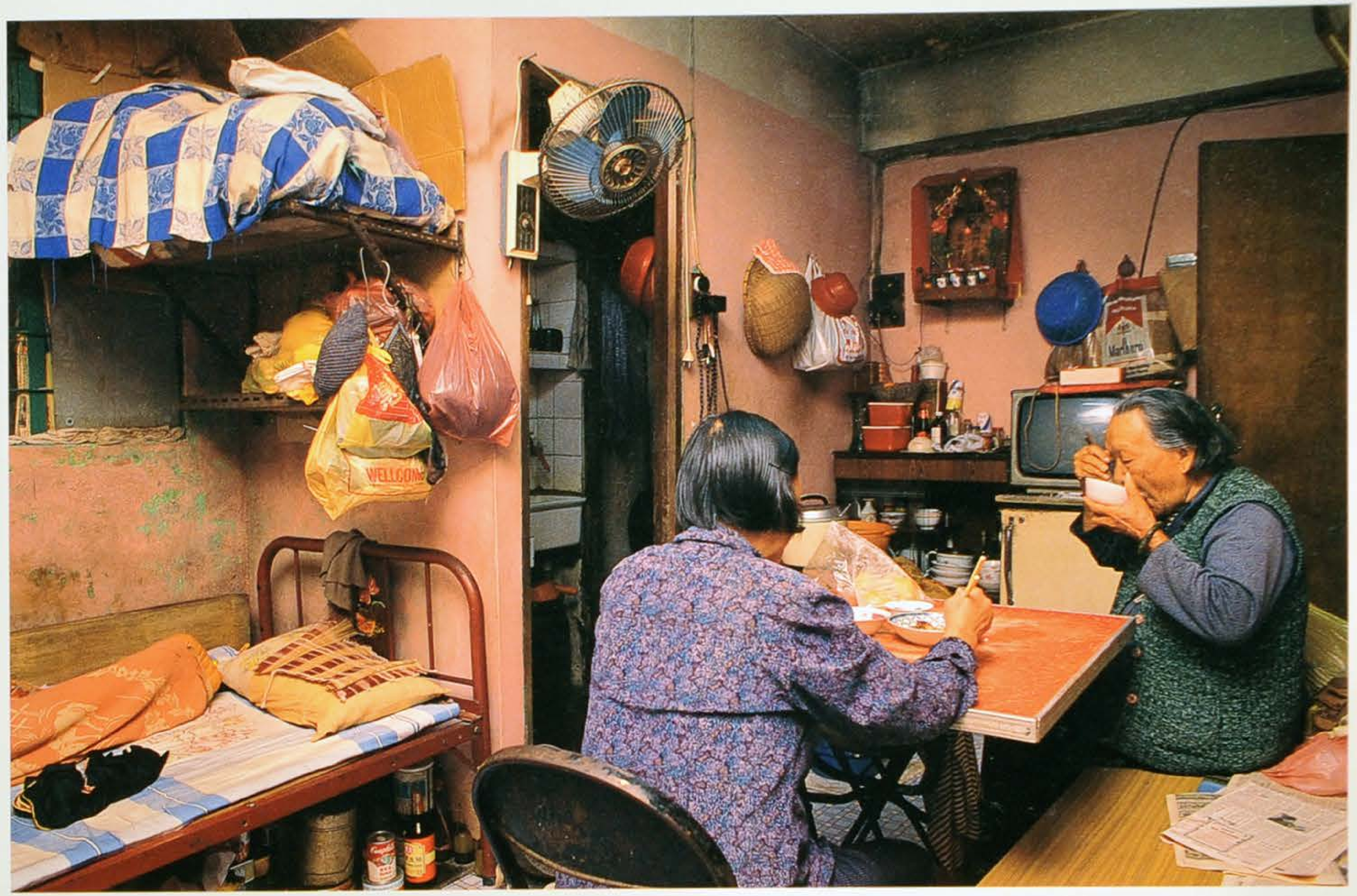
The Chiu Chows started up a music group. It was set up by a clansman of ours, Doctor Hui. It's been going for more than 20 years now and there are about 20 members. Most used to live in the City but many have already moved out. We play Chiu Chow music which has its own unique place within Chinese music. When a Chiu Chow listens to Chiu Chow music, he or she becomes totally enraptured. Music is a great healer; it even promotes blood circulation. Some people say we're hypnotising ourselves when we play! We're a non-profit making group and occasionally we give performances. I prefer playing in a group; it's more fun. We have singers too – male and female. The music group is a three-way alliance of the young, the middle-aged and the old!

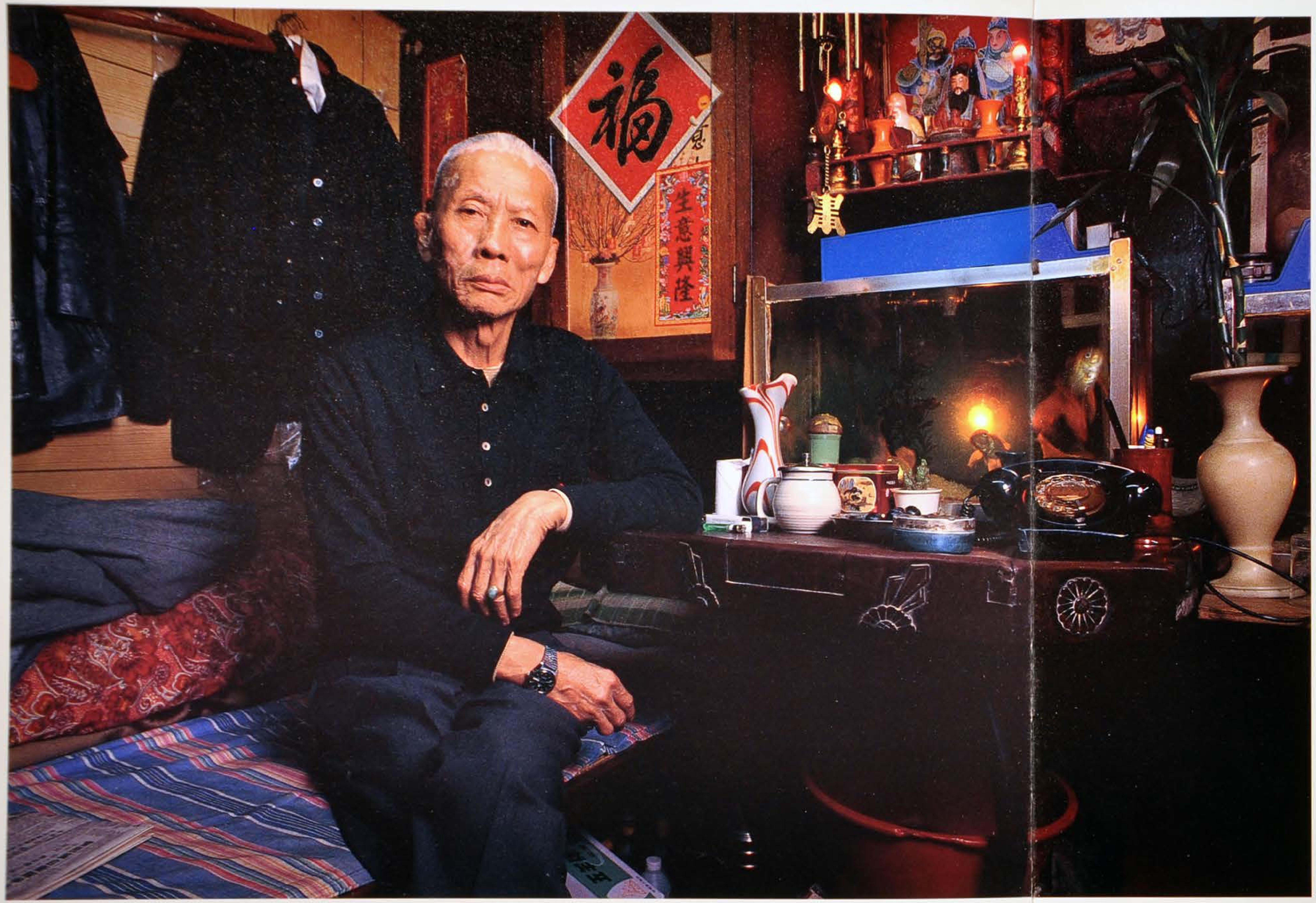


A colleague playing the erhu, a two-stringed instrument which creates the sorrowful wail of traditional Chinese music. A pot of tea, which Chiu Chow people take strong and short, sits stewing on the table [left].



Law Yu Yi, aged 90, lived in a small and exceptionally humid third-floor flat off Lung Chun First Alley with her 68-year-old daughter-in-law, an arrangement which almost certainly reflected the traditional Chinese obligation of a son's wife to serve his parents and family. Both their spouses had passed away, a not uncommon occurrence which often resulted in a close dependence and companionship between women of different generations, thrown together in their later years because of such marital bonds. Formerly a housewife and originally from Guangdong, Law Yu Yi had lived in the City for 28 years; a surviving son lived on a lower floor in the same building. Her daily routine would take her to the adjoining park, where she would groom her face meticulously in the traditional Chinese way, and to the Old People's Centre to take tea and meet friends.





Born in Po Ling, China, in 1920, Wong Hoi Ming spent much of his youth in Thailand, before being expelled back to China, in 1938, for campaigning against the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Leaving his wife and family to protect the family land in China, he fled to Hong Kong alone in 1949.

When I first arrived here from China, I became the head of a 'coolie' gang on Hong Kong island, in Western district. I was pretty good at martial arts, and when people were injured in fights I would fix them up. You see, I'd learnt a bit of medicine and kung fu when I was in Thailand, and I then studied under some masters back in Chiu Chow.

I was persuaded to take my medical practices more seriously, and a friend helped me to get a business licence. I began practising in Wing Lok Street – on Hong Kong island – then moved to Queen's Road. When that building was demolished I came across to the Walled City. It was cheap and I could afford it, and I'd known it for some time because I'd been coming here once a week for several years, to teach martial arts.

My students then came from all walks of life – some were drivers, others fish sellers, factory hands, air-conditioner repairers, coolies, you name it. They were learning martial arts for self-defence. Here in Hong Kong, if you know the art of self-defence you won't be bullied. I didn't ask for much money when someone became my student; they would just burn some incense and that was it. No money. Sometimes my students would bring me some food or fruit – that was enough.

I've actually only had four proper martial arts students since moving here – teaching them mainly how to tackle attacks from others. The last left some time ago and I haven't taken students since. Of course, I knew most of the 'big brothers' round here. They were Chiu Chow and so am I. But I didn't get involved and they respected that. I was given face – I didn't even have to pay for my water supply. I just try to get along with my neighbours; the kids round here greet me as uncle.

There was a time when I let people play mahjong here in the flat. There was room for two tables and I would charge a commission; people would leave what they wanted for the facilities. But I stopped that a few years ago. It's a small place, and if patients came for a consultation when the mahjong players or my friends were here I couldn't really do my job properly. Also, the women patients were usually too shy, especially if they had to take some of their clothes off for treatment.

Most of my patients suffer from rheumatism, though I also treat people with fight injuries, back problems and numbness in the body. I've got them all written up. My treatment includes the identification of the main symptoms, the use of cups on the body for suction and the application of herbal poultices. I also use massage and stretching. I make hot herbal medicines as well, and many people come to buy these for their rheumatism. Most of my clients come from Kwun Tong [a working-class industrial area in Kowloon], though there are some who come from as far away as Shatin and Aberdeen.

I always manage to cure people completely. Last year I treated a guy who couldn't move his arm. Now he's completely recovered. I've even healed cases of paralysis when they've come to me early enough. One person I remember, a man named Ng, was to have his legs amputated. However, he refused to have the operation and came to see me instead. I cured him. Now his son, his daughter and his son-in-law all see me. On another occasion, a policeman came to see me on someone's recommendation. He arrived on crutches. I looked him over and told him that he wouldn't need them when he left. And he didn't.

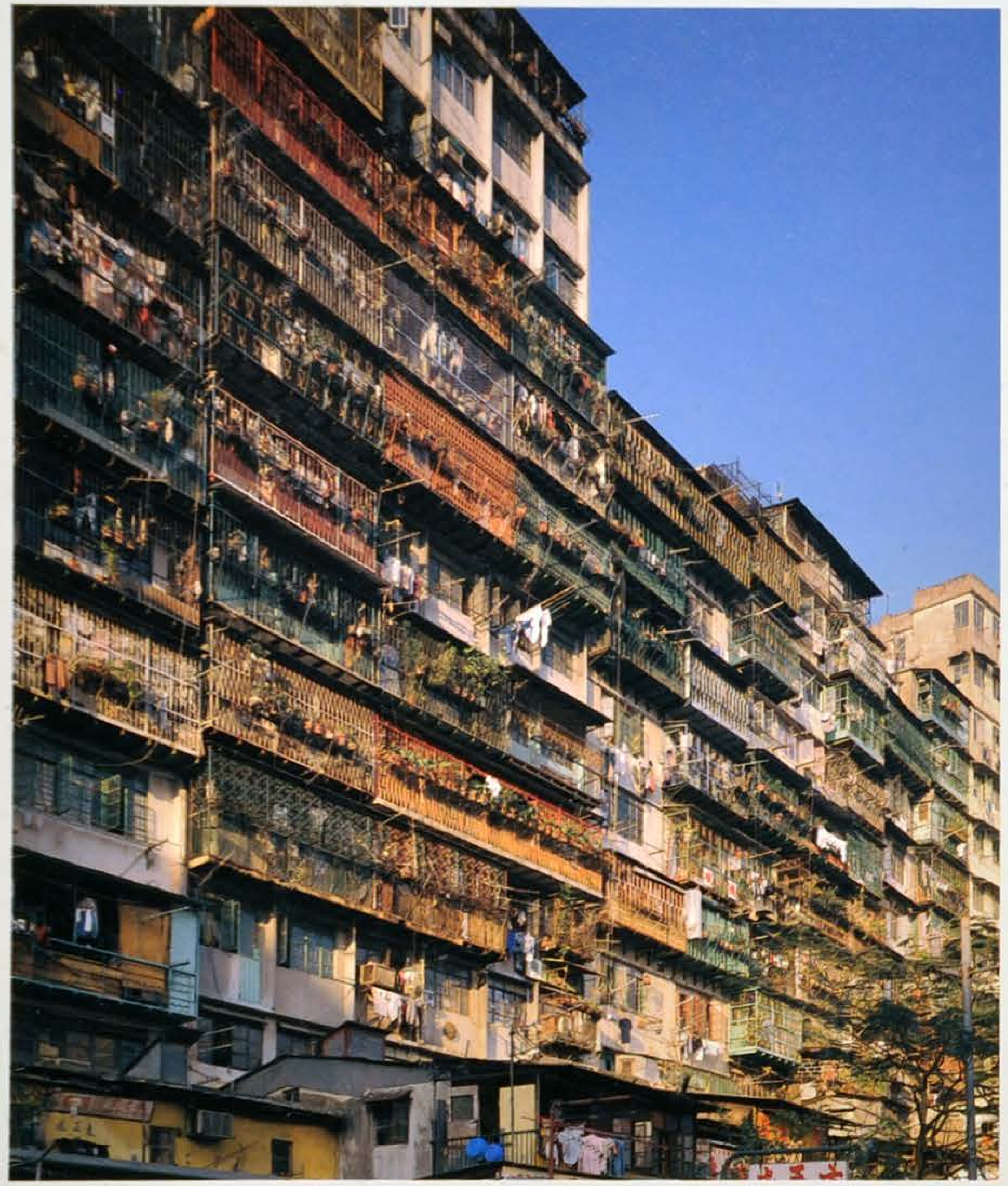
I don't have fixed fees. If my clients seem to be well off, I suggest they give me more; if not, I ask for less. A patient from Kwun Tong – a vegetable seller – always brings me a carton of cigarettes as payment! I could be charging $400 to $500 for one treatment alone, if I wanted. My income's never very stable, though. Sometimes, I don't get a single client for days or even weeks.

I've been in this apartment since I came to the Walled City; the rent here was originally just $150 per month. Then it went up to $300, so I bought the place. Actually I was told to leave, but the owner was not able to get me out. But now I will have to move. I'm getting around $140,000 for this place, but nothing for being a herbal doctor which I think is unfair. The other doctors are getting a lot more.

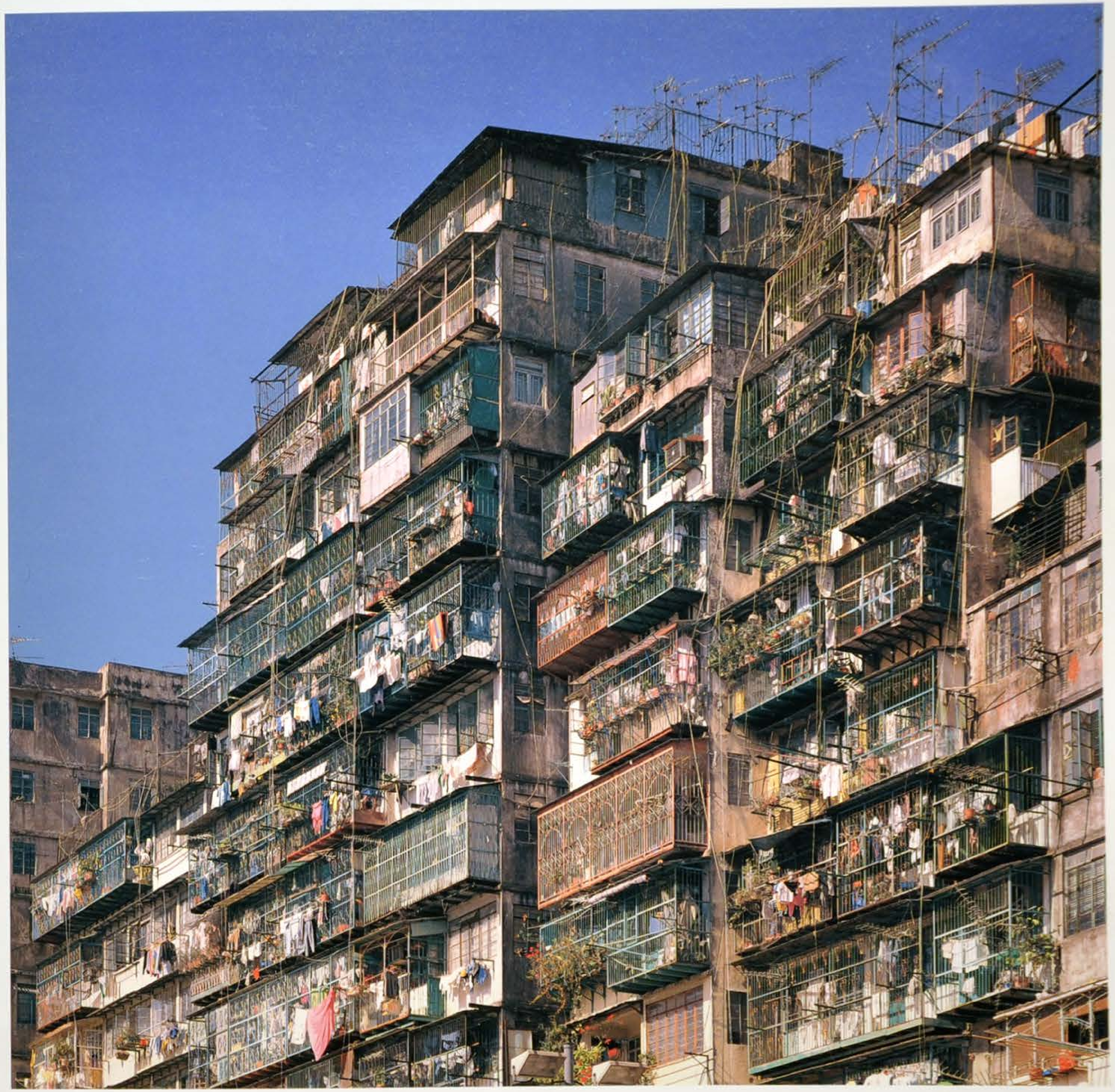
The flat itself took a little time to get used to. There's no sunlight, and my health has gone downhill since I began living here. Both air-conditioners work, but one's too noisy so I normally only have one on. I keep the fan on all day. My lavatory and bathroom are just outside; I share them with another person. It's okay to cook here as well; I always prepare my own food. A friend who lives upstairs comes down to eat with me in the evening.

My wife has passed away, and my sons, daughters-in-law and 11 grandchildren still live in China – I am the only one in Hong Kong. They phone me and we meet in Shenzhen quite regularly. I always take them things – jeans and suchlike. Last year I went back to my home village twice. I have applied for my second son and one grandson to join me in Hong Kong, but it hasn't been approved yet.

Now, I just take each day as it comes. People will get in touch with me if they know of me; I'm not worried. I take my own medicinal liquor twice a day – never a drop more. It's a good, nutritious wine that I prepare myself – various nourishing herbs and dried vegetables are in it. Would you like to try it? It's a little sweet.



Elevations of the east [left] *and south sides of the City showing the* ad hoc, *and technically illegal, extensions that were so characteristic of its outer perimeter and, indeed, are still prevalent in many of Hong Kong's older, lower-income housing areas. The caged balconies added valuable external space to limited living quarters, and lend human expression and life to otherwise monotonous, nondescript buildings. Noticeable, here, is the web of television cabling stretched over the entire facade, often running up 10 or more storeys to a riot of individual aerials on the rooftop.*



Like much else in the Walled City, the provision of a reliable water supply has been the source of considerable inventiveness and entrepreneurial skill, not all of it healthy. The Government's long-standing refusal to connect individual buildings, flats and factories into the external mains system, and thereby legalise water supplies, has meant the City's residents and businesses have had to resort to paying private suppliers, to pump water from wells sunk beneath the City, or local Triad groups for water tapped illegally from nearby mains supplies.

The only concession the authorities made over the years was to install a few public freshwater stand-pipes, though these were barely enough. By 1987, just eight stand-pipes were in place to supply up to 35,000 residents and hundreds of factories. Only one of these was located within the City, while the remainder were positioned, inconveniently, outside its perimeter. Running mains water was supplied to various recognised charities inside the Walled City, but this was very much the exception not the rule.

The first stand-pipe was installed in 1963 giving the City, in the words of a Government statement at the time, *"access to a free, unrestricted water supply"*. Residents had a somewhat different perception. Representatives of the newly formed Kai Fong Association, calling on the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs in 1964, complained of the acute shortage of water at a time when *"the Chinese Government is working selflessly on the East River scheme to provide ample water for Hong Kong residents"*. Their complaints were well grounded, if dressed in rhetoric. Four emergency hydrants had been removed following the end of the drought that year, leaving just five stand-pipes. Residents were paying $12-15 a month for labourers to carry six kerosene cans of water each day from the stand-pipes to their flats in the jumble of two- to four-storey buildings.

The business of carrying water for entire households became increasingly difficult the more the City grew skywards, during the boom days of the late 1960s and early '70s. Rapidly expanding demand, notably from new and thirsty factories, and the impracticality of trudging six or more storeys to individual apartments drove entrepreneurs underground to tap new sources. The new well diggers were mainly property owners who were able to drill on their own land; some were reputedly former water-carriers themselves.

There had been wells in the City in its earlier days. One former resident recalls water being collected from a couple of wells at the northern and eastern gates at the turn of the century. By the time the clearance was announced in 1987, Government surveyors assessing compensation claims identified 67 working wells owned by some 40 suppliers. Over the years, up to 300 'scientific wells' – as they are described by City-dwellers – are said to have been sunk beneath the area, though many had long run dry from overuse. The more recent drillings had to reach as far as 100 metres below the surface, as shallower sources had been depleted. Private drilling firms were contracted to carry out the work.

Physically transferring the water to residences was usually a crude, make-shift process. Water was first pumped up to rudimentary storage tanks on the City roofscape. From there, a twisted congestion of pipes ran downward again, branching into blocks and flats. Installation of a well-water link could cost as much as several thousand dollars, depending on the height above and distance from the well. By the late 1980s, monthly charges were anywhere between $50 and $70 per household.

Despite reports of numerous people being unable to afford the steep connection fees, the majority of City residents appear to have been linked up to receive well-water. A simple connection in itself, however, did not guarantee the end to one's water problems.

Pressure and pumping difficulties meant that many pumps would only be turned on at set times – usually noon and midnight – to replenish the tanks. This would give only a few hours' supply, and it meant that residents still had to store water in baths and buckets. About 20 people were employed to control the supply at various locations according to the well-owner's schedule.

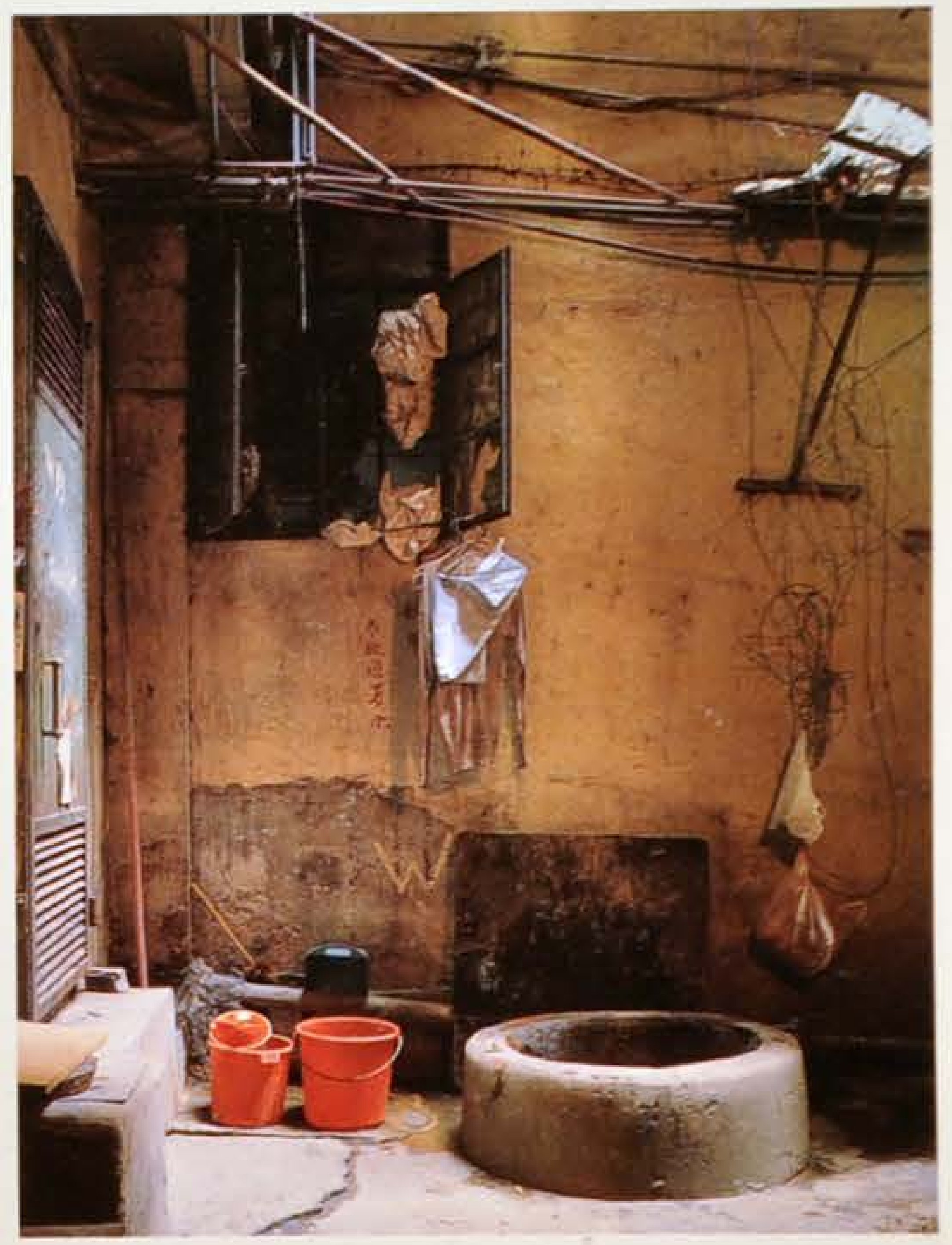
Perhaps the biggest drawback with the well-water was that much of it was undrinkable. Pungent and murky, it was impregnated with the usual seepage of urban and industrial pollutants. The best use it could be put to was washing and floor-cleaning; it was not even fit to boil. Drinking and cooking water still had to be carried from the stand-pipes, and a small workforce was engaged in this activity till the end.

Health problems were also a major concern. Before the Government got together with the Kai Fong to install a mains sewage line in the 1970s, raw human waste exited the City via open drains driven down the side of the tiny streets. Much of this sewage seeped away, forgotten, into the ground, leaving the underlying geology of the area much like a giant septic tank. Underground sources, especially from the shallower wells, could not help but be contaminated.

The installation of a sewage mains was one of a number of essential services the Government felt compelled to provide. Like basic policing and lighting, and the provision of social services and rubbish removal, it was one of the several exceptions which broke the rule of non-intervention. It was, in a sense, the other necessary side of the coin to water supply, which the Government had allowed to be managed privately without regulation – extra-legally but not illegally. But sewage and waste removal was a matter of public hygiene, and had implications for the health of people beyond the City.

Among the reasons cited for refusing to supply water to households were the technical difficulties presented by the City. First among these, the Government argued, was the high concentration of buildings, none of which had adequate provision for water or waste. Second, there were the narrow streets and the sheer disruption that laying mains pipes would cause to City life. These were certainly valid considerations, but more important, perhaps, was a reluctance to further encourage permanent settlement in the City.

Wells were not enough in themselves to supplement the eight paltry stand-pipes. Consequently there was some illegal tapping of mains water from outside the City, notably from the adjacent Sai Tau Tsuen and Mei Tung estates. This illegal business was monopolised, in the beginning, by the Triads. As these same organisations were also responsible for much of the construction in the City, they were able to ensure that the newer buildings, at least, had some provision for water supply and waste – even if only of the most



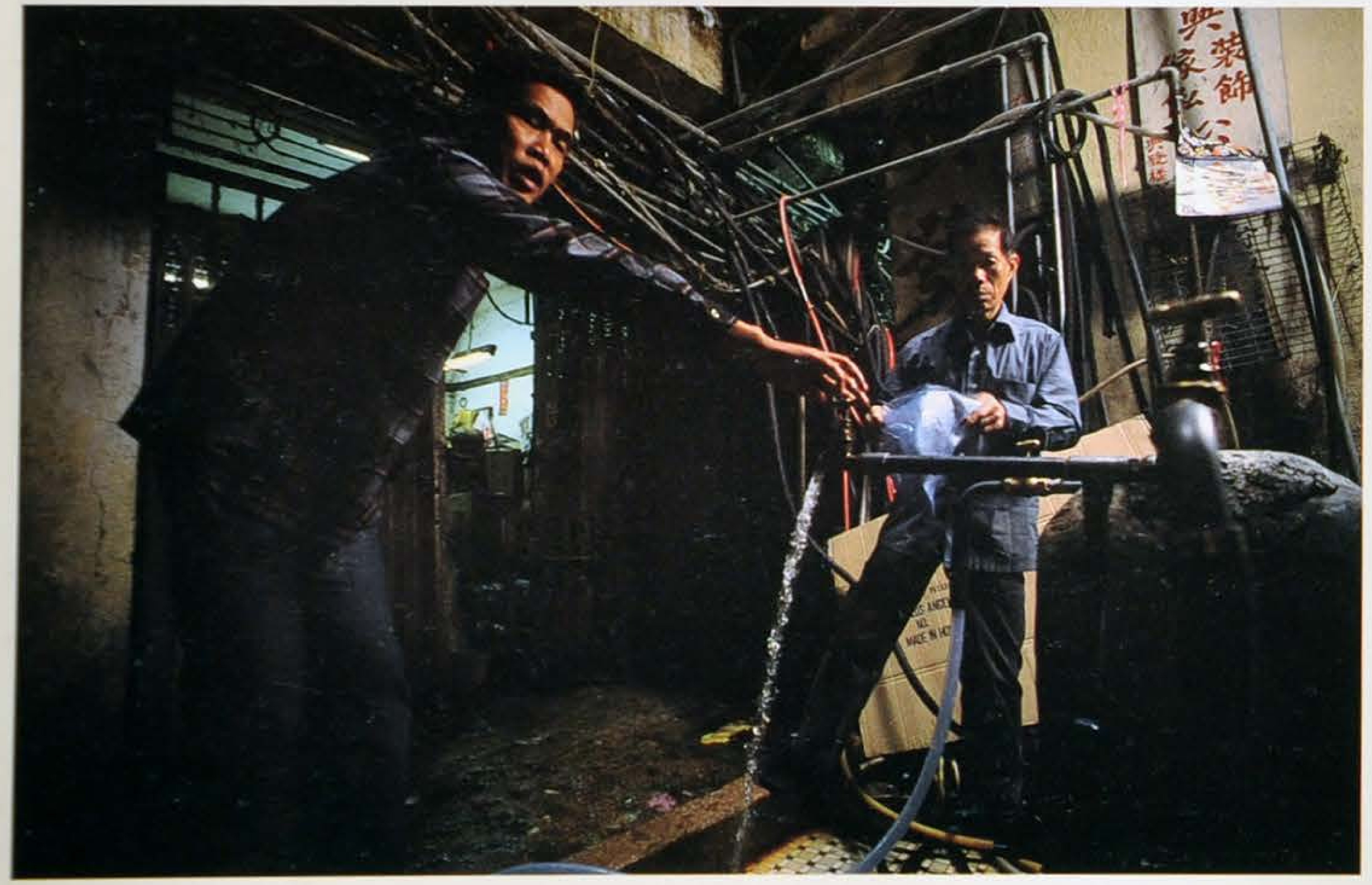
Dating from the nineteenth century, the only remaining natural ground-well within the City boundaries [above] *was just off Tai Chang (Big Well) Street, near the Government stand-pipe* [left]. *Once potable, signs had been put up during the 1970s to warn the populace against drinking its water.*

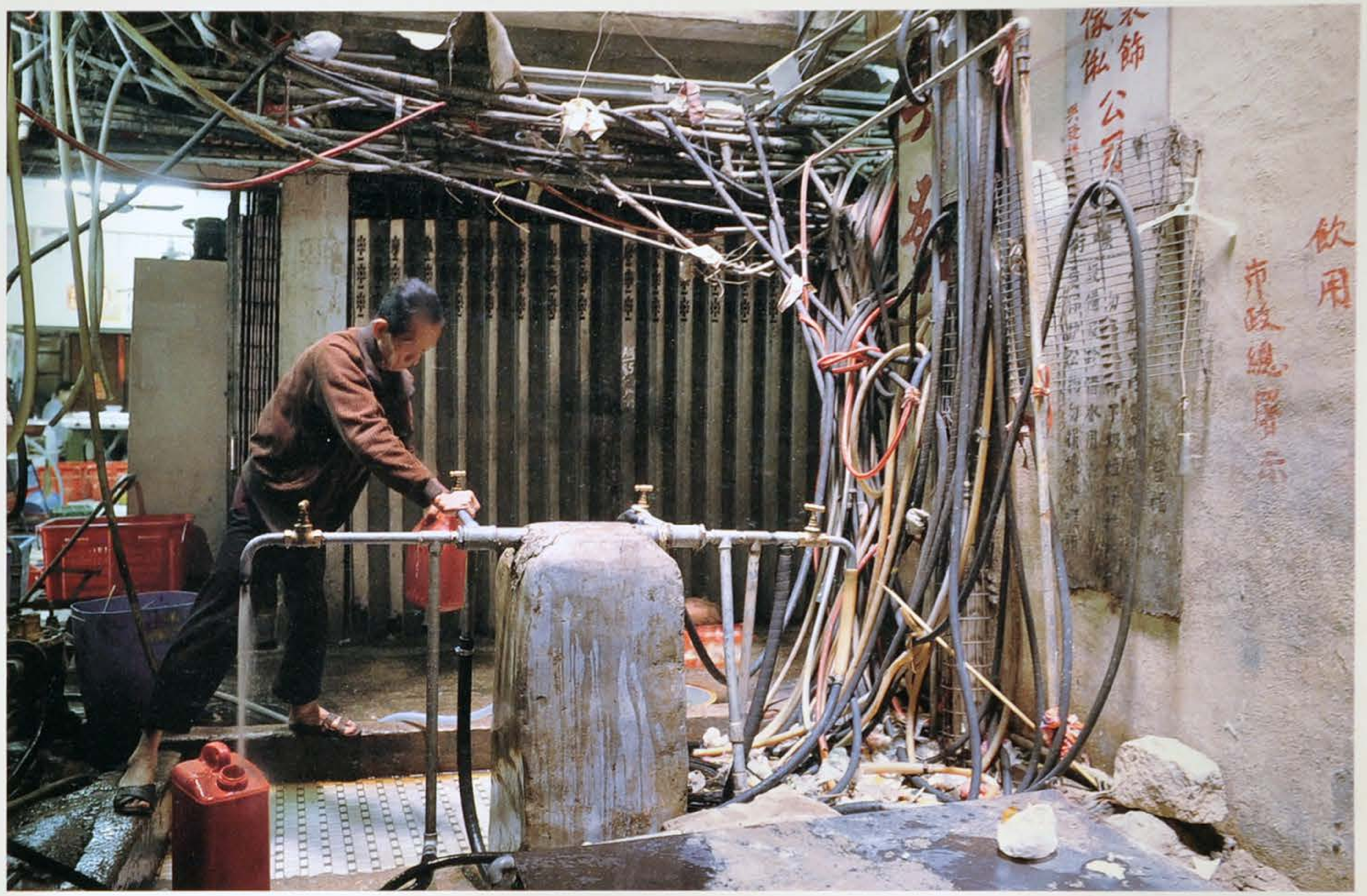
Though many flats had piped supplies from one of the 70 or so privately drilled artesian wells, safe drinking water was available from just eight Government stand-pipes. Of these, only the one on Tai Chang Street was within the City's boundaries. At certain times queues would form to fill buckets and containers, though throughout the day a constant stream of residents would drop by to wash vegetables, dishes or even their hair. The many hoses seen clustered around the stand-pipe were from the numerous food factories which naturally congregated in this area. These would be attached periodically to replenish the small storage tanks on individual premises.

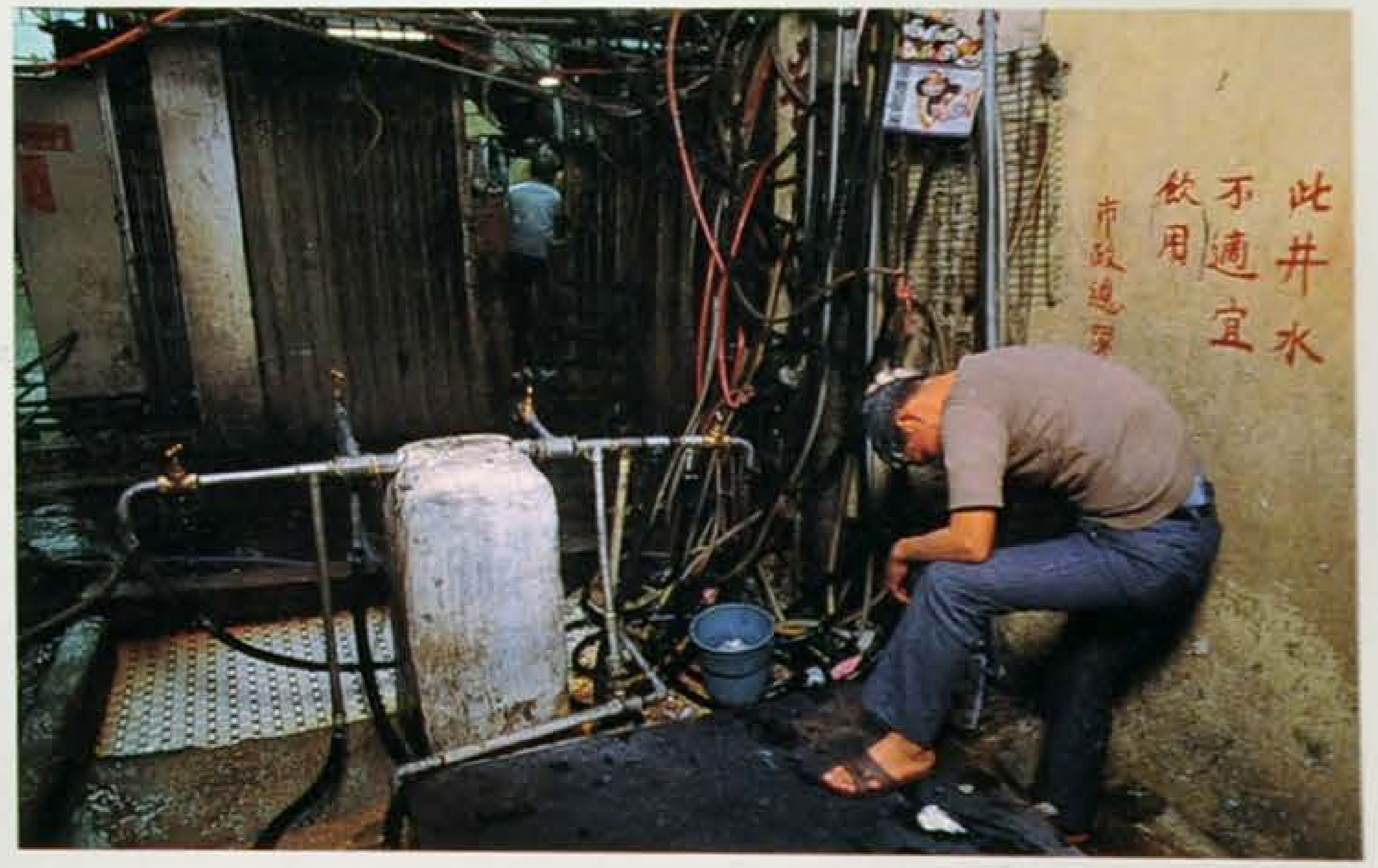
rudimentary kind – or could impress on the buyers the benefits of being connected.

Several competing water suppliers might also be vying for business in one building, particularly where the building was not owned by a single proprietor. Once a household was connected to a particular supplier, there were clear rules of business-client behaviour. Residents would generally pay on time for fear their water would be cut off or their pipes damaged. Fee collectors would tell customers that their dues were partly for the upkeep of the system and partly for bribes to officials. For some residents it could mean more than a simple business relationship. The Triad leader who, in 1980, laid down the law on a price rise is one case in point. *"Whoever dares to take the lead in opposing the hike"*, he said, *"we'll chop him up in front of the crowd."*

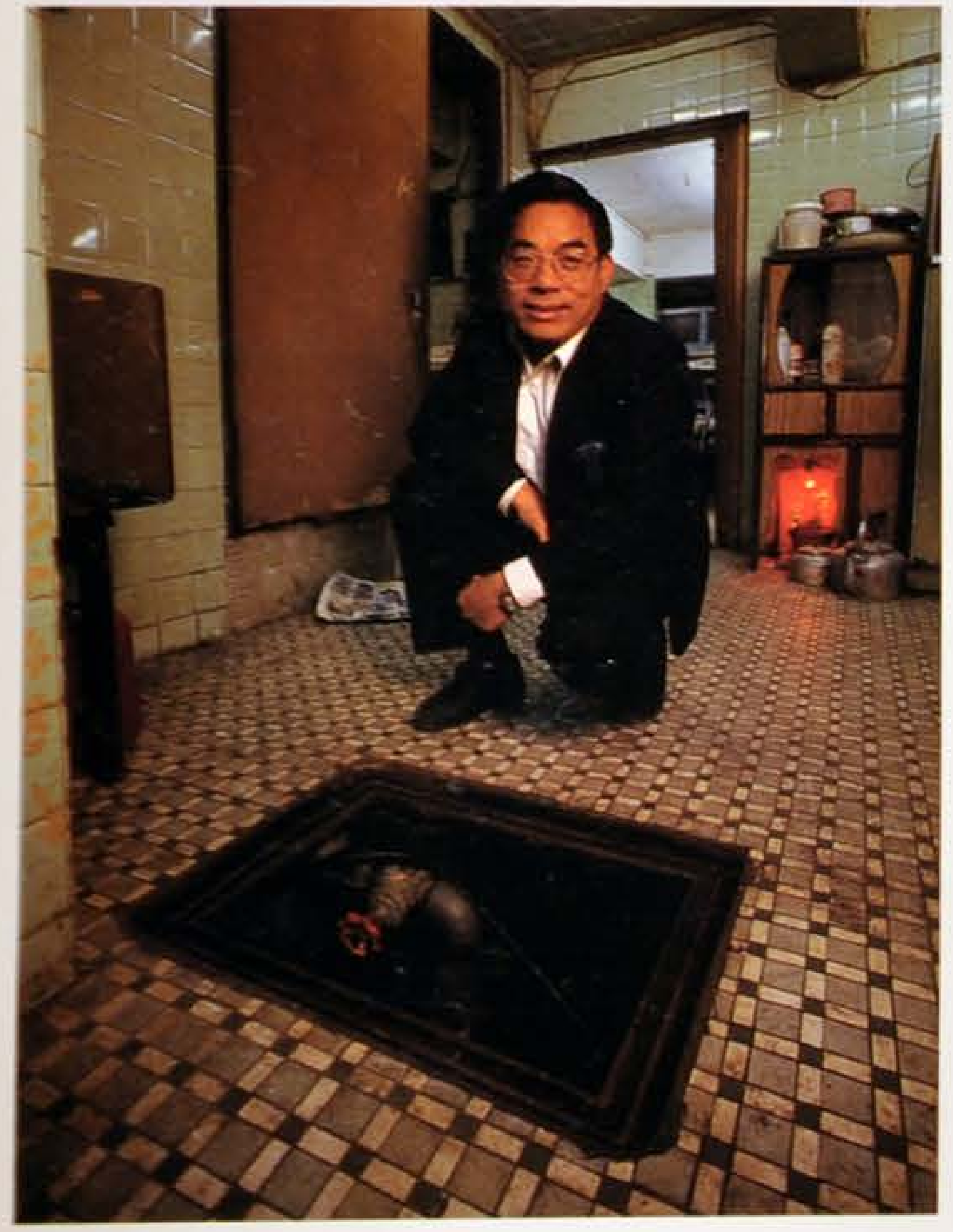
In time, the Triads sold off most of their 'business' interests in the City, but the illegal tapping of mains water remained an important source of drinking water until the end. Those involved in the clearance are reluctant to admit how extensive this practice might have been, but it is unrealistic to assume that 33,000 people and 700 businesses could have been supplied by 67 ground wells alone. The decision was made that it was better to turn a blind eye. To close down the illegal supplies would have caused unnecessary hardship for the residents and brought increased resentment. It was easier to clear the City and solve the problem once and for all.







One of the 50 or so private water suppliers in the City, Chan Shing collected monthly charges personally from his customers, occasionally waiving them for the elderly since, as he said, "we are all poor people and we should help each other".



Born in 1951, Chu Yiu Shan was brought up and spent much of his adult life in the Walled City. He operated as a property developer and estate agent for many years, only moving to Junk Bay when the clearance was announced.

My parents ran a store and, when I was about 13 years old, I began delivering drinks to nearby establishments. These included some specialising in opium, 'red pills', gambling and sex shows.

The Walled City was very prosperous then, with a great concentration of activity around Tai Chang Street. A lot of Japanese tourists came to see the shows, as well as a few big movie stars. Other stars came for the dog meat. The police would also come, take off their hats and collect bribes from the gambling and drug dens.

I got involved in the property business to serve as an intermediary between sellers and buyers. I had seen a lot of cheating, with people running off with deposits by 'selling' properties which did not belong to them. I remember one old woman, for example, who owned a flat and rented it out. When she died, the people renting claimed it was theirs. There were no deeds and the dead woman's family, being strangers to the Walled City, were powerless to do anything. As a resident who had lived in the City for many years, I was in a good position to find out who the real owners were. I knew the people who 'released' the water, and they helped me identify who had built which properties.

I used to earn around $20,000 a month through my property business, which became the biggest in the Walled City. People entrusted their flats to me. They would ask for a certain price and, if I considered it to be reasonable, I would try and sell the property on their behalf. I would renovate and clean the place a little.

Since the 1960s, the Kai FongAssociation has helped to draw up deeds for property transactions. I have sometimes acted as witness. There are altogether three companies that deal with the buying and selling of flats here. There are some other companies but they don't really handle property transactions; they are just places where residents can pay their rent and water charges, so that the collectors don't have to chase all over the place.

Water was the main hardship for people living here. The people who 'released' water would sometimes lock the main tap and disappear for a few days, before confronting the residents of a block with the news that the pump had malfunctioned and that $300 would have to be collected from each unit to fix it. Many of these well owners were habitual gamblers – when they lost at the casinos in Macau, they would just stop the water.

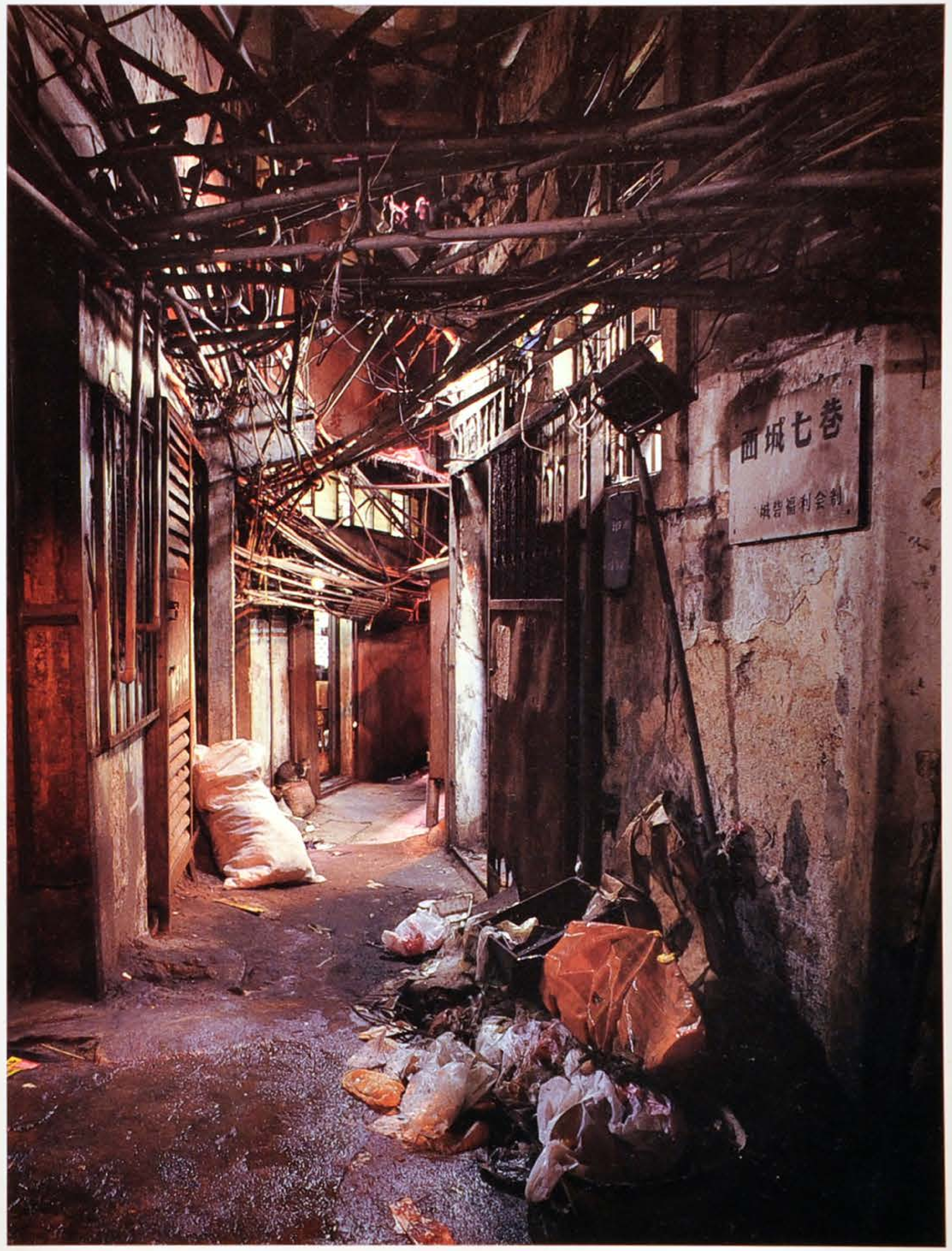
Everyone knew that water was also stolen from the Government supply. The largest main ran beneath the Lung Heung café. There were some people 'releasing' water there, but they were forced to negotiate after the Triads heard about it and demanded protection money.

The water that comes from the wells often looks like drain-water and is usually undrinkable; people would probably die if they had to drink it. So who would have bought a flat in the Walled City if there hadn't been proper tap water? Arrangements were made to allow drinking water to be 'diverted' to special wells and tanks on the roof, and from there through pipes to all the main apartments. Some builders made several connections to ensure a 24-hour supply, but this is not the case in most blocks.

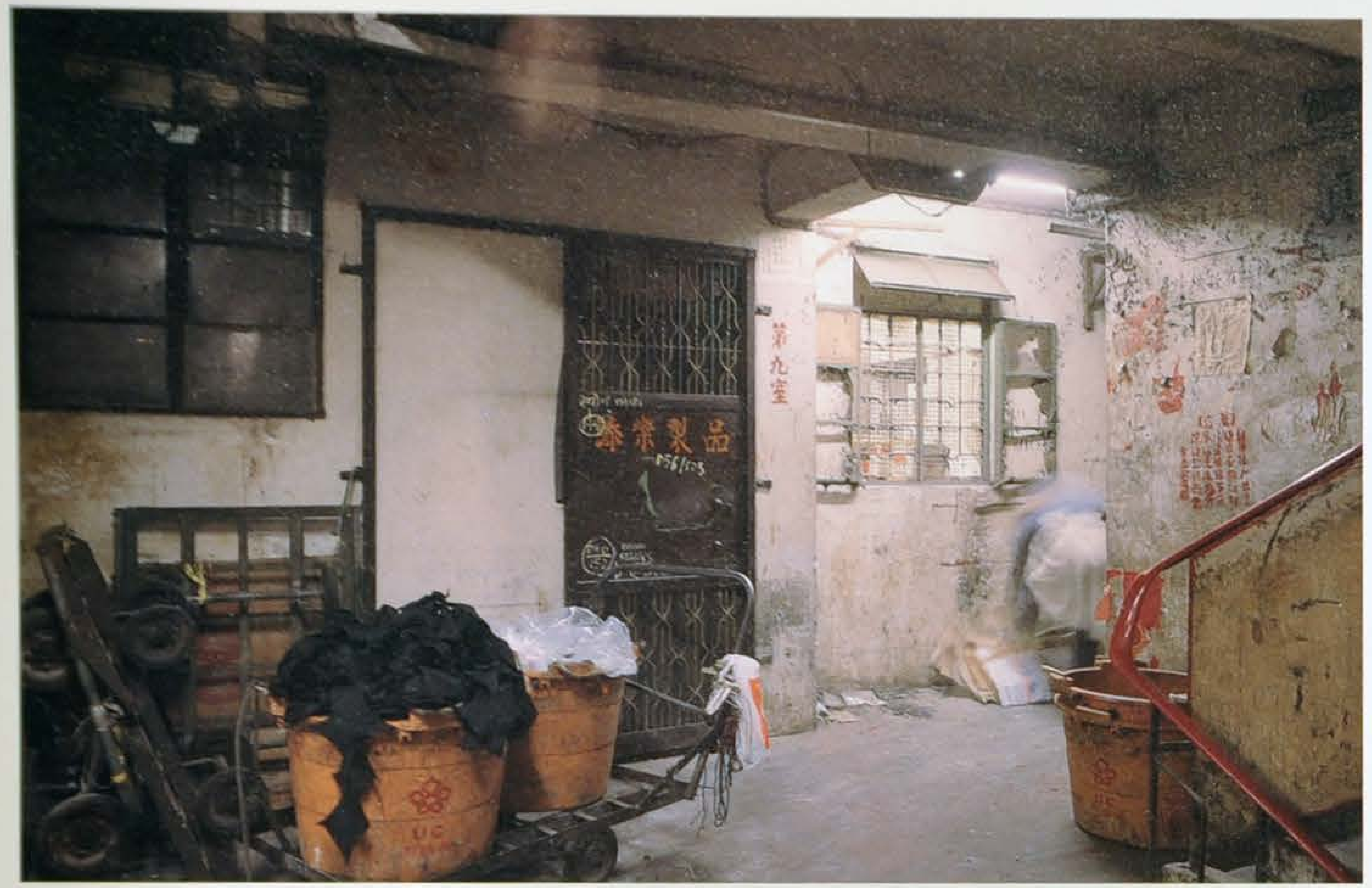
The people who 'released' water are now receiving $200,000 in compensation for their wells, but the so-called 'poor electricity companies' will get nothing. They used to steal electricity from the mains for people living in the City – factories and so on would pay a bill of only a few hundred dollars a month, when their consumption actually amounted to $1000 or more.

I don't want to tell you exactly how much compensation I am receiving from the Government. It is similar to the dentists who have got a good deal. Let's face it – not very many of them do that much business. I wonder if some would even reach a turnover of $30,000 a year. Now, everyone – the stores, the beef-ball maker and the like – wants to be compensated like the dentists, so they have stayed put.

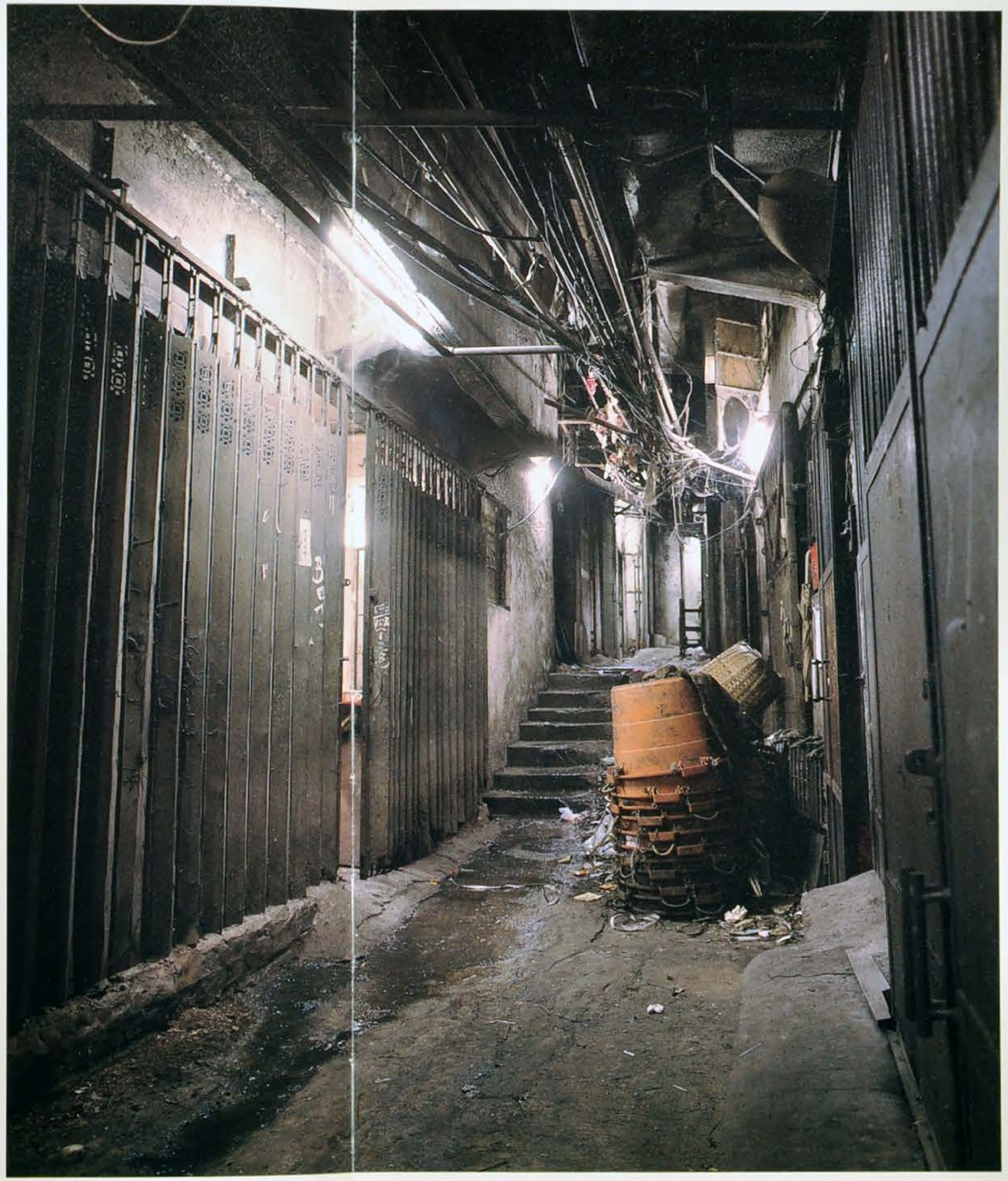
The demolition of the Walled City will be the end of everything. I only hope that I can get a hawker's licence.

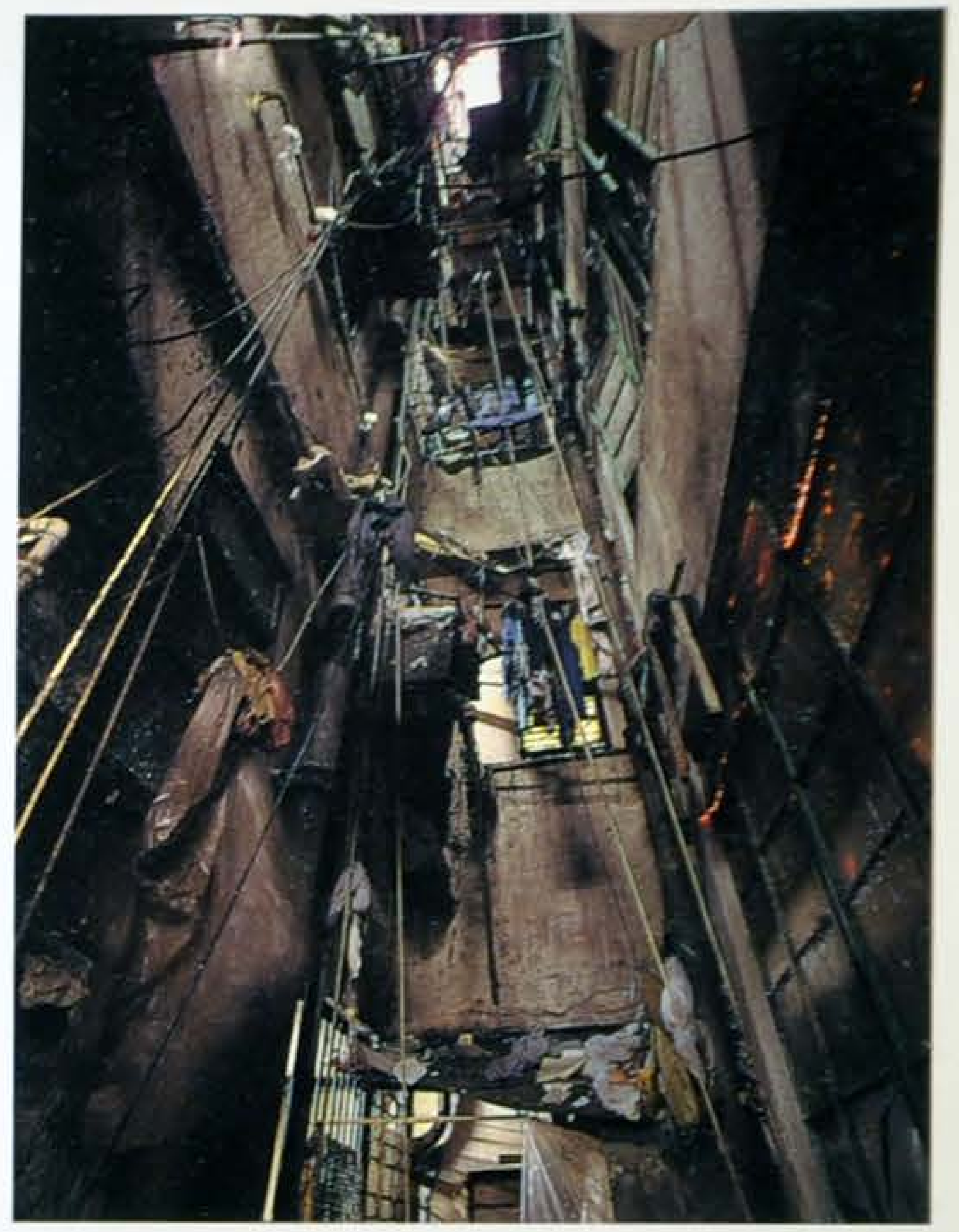


The visual chaos of piping – usually leaking, corroded and ingeniously patched up – channelled well water overhead. Buildings were rarely supplied with fresh-water or drainage connections, so all such piping had to be run externally. The residents' descriptions of well water varied by location: those in the northern sector complained that it was murky, heavy and malodorous, while others noticed a film of surface oil and black soot-like particles. What is certain is that, by the time of demolition, the over-exploited reservoirs beneath the City had become heavily polluted with urban and industrial effluence.



It is a misconception that the Walled City was not subject to Government controls or services, though it is certainly true that the enclave's political sensitivity meant that municipal regulations which hold currency in the rest of Hong Kong were more often merely suggested than enforced. One essential service, however, was provided by the Urban Services Department (USD) refuse collectors. Clearing away the two tons of rubbish that accumulated each day in the City was a priority in the Government's eyes, not just to maintain some level of communal hygiene — and control the large rat population — but equally to expunge the City of a potential fire hazard. Orange USD buckets were commonplace, and numerous refuse collection points rationalised the cleaning system for the 10 sweepers who patrolled the City. The City's residents were not exactly model citizens in this respect, although their consciences occasionally stirred them to join a clean-up of the roof-tops, alleys and overhead piping or electricity cables that was organised every year by the Kai Fong Association. During the 1960s and early '70s, before a mains sewage line replaced open drains that ran down the side of the alleyways, the Urban Services had the unsavoury task of collecting night-soil and, on occasion, the corpses of drug addicts left outside the public lavatory.





Natural light penetrated to street level only in those few places where narrow gaps had been left between buildings, though, all too often, these were obstructed by plastic bags and assorted rubbish. Where space permitted, washing would be hung out to dry. Adding to the general gloom and unpleasantness, many of the smaller alleys in the middle of the City were only intermittently lit.

An employee of China Light and Power since the mid-1960s, Mok Chung Yuk was one of the company's engineers responsible for the regulated installation of electricity throughout the City during the late '70s and early '80s. He declined to be photographed.

China Electric [now China Light & Power] began supplying electricity to the Walled City in a major way in 1977. Before that – starting in the '50s, I think – only a few places along the edge of the City received electricity officially; there were three supply points on Tung Tau Village Road and United Road.

You see, electricity wasn't always an absolute necessity for the residents, and the Company itself found the whole area somewhat complicated. There were loads of sex businesses, for instance; some much as you might imagine, others you most definitely could not! But by 1977, China Electric had come round to the idea of supplying electricity as long as the buildings were legal.

That was the year of the big fire, when everyone realised things had to change. We began drafting a plan to supply electricity throughout the City and the Government established guidelines as to which buildings were acceptable. The years 1977 to '85 were years of drastic transformation. The local District Office began to collaborate more closely with the Kai Fong, and Government involvement in the City also increased. Later, just before the Sino-British Agreement was signed, China told the British that they could exercise full authority over the City and things became much easier.

I reckon that before we drew up our master plan, about 20 per cent of households already had some sort of supply. Afterwards, the numbers shot up incredibly, like a chain reaction. When people saw their neighbours being connected, they made enquiries and applied themselves.

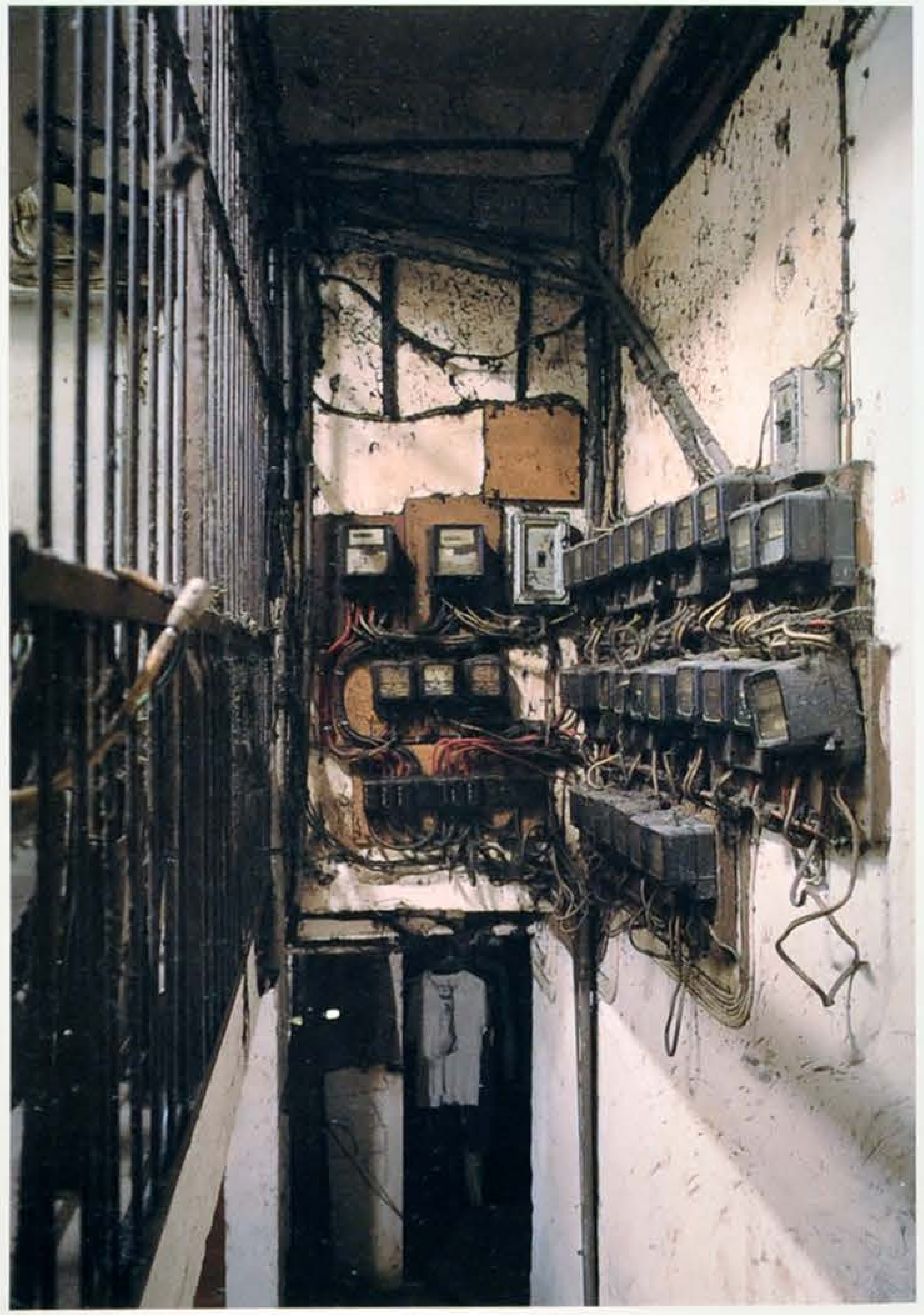
I was one of those doing the groundwork for the new electricity supply – I carried out the very first surveys. In fact, I remember well the first time I went in – edging in a short way then turning back! It seemed very frightening at the time. We all dressed down at first, and we were careful not to enter looking like an official team. Only when we were familiar with the streets and alleys did we bring out our maps and plans. For the first few days, before we got talking to any of the locals, we just got used to the place.

We had two big worries in those early months. First, we had no idea what we would find and, second, when we found out how bad it was, we had no idea how to cope with the chaos. We quickly saw the difficulties: the narrow alleys, the filth, the rubbish, the character of the people living and working there. A few of my colleagues were robbed, possibly by drug addicts; they would even take $30. We were never really hassled by thugs, though, since so many Government departments were involved in the project, including the police. And so was the Kai Fong, of course. Also, the majority of residents saw the need for electricity, so nothing unruly took place.

There were many specific technical problems. The City was just a maze of pipes and wires all over the place. We were at a loss where to begin! Eventually we decided that we'd just have to make a start from the outside and work in – take the cable and enter inch by inch. The alleys were incredibly narrow, and in places we needed to dig up the ground to lay the cable. But when we were digging we'd often strike rock or stone and have to stop. After several meetings in the City, we agreed to raise the level of the pavement instead!

We had to invent many new ways of installing cables. We'd try one way first and if that worked we'd use it again. Occasionally there'd be problems, of course. People didn't like us fixing cables to their walls, for example, and it took some persuasion before such matters were resolved. Sometimes the wiring had to go through someone else's premises and, of course, some saw this as an invasion. In these cases we just had to let the applicant negotiate with the owner. Actually, in a few instances, we just supplied electricity to the power points on a lower floor and let the owner connect it to the floor above. You know what the buildings are like in the Walled City – they're built one on top of the other, leaning here and there. In some cases, there was no way to make the necessary connections all the way up to the top floors. Of course, we'd check everything was done properly before switching on.

Hong Kong's economy was growing fast at that time, and as everyone became better off they bought more and more electrical goods. The population was increasing fast as well. The Walled City itself was booming, with a huge amount of new construction going on. All these things contributed to an increased demand for electricity.



The haphazard appearance of the electricity metering belied a certain order. Following careful notes, the meter readers – who were armed with torches and dog repellent – could cover 400 to 500 meters a day.

With more and more people in the City wanting electricity, we had to find space for the transformer we needed to cope with two high-density cables we were planning to bring in. We finally managed to persuade the church in the City to rent us around 250 square feet on condition we renovated their school. We also kept badgering the Government to release space cleared because of fires so we could build a couple more sub-stations. We discussed this with the authorities for several years, in fact, until they eventually gave us permission in 1984. It took us three years to set up the stations, by which time they had announced they were going to tear the place down!

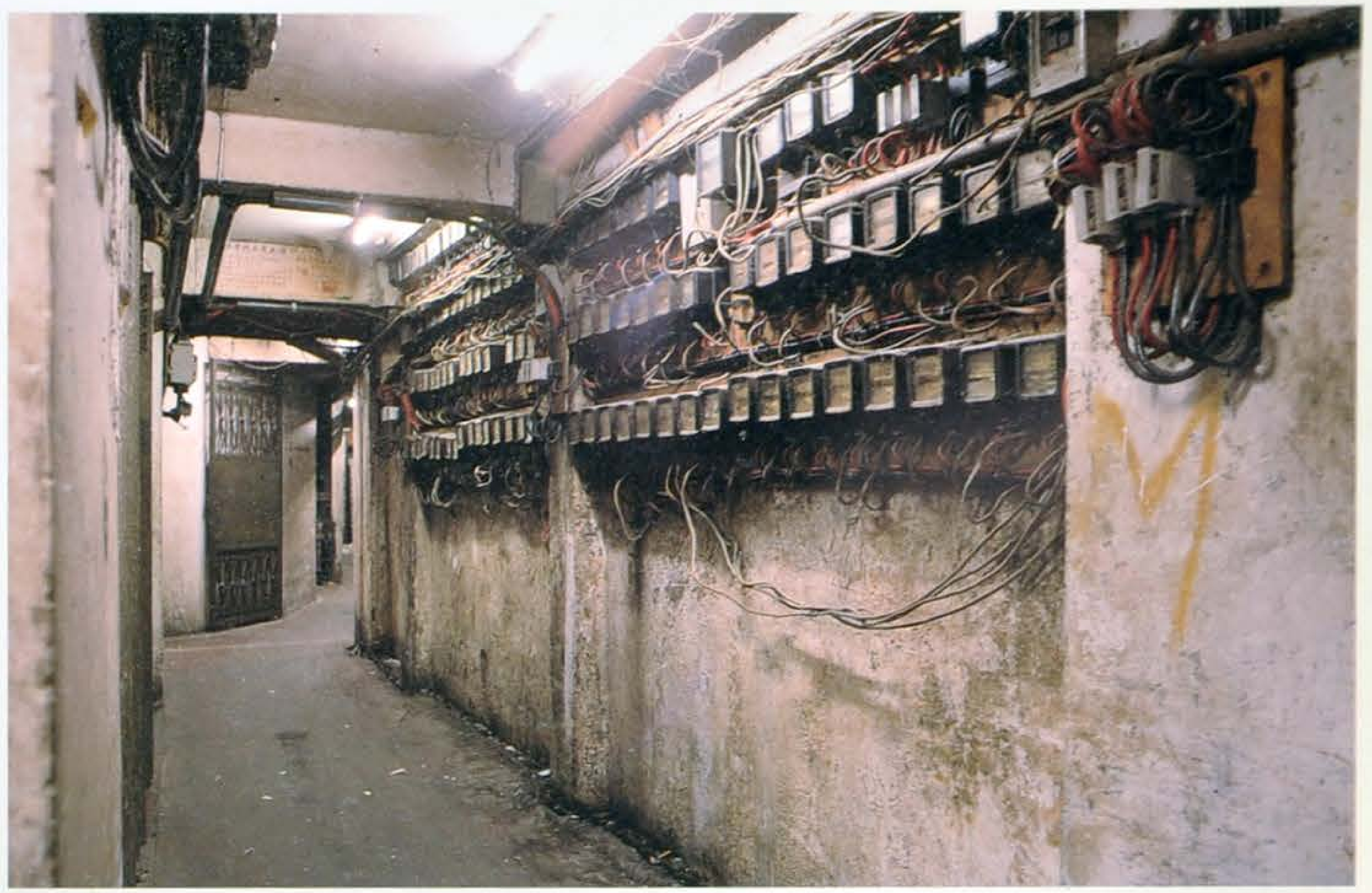
By this time almost every flat had electricity. But that didn't take care of all the factories. When we started out we'd no idea there'd be so many. We had made provision in our plans for some excess supply, but we'd underestimated the demand – we'd often have to make spur-of-the-moment adjustments and modifications to meet requirements as we found them.

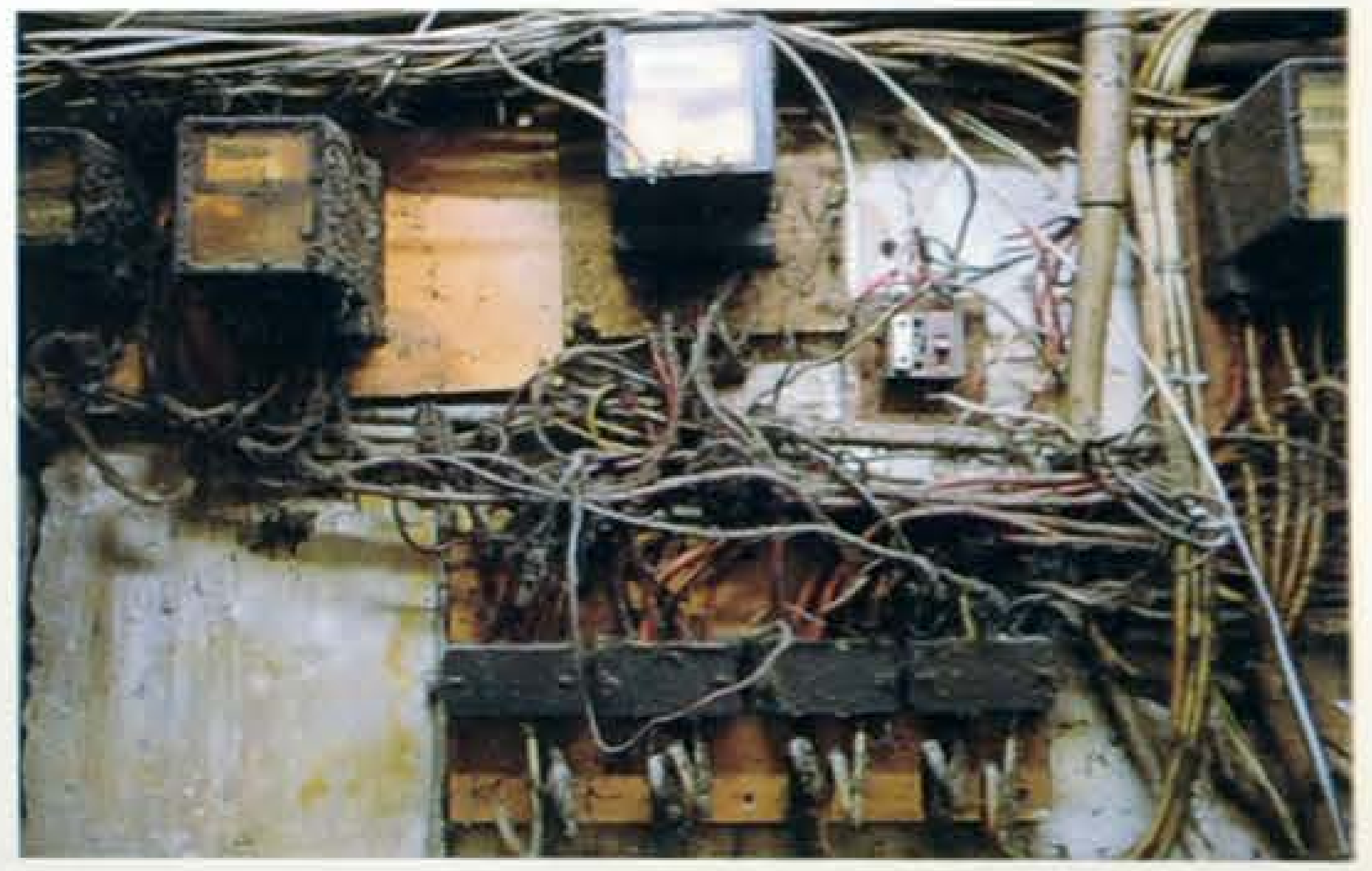
The Walled City uses a lot of electricity. The years of highest demand were 1985 and '86, with around 6ma being used. That's about the same consumption as five of the big 'Y-type' public housing blocks, each of which has about 750 households.

There are, of course, instances of electricity theft. Certainly, the total supply of electricity is not fully paid up or accounted for. But it's no longer easy to steal from the Company on a large scale. When they see us, factory owners using stolen electricity are careful to hide any evidence that might give cause for suspicion. Many also realise that stolen electricity might not be that much cheaper. At least when they get their supply direct from the Company, they are never threatened or subject to extortion.

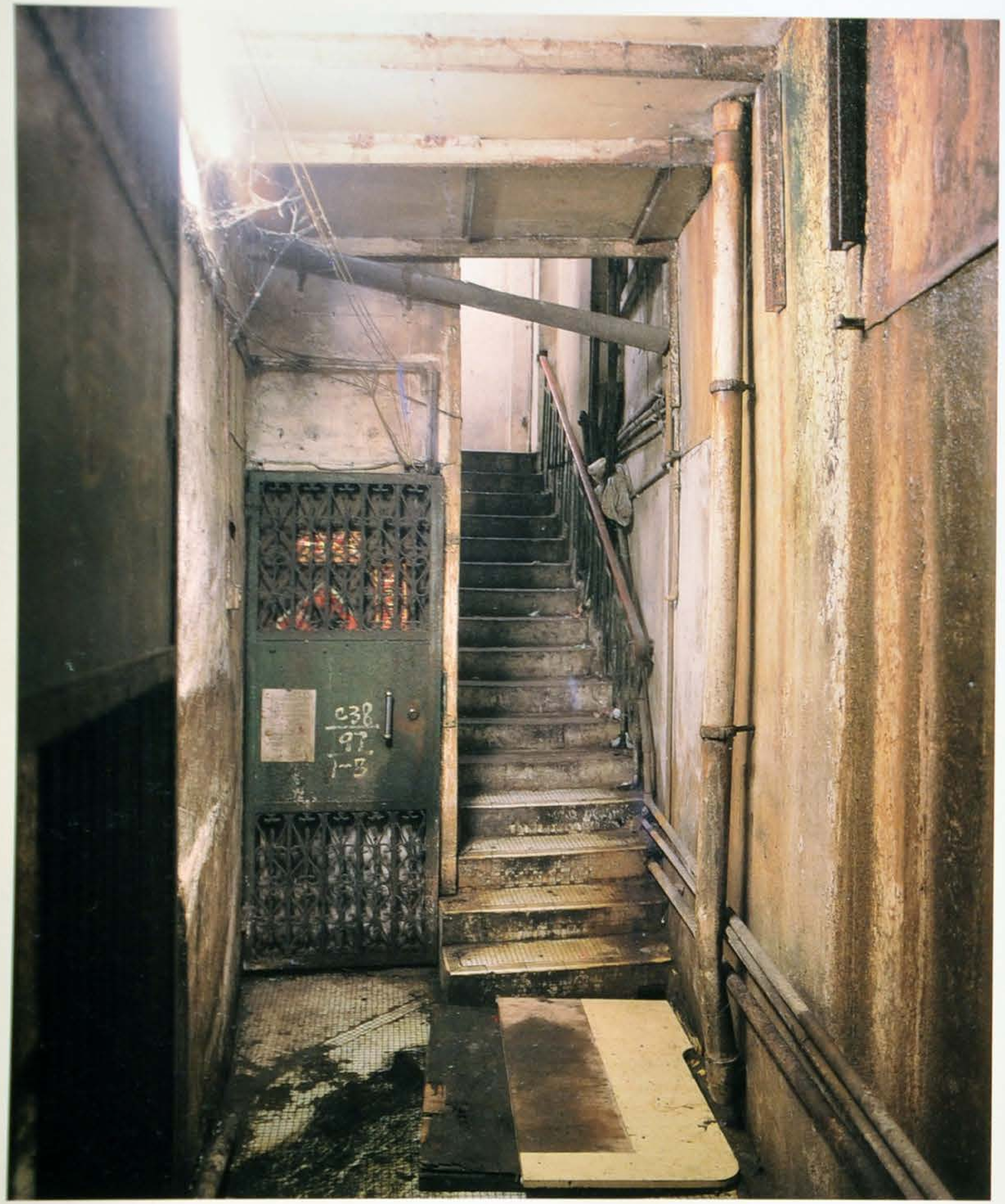
In the past, those who stole were not dealt with very effectively. This is partly because our employees didn't dare go too far into the City! But even if action was taken, we'd usually have to bring the police in – and they did not have much authority in the place themselves. The Walled City was a unique place in the old days – even the police were reluctant to enter. When they did make a raid, they often barged in and found nothing. There were also cases where the police arrested people who were later found not guilty, simply because they'd been arrested inside the City. Some people claimed they had their own private power sources, which just wasn't true! They stole from China Electric but were only rarely brought to account. If they were discovered, they'd just be disconnected.

Bringing electricity to the City was not just a unique project for Hong Kong, but pretty much anywhere I'd say. Because of the background of the place, and the conditions and environment there, we were forced to make many innovations and to problem-solve. I myself feel happy, however, that people are finally moving out, although I feel that the Government is spending far too much on compensation. When the clearance was announced, I'm sure many people moved in quickly enough to spend a couple of nights in the City, in the hope that they could benefit too.

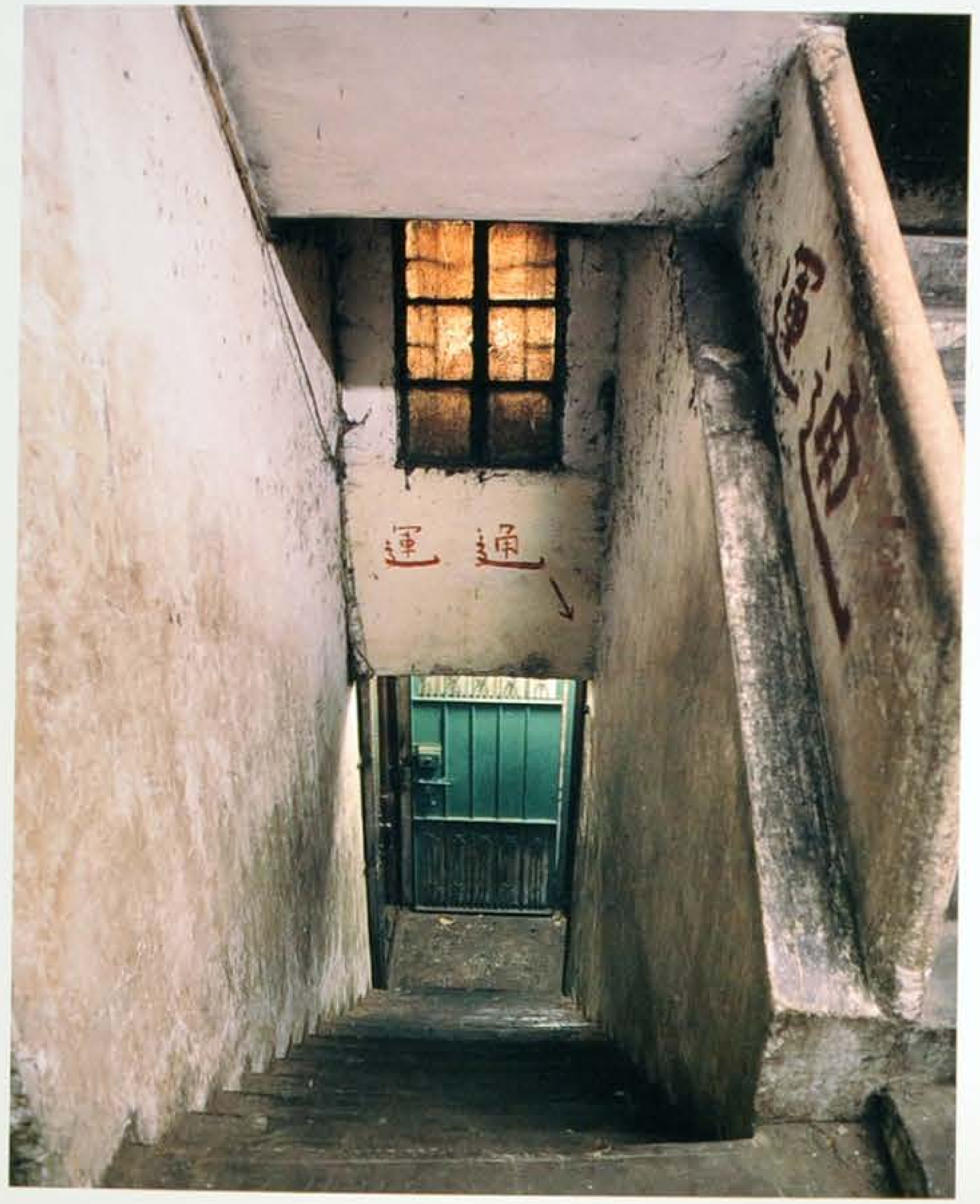


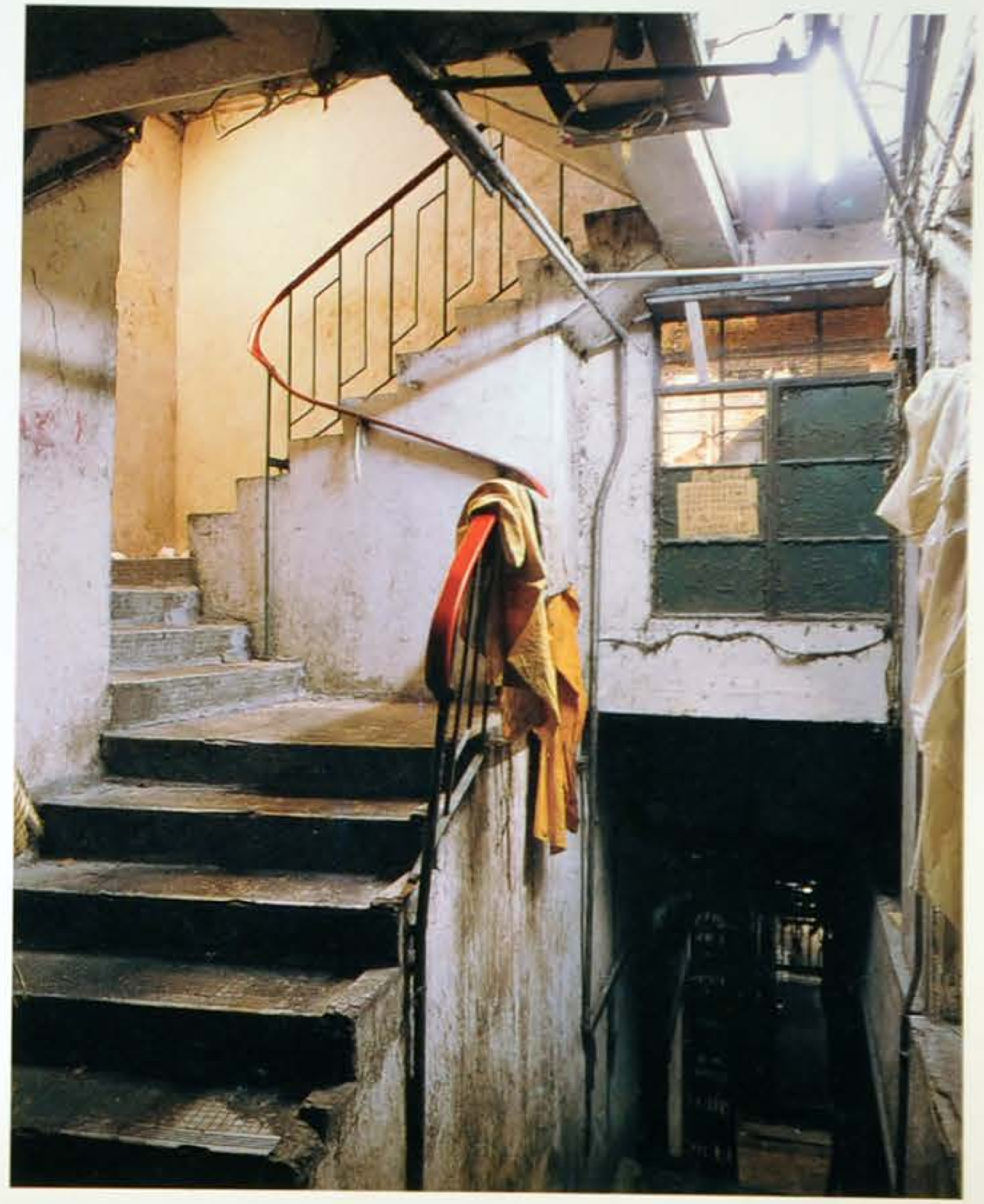


Crusted in filth, the typical chaos of wiring spread from the meter bay on the ground floor towards individual apartments, the wires tacked crudely to external walls.



With lifts in just two of the City's 350 or so buildings, access to the upper floors of the 10 to 14 storey apartment blocks was nearly always by stairs, necessitating considerable climbs for those who lived near the top. This was partly alleviated by an extraordinary system of interconnecting stairways and bridges at different levels within the City, which took shape – somewhat organically – during the construction boom of the 1960s and early '70s. It was possible, for example, to travel across the City from north to south – at about the third or fourth storey – without once coming down to street level. A single staircase might link three or four buildings on such a route.





One of 12 children, Lau Yeung Yin took over the family weaving business from his father in 1982, running the company from a small factory on Sai Shing (West City) Road.

I was born in the Walled City. My father arrived in Hong Kong the day before peace was declared. He settled in the Walled City and began to run a weaving factory, just as he had done before in his home village and in Canton.

The Walled City was a better place when I was a kid. There were just two- or three-storey stone and wooden houses then. Dad's factory was on Lung Chun Road. I think he just squatted and occupied the space. He was always late coming home; we would often find him with his mates or business associates at the Wah Do restaurant, over on Kai Tak Road. Mum worked at the factory the whole day too, and I helped sometimes after I had finished my homework.

I have 11 brothers and sisters, but we were not all living together. One sister was left in the home village on the mainland, another sister was given away and an elder brother was married before I came along. We lived in the factory. There were no beds; we just moved the yarn and cleared a space when we wanted to sleep.

We used water from the wells at the beginning and then we were served by taps outside the City. There were lots of fights in the old days when water had to be rationed: people were always queue jumping. We washed ourselves right next to the taps – we weren't shy then – but the girls would take pails of water back home for their baths.

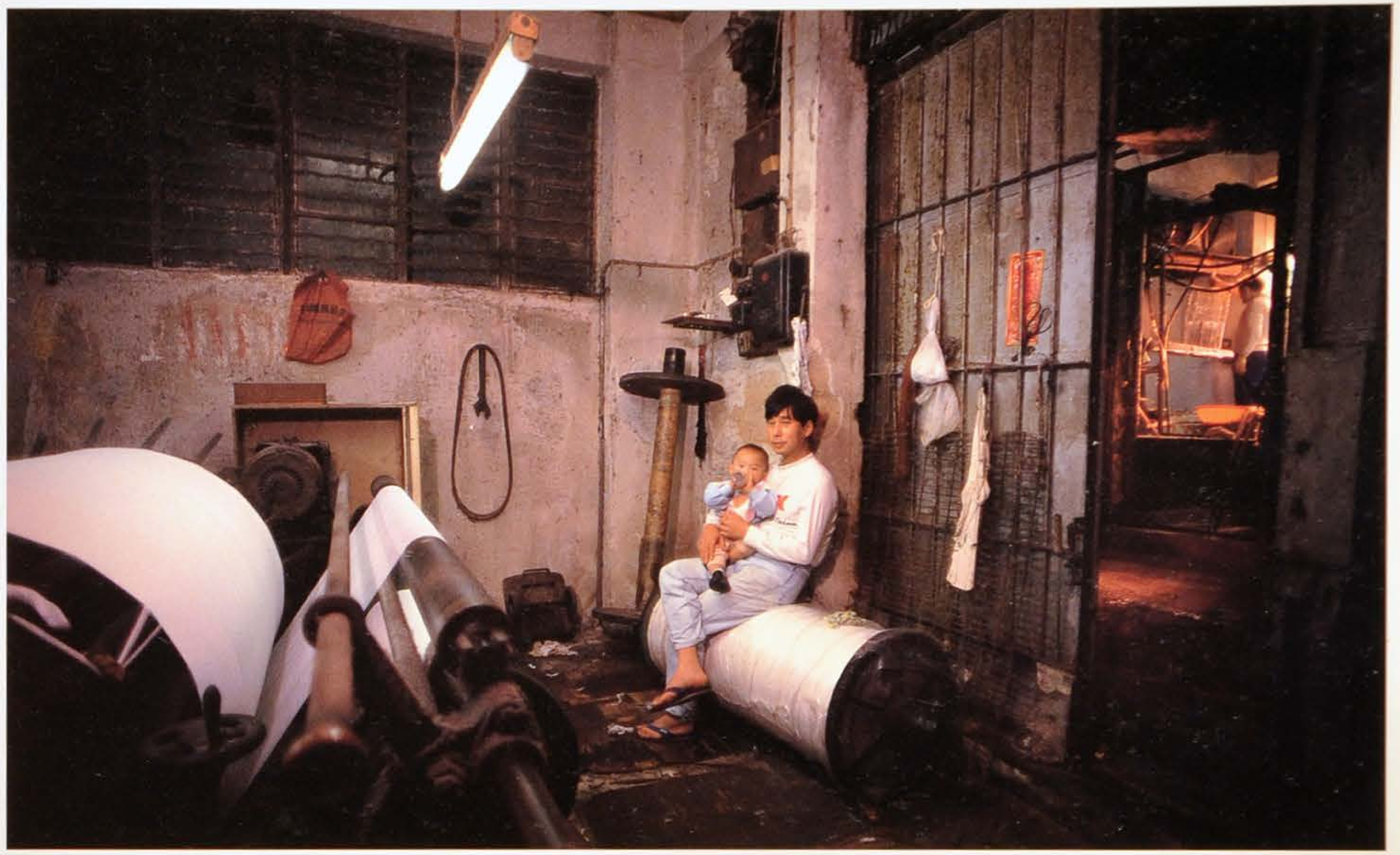
Instead of coming straight home after school we sneaked out to play, but if I came home too late Mum would beat me. We went up into the hills, sometimes as far as Lion Rock, and played hide-and-seek. One of our great joys was to have a little money to buy sweet potatoes and have them baked.

When I was very young, I was unaware of the existence of anything bad. It was only when I was 14 or 15 years old that I started to be aware of the gambling dens and the drug addicts. It was quite a sight to see a line of heroin addicts squatting along the alley taking their drugs. People who came from outside to take part in such goings on would not bother the local residents. Some of the locals participated and we knew them. Some of my friends in the Walled City became Triad members but they remained the same as before – just friends living in the neighbourhood. They became Triad members for various reasons: they were not given sufficient attention and care at home, or came from broken families.

In the early 1960s, the Government tried to demolish the Walled City and a big fight ensued. Dad was the treasurer at the Kai Fong Association then. Three days before the demolition was due to take place, they sent a telegram to Beijing and the Chinese Government responded by demanding compensation and resettlement on the residents' behalf. Gun fights actually broke out between the residents and police. Some students in Canton also responded by taking down the British flag and some were killed. Dad told me that during that time a lot of overseas people sent money as an expression of support. Dad was fairly neutral in his politics – the Kai Fong also sent telegrams to Taiwan and it was just a matter of who cared the most. Later, as more people wanted to be involved in the Kai Fong, Dad became less active.

I studied at the left-wing Heung To Middle School until middle Three. We had to sing a few songs each day and learn to recite the quotations of Chairman Mao. I was regarded as a student of bad conduct. Once, my classmates came to our vacant lot – we had moved out because our place was being redeveloped – to play mahjong and one of them wrote about it in his weekly report at school. I was regarded as the leader of this unwholesome activity. My teacher was concerned, but in the wrong way, and she reported that I was going out with gangs. The school authorities visited my parents and went through all my things. I decided that it was pointless to continue, so I quit school without even doing the middle Three examinations.

I became a tailor's apprentice, but only for a few months. Then I went to work in a rattan shop for my brother-in-law on Hong Kong island, and lived and worked there for several years until I was 19. Following that, I went to work at Dad's weaving factory until I was married, at the age of 21, and then went back to the rattan shop. A while later, I was asked to return to help in Dad's factory – my younger brother had taken it over by then. Dad trusted him, but he was just taking money from the till as he saw fit. We were making fabric for gloves and I was paid $1500 a month.



Lau Yeung Yin sits among the giant spindles of his weaving and threading factory with his baby son. Though most of his clients were from outside the City, Lau maintained regular business contacts with resident muslin-maker, Yu Hing Wan [see page 150].

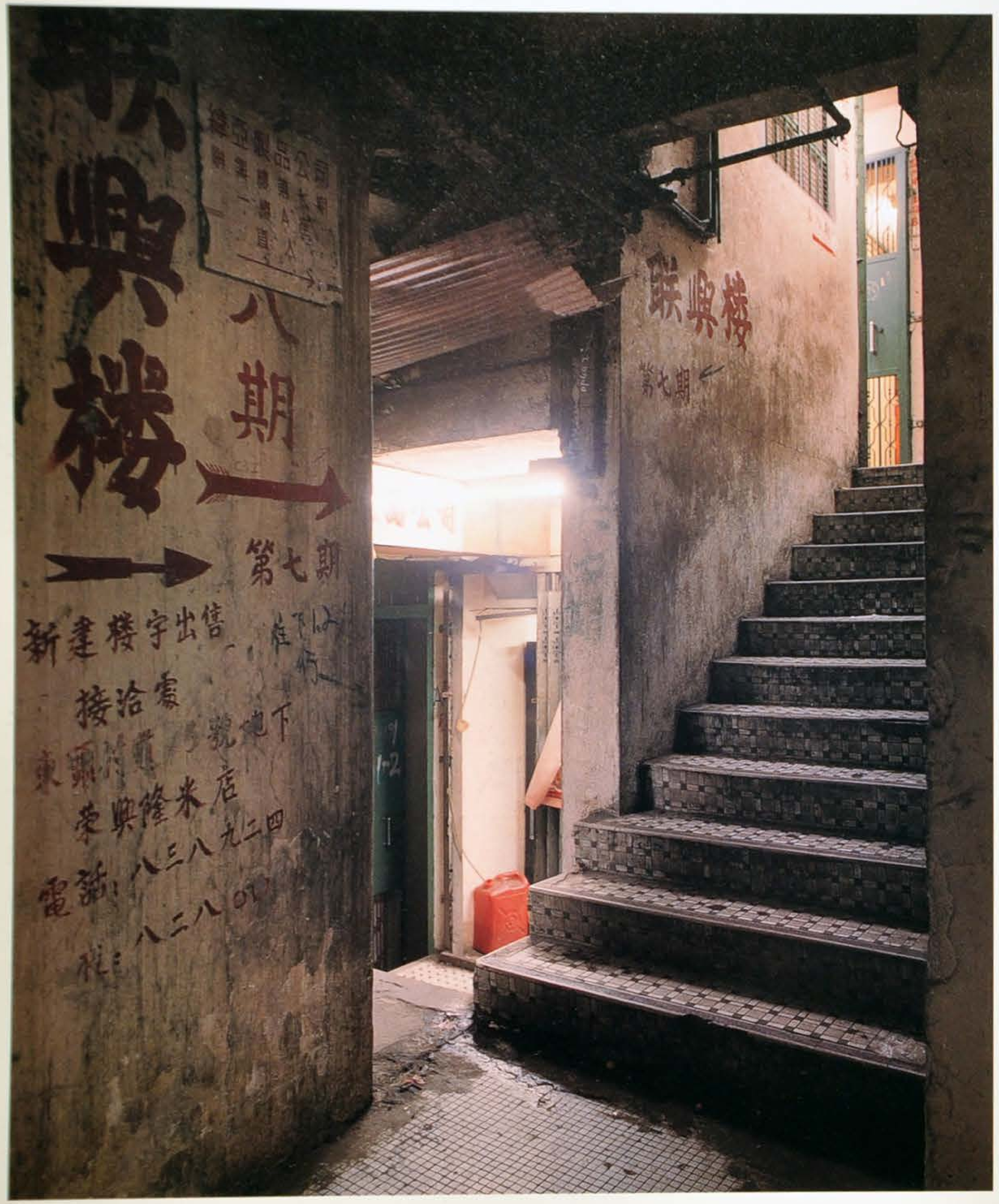
Then, seven years ago, we took over this second place. Dad knew the owner and it cost us about $10,000 including the machines. My younger brother didn't like it, but my sister lent me the money; I was able to repay her loan within a year. There used to be six of us working here, including myself and my wife. Meanwhile, Dad decided to close down the original plant and I had to take on all of its liabilities – nearly $90,000.

For a while though, there were a lot of customers and lots of work. We were prepared to handle small quantities of just a few hundred yards, while bigger companies would only deal with orders amounting to $10,000 or more. I was able to repay all my debts in a year.

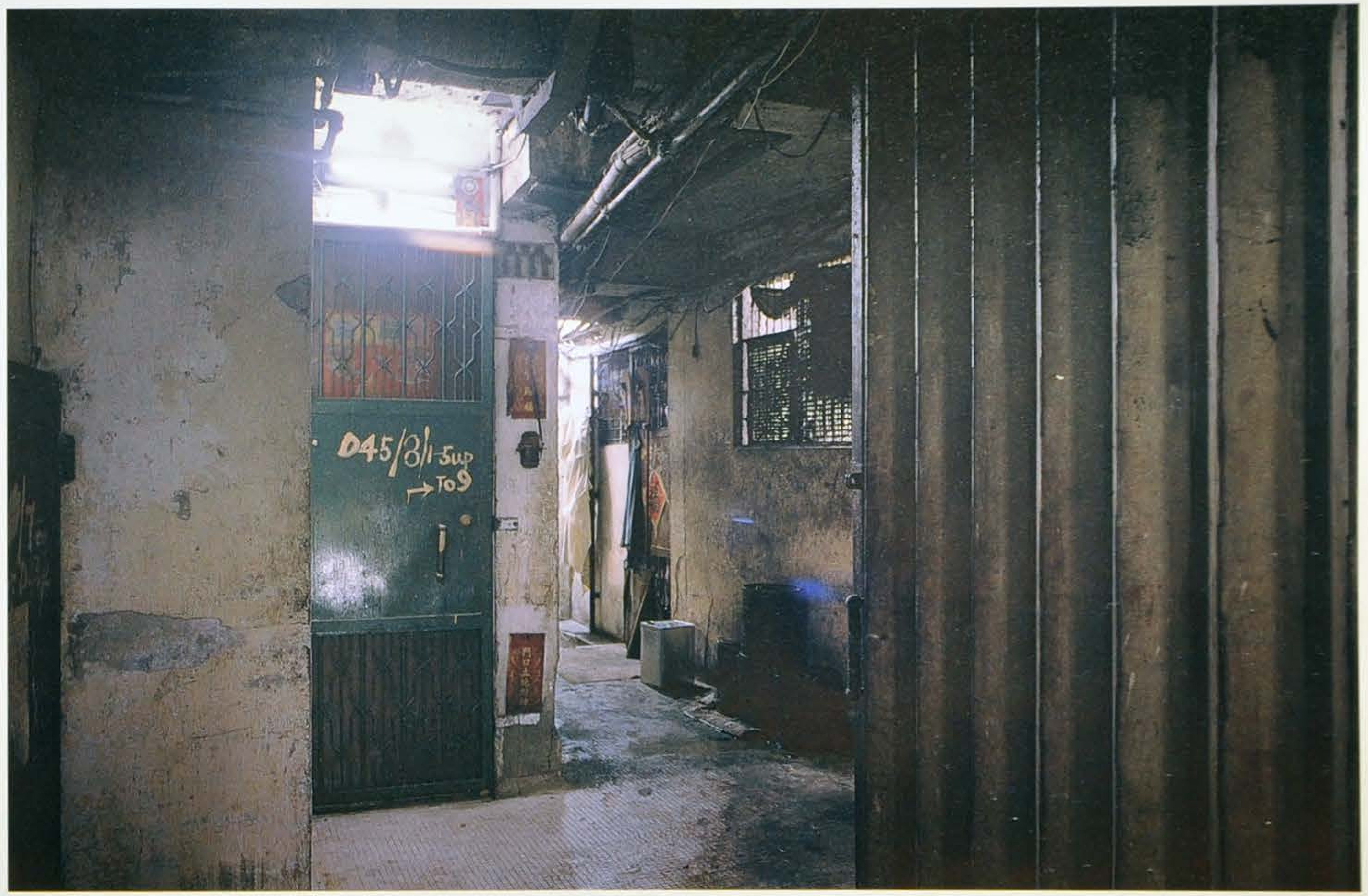
The income before deductions was about $40,000 a month during the best times. My workers got about $2000 a month, paid on a piece rate. But it was work all the time. My hands never stopped and I never wanted to wake up once I went to bed. Business slowed down in 1985 and '86, and although it picked up a little in 1987 it has steadily got worse. People get things made in mainland China now, where labour is cheaper. They come to me to try out a colour or ask for a sample, but then they take their orders to China.

I have a son and a daughter who are studying in Wong Tai Sin. We have a public housing unit in Tai Po and we go there sometimes. We rarely sleep there though, as it is too much of a rush in the morning to get the kids to school on time.

I'll be paid about $103,000 in compensation for this factory. I tried to get $200,000 but there was an interview – not a very satisfactory one – where I was told to reduce the sum I was demanding. I don't think I will be able to find a similar place to continue the weaving business – I can only afford $1500 a month in rent. The machines will be sold but no one will pay a high price for them. Maybe I'll change to another business. I'll see if Dad will support me, or maybe I'll borrow some money from him. It's a funny world though. Articles that our factory helped to make five years ago – shirts and other items that I recognise – are still being sold in Tai Po today!


联興樓
八期
第七期
联興樓
第七期
新建樓宇出售
接洽處
東頭村道
榮興隆米店

The name and number of a building was usually painted at its entrance, to register a clear visual signpost amid the City's chaotic alleyways. In the photograph on the left, a fading notice has also been added advertising an apartment for sale: prospective buyers were asked to contact a rice-seller on Tung Tau Tsuen Road. Following the clearance survey in 1987, premises were marked in white paint with an individual code [right].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On its corner site, Lee Pui Yuen's store opened directly on to both Tai Chang Street [right and below] *and Lung Chun Back Road* [overleaf].

GARDEN BAKERY

Lee Pui Yuen lived in the Walled City for 15 years, before opening his own store there, at 12 Tai Chang Street, in 1979. He lived and worked there with his wife and young son for the next 12 years. They moved out as part of the clearance in 1991.

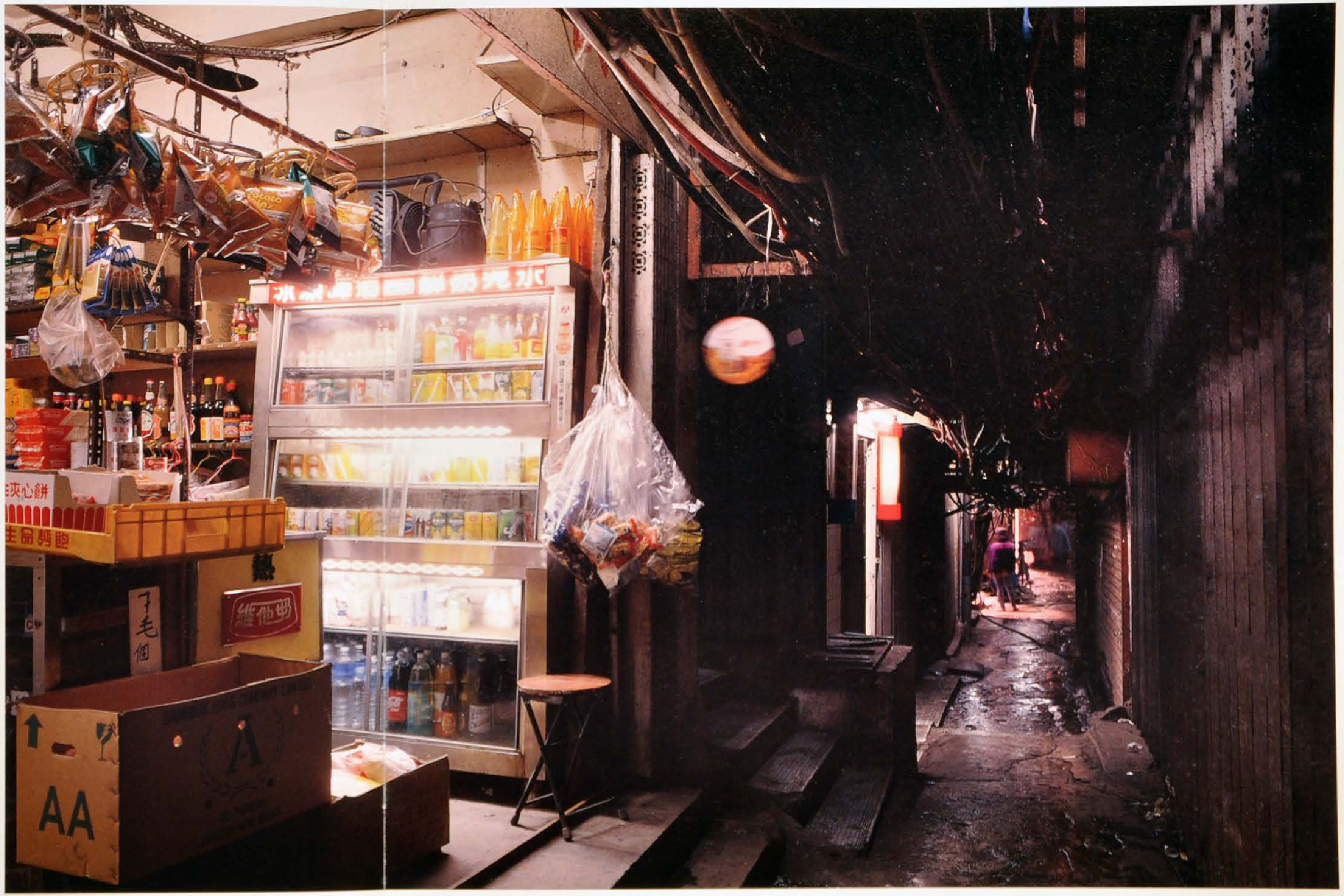
I was a fisherman and I came to Hong Kong, with about 10 others, in 1964 from Hai Fang county. We arrived in Sai Kung in three boats and were arrested by the Hong Kong police. We were kept in custody for three days and nights, but through a Christian organisation I was able to get out and contact my relatives and friends in Hong Kong.

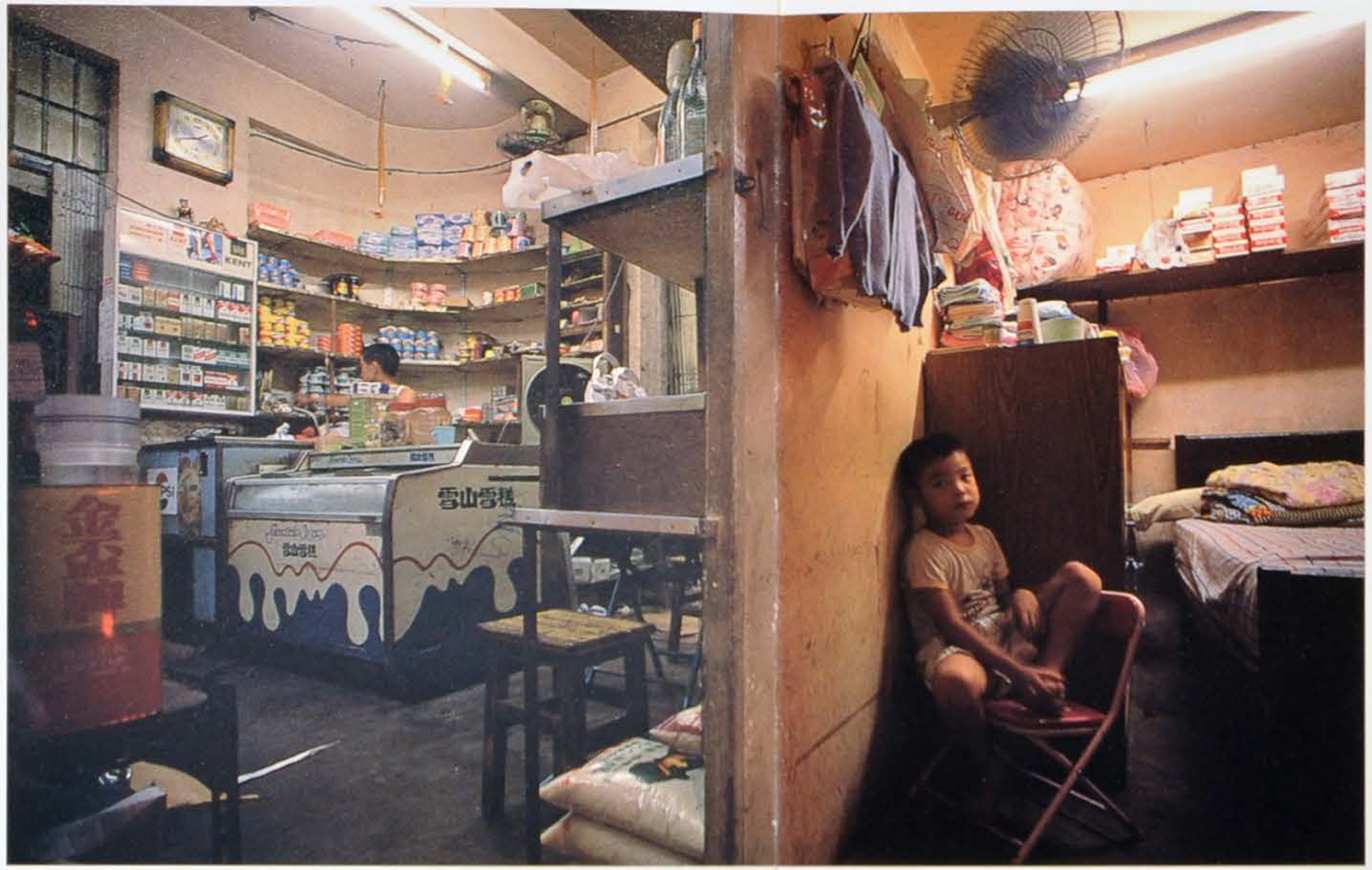
I lived with a friend in Sham Shui Po for two or three months and then moved into a very small place in the Walled City. Four families, more than 20 people, lived in an area of about 300 square feet. I was working in a weaving factory on the night shift then, and it was difficult to sleep during the day as it was always noisy. I didn't even have a proper bed space – I shared with my sister and her family who had rented a room in the same flat.

I moved into the City because of them, but it was tough living here to begin with. I fell down the stairs once in the dark. I often thought of going back to China.

Before coming to the City, I had switched from one job to another. From the weaving factory, I had moved to a woollen garment factory, then to a wig factory. I sold fruit for a while and then became a construction worker, but at the site I fell down and broke my arm. Eventually I became involved in running a small store and subsequently moved to this place in 1979. My brother-in-law had been doing the same business in the Walled City and he knew about the trade. It cost about $16,000 to take over the business and the rent was about $300 a month.

It was not difficult to obtain stock – there were always salesmen coming around – but we were never given goods on credit. We always had to pay cash on delivery. Living in the City, I was often refused hire-purchase facilities too. We are unable to get credit from banks, and insurance companies won't cover us either. You don't have to register your business here, of course. I did to begin with, but it was





Lee Pui Yuen's store was partitioned into a shop-cum-living area, at the front, and a rudimentary bedroom at the back – where mother, father and son slept together. Since the family lived in the store, the business effectively remained open until Pui Yuen and his wife turned off the television and went to bed.

too troublesome and the Inland Revenue Department was always chasing after me to pay my taxes.

My customers have been regulars – people living in the neighbourhood. My prices have always been about the same as those outside. If people bought kerosene or rice, I would deliver to their homes. I could carry 40 or 50 catties of rice and a drum of kerosene up 10 or more storeys.

This place costs $3000 a month to rent nowadays. We used to have a turnover of $4000 to $5000 every day. People bought a lot of things from us – mainly cigarettes, beer and kerosene. We're open from 8am to midnight and the store used to be crowded between 5 and 9pm every day. This is the biggest store in the City. We stock so much that it is like a small supermarket!

There used to be a lot of factories around here at ground level, but since the announcement of the demolition they have all gradually gone. This place was a factory before I turned it into a store. It's about 700 square feet or so.

I haven't got rich doing business here, but I have made enough to survive. My wife has helped me a lot. I met and married her in Hong Kong and she is the greatest wife in the world, helping me with the business every day, from morning to night.

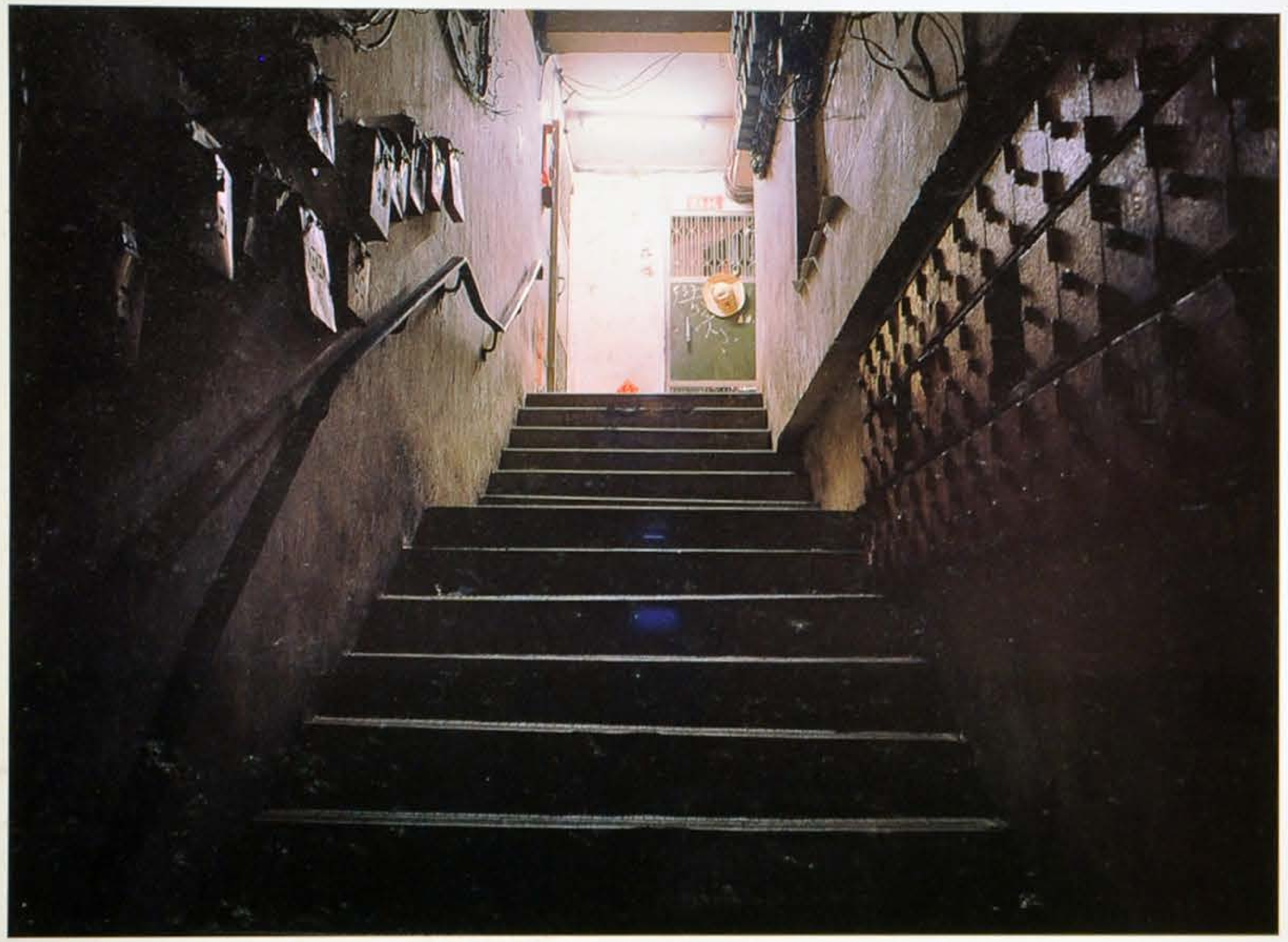
We've never had any trouble doing business here. I have never been robbed and people just get along. People outside think that anyone living in the City is barbaric and it's true the living conditions aren't so good. We sleep here in the store – the nights are pretty quiet until about 4am, but then the rubbish collectors come round banging and clanging.

Sometimes I do feel that people discriminate against us. For example, when my son was seeking admission to Mansang School there was a kid who was crying like mad, while my son was calm and showed no fear. This other kid was accepted, but not mine – I think it was a plain case of discrimination. Now, of course, people look at us differently. Everyone living in the City is regarded as rich.

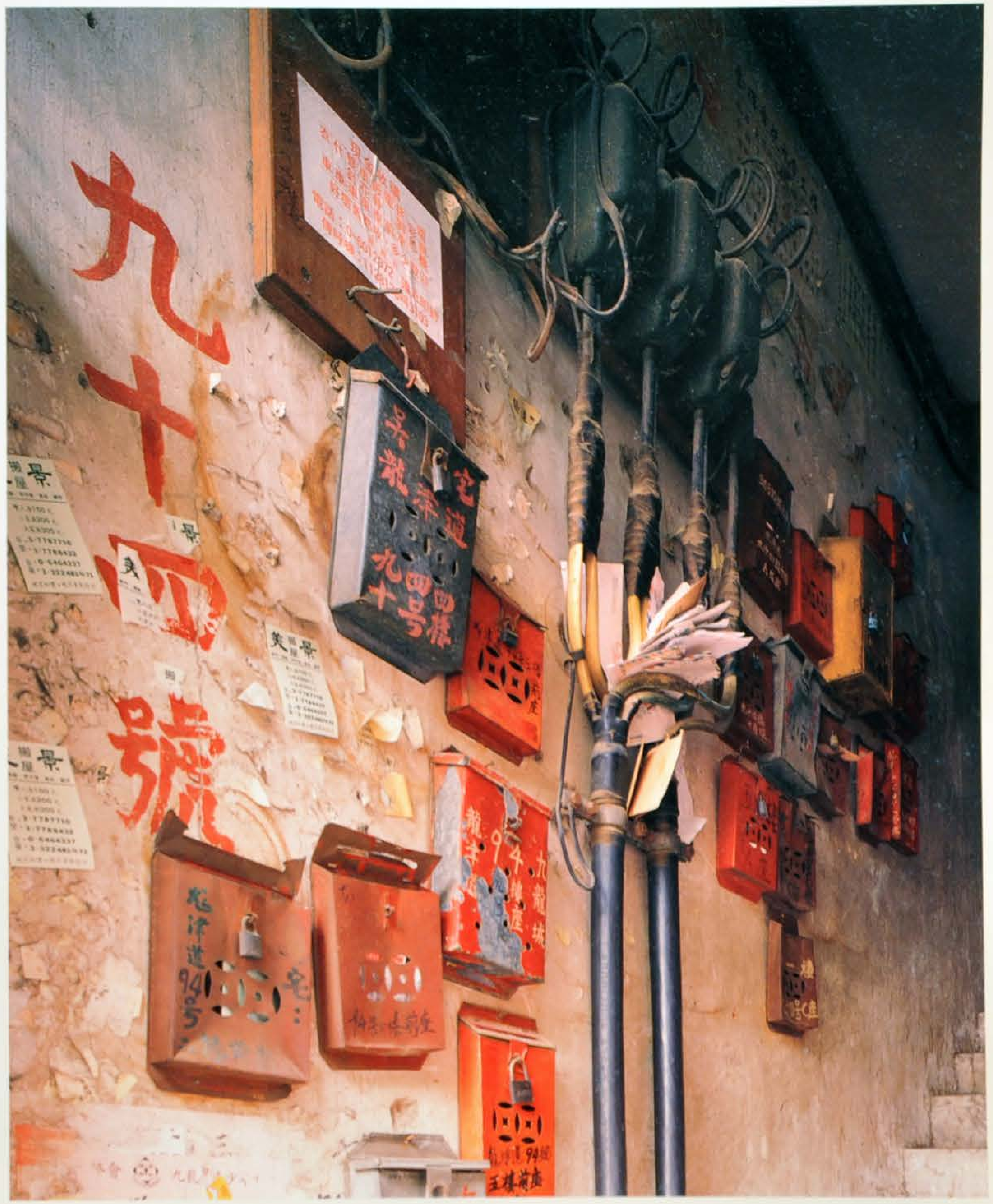
I owned two flats, for which I was compensated by the Government with $400,000. I am getting a place outside and will do some business. I might run a similar store or sell fruit.

In all sincerity, I have to thank the Government and the Communist Party for giving me such a big sum. If it had not been for the Communist Party, I am sure that I would not have received so much; they told me what to do. I will also get $80,000 for relocating my store. It was a pity that my wife was hoodwinked into signing a piece of paper agreeing to vacate these premises for so little – I wonder if anything can be done now?

We could probably have won more compensation if we had argued, but my wife put her signature on the piece of paper. I suppose I will just have to treat it as having gambled and lost. Anyway, I've had enough of the City now and it is becoming so boring. People have moved out and I sit here all day with nothing to do. The old days were different: people were always here, playing mahjong or just chatting.



Post-boxes were usually found at street level in the main entrances of the high-rise buildings, either in organised ranks [left] or — as at 94 Lung Chun Road [right] — as individual boxes tacked haphazardly to the wall. The incomplete and non-sequential collection of boxes meant that mail often had to be jammed into any available crevice, highlighting one of the many difficulties facing postmen in the City. The small white posters, pasted on to the wall, advertise a removal company which was charging $100 for a small room, $200 for a small family, and $300 for a large family.



A Chinese Magistrate's Fort

by Julia Wilkinson

Julia Wilkinson is an English freelance writer who has been based in Hong Kong since 1979. She has travelled extensively in Asia and written for numerous publications, including the Far Eastern Economic Review, *the* Asian Wall Street Journal, The Sunday Times, Travel & Leisure *and* National Geographic Traveler. *She now divides her time between a base in the Wiltshire countryside, in south-west England, and Hong Kong's outlying island of Cheung Chau. She made a number of visits to the Walled City during the 1980s, writing about it for several regional publications.*

The Kowloon Walled City was one of the greatest anomalies in Hong Kong's history. No other part of the territory caused such controversy or maintained such a confused identity as this $6^1/_2$ acre slum. Claimed by both China and Britain but properly administered by neither, the Walled City became a legal no-man's-land, a notorious city of darkness and sin.

It wasn't sin, but salt, which first gave the Walled City life. In the Sung Dynasty (960–1297), north-east coastal Kowloon was an important salt-field, one of several in the district of San On. It was known then as Kuan-fu Ch'ang – Kowloon, the vernacular name, was only officially adopted in 1840. A small fort was established here early on in the Sung Dynasty, to house Imperial soldiers who controlled the salt trade. For a brief time, too, in 1277, it probably hosted the 'travelling palace' of the young Sung Emperor, fleeing from the Mongols who had invaded south China two years earlier.

This distant military outpost of Imperial China, called Kau Lung Shing (Kowloon City) by the locals, was situated immediately north-west of a settlement known as Kau Lung Gai (Kowloon Street), an area which became notorious in the 1890s for its gambling dens. The fort itself made no headlines for several centuries, until 1668, when a watchpost was established on the site with a small garrison of 30 guards. In later years this number was reduced to 10. In 1810, an additional fort was built near the coast. Its strategic position, just a quarter of a mile from the sea and across the harbour from Hong Kong, was soon to bring it lasting fame.

In 1841 Britain occupied Hong Kong island, forcing the Chinese to respond. How could they defend Kowloon from a possible British invasion? In 1843 they decided to transfer a deputy magistrate, administratively responsible for 492 neighbouring villages, to Kowloon City, together with the chief military officer of the county and an increased garrison of 150 soldiers.

The Viceroy of Canton soon suggested further improvements to the fort, including offices, barracks and training facilities. But his most significant proposal was to build a wall. By 1847 it was finished, transforming the nondescript fort into the Kowloon Walled City, a visible and psychological symbol of Imperial control to the barbarians in Hong Kong.

When the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong, J.H. Stewart Lockhart, surveyed the newly-leased New Territories in 1898, he described the wall's impressive dimensions: *"The wall is built of granite ashlar facing, is 15 feet in width at the top and averages in height 13 feet".* A rough parallelogram, it measured 700 feet by 400 feet and enclosed an area of $6^1/_2$ acres, an earlier extension which ran from the northern corner up the rocky hill behind having already fallen into disuse. It featured six watch-towers (then occupied as family dwellings), four gateways, a granite parapet with 119 embrasures, and dozens of cannons. *"Kowloon might . . . be styled the City of Cannons"*, declared a *Hongkong Weekly Press* article in 1904. *"Everywhere one goes one strikes up against ancient dismantled guns."*

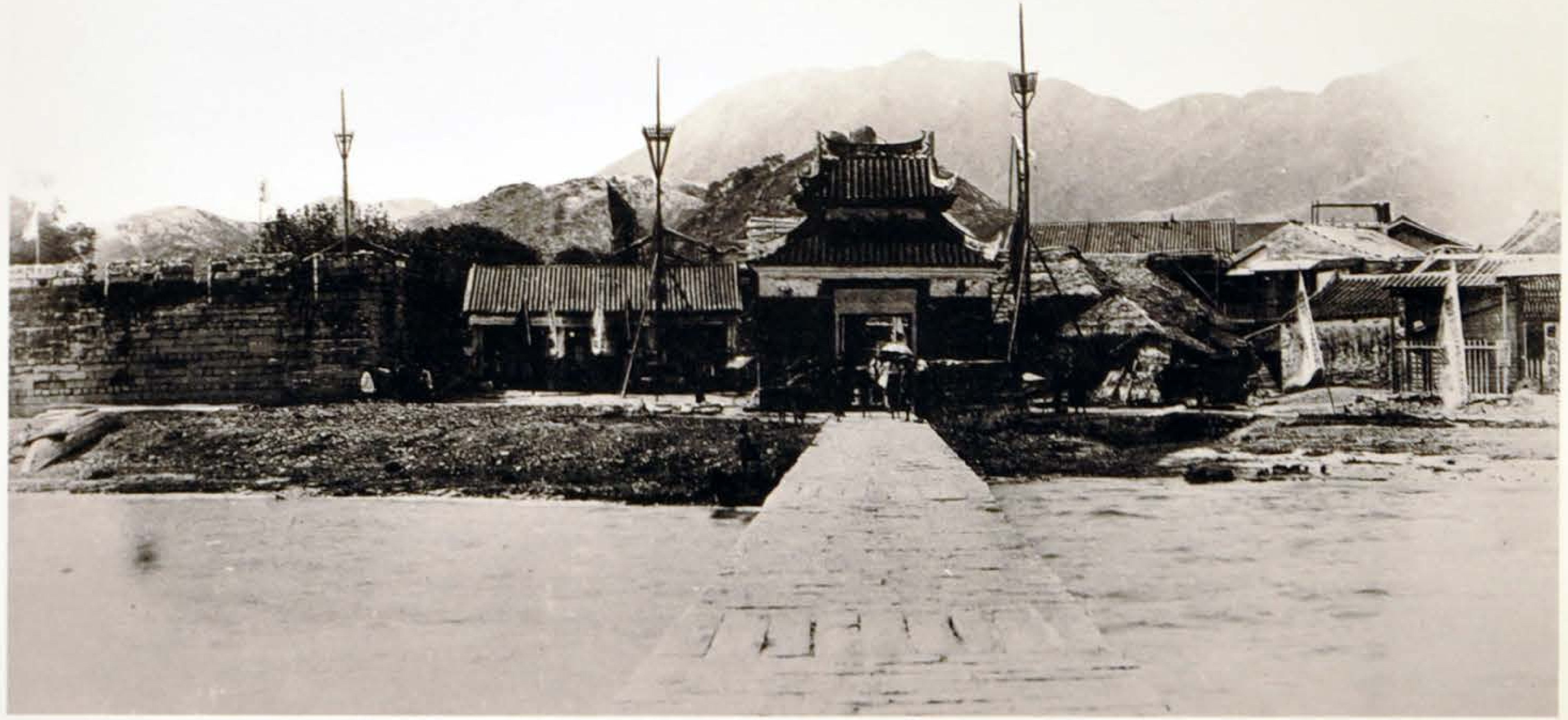
Not long after the wall was completed, the City boasted more refinements: a *yamen* (office for the deputy magistrate), a traditional paper-burning pavilion near the east gate, and the Lung Chun Yee Hok (communal school), founded in 1847 to act as a moral defence against barbarian influences and a meeting place for officials. By 1880 a charitable society, the Lok Sin Tong (Hall of Willing Charity), had been established to distribute free education and free medicine to the surrounding villages.

The one thing the Walled City did not have was a market or, indeed, shops of any kind. It was primarily a garrison town for officials and soldiers. In 1898 the garrison numbered 500 and the civilian population 200, largely dependants of the military and reportedly under the jurisdiction of the military commander. But the area leading from the east gate to the waterfront a quarter of a mile away – the original Kau Lung Gai – soon developed into a bustling market town attracting villagers from as far as Shatin and Sai Kung. As trade developed, a provincial customs station was set up in 1871 to prevent smuggling – especially opium – from Hong Kong, replaced 15 years later by a more important 'Chinese Maritime Customs Station'.

Beyond these suburbs of Kowloon City ran the Lung Chun Pier, an imposing stone jetty supported by 21 pillars, completed in 1875 and running 700 feet out into the sea to enable the mandarin to reach his boat in style. In 1892 a 260-foot wooden extension was added. A two-storey Lung Chun (Mandarin Greeting) Pavilion was built at the head of the pier as an official reception area and rest house for travellers. Completing the formal entrance-way was a *pai lau,* or ceremonial arch.

Ironically, the first people to test the Walled City's new defences were not British, but Chinese; rebels captured the Walled City during the 1854 Taiping uprising, ransacking its houses and seizing livestock. The Imperial officials and soldiers fled to the only safe place around – Hong Kong island. A week later they regained their military foothold; the garrison of 300 which the rebels had left behind when they headed north had already become quarrelsome and restless, and had begun to split up. Within a fortnight, most had left to join the main body of rebels, which eventually met with a crushing defeat.

Triads, the republican secret societies which were being formed at this time to oppose Imperial Manchu rule, were another menace. In 1884, the Walled City mandarin warned British authorities of a possible Triad uprising and advised them to be on their guard. Nothing alarming occurred, though it served to highlight the fear of repercussions across the harbour if anything happened in Kowloon.



The view from Lung Chun (Dragon's Path) Pier towards Kowloon City, circa 1875. Directly in line with the new stone pier was the pai lau, *or ceremonial arch, which straddled the main street.*

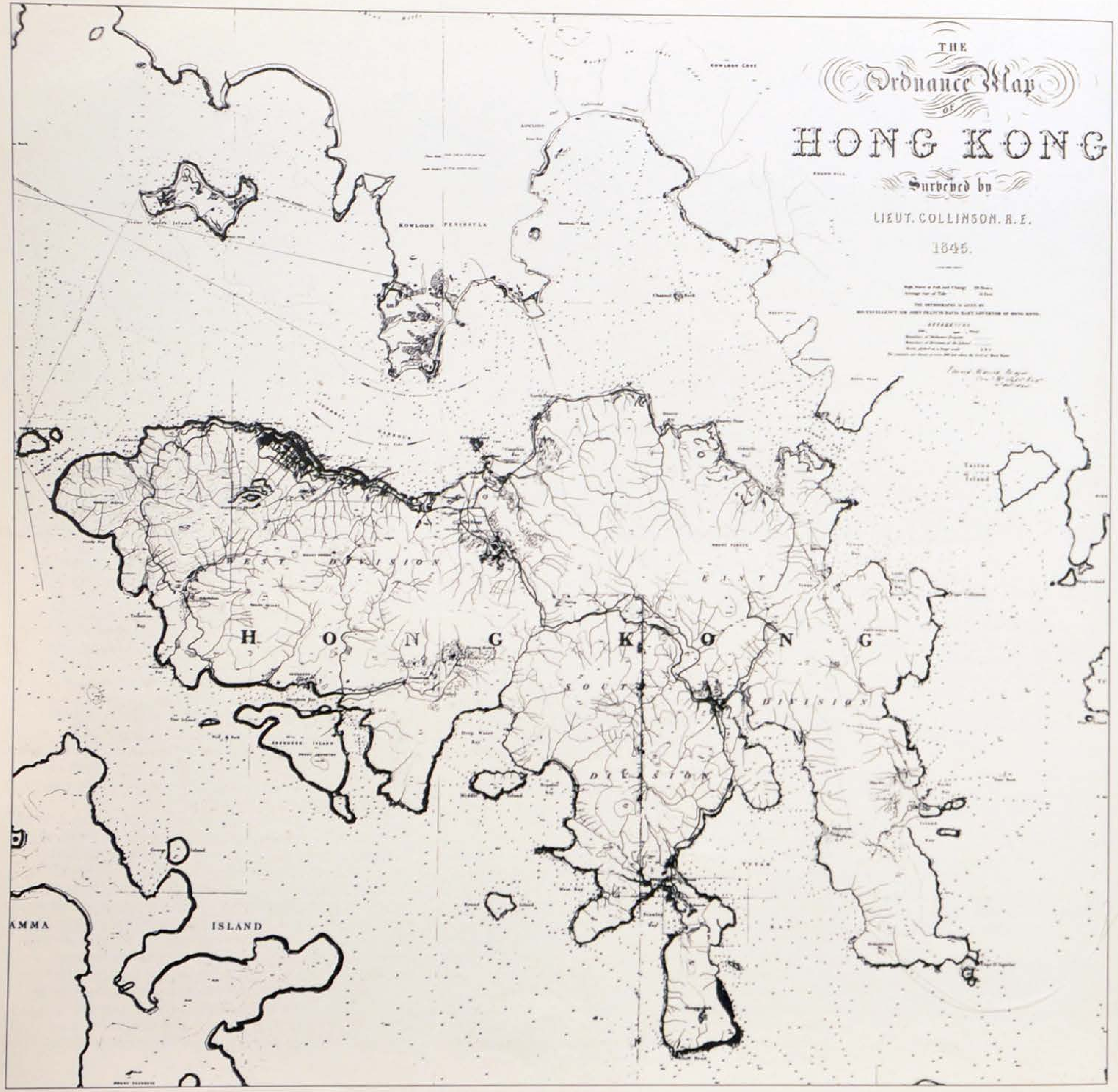
In these early days prior to 1898, relations between the officials of the Walled City and those of Hong Kong were surprisingly amicable, at least in the field of law and order. An ordinance of 1850 required that Chinese fugitives in Hong Kong were handed over to Kowloon officials, and though China was not obliged to reciprocate, it carried out ruthless punishments of its own against criminals. In 1890, for instance, a couple of pirates were arrested in Hong Kong but later released for lack of evidence. Their associates in Kowloon, however, were promptly arrested, convicted and beheaded on the beach in front of the fort. British officials were politely invited to witness the event.

The Walled City and its adjacent town were well known to the British of Hong Kong by then. The fort had been something of a tourist attraction for Hong Kong's European residents ever since the 1850s, though a Reverend Krone, writing about San On district in 1858, had *"little to say"* about the *"low walls and miserable forts of Kowloong* [sic]*"*.

The 1893 *Hongkong Guide* was more forthcoming, though scarcely more complimentary. It described one of the popular 'picnic party' walks on the Kowloon mainland ending in the *"curious and particularly dirty little Kowloon City"*, where a circuit of the walls *"can be made in five minutes. The formalities usually insisted upon in garrison towns . . . are dispensed with here. You come, you see, you walk round. The cannon on the walls suggest the idea that you would rather be a good way off when any attempt is made to fire them. One or two petty officers are stationed on this dreary spot, and they must have a dull time of it. The chief trade of the place is from the several gambling houses erected near the beach there"*.

This, indeed, had been Kowloon City's increasing claim to fame ever since the Kowloon peninsula was ceded to Britain in 1860, leading to a rapid growth in the City's population and corresponding decline in its physical and moral state. While the walled fort managed to maintain its dignity as an important centre of civil and military administration – with houses *"of a very superior class"*, according to a 1904 *Hongkong Weekly Press* article, and tree-lined streets *"wide and commodious"* – the suburban area outside was little better than a plague-ridden slum, with narrow, dirty streets and a *"wretched agglomeration of Chinese hovels"*, as described by an 1890 report in *The Hongkong Telegraph.*

This *"festering sore"* harboured all kinds of vice: brothels, opium parlours and gambling dens. Worst of all, exclaimed the Hong Kong press, it had become the *"favourite* [gambling] *rendezvous of a considerable number of the British and foreign community"*. Since gambling had been prohibited in Hong Kong, Kowloon City's gambling dens proved an irresistible attraction. In typical Hong Kong entrepreneurial style, operators offered free steam-launch rides for punters from Hong Kong, with complimentary coffee and cigars on board. Hong Kong officials, as well as the press, were increasingly outraged by the goings-on. *"It is not too much to say that this place, with its encouragements to vice and dishonesty, adds enormously to the task of preserving order and good government among the large Chinese population of*



Remarkably accurate for 1845, the original survey map of Hong Kong marks the location of a stone fort in the north-eastern sector of Kowloon Peninsula. The British began settling on Hong Kong island and the tip of Kowloon in 1841, prompting China to respond by upgrading the fort to the seat of a county magistracy and completing a new wall. According to the principles of Chinese geomancy, the relationship of the fort to its surrounding landscape could be considered unharmonious, the protective shield of the hills to the north being outweighed by the open stretch of 'approaching' water to the south which dissipated the balance of its qi, or spirit. The low wall tracing the small hill immediately behind the fort in the photograph of 1865 [right] *marked a separate compound.*

the Colony", exclaimed the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce in 1898. *"The inclusion of this small city within British boundaries would greatly assist in the detection and repression of crime."*

It was easier said than done. In early 1898, Sir Claude MacDonald, British Minister in Peking, began negotiations with the Chinese on leasing extra territory on the mainland opposite Hong Kong for defence purposes. Almost at once he encountered a problem: *"Great difficulty is Kowloon City"*, he reported to the Foreign Office, *"necessity of withdrawing permanent officials being much resented"*.

Impatient to reach agreement on the lease, Arthur Balfour of the Foreign Office hastily telegraphed back: *"Is it a question of dignity or money? Would a lease get over it? If money compensation is required we could offer reasonable terms, or some arrangements might be made leaving Chinese officials in the town undisturbed but subjecting them to paramount British authority"*.

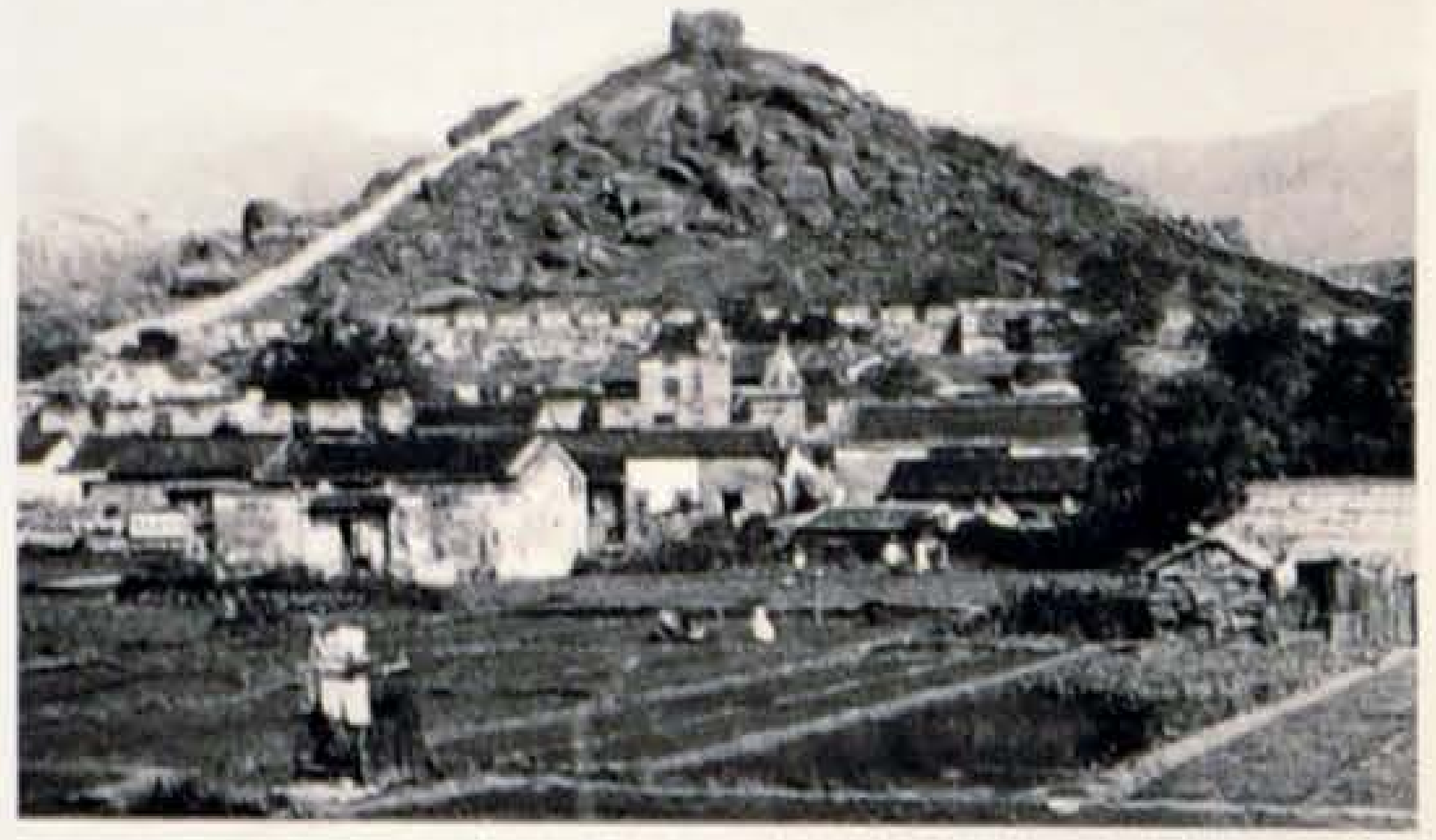
MacDonald confirmed that it did indeed seem to be a question of *"saving 'face', a very important consideration with Chinese"*, although officially the Tsungli Yamen (Chinese Foreign Office) claimed the transfer of power would cause instability. There may also have been some concern that, according to traditional belief, any Emperor who lost a city during his reign would be unable to enter the royal temple and face his ancestors' spirits.

At any rate, the Chinese were adamant about retaining jurisdiction in Kowloon City, by which they meant the Walled City, not the suburbs, even if it was limited by the British insistence on the phrase *"except so far as may be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defence of Hong Kong"*.

"The retention of Chinese jurisdiction within Kowloon City was the point on which the Yamen showed the greatest determination", summarised MacDonald after the final draft for the New Territories lease was completed. He continued: *"It is not to be supposed that the City of Kowloon will long remain outside British jurisdiction with the surrounding district subject to it, but I think that no harm can result from allowing it to do so for a few years longer, and that little inconvenience will be caused by it, especially as the authority of the Chinese officials will be exercised subject to the stipulation that it does not interfere with military requirements"*.

How wrong this proved to be! The ambiguous wording of the Kowloon City clause that was inserted in the hurriedly-drafted Peking Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong, signed on 9 June 1898, would only serve to exacerbate problems in the future: *". . . within the city of Kowloon, the Chinese officials now stationed there shall continue to exercise jurisdiction except so far as may be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defence of Hong Kong. Within the remainder of the newly-leased territory Great Britain shall have sole jurisdiction. It is further agreed that the existing landing-place near Kowloon City shall be reserved for the convenience of Chinese men-of-war, merchant and passenger vessels, which may come and go and lie there at their pleasure; and for the convenience of movement of the officials and people within the City"*.

The clause immediately caused outrage among the Hong Kong press and business community. Chinese jurisdiction in the Walled City, claimed the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, would prolong the *"moral danger"* that the City's notorious suburbs represented and *"could not fail to exercise a malign influence on the minds of the natives, and would assuredly have a damaging effect on British prestige in South China"*. A British journal was even more explicit: *"We will never be able to maintain good order nor enforce sanitary measures as long as Chinese officials are allowed to remain in Kowloon. The Chinese officials must go, and the sooner they go, the better for all concerned"*.



The convention was to take effect on 1 July 1898. But various factors delayed the formal possession of the New Territories until April the following year, by which time local villagers and clan leaders had built up considerable resentment to the new arrangements. When they resisted preparations for the takeover, the Governor, Sir Henry Blake, called on the Viceroy of Canton for *"ample protection"*. Although the elderly Viceroy heartily disliked the barbarians, he immediately complied and sent down 300 troops.

On 3 April, after a party of police sent to guard workers erecting 'mat-sheds' for the official possession ceremony was attacked, a further 600 troops were sent. But organised resistance continued, with violent clashes and some loss of

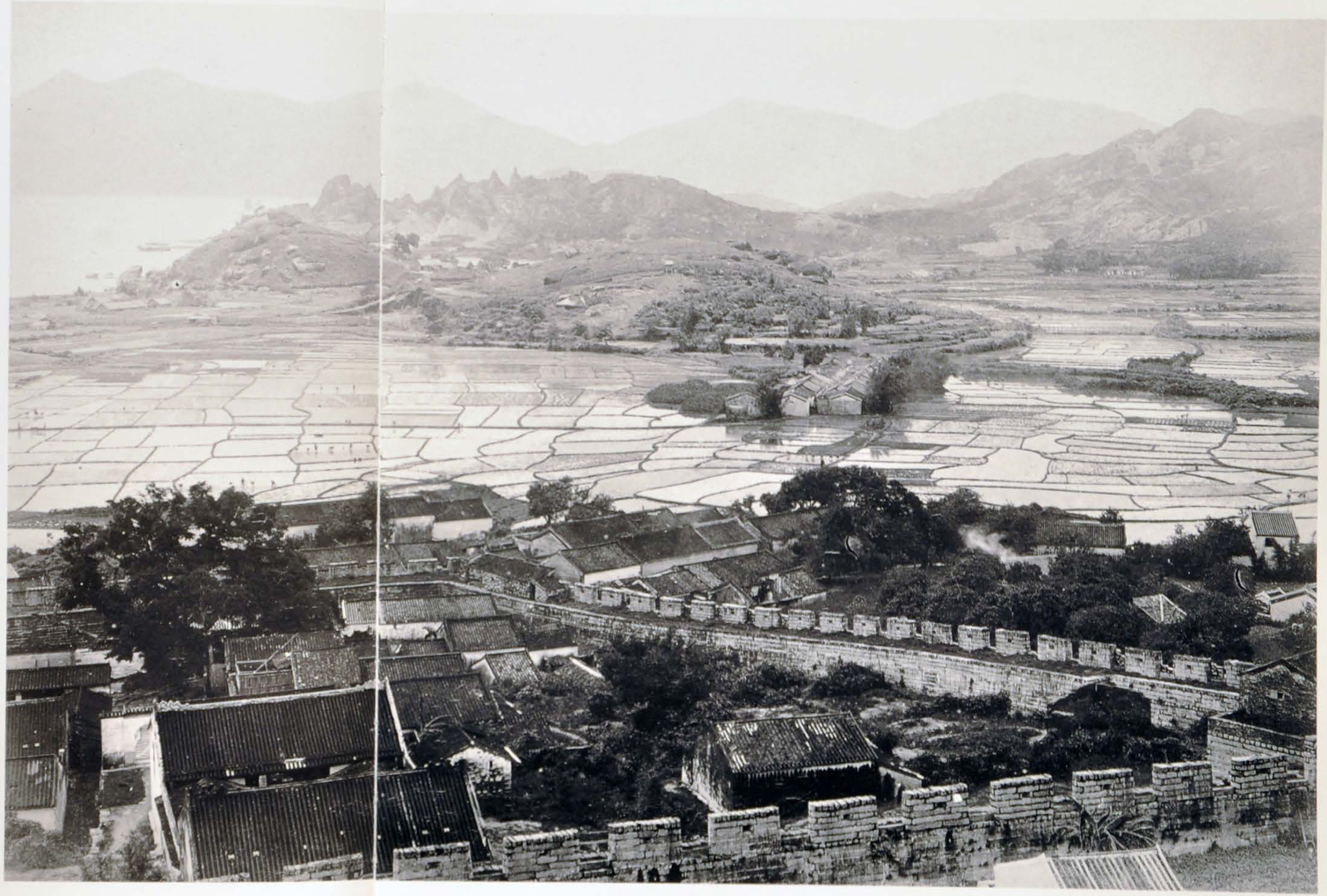
The scale and location of the fortified wall, the mix of public and private dwellings, and the relationship of the magistrate's compound to the surrounding countryside are clearly visible in this extraordinary photograph taken in 1865. Taken from the small hill behind the fort, the view looks south over Kowloon Peninsula towards the hills of Hong Kong island. In the middle distance, just beyond the rice fields and barely discernible, is the boundary fence that defined the limit of British colonial expansion at that time, and which lives on as Boundary Street today.

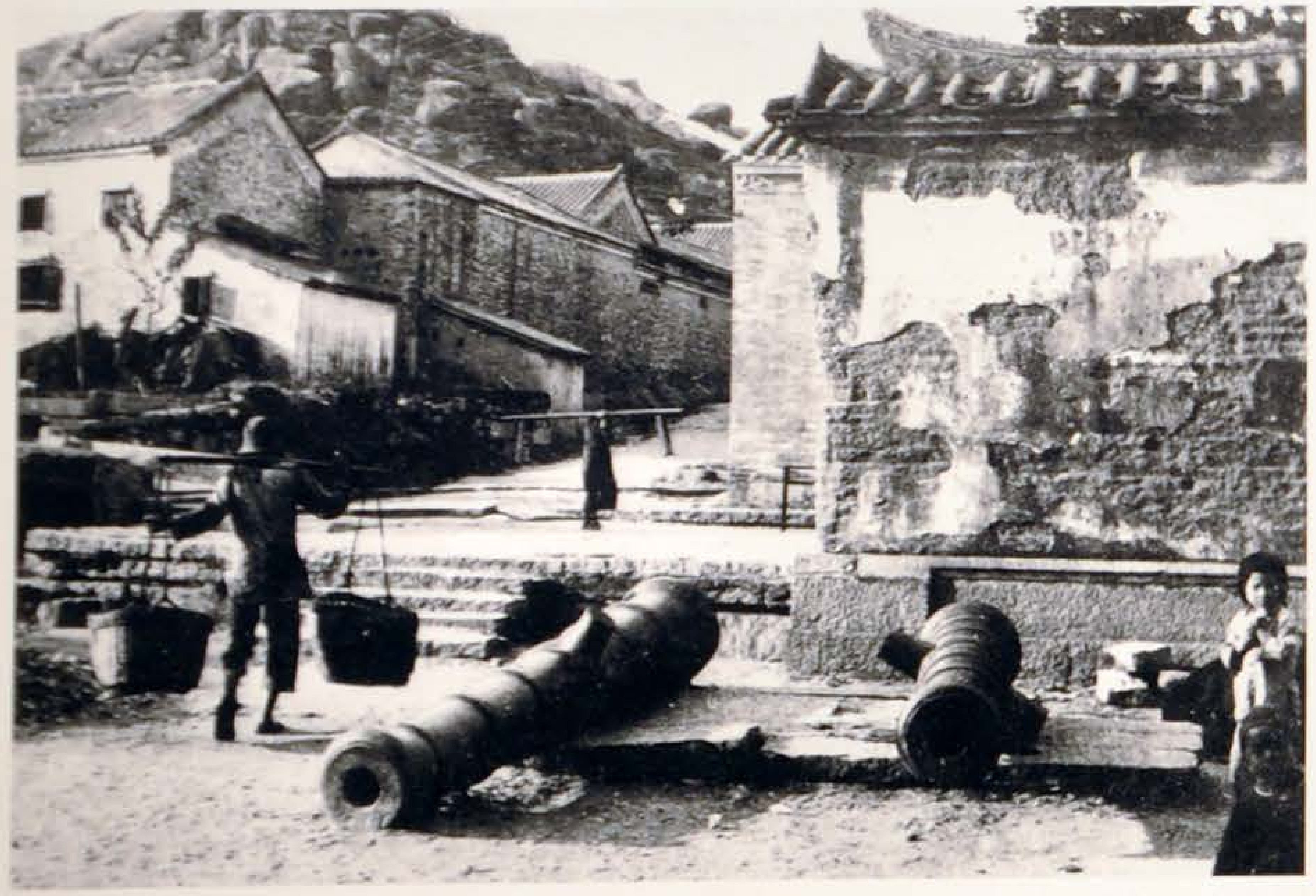
life to the Chinese, and the Union Jack was hurriedly raised on 16 April, one day earlier than planned. Hong Kong's British residents were most upset, said *The Daily Press*, at missing the official ceremony, which should have been *"a pleasant little outing and an opportunity for indulging in an outburst of patriotic fervour"*.

The public was also indignant at the resistance shown by the locals and demanded the expulsion of Chinese officials from the Walled City as reparation. This coincided neatly with the eagerness of the Colonial Office to rectify the Walled City's awkward status which they had always hoped to be temporary. But they needed a good excuse to act; in the end, it was the Viceroy himself who provided it. The day before the flag-raising ceremony, the Viceroy had sent a further 600 troops to the New Territories: half had gone to the Walled City, and half to the border town of Shum Chun. The Governor, suspecting the Viceroy's complicity in the well-organised disturbances and his intentions in sending this new batch of soldiers, requested the *"removal of all Chinese troops and officials from leased territory, except Customs officials"*.

The Tsungli Yamen promised to instruct the Viceroy to remove the troops, but by 29 April there were still 300 soldiers in the Walled City. The Colonial Office turned pugnacious, proposing that the garrison should be blockaded and starved out. The British Government vacillated, but by 14 May, with 200 soldiers still holding out, it finally agreed that the Walled City should be seized. Two days later, British troops valiantly launched their attack. Watched by a large crowd who, despite the supposed secrecy of the operation had gathered in good time on the beach, 100 Hong Kong volunteers and 200 Royal Welch Fusiliers disembarked at Lung Chun Pier and manoeuvred their Maxim-guns through the suburb's narrow and dark, *"evil-smelling streets"*. Marching through the Walled City's open south gate, their guns at the ready, what did they find? Nothing. The Viceroy's soldiers had gone.

Only the mandarin, protesting loudly, was there to greet them, and about 150 inhabitants. The British troops rounded up a cache of arms, raised the Union Jack and fired a 21-gun salute before returning to Hong Kong, leaving a small force in occupation. *"The trip"*, reported a satisfied *Hongkong Weekly Press*, *"was immensely enjoyed by all who took part in it."* Although the Walled City's inhabitants left by junk a few days later, the garrison's officers refused to evacuate without orders from the Viceroy. Meanwhile, of course, protests about the occupation came flying in from the Viceroy and the Tsungli Yamen. But the more they protested, the more the British authorities dug in their heels: *"After the recent experience which* [the Hong Kong authorities] *have had"*, wrote the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, to the





By 1924, the Walled City was little more than a small rural community with a static population of only a few hundred. The building in the left foreground, at that time the Old People's Home, was formerly the yamen or residence of the military official.

Chinese Minister in London, *"not only of the worthlessness of the protection extended by the Chinese garrison at Kowloon but of the additional danger involved in its presence, it is impossible for Her Majesty's Government to allow the resumption of Chinese authority within the walls of that City"*.

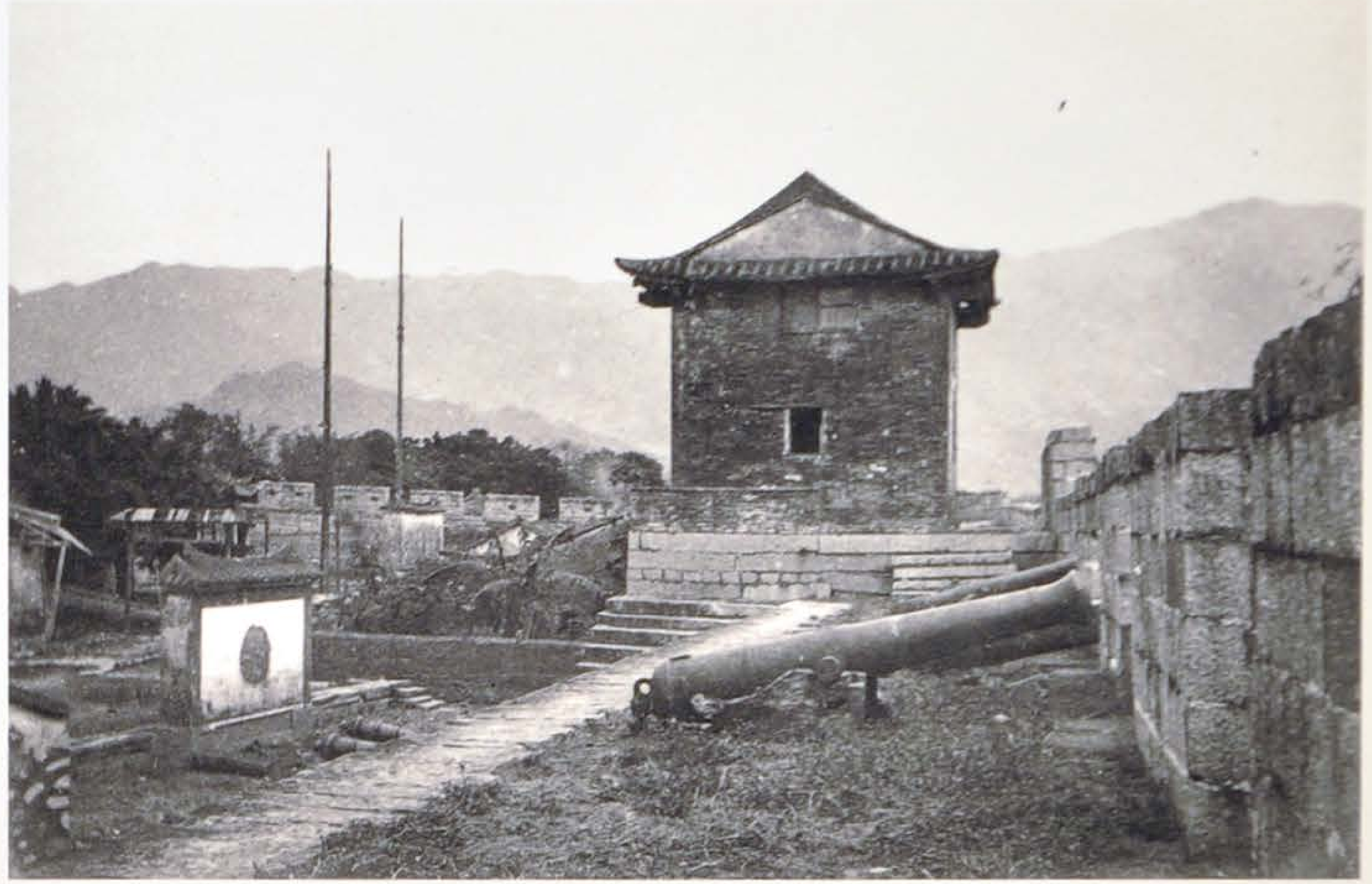
To seal the issue legally, an Order in Council on 27 December 1899, declared that *"the exercise of jurisdiction by the Chinese officials in the City of Kowloon, having been found to be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defence of Hong Kong"*, the Walled City would now become, *"part and parcel of Her Majesty's Colony of Hong Kong . . . as if it had originally formed part of the said Colony"*.

At this point, it might have been expected that the British would demonstrate clearly their control of the Walled City. But apart from establishing the New Territories' first Land Court in the City's Lung Chun school building in 1900, they left the place pretty much alone. Neither did the Chinese, for all their remonstrating, try to reinstate an administration.

By 1904, there was *"nothing but desolation"* inside the Walled City, according to a *Hongkong Weekly Press* article. Sensitive to further outbursts of Chinese criticism, the Government was only prepared to grant short-term leases inside the City for public purposes, which resulted in the establishment of many church-run charitable institutions. The Protestant church operated schools and charities, while the Anglican Holy Trinity church converted the former San Sheng (Three Saints) Temple into a chapel and held twice-weekly services. An old people's home, school and almshouse – all run by the church – were converted from former offices, and when the Lung Chun school ceased to be used by the Lands Office, in 1905, it became a free secondary school and public dispensary.

For tourists and Hong Kong residents, the Walled City was now once again a quaint curiosity, *"a little bit of Old China"* to be visited and photographed. Especially popular were two huge cannon near the south gate, apparently the only ones to escape being dismantled or sold to metal dealers after the British occupation. One inhabitant capitalised on this tourist trade by selling copies of the Walled City's historical stone inscriptions to visitors.

Meanwhile, however, the world outside the walls was rapidly changing: with the reclamation and development of Kowloon Bay, the Walled City gradually found itself further and further inland, surrounded by new roads, public housing estates, factories and, eventually, Kai Tak Airport. By contrast, the City itself was deteriorating; by the 1920s its south wall had crumbled and Lung Chun Pier had fallen into disuse. The mandarin's office and many of the 60 domestic buildings were practically in ruins. In the surrounding hills, thousands of Chiu Chow squatters raised pigs and poultry; many of them had even filtered into the City itself.



As these photographs [left and right] *of 1906 show, the City's remaining buildings and structures were still in fairly good condition, in marked contrast to their neglected state in the 1920s* [far left and overleaf].

It was time, thought the Hong Kong authorities, to get rid of this awkward and insanitary place once and for all. In 1933 the Government announced plans to demolish the houses, compensate the 436 squatter-residents and turn the area into *"a place of popular resort and antiquarian interest"*. When the residents protested and appealed to China for support, further compensation in the form of a new house for each family was offered. The District Officer South responsible for the evacuation, G. Kennedy-Skipton, recalled, in 1970, that these generous offers of compensation were largely responsible for persuading the people to move voluntarily, *"despite resistance from the Nationalist Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs who made a trip from Canton to dissuade them from moving"*.

With one recalcitrant stirring up trouble, China continued to protest, but the evacuation went ahead anyway. By 1940 everything had been demolished apart from the Lung Chun school, the *yamen* – more recently used as an old people's home – and one private house. The clearance gave the Hong Kong Government its first taste since 1899 of China's stubborn insistence on claiming jurisdiction over the Walled City, and its last taste of success in achieving its aims relatively peacefully. The 'place of popular resort', however, never materialised, much to Kennedy-Skipton's dismay. When the Japanese occupied Hong Kong during the Second World War, they demolished the last bit of the Walled City's historical identity: its wall. The stone was used, ignominiously, to extend Kai Tak Airport.

But although the Walled City had lost much of its visible prestige, it didn't stop China, after the War, from announcing its intention to reclaim its rights and establish civil courts within the City. Nor did it prevent refugees, flooding into the enclave, from recognising it as a refuge guaranteed protection by China. By 1947 there were 2000 squatters camped in the previously deserted city. The Government decided to act before the situation got out of control.

A British Government document from 1948 described the plan: *"The Secretary of State will recall we attempted to side-step the Chinese claim of jurisdiction over the Kowloon Walled City by proposing that the site be turned into a Garden of Remembrance of Anglo-Chinese trusteeship"*. But the Chinese would have none of it. They made a series of counter-proposals, *"of which the least objectionable seemed to be to make over the whole site as a compound for the official residence of the local representative of the Chinese Government"*, reported the Government document. And no, they would still not give up their claim of jurisdiction.

With negotiations deadlocked, the Hong Kong Government went ahead with its alternative plan: evacuation of the squatters. This time, however, things didn't go as well as they had done in 1934. A week after the squatters had been forcibly expelled and their huts demolished, a riot broke out resulting in several injuries when police tried to stop those who had been evicted from returning. Protests flared up, spreading as far as Shanghai and Canton, where the British Consulate was set ablaze. To prevent Anglo-Chinese relations deteriorating any further, the Government quickly dropped the eviction programme. It marked a turning point in policy; from now on, apart from a couple of occasions, the Government was to adopt a largely 'hands-off' approach towards the Walled City.

Left to its own devices, the enclave developed into what the Governor, Sir Alexander Grantham, colourfully described as *"a cesspool of iniquity, with heroin divans, brothels and everything unsavoury"*. Not that this was anything new as far as the City was concerned – unsavoury happenings had been

By the late 1920s, much of the Walled City was dilapidated and forlorn. Within 10 years, reclamation work on Kowloon Bay would leave the City far inland.

all the rage in the City's suburbs back in the 1890s – but now such iniquity had crept within the boundaries of the walls themselves.

The police tentatively carried out a few raids on the worst offenders, but it was not until 1959 that legal justification for interfering in the Walled City was raised in the Supreme Court. During a murder trial, it was argued that since the accused Wong Hon's alleged offence had been committed inside the Walled City it was beyond British jurisdiction.

The Chief Justice, however, claimed that Chinese jurisdiction was *"merely the jurisdiction appertaining to those officials stationed within the City at the time, and the use of the word 'now'* [in the 1898 Convention] *seems to contemplate the authority appertaining to an individual rather than to an office of a continuing nature"*. In other words, Chinese jurisdiction had been only temporary, and was cancelled under the Order in Council of December 1899. *"It appears to us"*, concluded the Chief Justice, *"that the assertion that the City of Kowloon is an Alsatia, wherein the Queen's Writ does not run, cannot be supported"*.

There were plenty of flaws in that argument, but the court accepted it and from then on suspects arrested in the City were duly prosecuted. The police went ahead – although still cautiously – with more raids on the City's notorious drug dens. *"The police didn't dare come in except in bands of 40 men together"*, one of the City's first post-war missionaries, Mrs Donnithorne, recalled in 1970. *"There were opium dens lining all the narrow lanes and you could see drug addicts openly smoking. It was a hideout for every criminal. In those days, the bodies of many drug addicts would be left lying in the streets. Some days there would be so many bodies you could hardly walk through. They used to put the bodies near two or three lavatories and in the morning the Government truck would come and take them away."*

In these wretched years of the 1950s and '60s, missionaries such as Mrs Donnithorne, Maureen Clarke and Jackie Pullinger were among the few people offering regular assistance to the residents of the Walled City. It was only after another eviction incident in 1963 that a Kai Fong (neighbourhood association) Welfare Promotion Committee was officially established, but its role was largely political, aimed at unifying the residents to fight for their rights. Real power increasingly lay with the four main Triad societies – the 14K, King Yee, Sun Yee On and Yee Kwun – who controlled the brothels, gambling and drug dens.

The 1963 incident was yet another mismanaged attempt by the Government to demolish some of the huts in a corner of the Walled City to make way for the Tung Tau resettlement estate. The Government *"who apparently had learnt nothing from the experience of 1934-5"*, recalled Kennedy-Skipton, *"attempted to compel* [the residents] *to move without compensation . . . and failed owing to the vigorous opposition of the occupants"*.

During the 1930s, the City became a popular destination among the colonial classes for picnics and weekend walks, even though much of the central compound had returned to scrub.

The south gate circa 1920, inscribed with the words Kowloon Walled City.

This opposition had been promptly organised by a 'Kowloon City Anti-Demolition Committee' – the foundation for the Kai Fong – and duly supported by China who protested at *"this truculent act by the British authorities"*, and claimed that *"the city of Kowloon is China's territory and within Chinese jurisdiction and this has all along been so in history"*.

Significantly, China made no mention of the 1898 Convention; since the Communist Government regarded the treaty as 'unequal', any demand for the recognition of China's right to jurisdiction in the Walled City according to the Convention would have implied acceptance of Britain's right to occupy the rest of the New Territories. As a matter of saving face and national pride, it had to support the belligerent Walled City residents, but as P. Jones, the author of a 1969 Hong Kong guidebook, observed, *"it could hardly have enjoyed taking up the cudgels on their behalf"*. When China stepped up its protest at the *"gross violation of China's sovereignty"*, the Hong Kong Government once again backed down. While rejecting the Chinese claim to sovereignty, it agreed to defer, *"for the time being, action in the Kowloon Walled City"*.

It was back to business as usual in the drug dens of the rat-infested City, though a further flutter of political skirmishing occurred when the Kai Fong decided to celebrate the third anniversary of their 1963 victory by raising the Communist Chinese flag from the roof of their office building. The top-floor tenant objected, scuffles broke out and the police were called. Agreement was finally reached, but the comments of a Kai Fong leader, reported in *The Star* at the time, reveal just how sensitive the question of political loyalty to China had become. *"As long as the Communist flag is flying here"*, said Liu Kan, *"Peking knows it's their duty to protect us. They will look after us. This is part of China. The Walled City will never become part of Hong Kong. One day Hong Kong will become part of us – mainland China."*

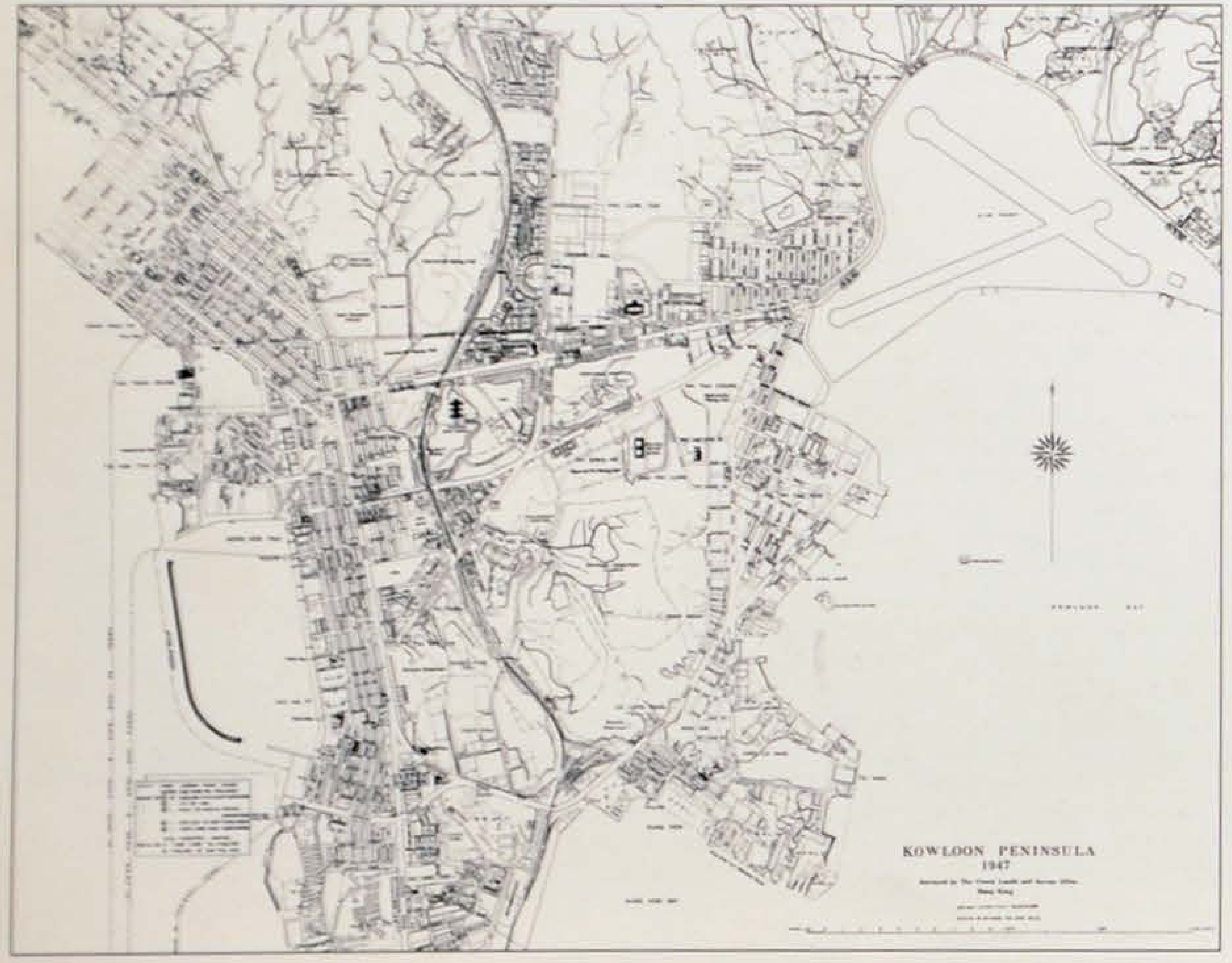
Surprisingly, however, there was little trouble from the Walled City during the 1967 Cultural Revolution-inspired riots, nor the following year when the police carried out an unprecedented number of raids – 905 within the first five months of the year, with 732 arrests. It did not stop the City's trade in vice, of course, since most dens re-opened once the raids were over, or were quickly alerted to the presence of police by the hundreds of 'lookouts' posted at strategic points in the alleys. *"The Walled City remains the vice centre of Hong Kong . . . with an estimated 5000 drug addicts"*, the *Hongkong Standard* remarked tartly in June 1968. *"The only difference* [since the raids] *is that many drug operators have gone underground."*

But by 1970, when two old cannon were unearthed in the Walled City, giving rise to claims by some residents that they were the property of mainland China, both the Government and the Kai Fong decided to play it cool. *"The Government has side-stepped a ticklish row"*, reported *The Star*, *"by deciding it is not interested in* [the cannon] *anyway."* The Kai Fong put it more directly. *"They are not very important"*, said the acting chairman, *"and if we move them away, leftist elements will take the chance to make a row."* So the cannon remained where they were, *"in a grim, dark and dirty alley"*, a feature of future tourist visits to the City just as they had been over a century earlier.

Leftist elements had their chance to make trouble the following year, however, when they tried to take over the former *yamen*, an old people's home which was being transferred to the Christian Nationals' Evangelism Commission for use as a school. After the police supervised the transfer, foiling the takeover attempt, the Hong Kong authorities waited for the usual protests from China. But nothing was said. Attitudes, at last, were starting to change.

At this time, according to the 1971 census, there were 10,004 people occupying 2185 dwellings in the Walled City, though unofficial estimates put the population much higher. (By the late 1980s there were more than 35,000 residents.) Many were descendants of the original Chiu Chow pig farm-

To the west of Kai Tak Airport, the parallelogram outline of the Walled City cuts a sorry figure in this map of 1947. With its wall dismantled during the Second World War, the 'City' was no more than a scrap of land on which a few solitary buildings remained.



ers or post-war immigrants. They worked as traders, coolies, shopkeepers, and factory workers – especially in the plastics industry. Many also ran illegal clinics within the confines of the City as unregistered doctors and dentists.

The medical authorities didn't interfere with their practices. Nor did the Education Department supervise the schools within the City, nor the Rating and Valuation Department demand rates on properties. Although the 1959 case against Wong Hon had clearly established that the Walled City was, by law, subject to Hong Kong regulations like any other part of the territory, the hands-off policy was still widespread among Government departments. Only a select few demonstrated Britain's tentative claim to jurisdiction, while the People's Republic of China made no show of jurisdiction at all.

Hong Kong's Urban Services Department was the most visible, chlorinating the four registered water wells several times a day, collecting rubbish and night-soil, and investigating infectious diseases. But it never prosecuted residents for dumping refuse in the street. Education and advice was the preferred softly-softly approach. Similarly, though warning notices were issued, health regulations were not enforced.

The Post Office delivered mail, a job only for the fit and fearless, the Social Welfare Department provided social services, and the Labour Department registered factories in the area and attempted to enforce safety and working regulations. The Inland Revenue Department even taxed the income and profits of those residents working outside the City. Perhaps the strictest controls were maintained by the Public Works Department against buildings which obstructed airport flight paths, and by the Fire Services Department, which prosecuted offenders and seized dangerous goods. There was little either department could do, however, to reduce the overall hazards of the tightly-packed and dangerously-built slum.

As for the police, their spokesman claimed in 1970 that *"action has been and will continue to be taken against any illegal activities in the Walled City, like any other places in the Colony"*. But it was only a few years later, when relations between Peking and London grew warmer, and visits to the City by Hong Kong and British government officials – including a very shocked Governor – increased, that they launched a serious drive against the *"cesspool of iniquity"*. From 1973 to '74, they made an unprecedented 3685 raids and 2580 arrests, seizing nearly 500 pounds of heroin and 3891 pounds of opium. The sustained activity represented a major shift in Hong Kong's policies towards the City. *"We've been walking a tight-rope for years"*, said a police source after the raids, *"and we're still treading carefully.* [But] *we're no longer satisfied in just keeping the lid on vice and criminal activity. We've stepped up our attacks on the City more than ever in the past year."*

The reaction from most of the residents was generally positive. A younger generation was beginning to influence opinion within the City, dissipating the fierce political loyalties of the older residents. The main concerns now were for better living conditions, particularly a proper water supply, safe housing, and crime-free streets.

There was a growing official recognition that these new attitudes held the key to change: *"The answer to an improved environment lies largely with the inhabitants"*, suggested a newspaper editorial in June 1974. *"When they are ready to co-operate with the Government, improvements can be made more swiftly. In the absence of a political solution that would permit more rapid measures to be taken, the slow and steady nibbling at the fringes will have to continue."*

Slow and steady it was. In 1980, a 21-strong Walled City and neighbouring Sai Tau patrol unit was established, with a seven-man team on 24-hour duty. Although Triads were still active (in 1980 a Triad gang boss threatened to 'chop up' anyone who dared oppose a rise in fees for the sale of illegally tapped water), by 1983 the Kowloon City district's police commander maintained that the crime rate within the Walled City was *"no higher than that of other parts of Kowloon City"*. Organised drug dens and vice syndicates were no longer a major problem, he said: minor robberies had taken their place. The sin was going out of the City. In 1983, 50 street lamps were erected by the Kowloon City district board. Light was coming to the City of Darkness.

In August of the same year, China's senior representative in Hong Kong, Xinhua News Agency bureau chief, Xu Jiatun, made an unprecedented visit to the Walled City, praising the local Welfare Promotion Committee – rather ironically, considering the sordid state of the place – for doing *"a good job in self-administration"*. The Kai Fong's president, Cheung Yat Fan, was delighted by this symbolic show of concern. Did he think Xu would now reinforce China's claim to jurisdiction, protecting the residents from the Hong Kong Government's increasing presence? Did he want Xu to raise the red flag and tell the Government to keep their hands off China's territory? No. He hoped Xu would help them get a piped water supply. *"Although the Hong Kong Government has bettered our living environment in recent years"*, he said tactfully, *"there is still plenty of room for improvement."*

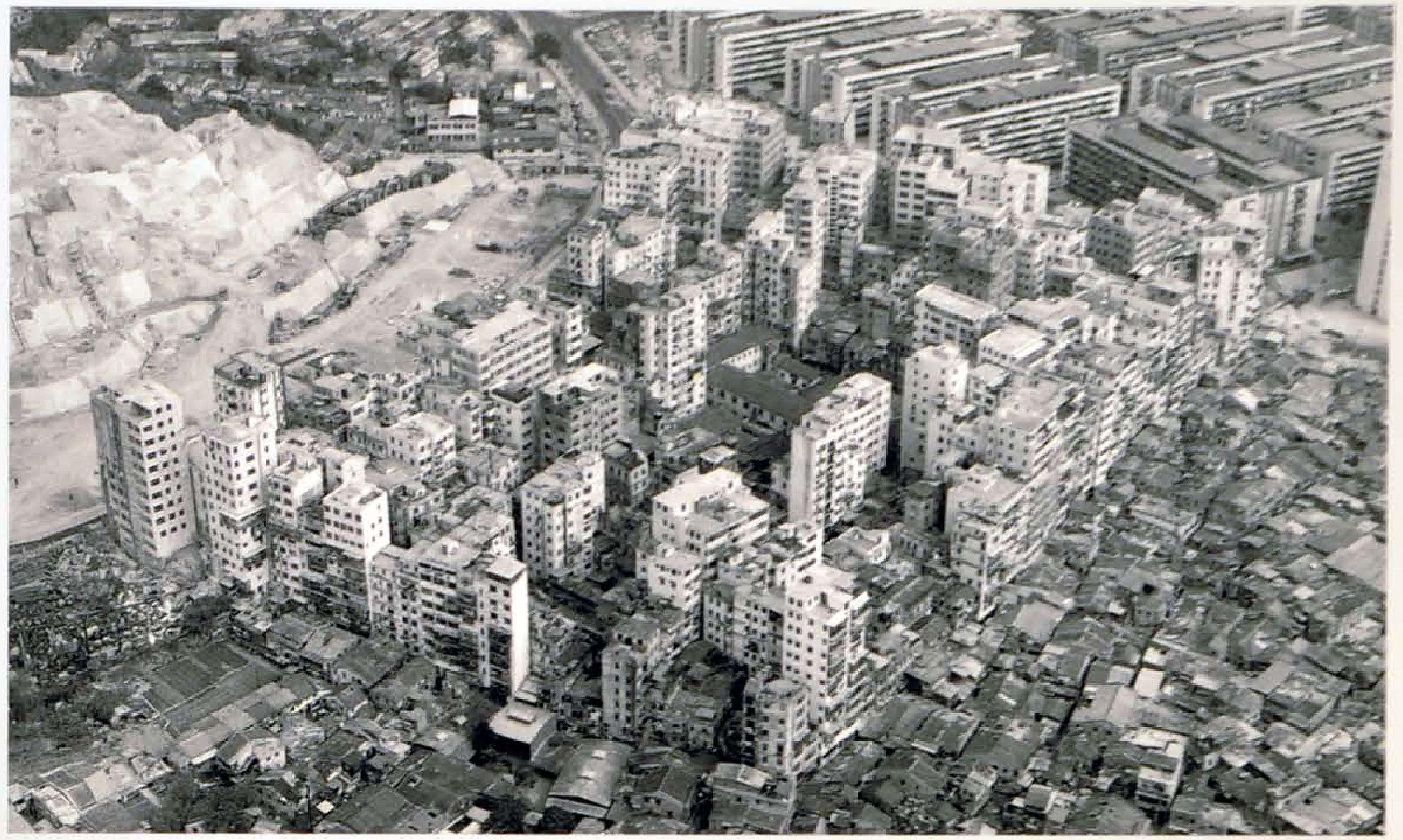
Not long afterwards, Hong Kong's Acting Governor, Sir Phillip Haddon-Cave, also paid a visit to Kowloon City, though, diplomatically, he only skirted the edge of the Walled City. Nonetheless, speculation ran high that something was about to happen.

Slow and steady, still treading carefully, the Government bided its time. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong was signed. It provided the impetus needed to solve the Walled City problem once and for all. The people, too, were ready: *"Times have changed"*, confirmed Law Hio Cheung, a founding member of the Kai Fong, in 1986. *"We don't say 'we have to defend Chinese territory with our lives' any more. Nowadays it's the economic well-being of the people that is most important."*

The announcement, made at 9am on 14 January 1987, came without warning; the Government was to clear the Walled City, compensate eligible residents and develop the area into a park. Fifteen minutes later, a similar announcement was made by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing. *"An actual improvement of the living environment of the Kowloon Walled City not only accords with the vital interests of the inhabitants within the Kowloon Walled City, but also with the interests of the Hong Kong inhabitants as a whole."*

No mention was made of the 1898 Convention, nor of jurisdiction claims. The only reference to the Walled City's tangled political past was in the Ministry's last words: *"Like other parts of Hong Kong"*, it said pointedly, *"the Kowloon Walled City is a question left over from history"*. No one, even now, was giving any answers. But a solution had finally been found.

An aerial view of the Walled City in 1973, just a few years after the final crop of multi-storey buildings had begun to replace the earlier stone and wooden houses. Spreading out in a low canopy to the south and west are the tin shacks of the Sai Tau Tsuen squatter settlement, which was not cleared until 1985.



The editor and author gratefully acknowledge the Royal Asiatic Society, Dr Peter Wesley-Smith, author of *Unequal Treaty 1898-1997*, and Gillian Chambers for their help in locating the sources used in researching this chapter.

Lam Shu Chuen lived in the City for more than 50 years. A senior member of the Kai Fong Association, he served as chairman of the Industrial Commercial Liaison Committee for many years.

My family came from the mainland when I was very young. The Walled City was great fun in my childhood days. The place was deserted, miraculous and wonderful. There was a 'security committee' in those days, whose job it was to strike the gong that signalled the hours of the night. It would also handle thieves who stole chickens or other things by parading them in public outside the *yamen* (the Chinese court). We used to throw stones at them. Mum did embroidery. I did not go to school. Such are my childhood memories.

The Walled City came under the jurisdiction of Po On county in China, and there was a Po On county 'self-governing committee' which was meant to look after the residents' interests – though the place was sparsely populated then. When the Japanese came they demolished the walls in order to construct the airport, and the City was abandoned – apart from a few families growing vegetables.

There were a lot of new graves at the back of the City then. People killed by the Japanese were simply dumped behind the wall. By the Ng Wah dental clinic, we once dug up half a lorry-load of human skeletons. We paid people to get rid of them. There was no need to ask any monks to perform pacifying rituals. Instead, the church minister was invited to come and say some prayers. My mother had converted to Christianity, so she said Jesus would do.

I used to own land extending from my place here to down there below. It cost me $25 which I paid to those who had earlier claimed the land. First we built wooden huts. When the Government burned them down, brick houses were built. Then there was a big fire around 1953 or '54, when more than 3000 huts were destroyed. It started at a shop that sold rice and charcoal. Afterwards, China sent a relief team of 10 people to bring a lot of rice and cash to the people of the Walled City. Many of the left-wing trade unions sent welcoming delegations, but they got into a dispute with the police. There were skirmishes between the two sides and a bus was burnt along Nathan Road.

After the fire, the Government designated the burnt-out area as Crown Land, but people simply ignored this and we built again on the same spot – this time with stone and brick houses replacing the wooden ones, and two- or three-storeys high instead of one. It has been a miracle the way repeated fires have brought prosperity, and repeated demolition has only made way for bigger houses.

Step by step, new buildings have transformed the City. Then the Government intervened, saying that buildings should not be over a certain height. After that, the heights depended on whether or not the Government was watchful. If it was, the heights were lower: if not, they became higher. There was a shortage of water at that time, so the concrete was sometimes mixed with urine, and sometimes even worse, but never with seawater.

How were these buildings erected without piling? Well, you might consider it a miracle like Moses crossing the Red Sea. We used traditional Chinese ways. We excavated deep into the ground and then we built three storeys. After that, we built another three and then three more. The buildings also lean on one another. We have our own ways here. Have you ever heard of one of the 80 or more dentists causing the deaths of any patients? Of course not! You see, they relied on their years of experience. We're all struggling for survival here.

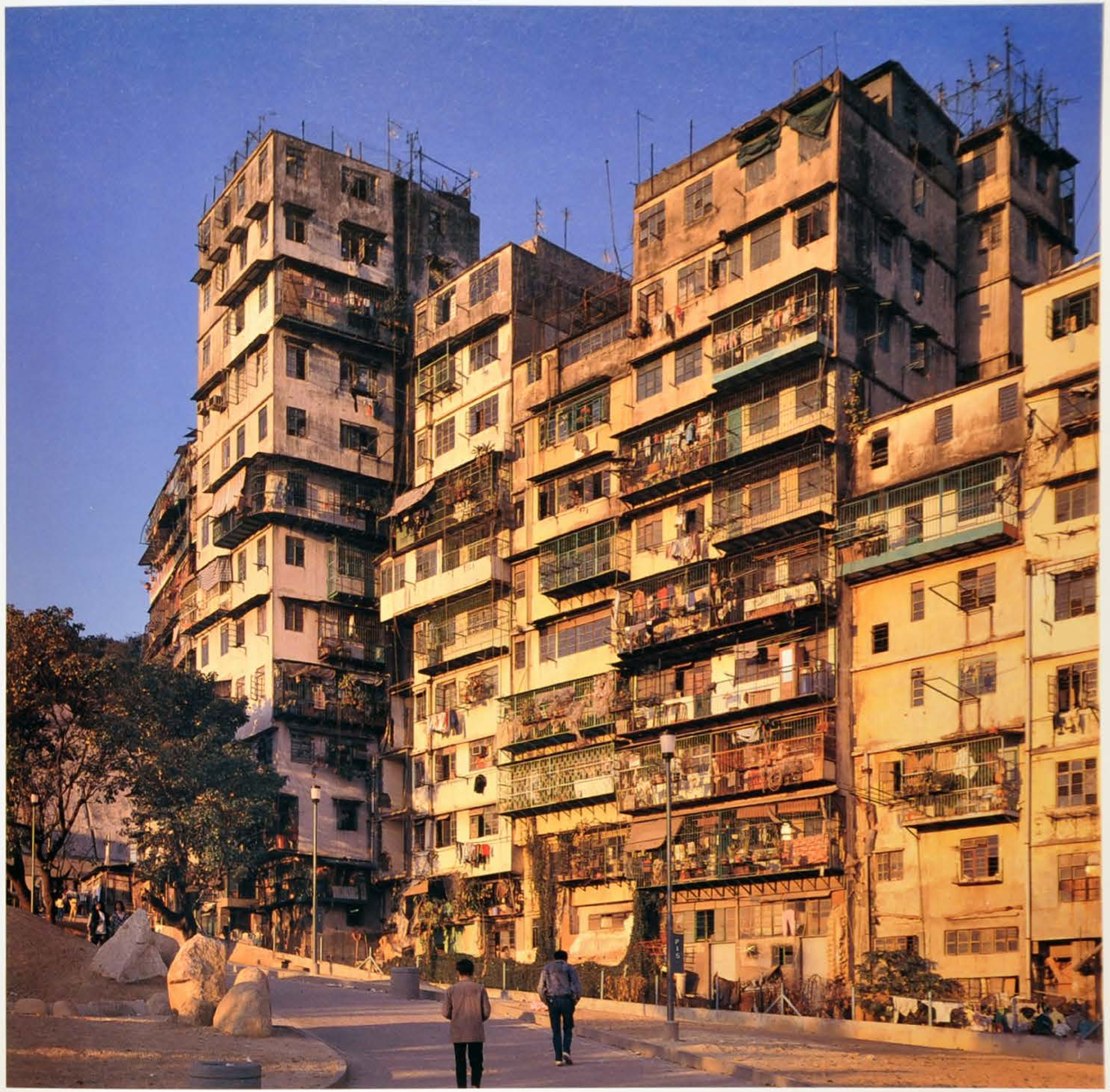
I made my money in the 1940s by renting out kerosene lamps. Subsequently, I provided electricity using generators. I charged according to the number of lights. People were happy just to have some light. It was a good business and I was the first person in the Walled City to own a car. That was in 1953 and its number was 3618.

In the 1950s the Walled City became a place for striptease performances, sex, drugs and gambling, as well as dog meat. There were dog-meat shops all along Lung Chun Road. School premises were turned into striptease joints and there was even a theatre called The Dragon's Gate that showed blue movies.

The Kai Fong Association was started up in the 1960s. There was a fire in the City and the Government wanted to resettle the fire victims, but they wanted to stay. The people of the City appealed to the Chinese Government which gave its support. The Kai Fong Association was set up then to be responsible for the prevention of theft and fire, for time-keeping and to promote harmony among the residents. It never came under the control of any left-wing organisations, though it was run by a group of what you might call progressives and its early publications showed left-wing sympathies. Its founder, Cheung Yan Fat, head of the old Lung Chun primary school, had left-wing sympathies. The Kai Fong also hoisted the red flag with five stars and I suppose that made it left-wing. But in the 1950s, people came from all over the place, from all sectors of society, and they had different connections. The factions did their own thing without meddling in other people's affairs.

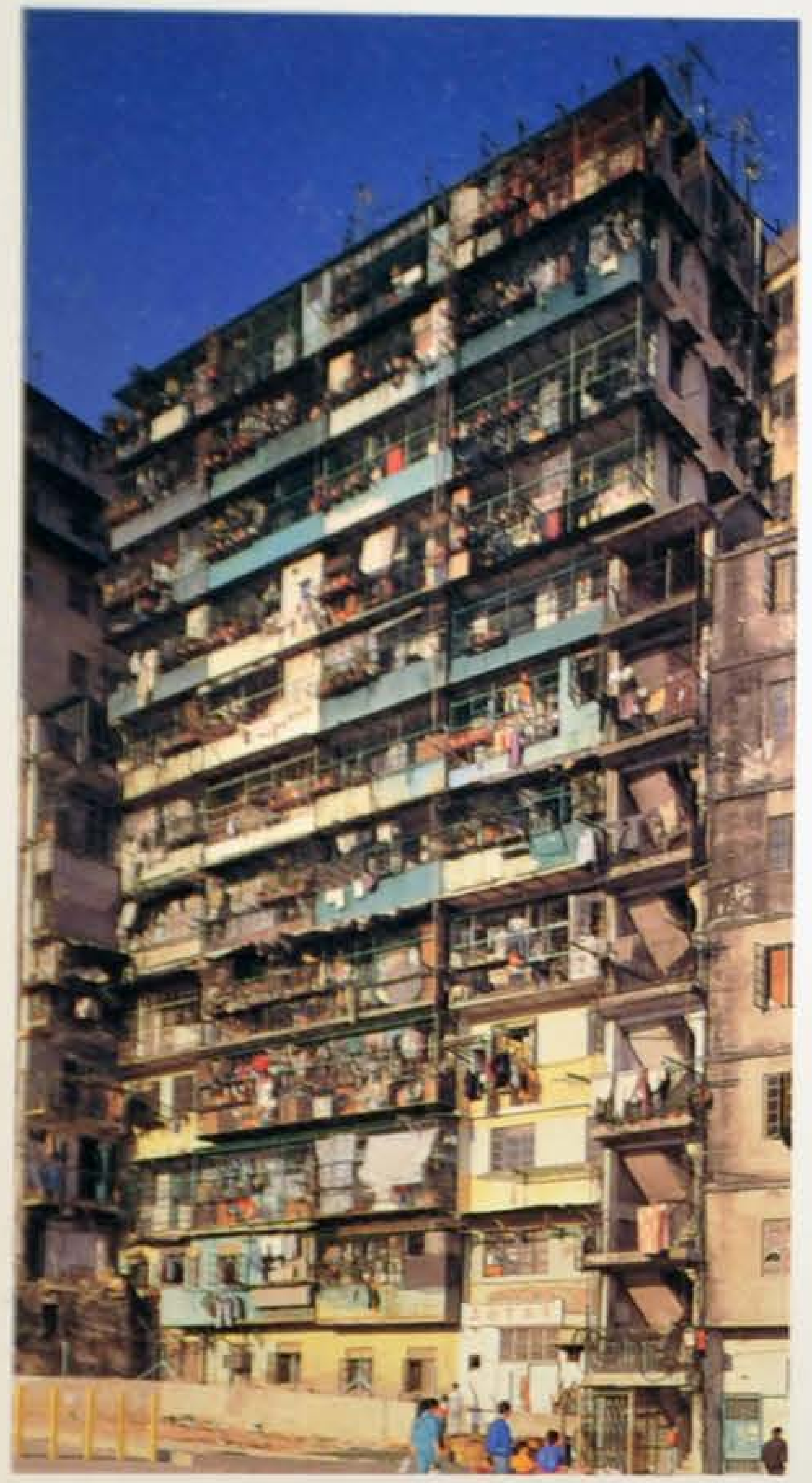
The Walled City was later transformed from a place of sex, drugs and gambling into a satellite industrial area. The Hong Kong Government took advantage of the 1967 riots to take action against all the vice dens and expel many of the people. It led to the construction of many high-rise buildings in the Walled City. There were also many migrants from China moving in. They found it easier to maintain a foothold in the City and it was easier for them to make a living. This unleashed their energy and vigour towards work.

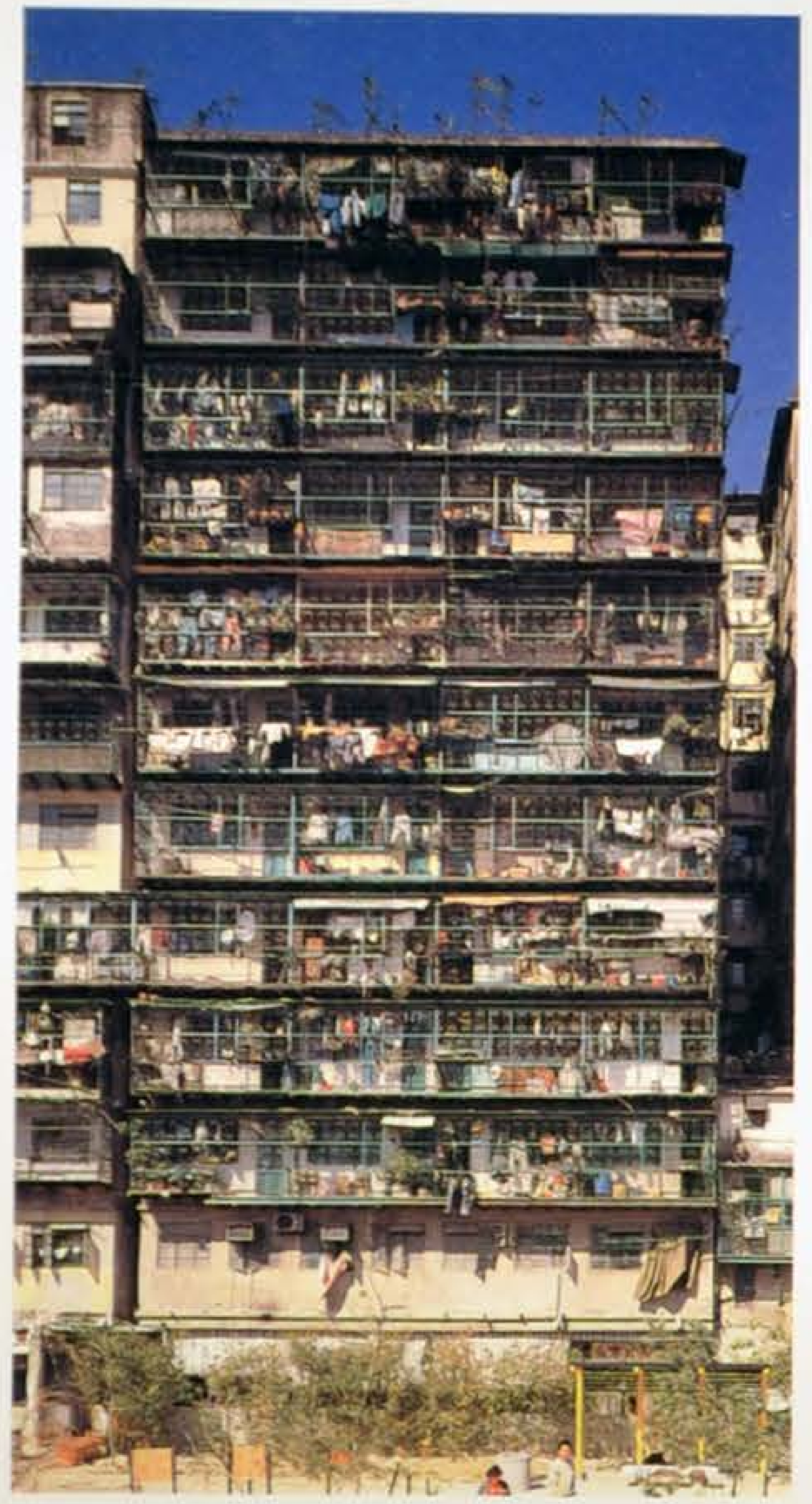
We in the City have contributed to the growth of Hong Kong. I have lived here since childhood and have built this place with my own hands. The compensation is not at all fair. The Government also uses delaying tactics which is not proper, and the dollar has depreciated in value since the announcement. We have to struggle a lot for the slightest concession. As representatives of businesses here, we went to Beijing to see the officials but they told us to sort it out with the British. People complain that the Industrial Commercial Liaison Committee has not done enough, but we can do nothing.

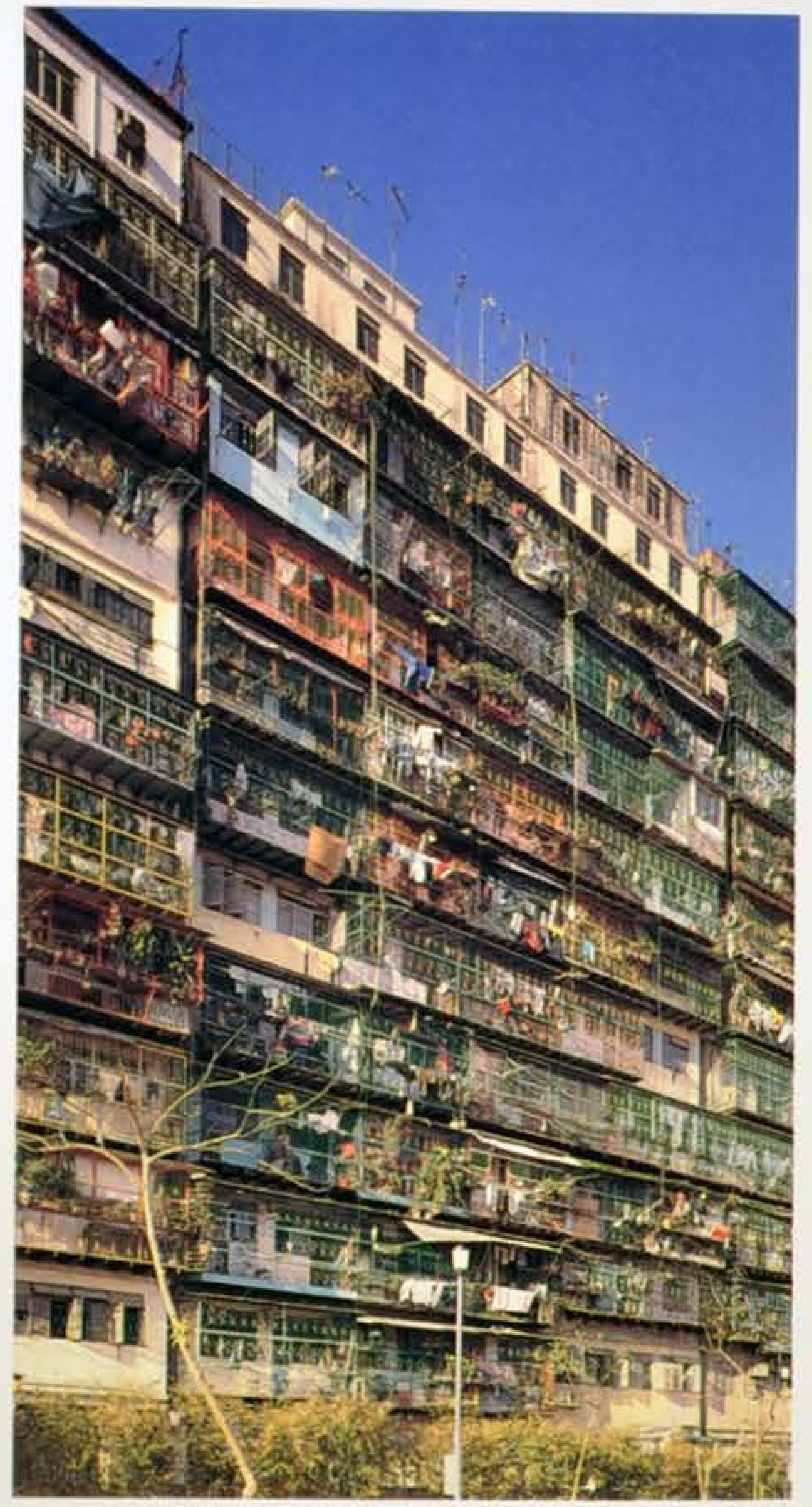


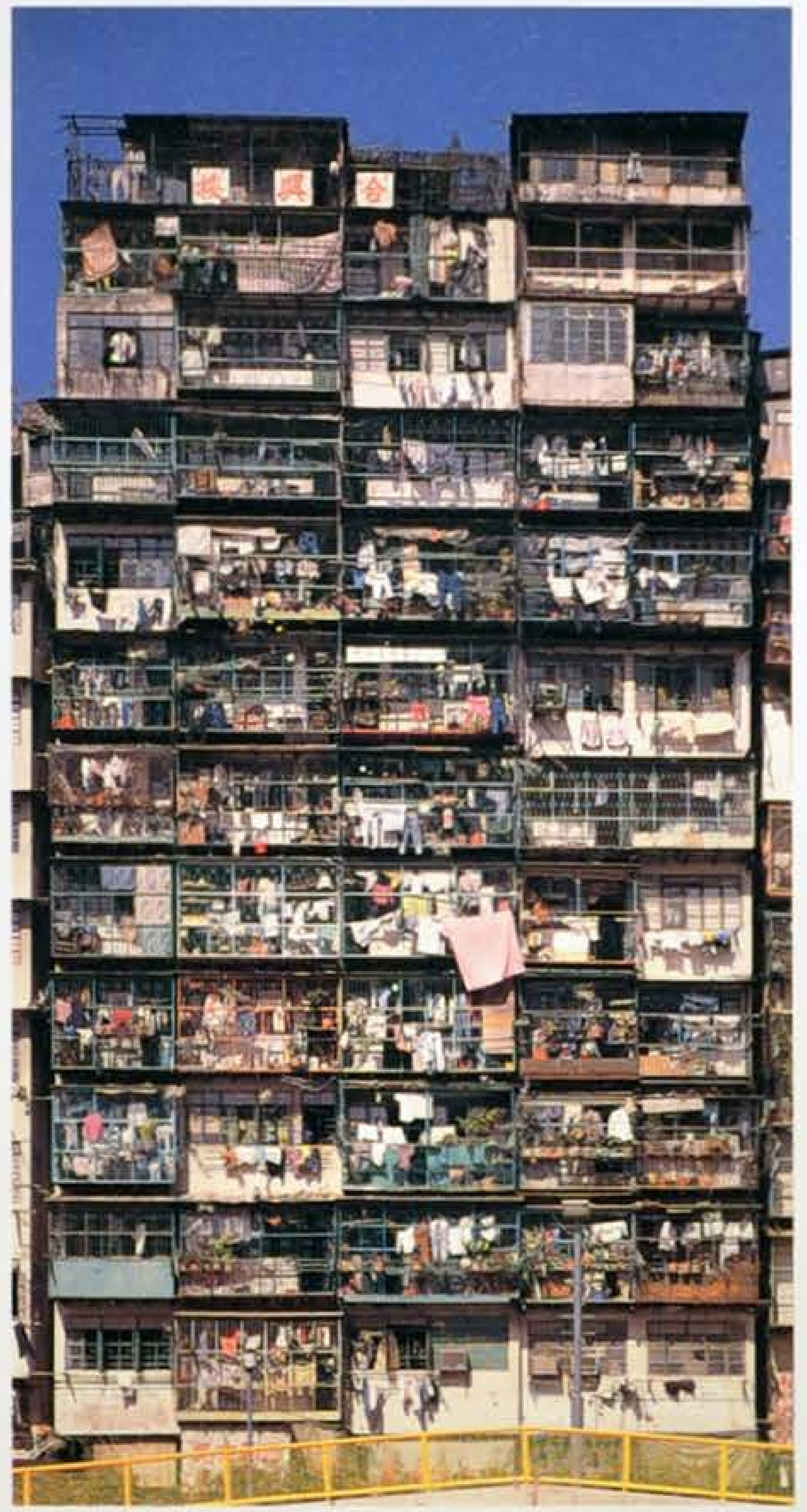
The west facade, burnished to a rich ochre hue by the late afternoon sun. This was certainly the wealthier part of the City, with cleaner streets and a lower ratio of factories to residents. Folklore has it that prosperity came to this side of the City after an important well on Kwong Ming Street, on the eastern side, was filled in. Paired with the well off Tai Chang Street, the Kwong Ming well was thought to be one of the 'eyes' of the City's protective dragon. Once blinded on that side, it was inevitable that good fortune would relocate across the City, nearer the Tai Chang well.

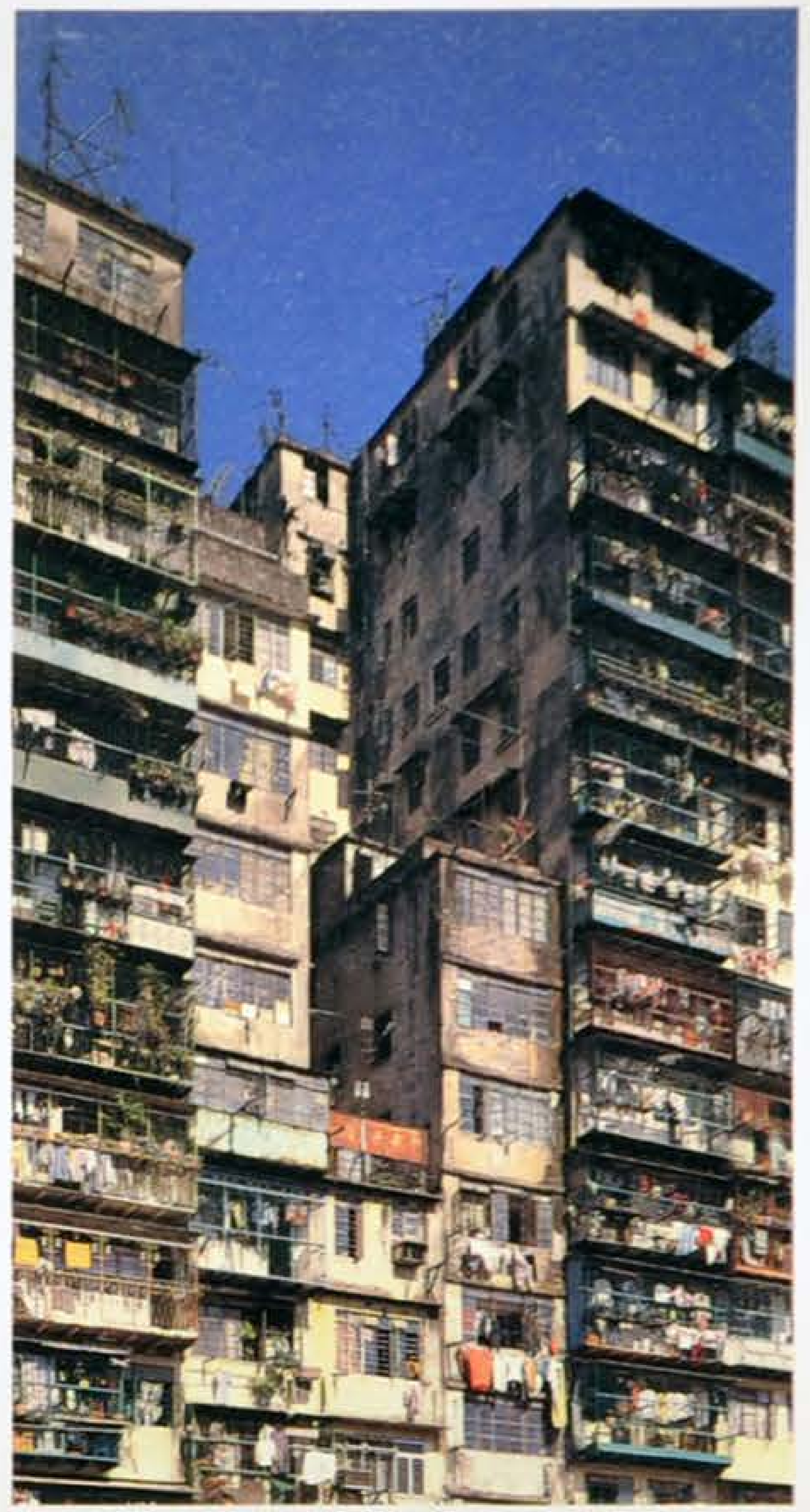
Detail views of the City's south elevation. With the exception of a strict height limit of 45 metres, due to the proximity of Kai Tak Airport, the Government's Public Works Department found it was virtually impossible to enforce the usual building regulations. The City's contractors were not obliged to submit plans or drawings: indeed, most blocks were built from experience using simple sketches, thereby saving on professional fees. Construction proceeded by sight and by hand, with the result that floor areas of different storeys of the same building were often markedly different – a serious inconvenience when it came to assessing compensation. Visually, this cavalier approach to construction lent the City's facades a marvellous articulation. Often sandwiched on to the narrowest of sites, the buildings stood out in clear vertical slices that showed a complete disregard for any sort of horizontal uniformity with their neighbours.

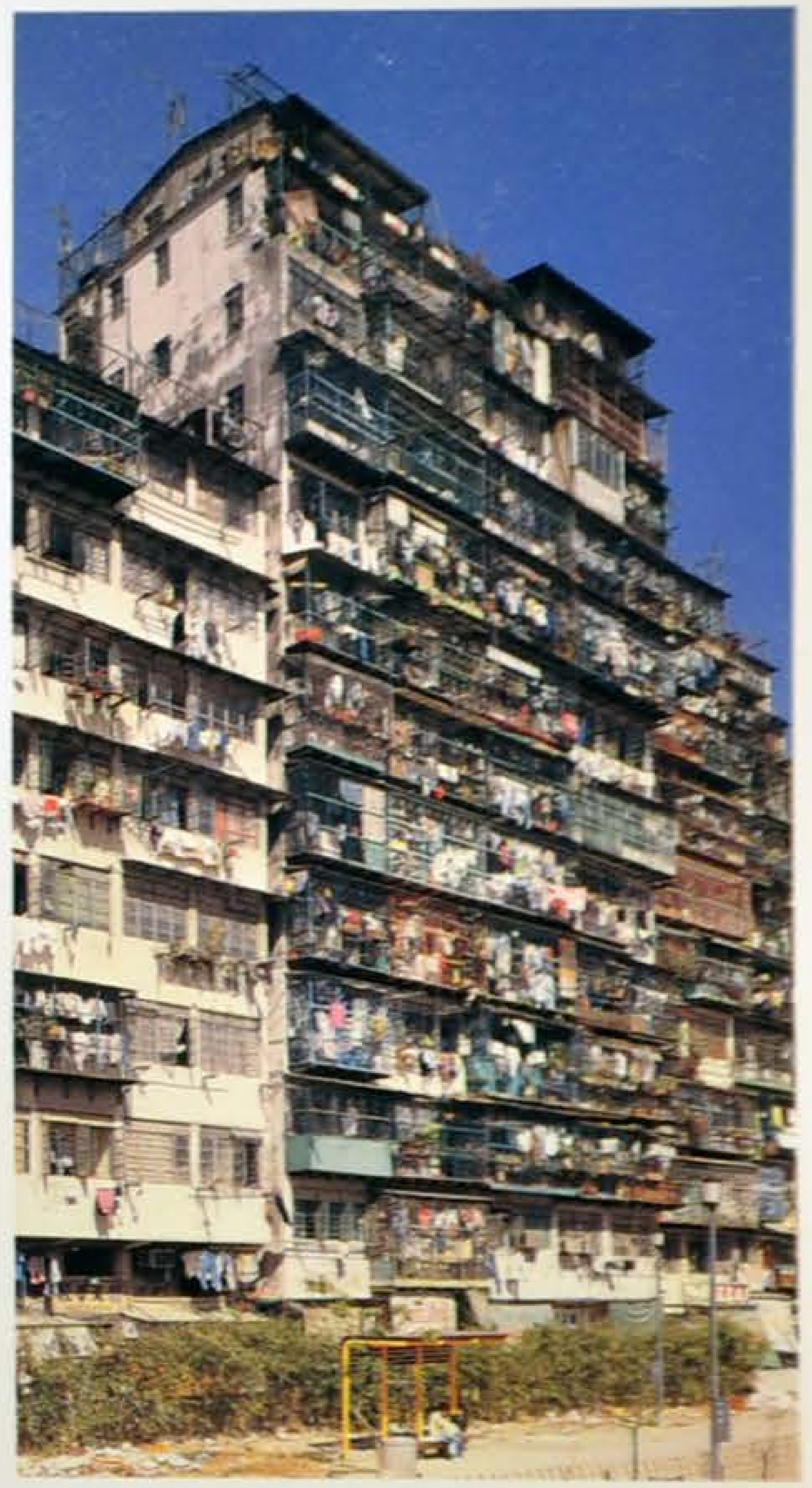


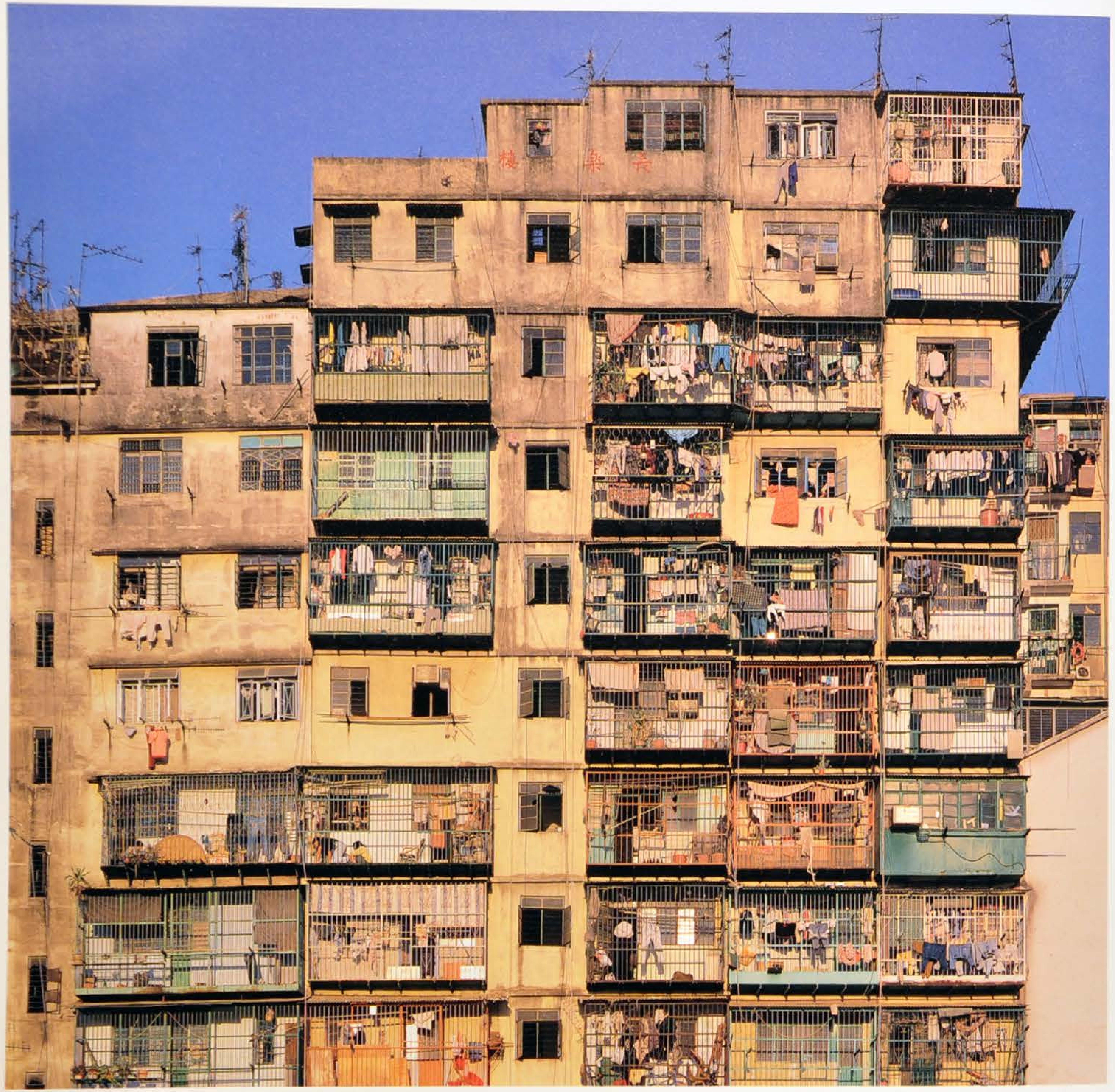




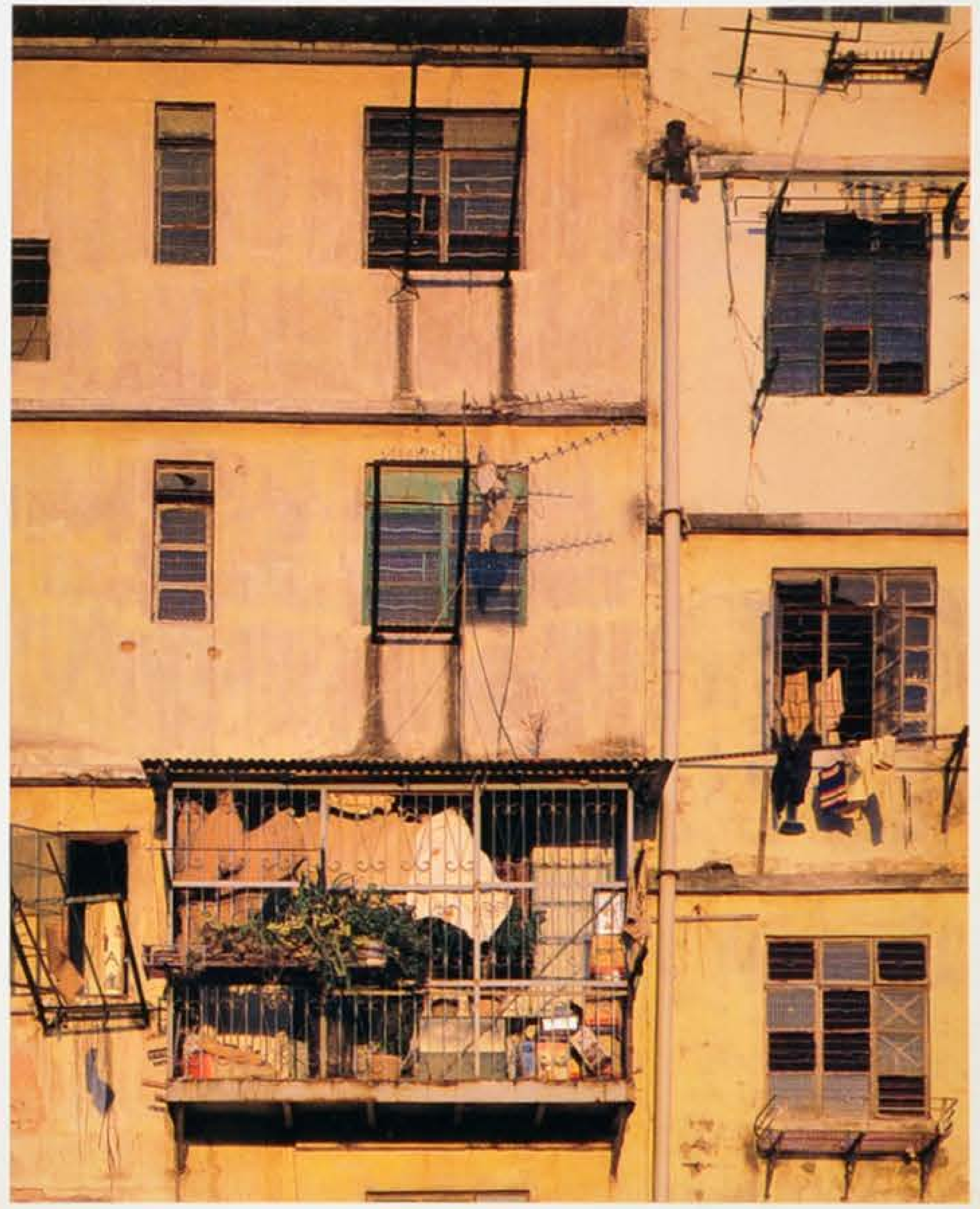








Detail views of the City's west elevation. New buildings were usually simple shells with little or no built-in amenities, not even piped water or drainage. To maximise space – and returns – contractors would extend their sites over adjoining lanes and streets as far as the tolerance of neighbours would allow. Workmanship was often slapdash, and foundations were makeshift and crude – normally little more than concrete poured into a shallow trench. Slight settlement of a building after completion was considered normal. Despite their fascinating ingenuity, these buildings were undeniably dangerous, "heaped together like dominoes", as one structural engineer mused. "If one collapses, all those linked or interlocked will fall as well."

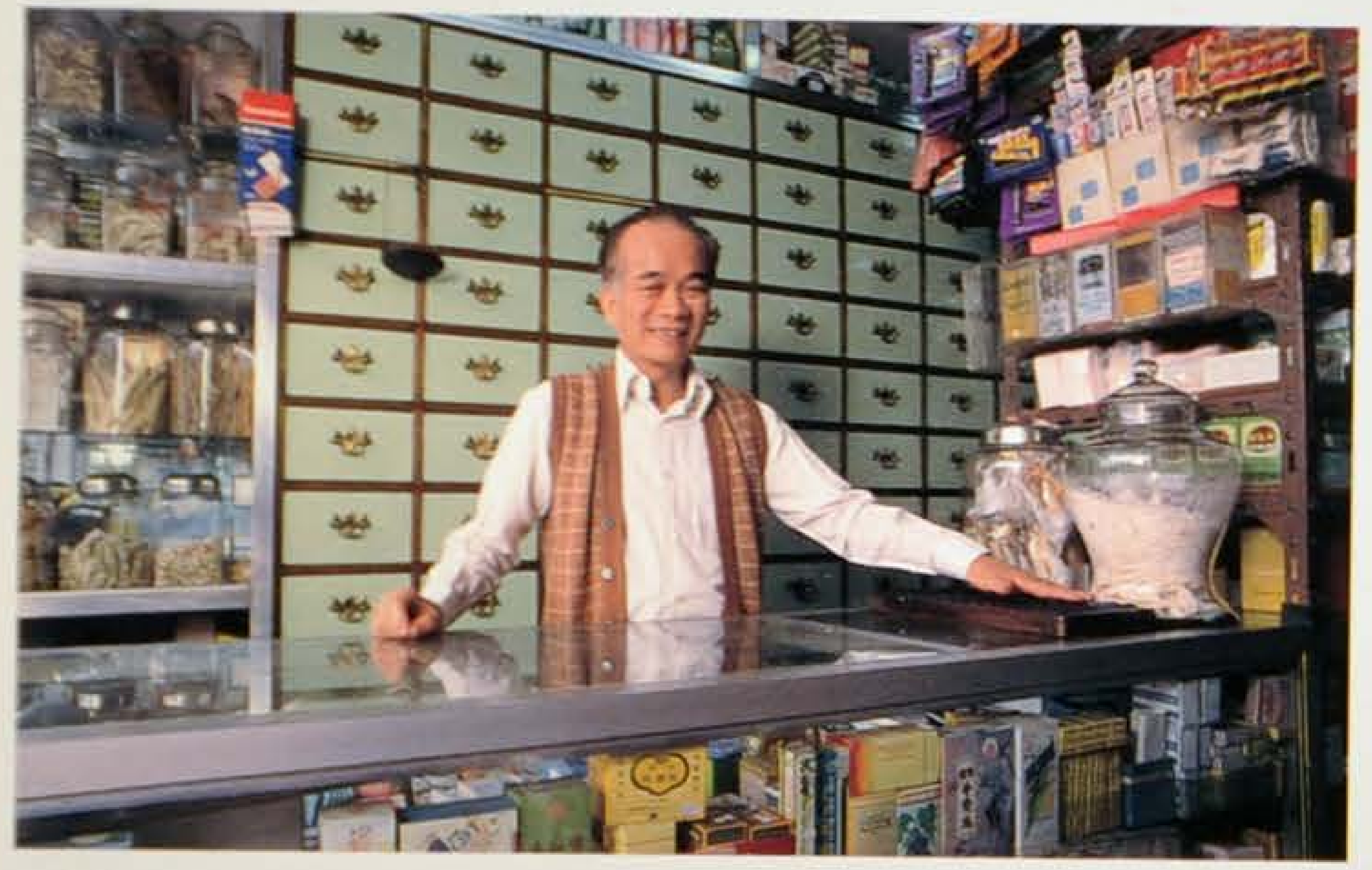


Chan Pui Yin arrived in Hong Kong from Chiu Chow county in 1947. Eight years later, at the age of 29, he opened his own store on Lung Chun Road.

I first worked for a pottery distributor on Hong Kong island, but then I borrowed some capital to open this store selling herbal medicine. It took a few thousand dollars to set it up. We didn't have much choice of location as our resources at that time didn't stretch very far; this was all we could afford. We opened in 1955, business was good, and eventually we bought the place. Originally the building only had two storeys, but later it was redeveloped into an 11-storey block. We were given two units here for the one we gave up.

The Walled City was much more prosperous then. People from all walks of life hung around the place and it was very much like the ground floor lobby of a cinema. But people's spending power was rather restricted and their purchases were small. I sold mainly herbs, but provided medical consultations as well. My clients came from all over the place – some from across on the island – and I treated all kinds of cases, whatever I could deal with. My father was a herbal doctor and I learnt my medical knowledge from him.

Like many traditional herbalists, Chan Pui Yin's shop was divided into two parts, with Chinese medicines on one side [below] and Western toiletries on the other [right].



The Walled City did have a bad name, but once I'd settled here I found that there was less crime in it than outside. Although the police were not around, there was a volunteer group to help keep the peace. There were no robberies – although criminals used the Walled City to hide in, everyone knew everyone else so they never tried to harm the locals. As an example, people outside wouldn't normally give a five year old a $500 note to take to a nearby store to get change, but here in the City no one would dream of robbing the kid. Even if it did happen, the thief wouldn't have been able to get away. It is a bit like back home in the villages in China – a harmonious state of anarchy.

Here you can do business without a licence and you don't have to keep accounts. You don't have to report to the authorities if you take on any employees. It's very convenient and it costs so much less.

Apart from the insanitary conditions in the City, life for me here has been quite pleasant. I live high up where I can see the sea and the sights at night, and it has plenty of fresh air.

We use water from a well which is good and has a pleasant flavour. In fact, a friend who lived across the road from the Walled City liked the water so much that he used to come over to collect a pailful every day. There used to be two big wells in the City, but only one is still in use. The other has been covered over and a building has been erected on the site.

The two big wells were known as the eyes of one of the nine dragons of Kowloon. The *fung shui* here is actually very good; the City sits on the lower slope of a hill and faces south to the sea. Our ancestors had obviously thought carefully when choosing this place for their settlement. It might sound superstitious, but you become better off living in the City – there are many people in high society today who have their origins here.

There are bad things here too, but we haven't been affected. My children – three sons and a daughter – were born and grew up here without using drugs. They could see what happened to you if you became an addict.

Many people in the City resorted to dubious ways of making a living, of course, but there was an absence of trouble in the area. People understood and trusted one another. For example, all that was required with property transactions was a piece of paper on which the names of the buyer and seller and the address of the property were written. There was no need to go to the Government nor, at the beginning, even to the Kai Fong Association. That came later, when the Kai Fong established its role as witness and settler of disputes in order to raise funds. Disputes arising out of property deals, however, are few and far between.

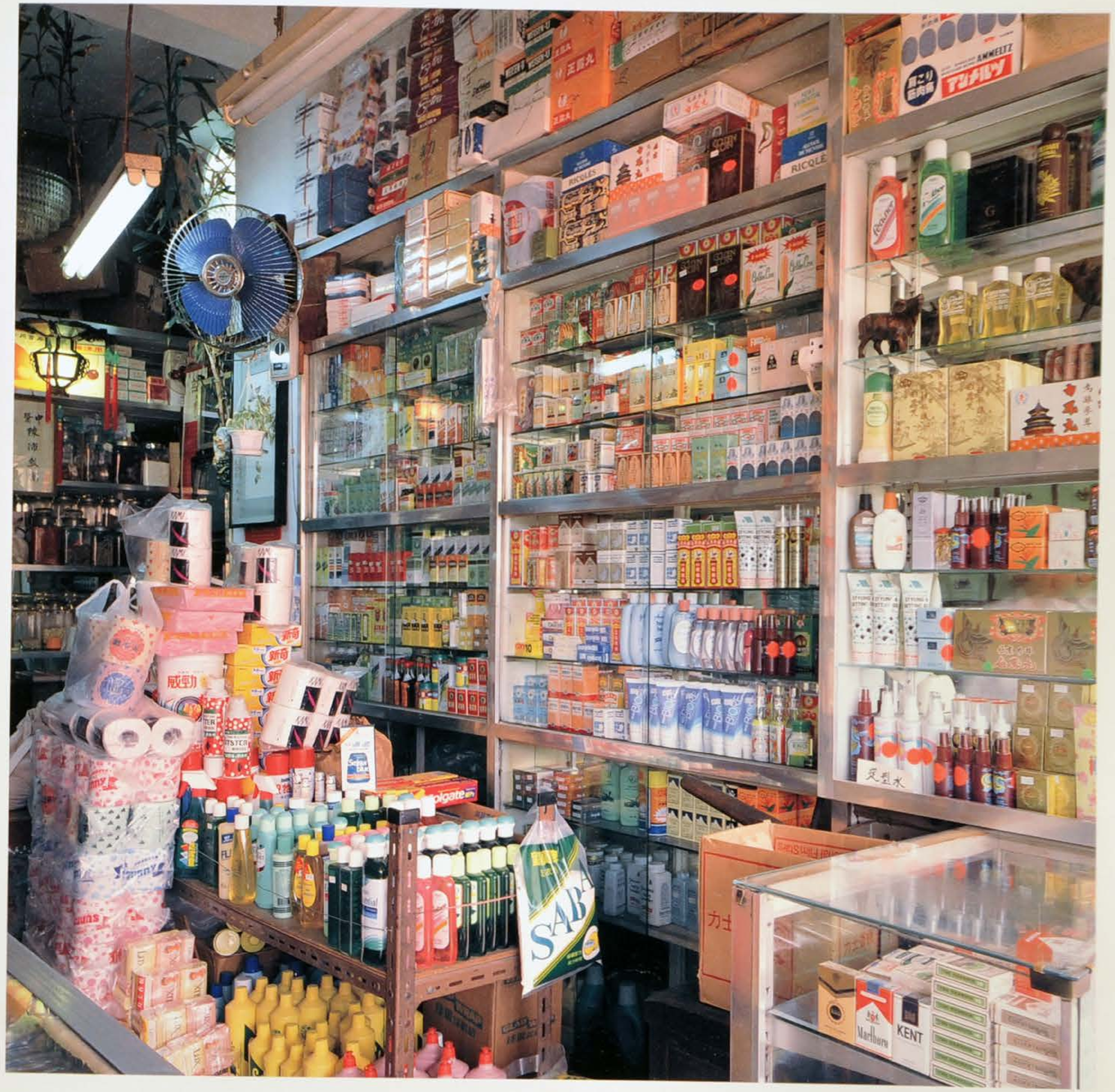
In the 1950s, there were still people in the Walled City rearing pigs and growing things. In the years immediately after the War, you could buy a plot of land for a few $10 notes. I was told that people just fenced off pieces of land with rope and bamboo, and $40 to $60 of tea money was sufficient to induce the owner to transfer ownership of the land.

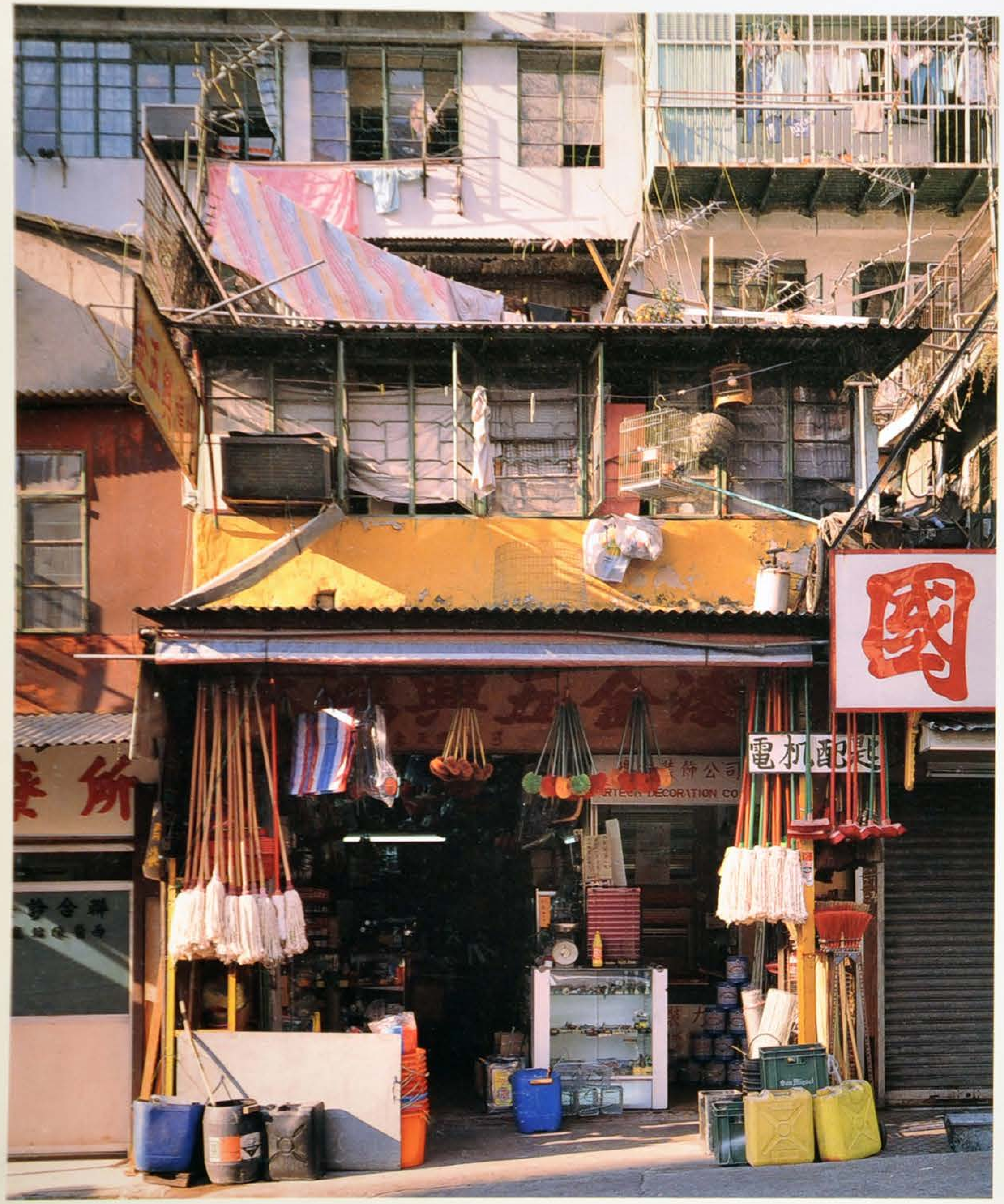
It's a tough job running a medicine store. Although officially we are open from 8am to 11pm, people always knock on your door in the small hours of the morning asking for this or that medicine. It's almost like running a 24-hour business.

There are more than 900 herbs and they all have more than one name: one proper name and various alternatives. I created a system to categorise them in drawers using the English telephone directory. Each drawer is numbered and usually contains four herbs. We need to know where they are, their nature and their cost. I learnt about herbs from my father and there were rhymes which helped me to memorise their properties. These rhymes would take a whole year to learn by heart and an apprentice would need at least three years to reach a stage where he could man the counter on his own.

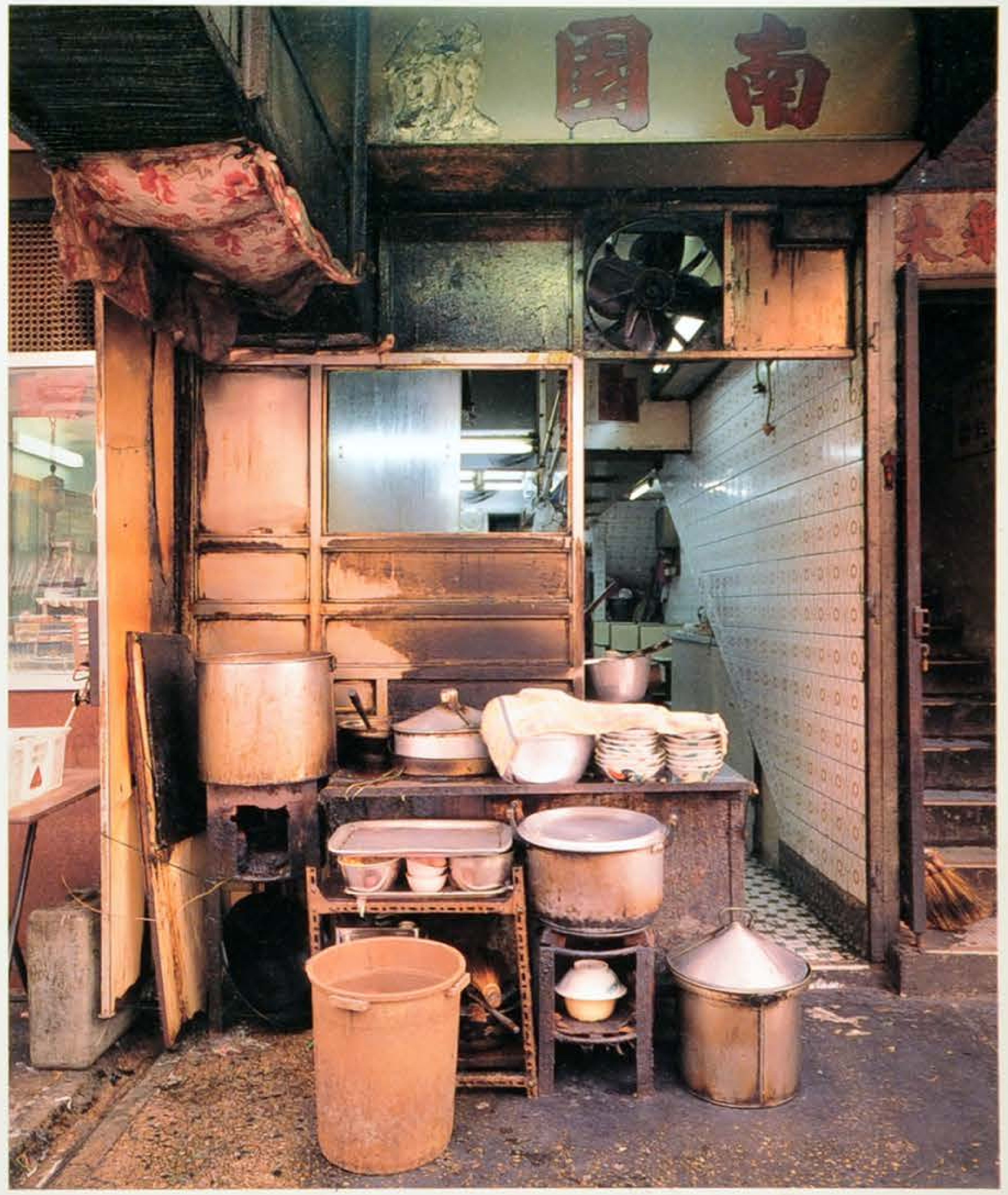
I don't sell forbidden drugs. There are, of course, dangerous Chinese herbs which are always treated very carefully and, at the very least, are put away in special places.

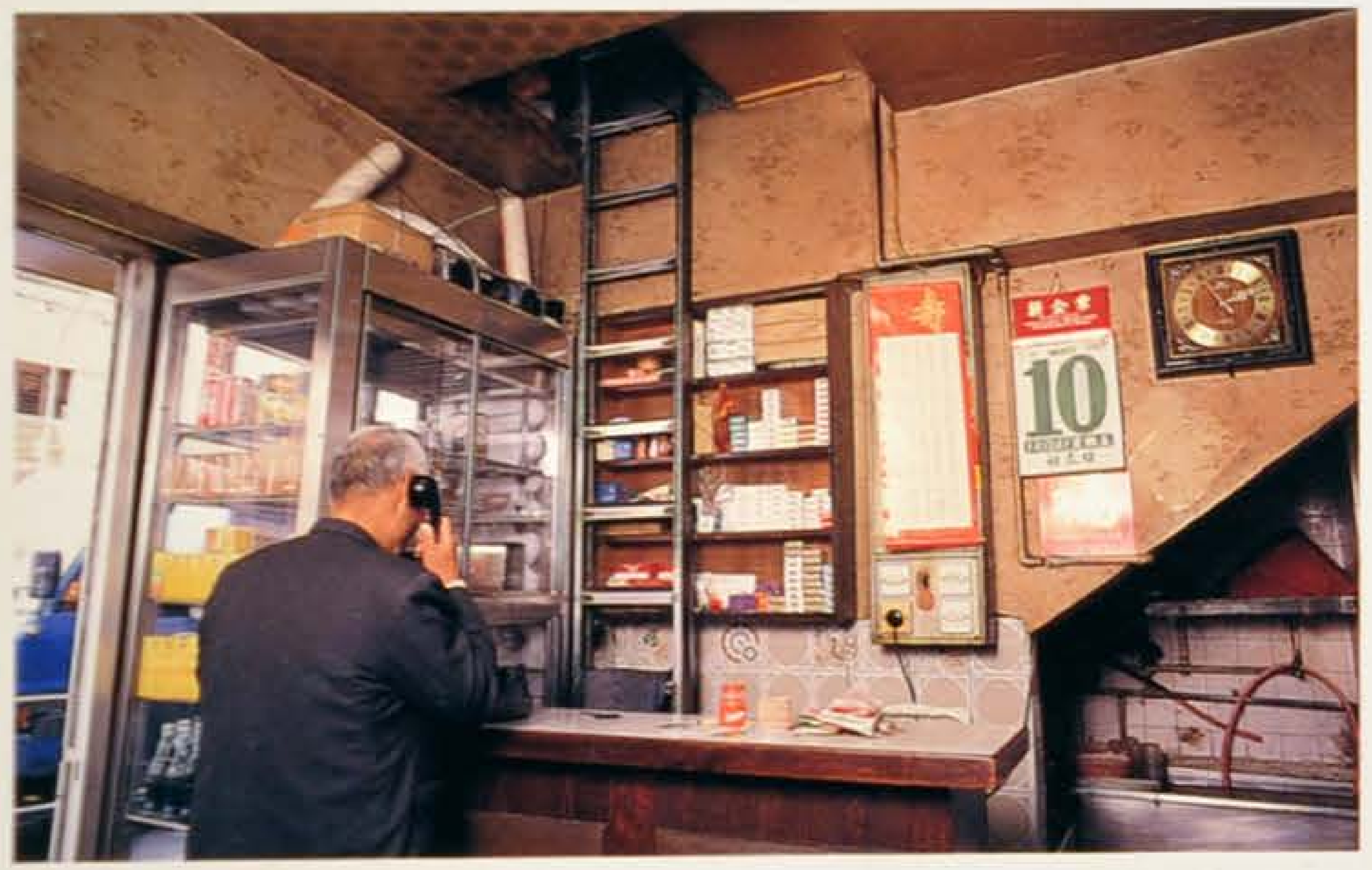
I don't really want to move. The compensation that the Government is offering us is the same as that offered to people living above the ground floor. But my shop could be sold for 20 times more than those roof-top units in the City. I would like to continue my business outside, but a new clinic would probably cost $2 million. Doctors practising Western medicine are being offered $340,000, but not the Chinese herbal doctors. The Government says that the Western doctors cannot practise outside but that herbal doctors can, and that this justifies the discrimination. But where can I practise when I move out?





A thriving hardware store [left] located among the low-rise, temporary-looking structures that had been erected, over the years, on the ambiguous no-man's-land off Tung Tsing Road —an area the authorities ostensibly treated as within the City's eastern boundary. The South Garden [right] on the City's northern side, facing Tung Tau Tsuen Road, was typical of the numerous cafés and restaurants which had become long-standing favourites with the residents of the Kowloon City area as a whole. Taxi drivers, in particular, were regular patrons, since they were able to park their cabs on the kerbside. In the days when the City was famous for its dog-meat restaurants, it was said that luxury cars would often discharge wealthy and well-known personalities here for illicit meals.





Ng Kam Mui's mother – the owner of the Chung Fat café – felt it was safer to sleep in a small cubicle above the shop, even though the only access was via a ladder behind the counter.

Ng Kam Mui lived or worked at the Chung Fat café on Tung Tau Tsuen Road for nearly 30 years, from the day it opened until its closure in 1991 during the first phase of the clearance. She preferred not to be photographed.

Mum and Dad moved here in the '60s. They used to live on Hong Kong island, but they didn't feel there were many opportunities there so decided to come over to the Walled City and open a café. Mum is Chiu Chow but they had no friends here really.

The Walled City was just a piece of undeveloped land in those days, but soon people were flooding in, settling and building houses. There were no contracts, no gangs, and the houses were just one-storey wooden huts like those on the hillsides.

But as more and more people moved in, those with money and influence – including the gangs – began to take an interest. There was 'a big piece of pork' waiting to be 'carved up'. Mum saw a lot of fights for control in those days. She was young and frightened, so she paid protection money – just a few dollars.

I remember when we were small we had to fetch water from taps at either end of the street. We even had our baths there, completely naked! We weren't as shy as kids today! But we weren't allowed to play outside much. Whenever there were quarrels or fights, Mum would tell us to come back inside. She always made sure we came home from school or wherever on time.

Dad was educated – he was doing some kind of secretarial work – and he insisted that we went to school and study. Not everyone went to school in those days; there was no compulsory education. I remember one school started by Chan Hip Ting: a left-wing place called the New China School. There was also a kindergarten run by the church; a woman was headmistress. The school heads would say to kids in the City: "Hey there! You've nowhere to go; why not come up and learn a few words and study?"

I was sent to a church school, close to where the Mei Tung estate is today; back then it was just four villages with stone houses. Since graduating from primary school, I've lived and worked here in the City.

Dad died early, and Mum had to go through quite a lot. In those days it was survival of the fittest. Mum was really brilliant and wouldn't let people look down on me or my brother. When Dad died someone tried to take the café away from us, but Mum resisted and struggled hard to keep it going. The café was everything to us. We sold all kinds of things then: tea, coffee, congee, rice. Right at the beginning, we actually sold soya milk and millet too.

But the whole area was becoming more and more developed, and concrete buildings three- or four-storeys high began cropping up. Then in the '70s, these were torn down as the rights to build even taller ones were negotiated. Developers offered owners two flats for one, in exchange for being able to build a new block. We were given two storeys when this 11-storey building was completed; we were even put into another place while it was built.

Shops like ours also asked for compensation for loss of business. We had to close down for nine months for which we got about $7000 – quite a reasonable amount because the average wage then was only around $1000 a month.

The café was very different before the changes. The ceiling was much higher, for a start. There was no air-conditioning then either, and the place was open to the outside. We eventually got electricity from China Electric; in the '50s and '60s there was none at all, so there were no fans or lights. We used kerosene lamps to study by and it was very dark at night, but the place was always full of bustle. All sorts of people were around then. It was much more peaceful, though, no robberies or suchlike.

We all worked long hours. The café was open from 9am until very late at night. Now people have started moving out, there's hardly any business.

The plan to pull down the City came as a real shock. We're still struggling to come to terms with it – this place has been around a long time after all. And Mum's put so much of her life and energy into this café. The older generation feel that this is their land; they built and made their lives on it. It's impossible sometimes to put into words the difficulties we've been through. The Government seems simply unable to appreciate our feelings.

And there used to be so much discrimination against us in the past – if you were from the City you were called a 'no-gooder'. Now people accuse us of being greedy. Mum doesn't want to talk about the old times any more. I am like Mum: a tough woman. I am forthright and demand to be informed of what's happening. I'm not going to be bossed around. In the past, when someone wanted to redevelop our plot, we were consulted.

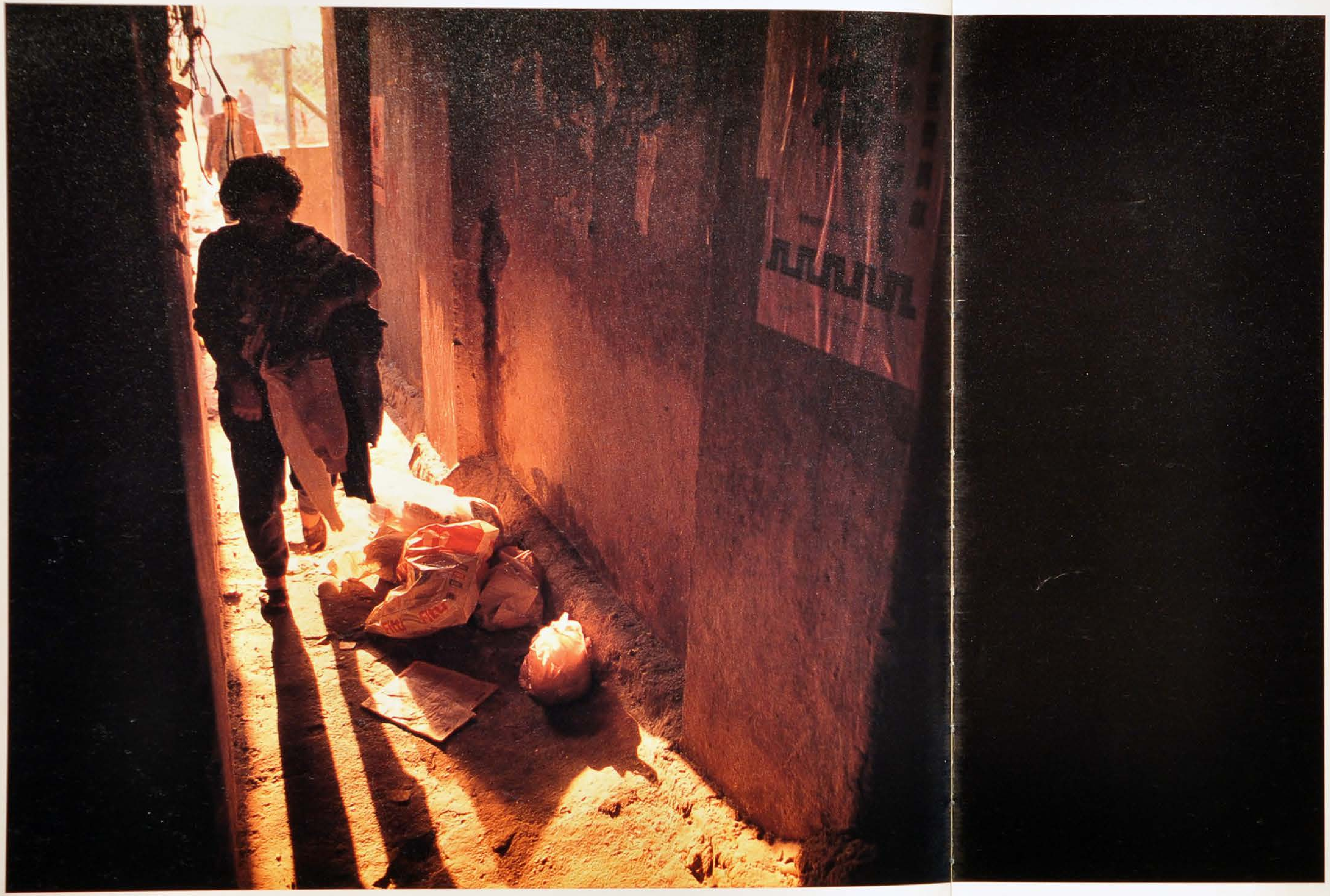
Government officials must be held responsible for what they do and say. People talk of there being no control whatsoever in the City, but actually the Government started to tackle the drug selling, prostitution and other criminal activities here as long ago as the 1960s. And now they announce they're pulling the place down. But have they consulted anyone?

I feel I am a victim. I want the City to stay; it has been our 'iron rice bowl'. Of course, it's true there are problems here, but I do feel a sense of belonging. I must admit though, that in the old days, when the place was all low buildings and small cottages rather than high-rises, people were much friendlier to each other. When you were walking around the City you'd greet people and say 'hello' in the street.

Since the high-rise buildings went up, I've rarely gone inside the City itself; I've always stayed on the outer edge where the café is – in fact, now that I work somewhere else in Hong Kong, I don't go in at all. I'd almost certainly get lost in there if I did!

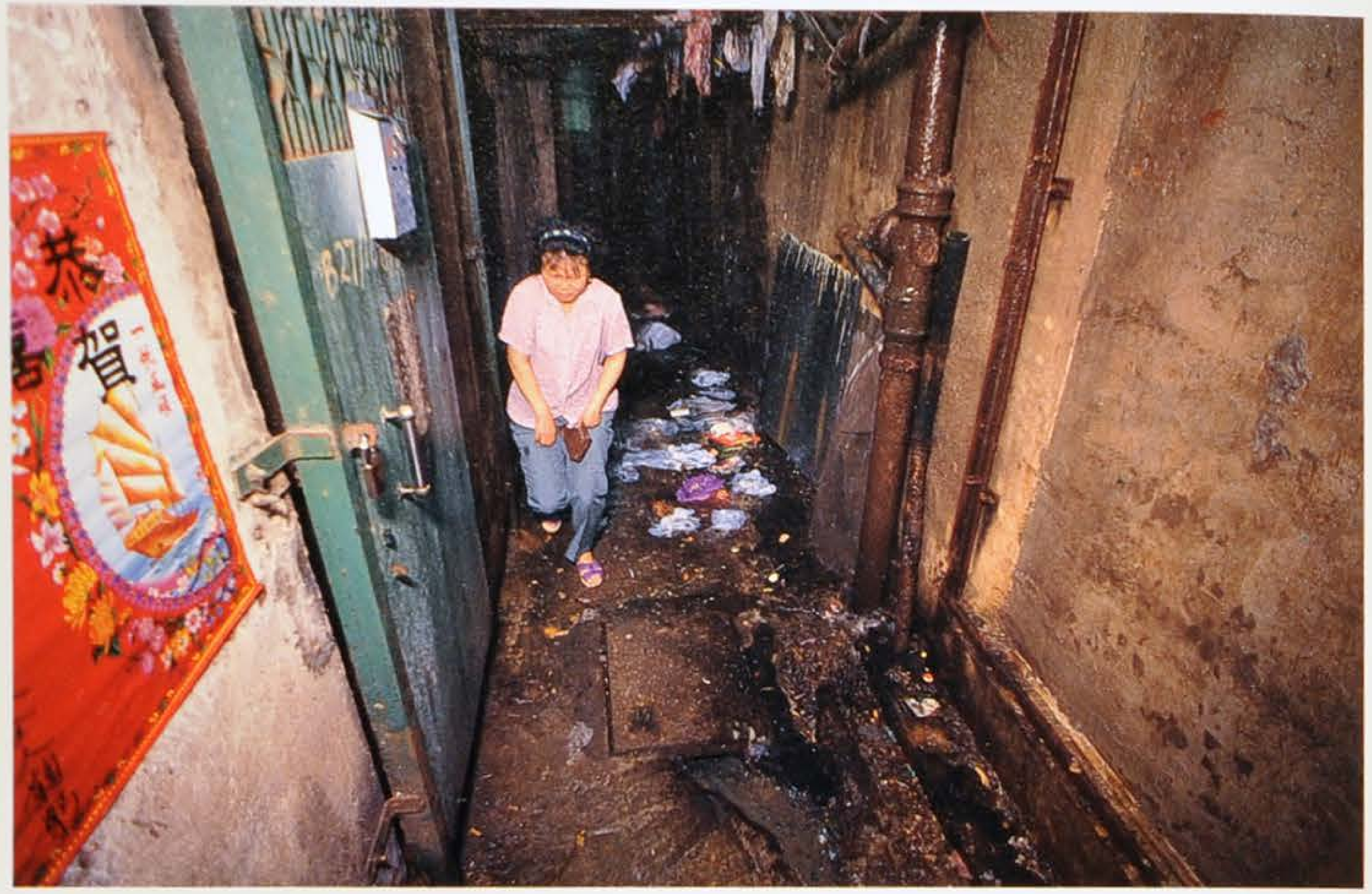
I've asked the Government for $5 million compensation, which I think is fair since I have to find my mother a flat, and that'll cost more than $1 million – and now I will have to take care of her for the rest of her life. It won't be possible to set up a similar shop outside the City: getting a licence is not easy, and finding such a good location impossible.

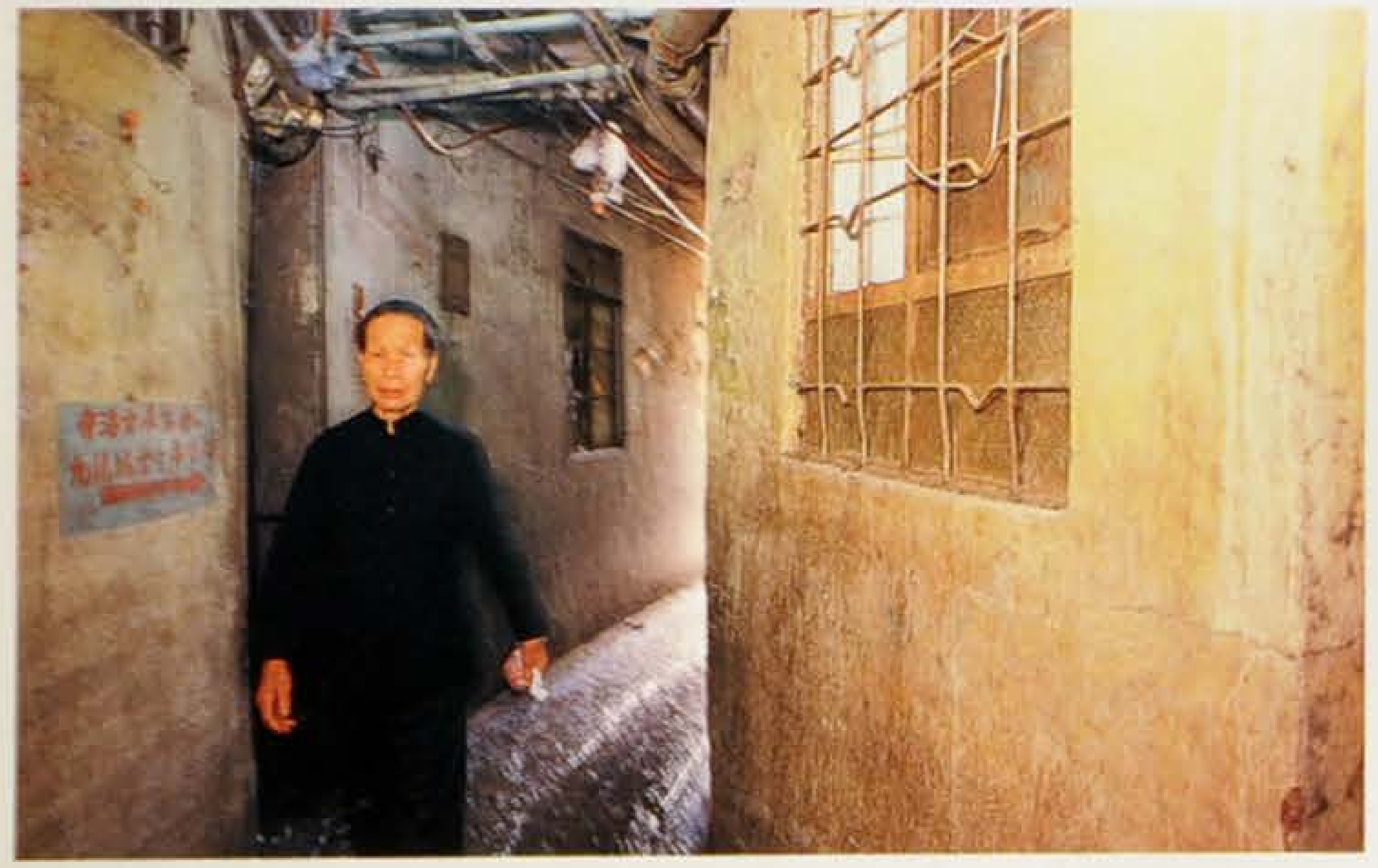
The Government must negotiate with us; it's unfair of them just to tear everything down and impose any conditions they want. I explained my proposal to the officials, but since then we've heard nothing.

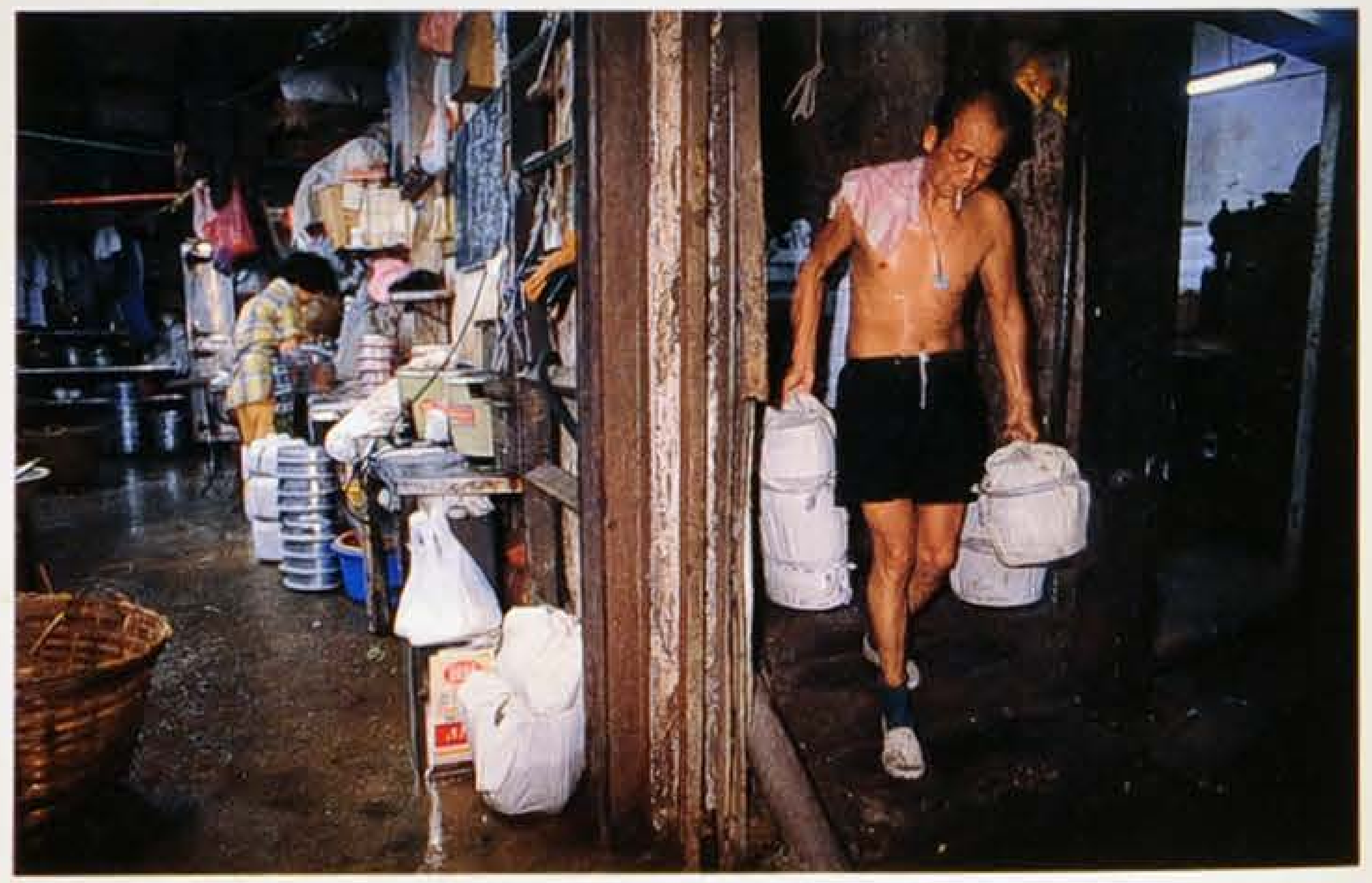


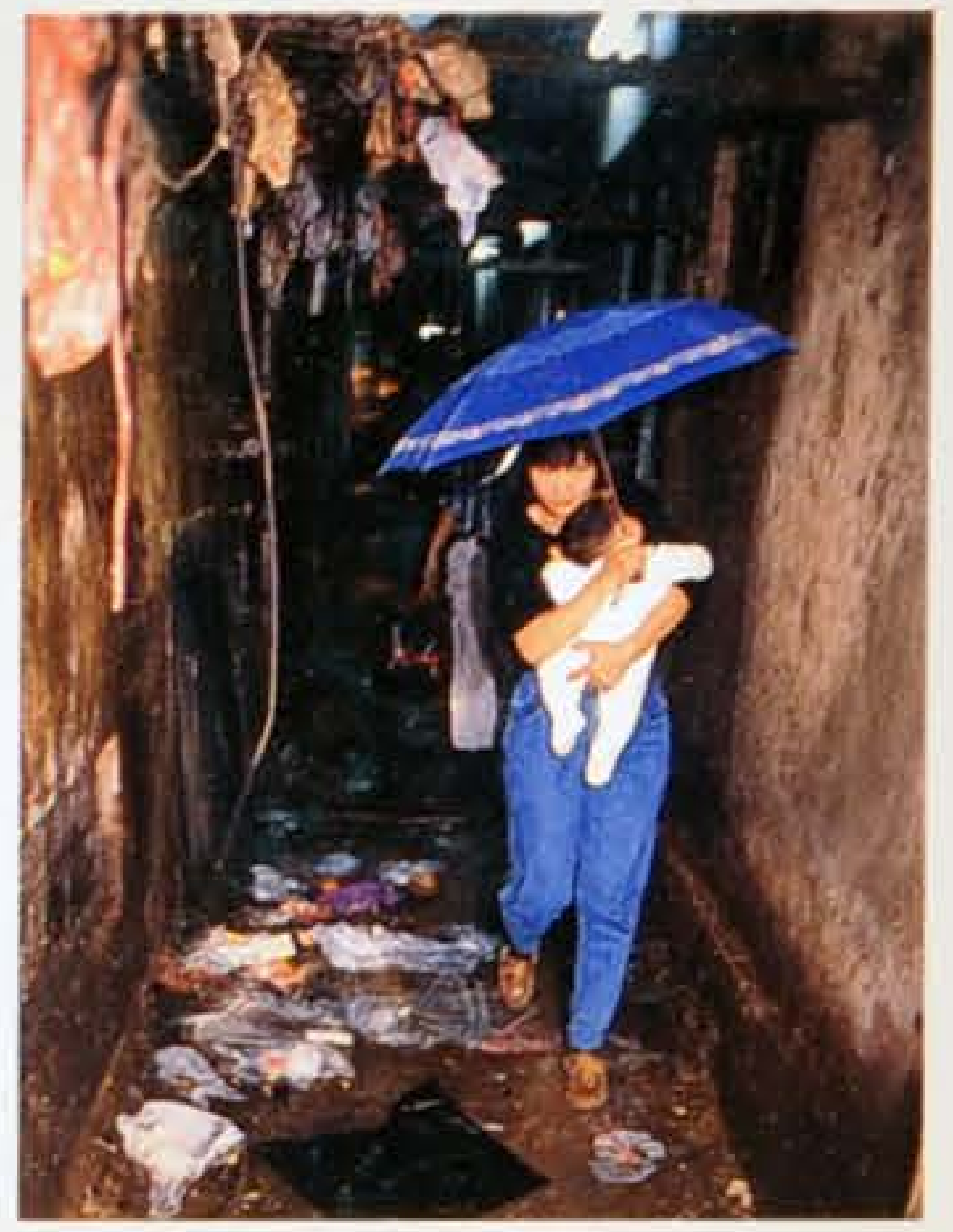
Sunlight floods in through a small alley off Lung Chun Road, on the south side of the City. Before the Sai Tau Tsuen squatter settlement was cleared in 1985, the City's southern and eastern exits fed straight into its rickety, corrugated tin structures. Mistakenly, the settlement was often believed to be part of the City, and certainly the carpet of shacks rolling up to the sheer facade of the City made them appear indivisible. Even after the settlement was cleared, the City remained impenetrable and forbidding to the outsider, even though life within was basically no different from many other parts of Hong Kong. In some respects, the City was considered safer by many residents, and young children were often allowed to wander freely within its confines.

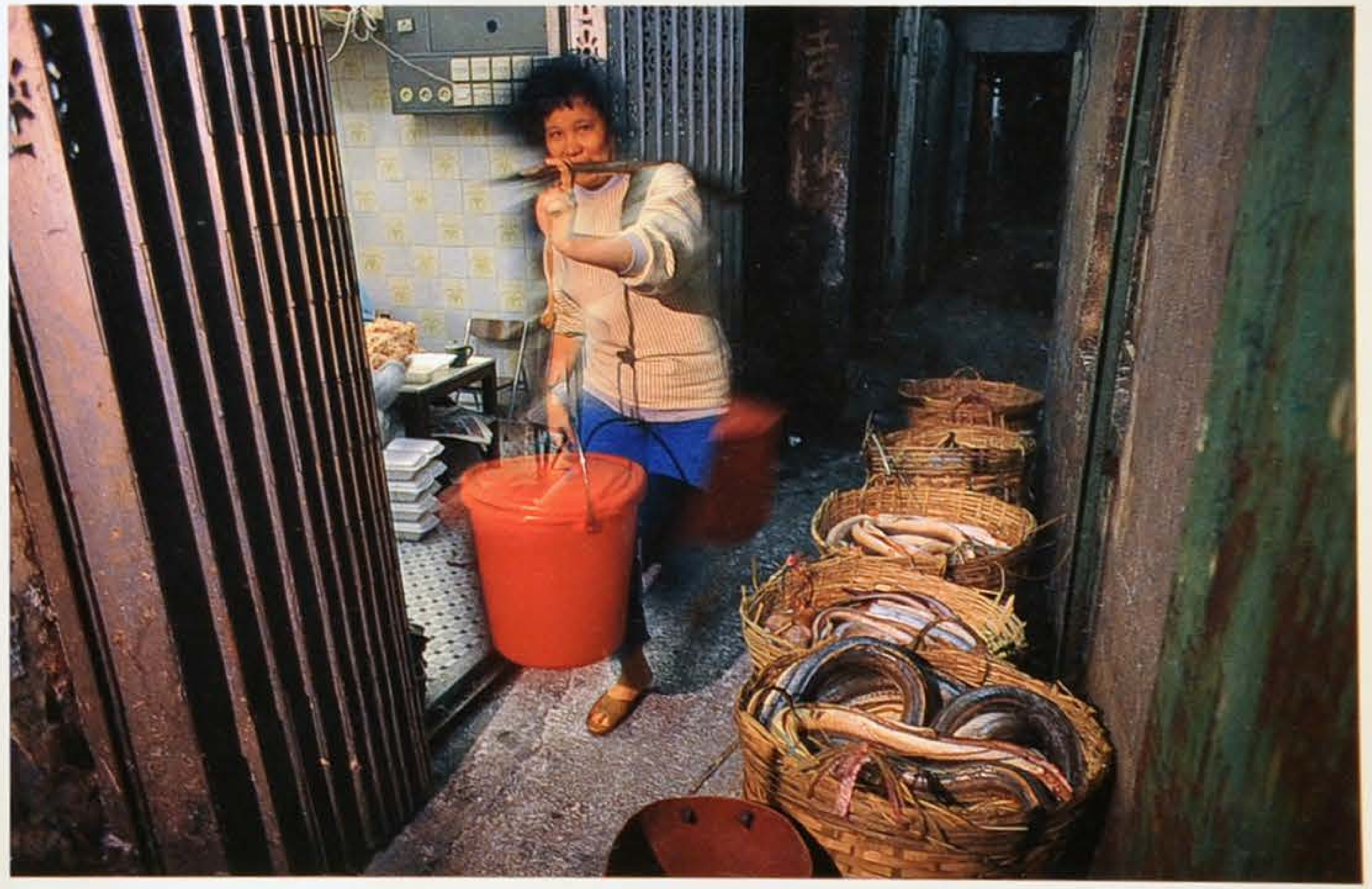
At ground level was a narrow network of 30 or so streets and alleyways, some no more than a metre across. These were busy thoroughfares, shared by residents and the City's 900 or more factories, restaurants and shops. Often fetid and dank, with water permanently dripping from the makeshift pipes overhead, the alleys were an obstacle course of delivery trolleys, broken concrete and sodden rubbish. Crudely installed plastic and metal sheeting barely protected passers-by from the worst of the water coursing down from above and, depending on the route, an umbrella was often a sensible accessory. Business carried on regardless, and men carrying cooked lunches or women hauling drinking water past fishball factories were an everyday sight.



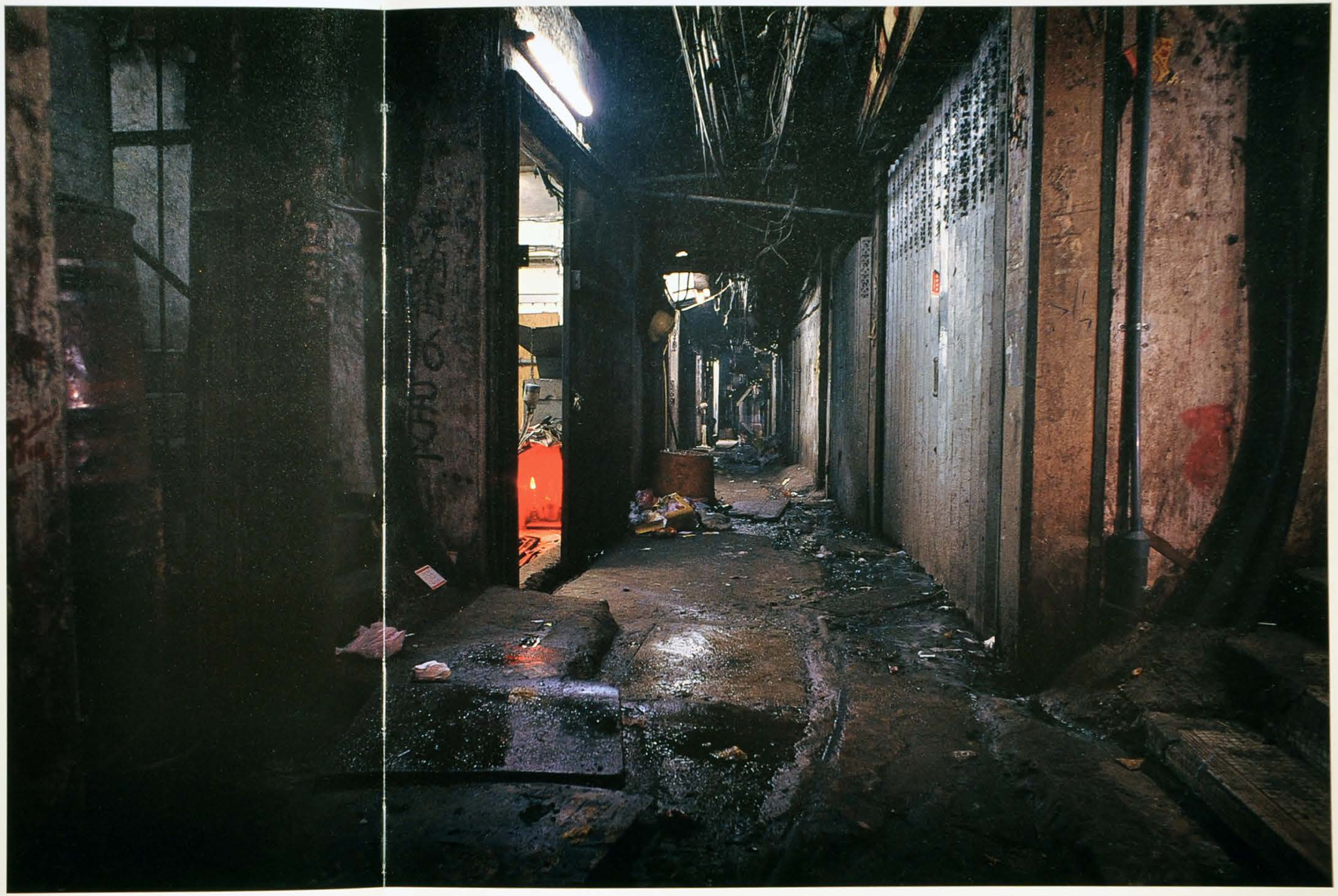


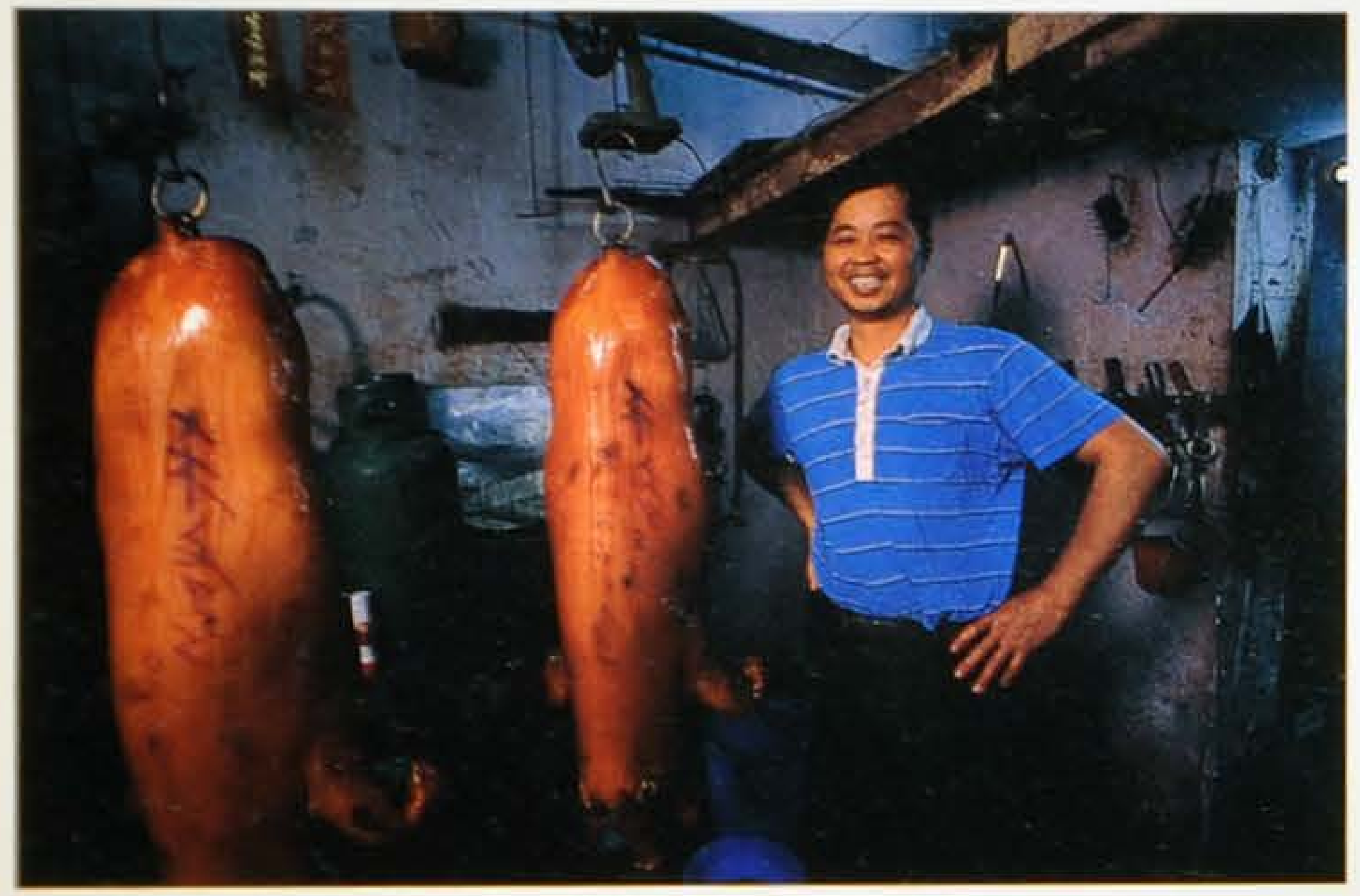






Far from being intimidating, the alleys became friendly and cheerful places after the clearance had been announced, filled with ordinary residents going about their daily lives. A rare survey conducted in 1975 noted: "Our findings indicate that the majority of the inhabitants have dissimilar traits to what the public usually attributes to the Walled City. They are, in fact, more akin than one would expect to residents of public housing estates, working hard to earn a living and having the same worries about unemployment, undesirable living conditions and the schooling problems of their children".





Glazed roast pig comprised the bulk of Yim Kwok Yuen's cooked meat business on Lo Yan Street. He had run his own operation for just three years when the clearance was announced.

Yim Kwok Yuen opened his cooked meat factory on Lo Yan Street in 1981, a few years after his arrival in Hong Kong.

I came to Hong Kong in 1978, when I was 35 years old, from Ching Yuen county in Kwangtung Province where I was a farmer.

My parents were old and, as the eldest of five brothers and sisters, I had to support the family. Life was not very different from death in China. We worked really hard for very little return. I started work at 4am and my daily salary was 20 to 30 cents. We did not have our own farm and, when hungry, we only had rice husks or the grass to eat. You felt cold and hungry in the winter, and in the summer there were lots of mosquitoes.

From 1971 onwards, I tried almost every year to sneak into Hong Kong. I didn't have to swim far but I had to climb hills after crossing a river about one metre deep. I was scratched by the bushes. I always used the same route, and each time I was caught I was imprisoned and starved. I often fainted. If I had been given my own fields I would not have tried to come here.

When I finally arrived in Hong Kong, I lived with my uncle and worked in a shop which made roasted food. After several months' apprenticeship, I went to work in my uncle's roasting shop in the Walled City. When my younger brother arrived in Hong Kong three years later, I started my own roasted food business, selling the cooked meat on the streets.

Initially, I made the roasted food in my uncle's shop and sold it. Then I rented this processing shop three years ago. I sell the food on the streets myself. If I delivered it to a retail shop, the profit would be much less. I am an unlicensed hawker and I sell in Wong Tai Sin market. I have been arrested five times since the computerisation of records. You have to deposit a bail of $700 and the fine is $500 increasing by $10 for each arrest. In Wong Tai Sin, they confiscate the food but return the tools and cart. The cart is worth more than $1000.

I start work every day at 4am. I do not need an alarm clock — my body wakes me up. I start to roast the meat then, and sell it in the market from 6:15am to 8am. As I am a hawker, I am not allowed to sell in the streets after 8am. I then come back for breakfast and at 9am start work again to prepare the meat to be roasted in the afternoon. At about 10am I return home to cook lunch and have a rest before coming back to the shop to roast. At about 3pm I go to the market again, returning home at around 7 or 8pm.

My brother and I manage the shop here. The roasted food we prepare includes chicken, goose and pork. To make the food, we use flavouring, salt, sugar and so on. If you can afford it you can use good Chinese wine, but otherwise a cheap one will do.

For pork, we have to call a buyer to purchase a pig from the Cheung Sha Wan abattoir. When the pig is delivered, we cut it, wash it and put it in the refrigerator. We normally have 10 or more pigs in stock. The whole process of preparing one roasted pig takes three hours. The cooking itself takes an hour. You have to roast the pig until it is 20 to 30 per cent cooked, take it out of the oven and pierce it to let the air out from the skin — otherwise it does not look good. Then you have to heat the skin with a hot flame so that bubbles appear and make it crispy.

We use the cart to carry the food to the market. We work hard, even though the temperature is very high in summer. The refrigerator is noisy, and the oven is noisy and hot. We sweat tremendously. We have fans in our workshop, but we have no cover in the market. We have cockroaches and rats too, which we feed. Occasionally, of course, when our customers criticise our food or don't buy it, we feel unhappy. The life is difficult but, as the returns belong to us, it's worth while.

We mostly sell roast pig. If the hawker control team doesn't come, we can sell about three pigs in one day and earn $2000 to $3000; if the team comes, we can only sell one. During festival periods we can sell 20 to 30 pigs in a day, and as festivals always fall on public holidays the hawker control teams don't come. We have no sleep on those days.

The shop is not licensed either and is rented. Outside the Walled City you must have a licence, although the Government has stopped issuing them for processing shops and only grants them to retail outlets. We have never been inspected, but we are cleaner than the famous workshops outside; they often don't wash and clean the pigs first.

When I had earned enough, I went to Canton and got married. I now have a son and have applied for my wife and child to come to Hong Kong. I first applied eight years ago, but I'll be satisfied if they can come before the Walled City is demolished.

I own two flats in the Walled City. The first one cost me around $80,000. The living environment is bad and it has no windows. The second flat is a few storeys higher in the same building and it has windows. I had intended to sell the first flat, but then the demolition was announced. The compensation for demolition is around $800,000 for the two flats.

My brother, my uncle and I live together in one flat. The other flat is rented out at $800 a month. Before I bought the first flat, I rented a place here in the City — eight single men lived in a room of 200 square feet. There are three bedrooms and two living rooms in my house. We have an air-conditioner, though we only use it on the hottest days; we also have a television and a washing machine.

The rent for the workshop is $2000 a month, with electricity and water charges included. I believe that half of the water is stolen from the mains, while the other half comes from the well. We all use well-water but we use water from the mains for drinking. We have never had a power failure.

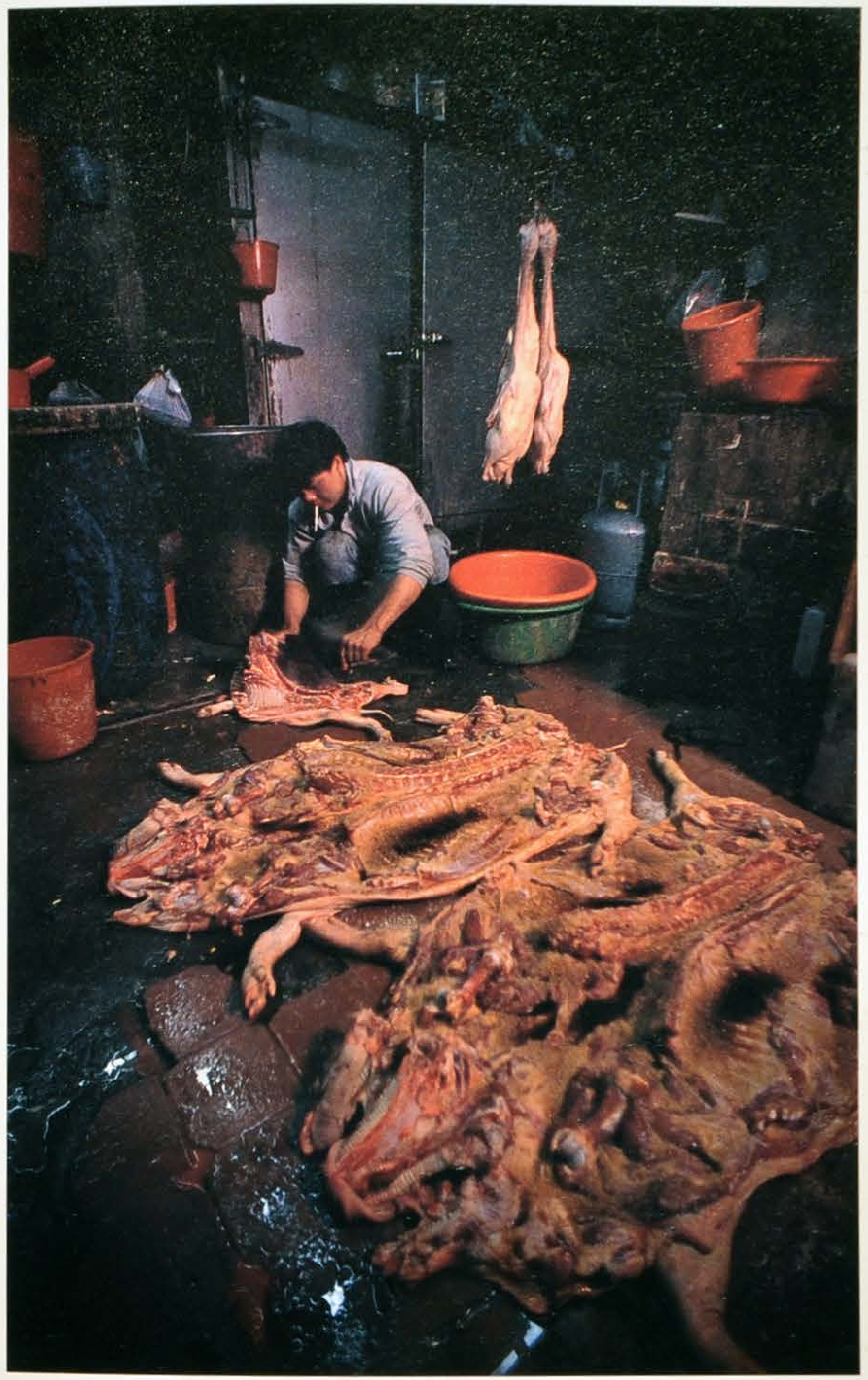
I don't think I will make any profit from the demolition of the Walled City except that I may get a new house. For rented premises, the Government will only compensate with a relocation fee. When I started my business, the initial capital outlay was $30,000 but I would need $50,000 to start up again. I have not decided where to go after the demolition. If I opt for a unit on a housing estate, the compensation will drop from $400,000 to $130,000 and I have to pay the rent. If I buy a new house, I need several hundred thousand more for renovation. I also have to give a house to my brother.

If possible, I would like the Government to compensate me for the shop by giving me a stall. It will be difficult to operate a processing workshop in future. If I want to have it properly licensed, I will have to go to a rural area. The roasted food will have to be transported to an urban district and it will be cold before it gets there. I have to decide on my place of business before I can decide where to settle.

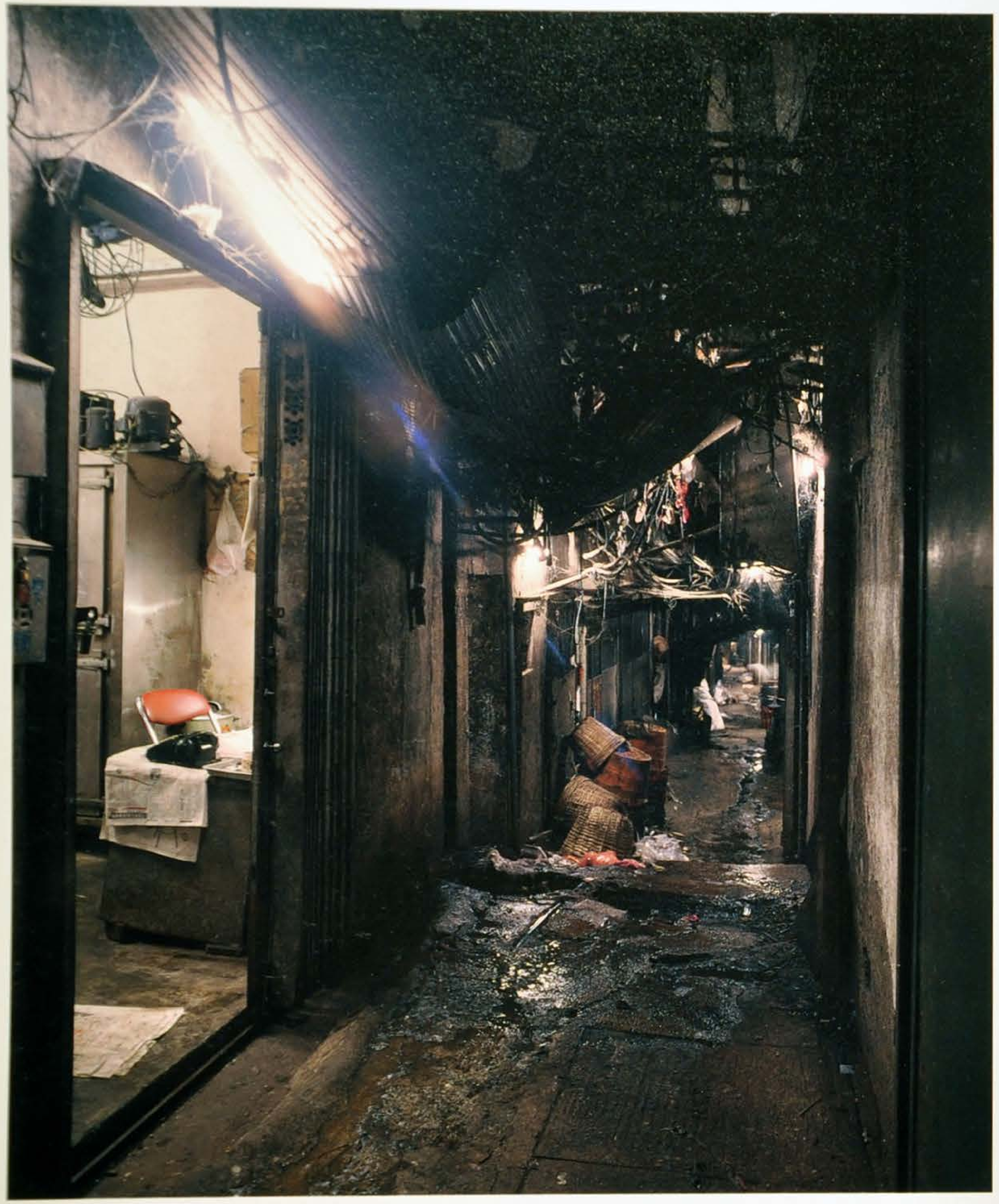
I was not scared of anything when I came to Hong Kong. After all, no one ill-treated you here. I came from a poor village where the hygiene conditions were much worse. Only the air was better. Coming from such a poor place, I thought Hong Kong was heaven. The Walled City is all right; I came from a worse environment, so I've never really thought of it as bad. If I had had a job or money I would have considered leaving, but I'm not educated and it would have been very difficult to survive anywhere else.

Huge cylindrical ovens are standard for the commercial roasting of chicken, geese and pigs. When in use, they raise the already stifling summer temperatures by several degrees, while their exhausts coat the surrounding walls and surfaces with a permanent layer of grease and grime.

Food processors freely admitted that they moved into the City to benefit from the low rents and to seek refuge from the jurisdiction of Government health and sanitation inspectors. When the latter did visit food premises, they confined themselves to 'educating and advising' owners on hygiene, judiciously holding short of enforcing regulations and penalties. For all their efforts, many operators continued to believe that the process of cooking removed bacteria and any harmful substances from the food.

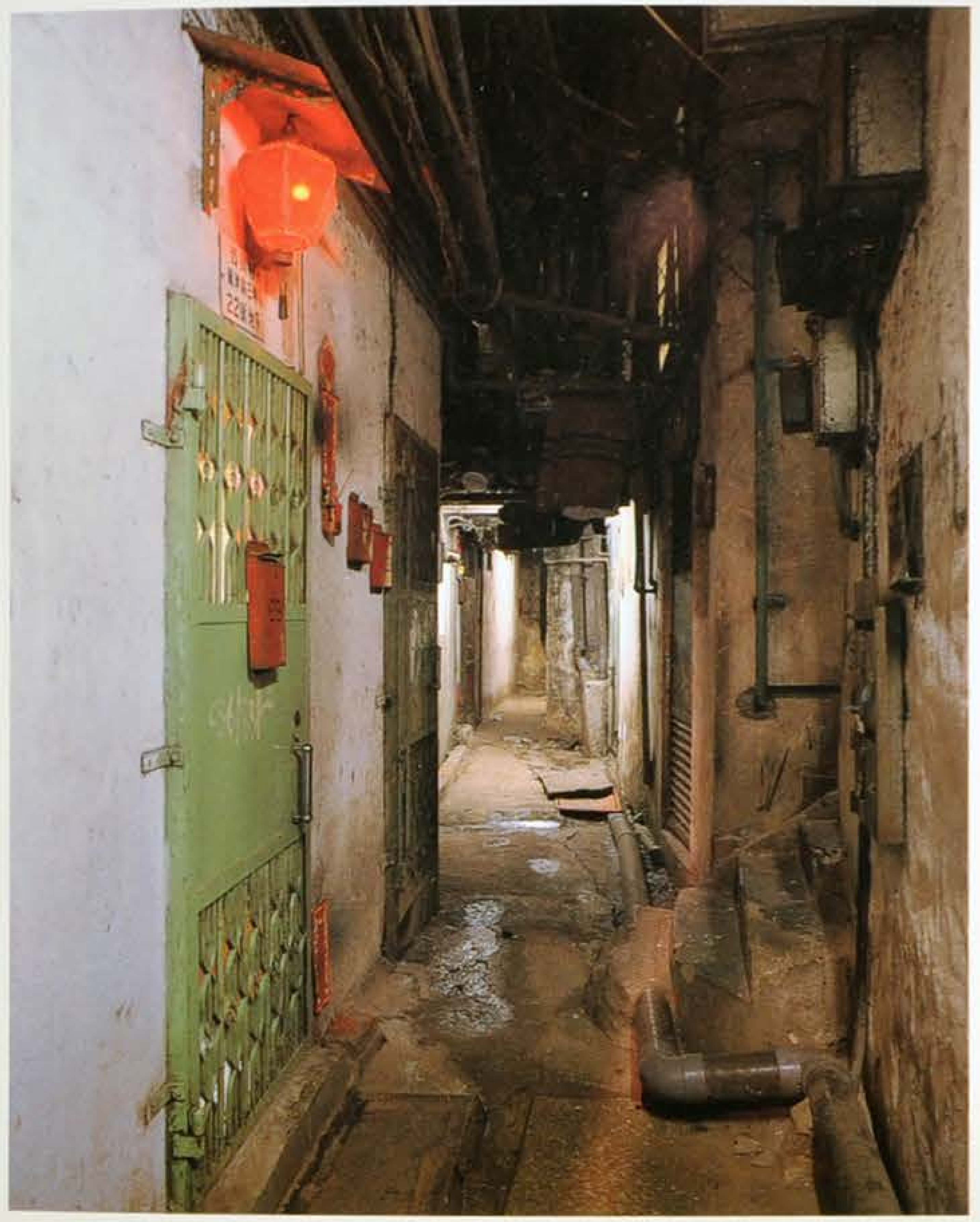


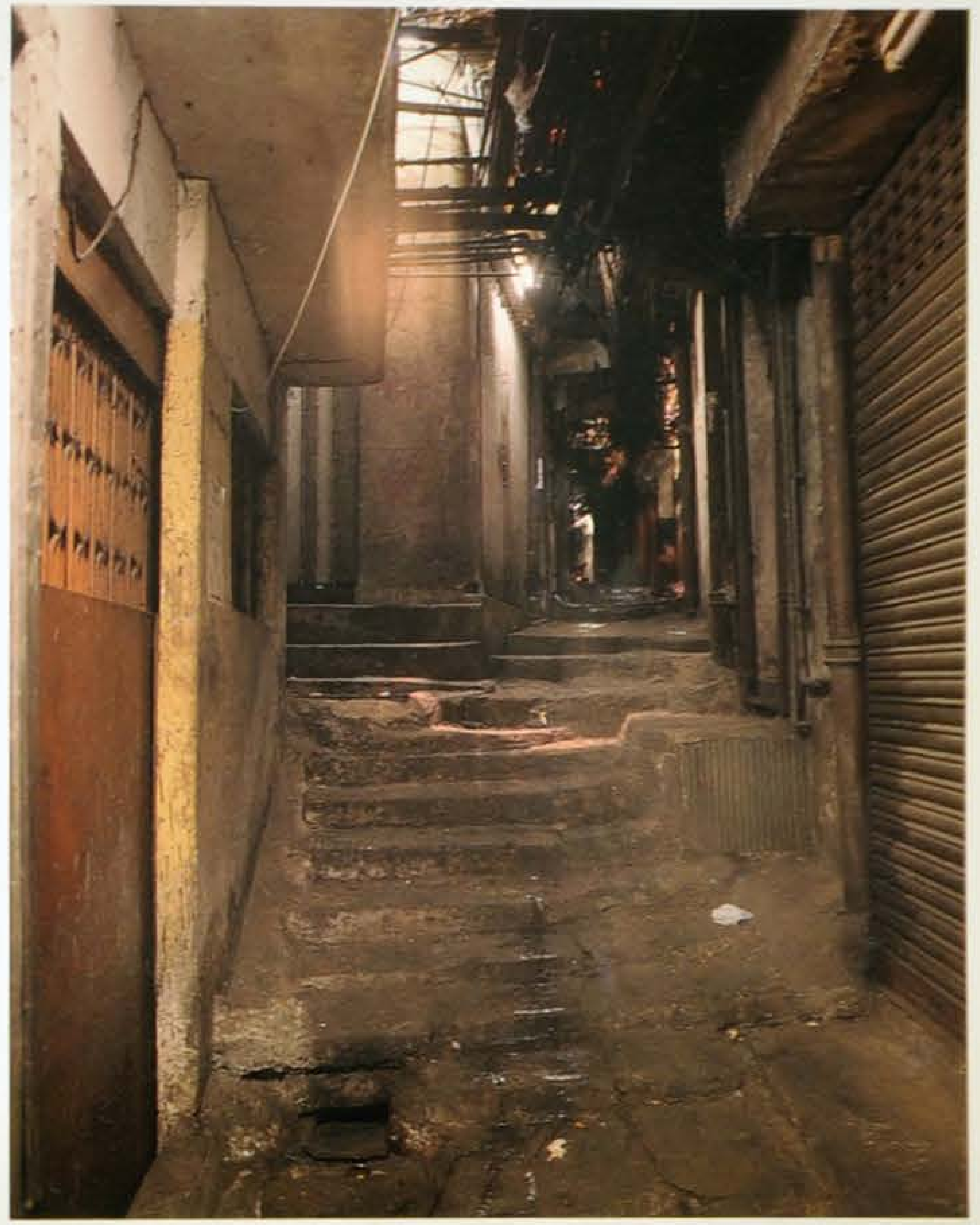
Left: *Yim Kwok Yuen's younger brother washes the split carcasses of pigs in preparation for making char siu, the highly popular roast pork fillet coated with honey. Most of the City's char siu was sold to Hong Kong's hawkers or delivered to local restaurants by hand.*



"Nevertheless [the Walled City] still feels like an enclave within a city, extra-territorial and even slightly unreal. It is a frightful slum. No vehicle can enter it – there are no streets wide enough – and its buildings, rising sometimes to 10 or 12 storeys, are so inextricably packed together that they seem to form one congealed mass of masonry, sealed together by overlapping structures, ladders, walkways, pipes and cables, and ventilated only by fetid air-shafts. A maze of dank alleys pierces the mass from one side to the other. Virtually no daylight reaches them. Looped electric cables festoon their ceilings, dripping alarmingly with moisture. It is like a bunker. Sometimes you seem to be all alone, with every door locked around you. Sometimes the lane is suddenly bright with the lights of a laundry or a sweatshop factory, and loud with Chinese music."

Jan Morris, Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire, *Penguin 1990*





To Gui Bon made rubber goods in his factory on Lung Chun Back Road for nearly 25 years. Born in 1937, he had been involved in the same business before he moved into the City.

When I first moved in, this was just a two-storey stone house. There wasn't much else here; Tung Tau Village was an empty space with a few pigsties. Houses for rent or for sale were advertised on handwritten posters pasted up along the streets. I used to live on the first floor above the factory. When the stone hut was pulled down to make way for a new building, I moved next door for a while. The new building is, of course, much better, and it's actually quite safe. The only problem is that it's not very convenient, especially for getting goods in and out of the City.

The Government doesn't interfere much here. The Labour Department turns up occasionally for a safety inspection, but there have been no real problems. The rubber we use in our production is not as flammable as plastic; it won't even catch fire at high temperatures. And I've tried to keep my factory clean and well painted – until the announcement of the clearance that is. Since then, I haven't bothered.

I've been in this spot for more than 20 years. I used to have a couple of employees, but now there's only one. We work quite long hours; after dinner I might come back and work until 2 or 3am. And it's fairly hard work; you need to be pretty quick with your hands and limbs. This machine operates continuously and can be quite dangerous. Outside the City it has to be operated with a safety net, but I don't have one here, so I have to be extra careful.

The production process involves a number of stages. First the rubber has to be pressed and spread out. It's then mixed with a kind of mineral powder and colouring. Then we cut the rubber to size with scissors; that's strenuous work. After that the little cup is pressed out, which only takes about a minute. The whole process from beginning to end takes about an hour and a half. We can make about 20 dozen plungers in that time. Actually, we're not restricted to making just plungers; in the past we've made badminton shuttlecocks, sink stoppers and the like. Our raw materials are mostly imported from Malaysia, Canada and Germany.

Customers place their orders by telephone. I usually sell to wholesalers at a fixed price. I make about a dollar or so from each dozen; the profit's only just enough to cover my own labour. Sometimes a customer buys for export to foreign countries. I do little retailing myself. Since the clearance announcement business has been going downhill. A number of my old clients are getting their supplies from Taiwan. If the City were not going to be demolished, I'd probably have diversified my production and taken on an extra person.

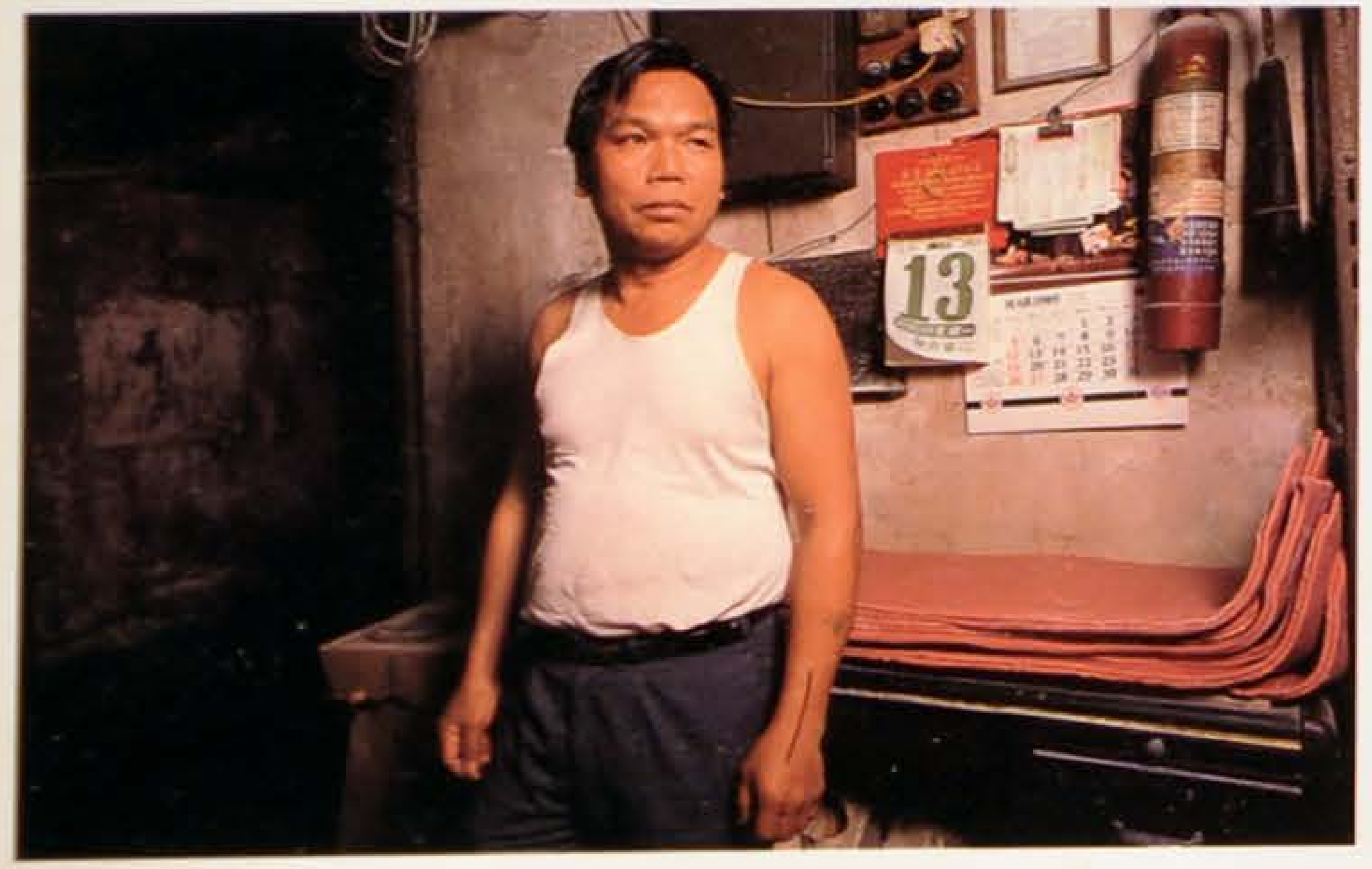
What are my future plans? Maybe I'll go to the mainland to buy plungers made there and sell them back to existing customers in Hong Kong. It's difficult to make a living, and I'm getting on. I have two very young children to look after as well. After all these years the flat is about the only wealth I've accumulated. You see, I don't gamble; I work hard.

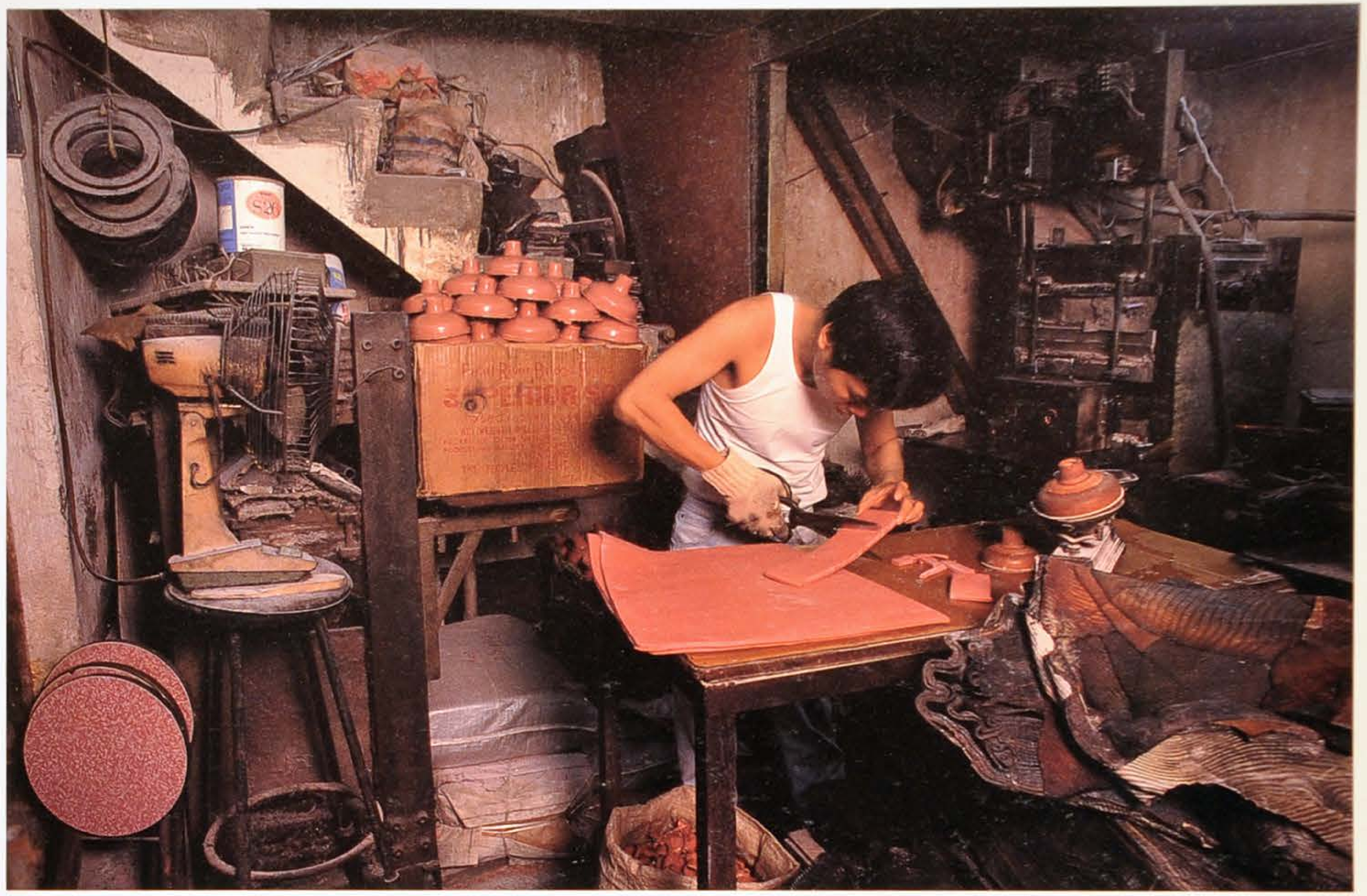
No one has ever bothered me. When I first arrived here heroin was sold openly. The addicts would queue up for their fix. In those days I had to keep a watchful eye on various things in the factory. They might steal your scissors, for example.

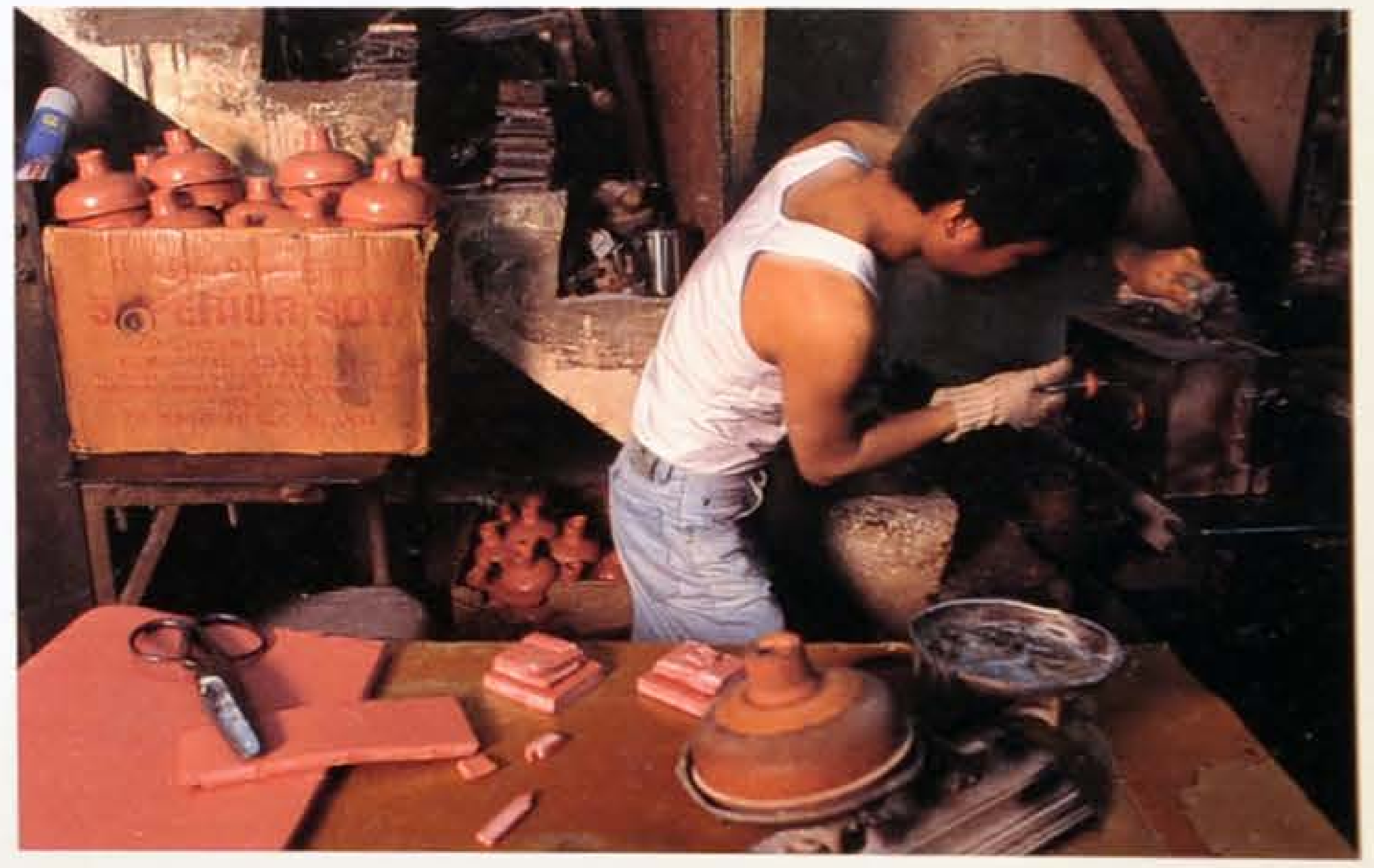
Compensation arrangements have not been finalised yet, but it looks like the Government is going to give me $70,000 for closing down the business. I have asked for $500,000; I think that's a reasonable sum. After all, when we were expanding during the early 1980s we were making $20,000 to $30,000 a month. But since the announcement that's dropped off.

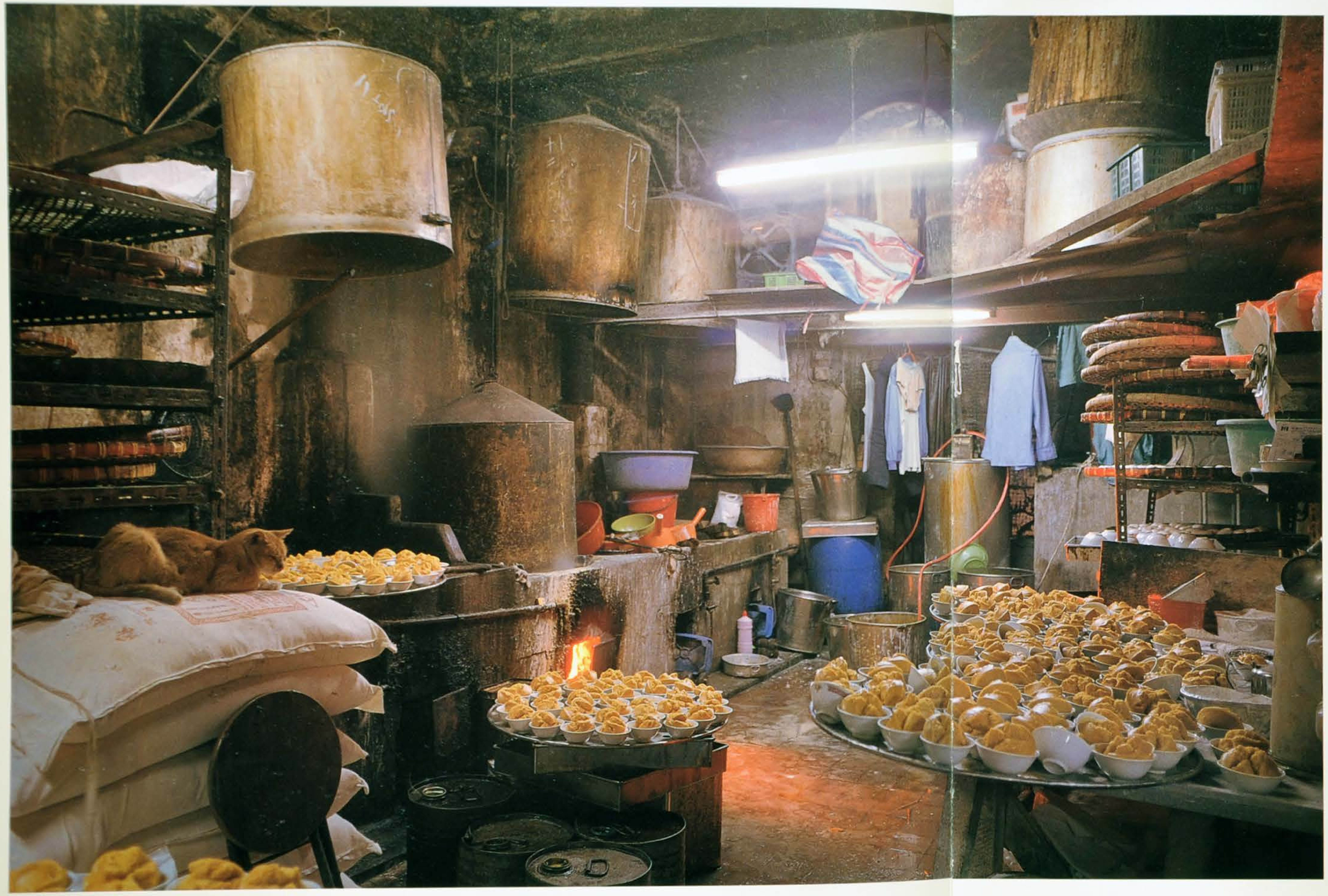
If not for the demolition of the Walled City, I think I'd stay in the same business. But the costs are so much higher outside. I've been in other jobs. I was a driver once, chauffeuring people in private cars. I moved here when that was made illegal. After they pull this place down I might work as a driver again. I'll have to learn to read the new maps. I live nearby and normally I just go home to eat and then come back to work. Work is my entertainment. Occasionally I might sit in the park for a while, or watch television. I've got used to going places very casually nowadays, just in my slippers.

Prohibitive costs saw the failure of To Gui Bon's [below] *rubber plunger business prior to his move to the Walled City in the mid-'60s. When he first arrived there, the rent for his cramped premises was just $50 a month.*

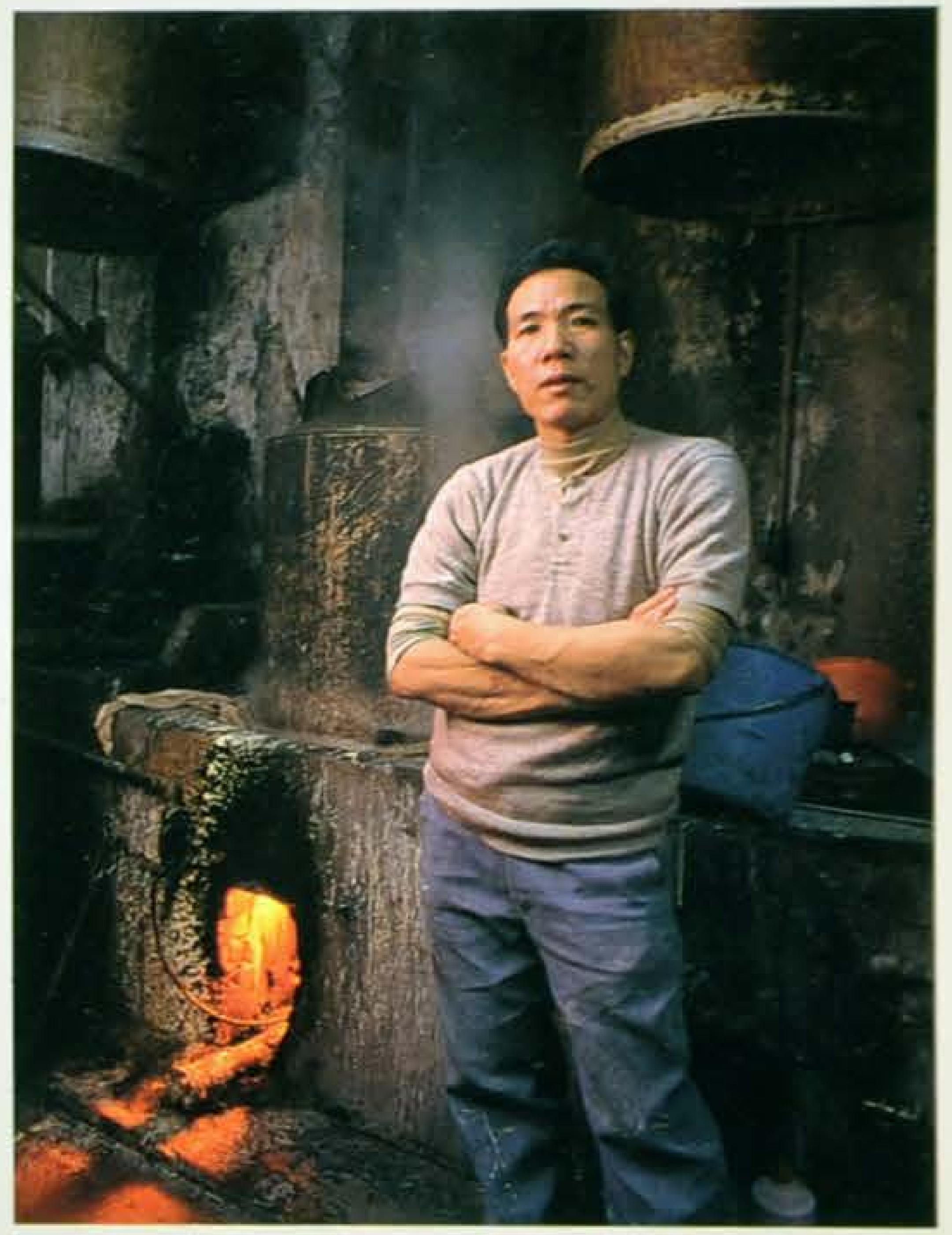


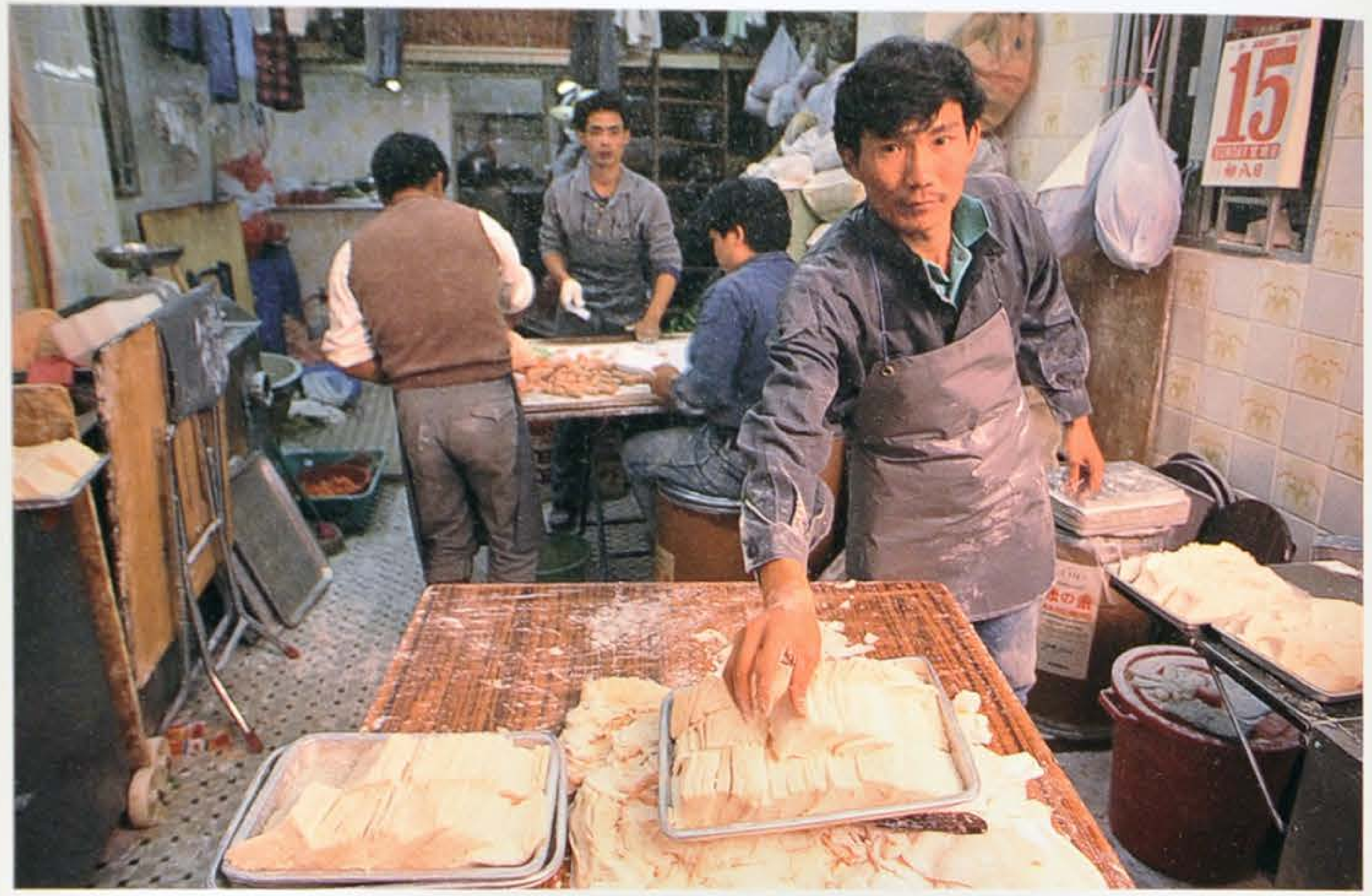




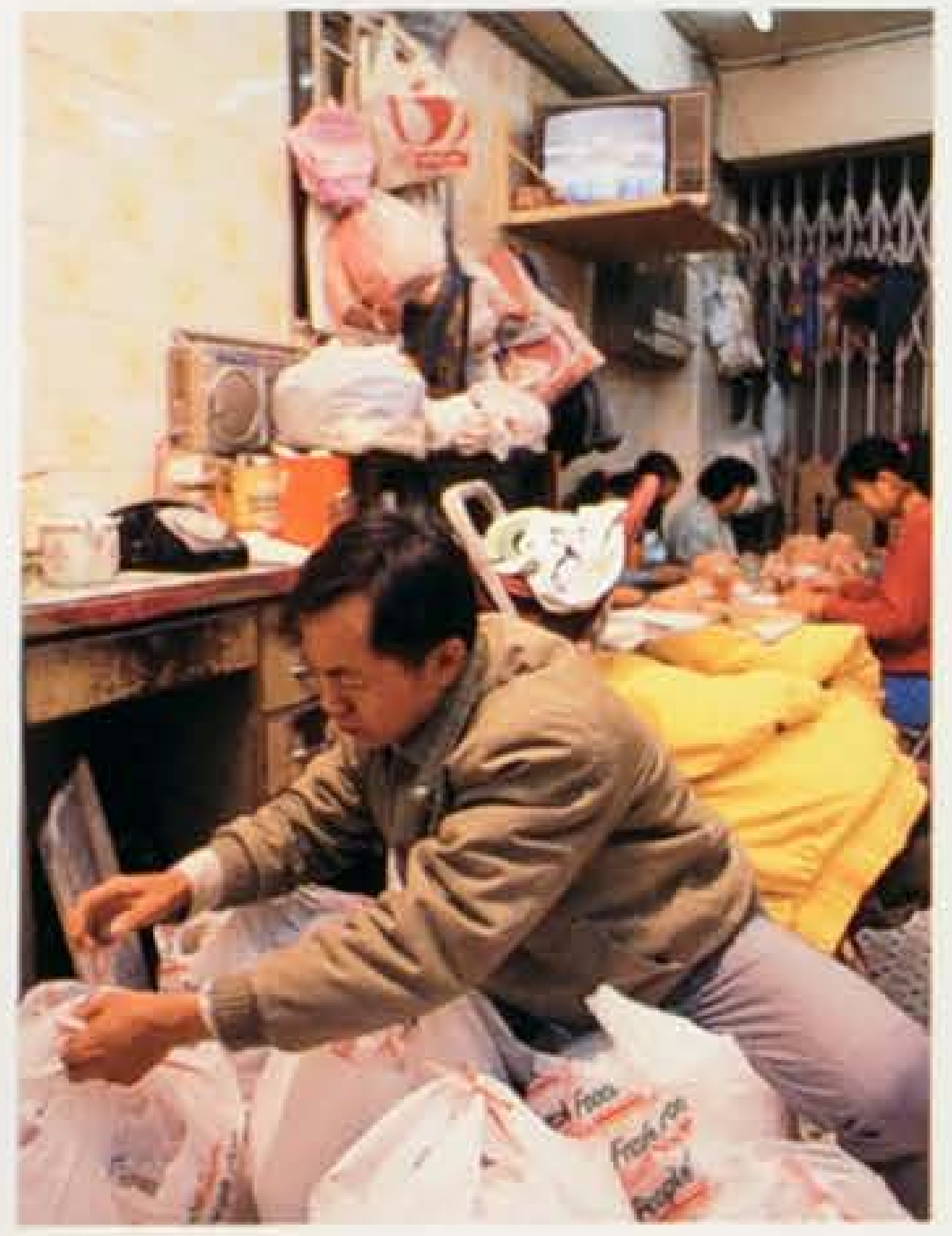


Baker Law Kim Kwong had worked overnight to finish these steamed sweet cakes for a Chiu Chow festival. Resident in the City for 20 years, Law came originally from the Chiu Chow area of eastern Guangdong. Different in dialect from the Cantonese, and with their own distinct culture and customs, Chiu Chows comprised more than 70 per cent of the City's population and were predominant in the socio-economic hierarchy: in the Kai Fong Association; as developers or water suppliers; or in the Triads. Chiu Chow settlers squatted on the hills around the Walled City in the 1950s and their refugee kinsmen, fleeing hardship and persecution under Communist rule, gravitated naturally to an area where there was a familiar language and culture.





Part-time female workers scoop minced fish into a dough wrapping to make the popular fish dumplings. Run by Lam Leung Po [right, facing camera], this factory was among the cleaner food establishments in the City.



Lam Leung Po became a partner in his minced fish factory in 1983. Located on the ground floor of 58 Lung Chun Road, his business was just one of many food-processing factories in an area conveniently close to the one Government stand-pipe to be found in the City.

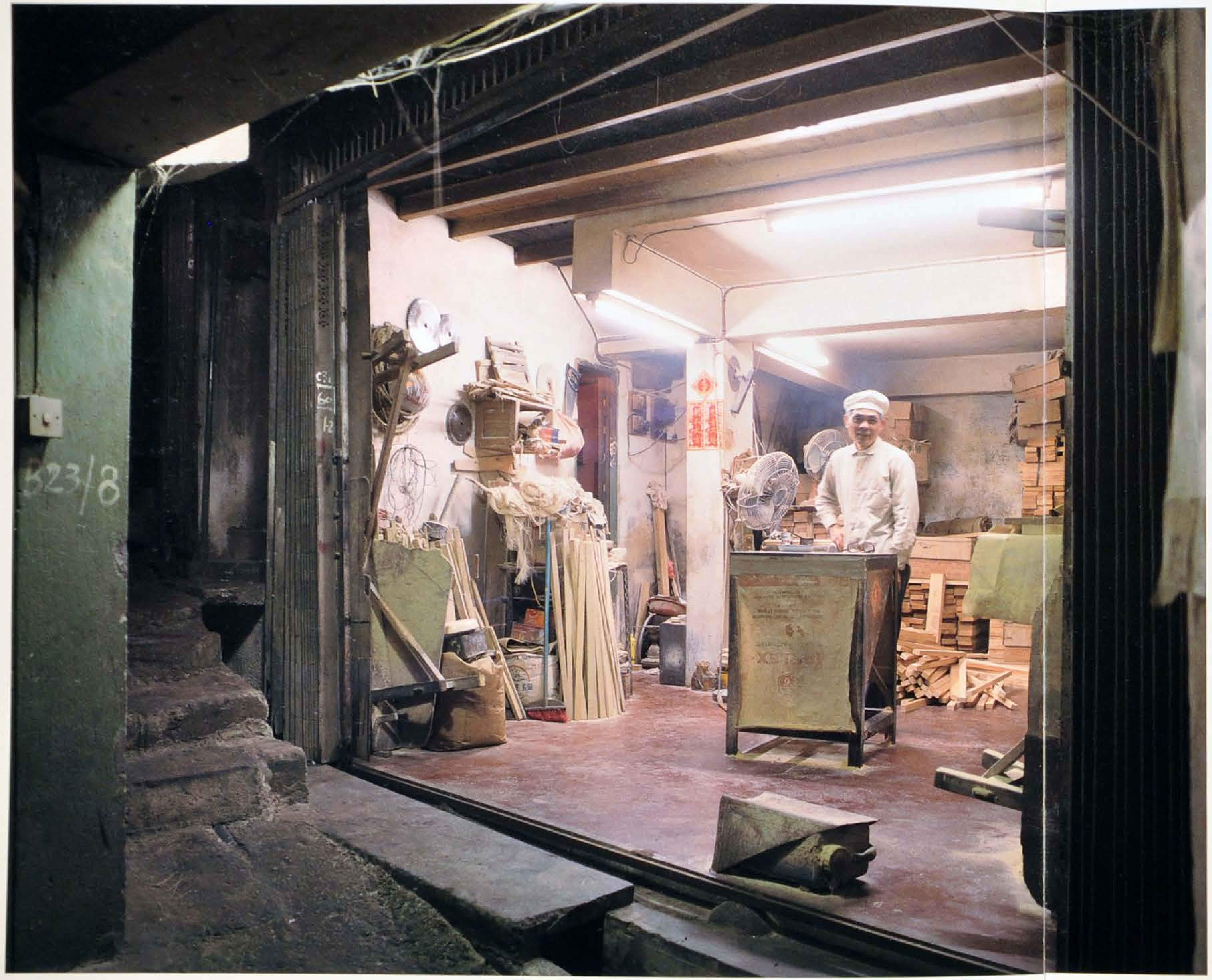
This business has been here, in the Walled City, for about eight or nine years. It used to be just outside, in the Sai Tau Tsuen squatter village before it was pulled down. That place opened a long time ago.

I joined the business only after it had moved here. The shop's quite big: around 480 square feet. We did a little decoration when we first moved in; it wasn't always like this. I've no idea what it was before we arrived. Of course, it wasn't that easy, but I wouldn't say it was that difficult either. Nobody asked us for protection money. The rent was cheaper here and the hygiene regulations were not so troublesome; that was the most convenient part. Everything was much simpler here somehow. We've never had a hygiene inspector visit, for example, not once. Of course, businesses outside are doing things much the same way, but they need a licence. I could probably get a licence if I wanted to, since I'm doing the same job, but we don't really need one here.

What I'm making now is minced fish. We also make fish dumplings and squidballs – three products altogether. I've been making these since we started. The fish used in the dumplings is not the same as that for fishballs; it's eel which is quite expensive. The squid for the squidballs comes from Thailand. I used to mix things by hand, but now I use this mixer. It's no big deal – just put the stuff in, mix it and then stir.

There weren't so many helpers in the beginning, but over time the staff has kept on expanding. A few neighbours – ladies – help me with the fish dumplings. I have five full-time workers as well, making seven of us in all with me and my partner. The dumpling makers are just part-time. We make about 300 catties of minced fish and dumplings a day. If we have more orders, we just work harder. It would be easier if we had more helpers, but I won't bring in more people now.

Most of my customers come from outside the City. We make less on Tuesdays, because traditionally not many people eat fish then. They tend to eat more on the other days, mainly in hotpots. At the moment we sell the minced fish to over 200 shops, the fish dumplings go to several dozen places and the squidballs to around 100 shops. That is quite a lot, but it'll be more as the weather gets cooler and demand rises.



Cheng San set up his small factory on Tai Chang Street, in the City, in 1968. He made wooden rulers there for the next 22 years, moving out in 1990 during the first phase of the clearance.

I used to be a seaman, but at the end of 1967 – after all my six children had been born – I came back to live in Hong Kong, on the Ngau Tau Kok housing estate. I was about 40 years of age.

I didn't know a trade, so I started making rulers because a relative said it was a good business. I rented a factory on Ko Shan Road, but then moved to these premises in the Walled City because the rent was cheaper and they were bigger – I think I have about 600 square feet.

My home has been in the Kowloon City area since 1947. I used to live in Shing Ngau Road. In those days, there wasn't much in the Walled City – a hill, vegetable fields, a few village houses. There were no roads and only one small shop, called Cheng Man Yuen. Some small squatters' houses were built in the 1950s, but most of the buildings went up in the '60s after the riots.

Once I moved into the Walled City, I couldn't afford to move out. I used to employ seven or eight people and our products were for export. We exported to Singapore and Malaysia through some friends I had made as a sailor. Now I'm mainly doing business for the local market and Macau, with just a few overseas buyers, and I haven't employed any workers for the last 10 years. I produce 10 different kinds of ruler and my customers are mostly grocery and stationery shops.

I have been doing business here for 20 years and no one has troubled me – not even the drug addicts. I get rid of them by giving them a few dollars. The only problem is carrying the wood down from the street. It's too expensive to hire someone to do the job as it costs $5 a bunch, so I ask my sons to help me with that and the more difficult deliveries. My wife delivers to the nearby shops and to my old customers. I have several hundred customers in all, but no agent. The children used to help when they were younger, but now only my youngest daughter comes by.

I do not produce a regular quantity of rulers every month; it depends on the number of orders. Normally I start after 10am and often work until midnight or later. I stop for dinner at 7pm and rest until 9, then start painting. I saw the wood, which comes from Borneo, by machine and my daughter prints the measurements on upstairs. The prices of the rulers vary, but my profit is about 50 per cent. Twelve-inch rulers are sold at a little over $30 a dozen, 18-inch at $40 a dozen, and 36-inch ones at $60. The announcement of the demolition has affected my business. There are fewer orders from foreign buyers because they fear we can't deliver the goods, and some regular customers don't turn up any more.

I live here all the time and seldom leave the City – except to go to a nearby restaurant in the morning. There's nothing that special outside. In the past, all my children had supper here with me, but now the children go to work and my daughter does the cooking for me before she goes home. When my mother was alive, my wife stayed here too, but after my mother died my wife had to go back to our flat to look after the children. I have to stay here at night otherwise the drug addicts would steal everything.

I don't want the Walled City to be demolished because I could work for a few more years and earn some more money; once it's knocked down, I will have to retire.

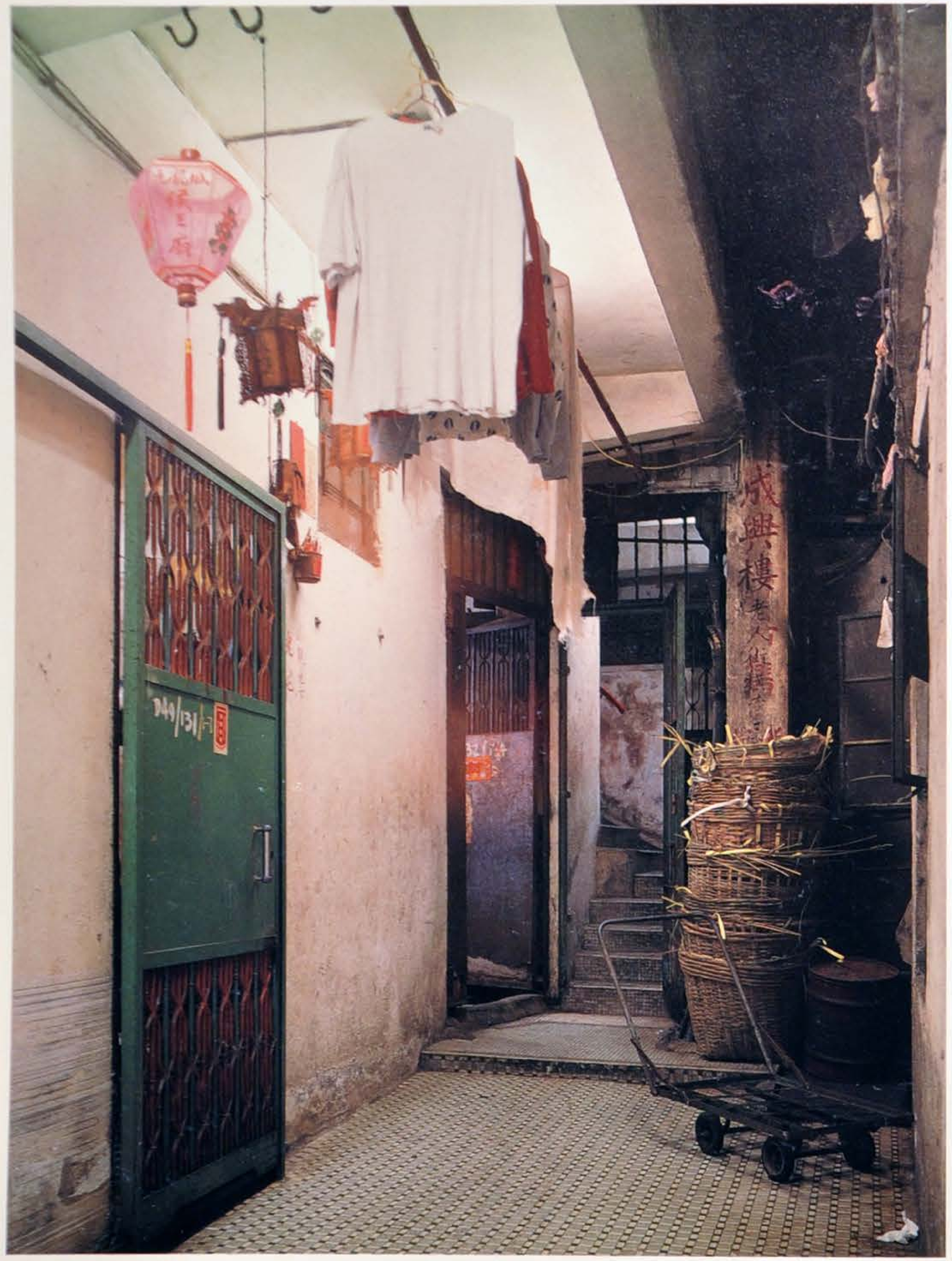
I expect my removal compensation to be about $60,000 as I have only rented these premises. That's not even enough for the decoration costs of a new factory. How can I move? I told the Housing Department to move my factory for me. I'd follow wherever they put me. If they won't do that, then they can demolish my premises with a bulldozer. I won't stop them, but I won't accept the $60,000 either.

They invited me and the family to their offices to discuss the matter. I said that was okay if they bought us a meal. They asked how many were in my family and when I told them there are eight of us, they asked if I could go by myself. I said that was fine if they paid me $200 because I would lose a day's income with all the travelling.

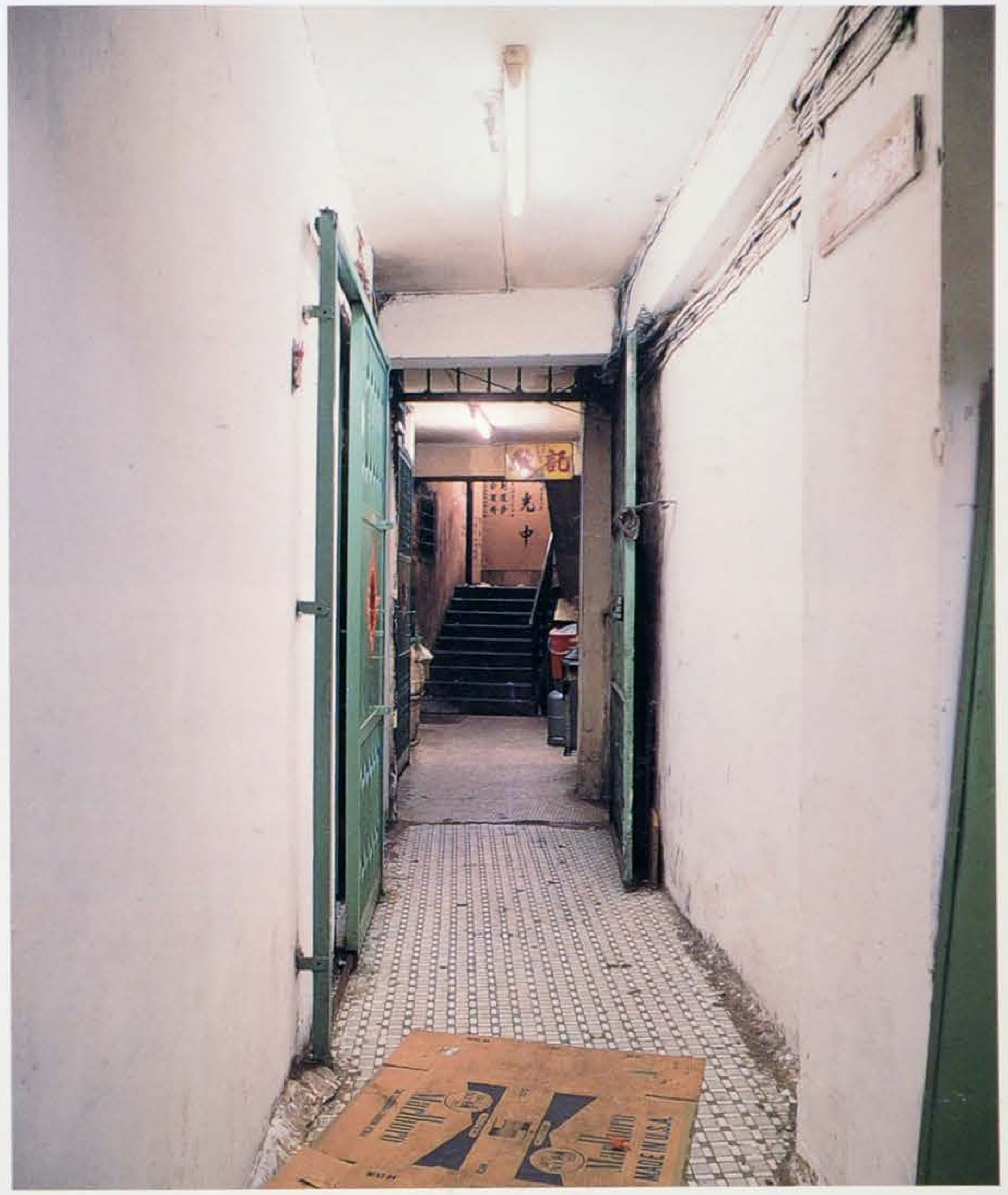
I think my compensation should be the same as for my landlord. I have paid rent for tens of years. If I wanted to continue the business outside, the rent would be at least $6000 per month. If I have to spend that, I should be compensated for the same sum. I could work for five more years, so I should receive $300,000 in compensation – the same as the landlord. My case is different because I have been working here for so long. Anyway, there's nothing I can do and I am preparing to give the factory up. I told the Housing Department officer who came here to get lost. He said that I would have to leave. I replied that it was he who must go or I would use the saw on him. I don't care. The police know about me too.

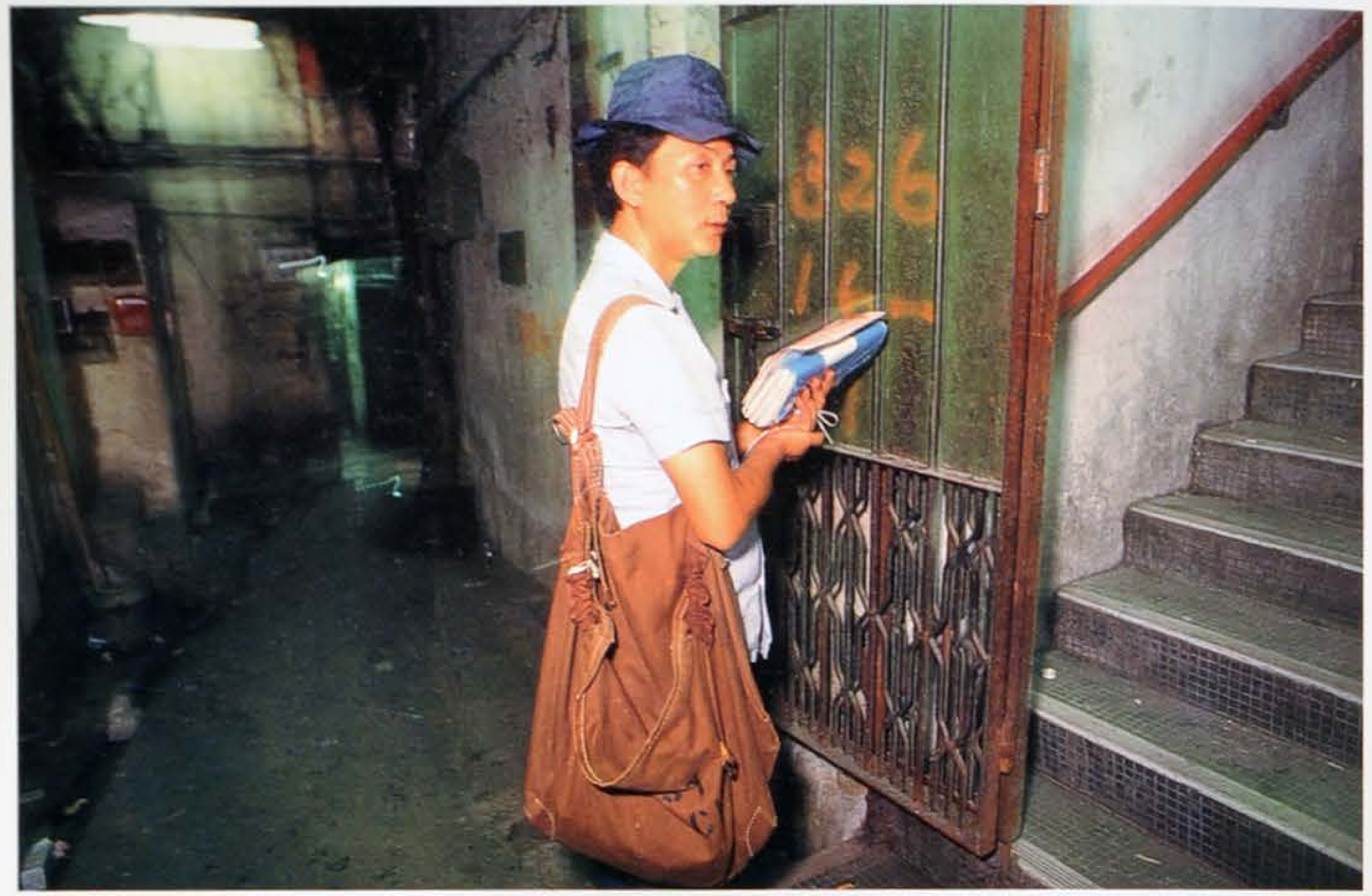
As the Kai Fong didn't help much, a local neighbourhood association was established to help those who are not getting enough compensation. Those people who have a few flats rented out do not object, but people like me object at every opportunity. We hold meetings when topics need to be discussed. We talk about strategy – there are about 200 people including shop operators and residents.

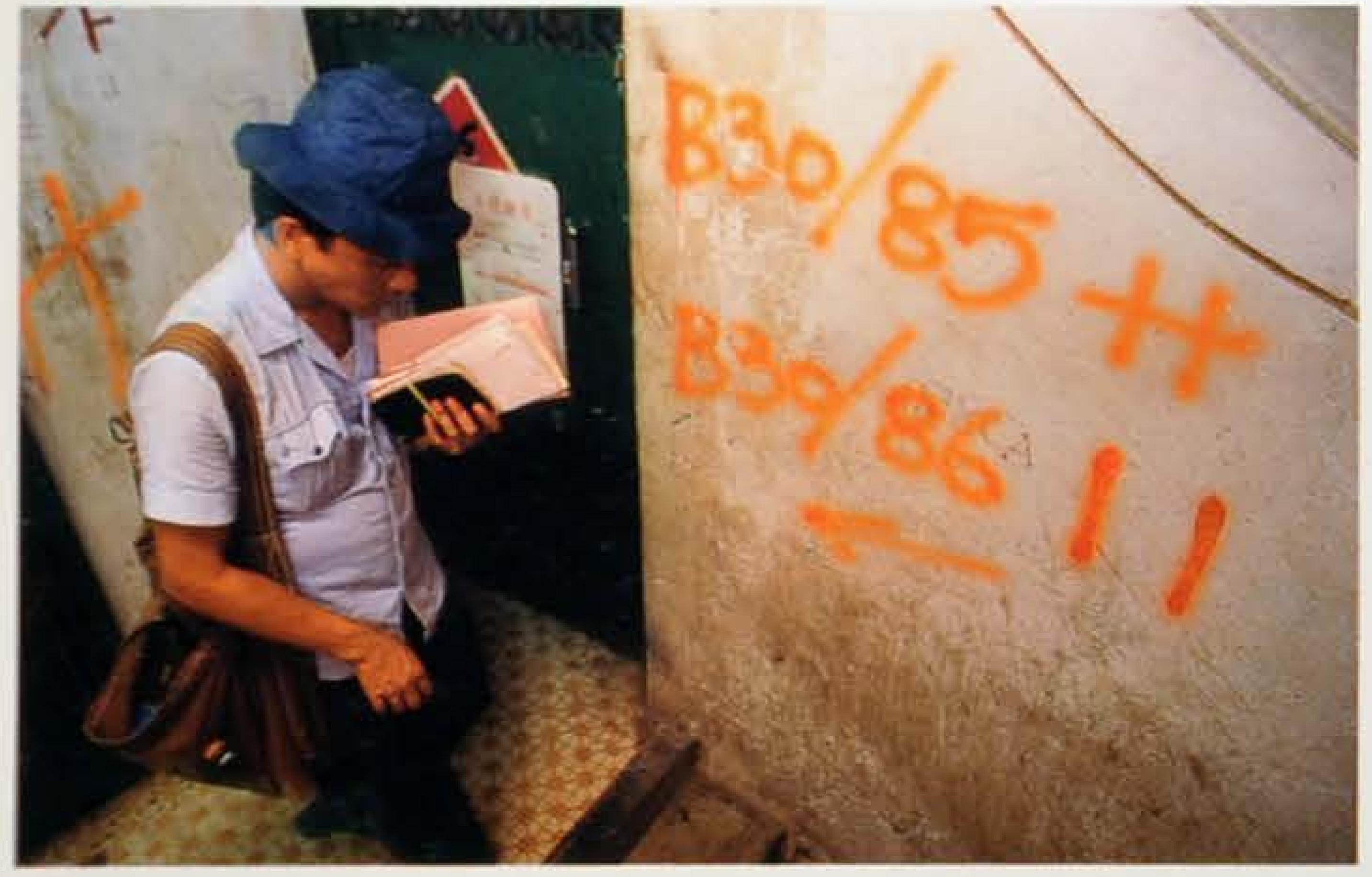
The Government measures the size of a residence before awarding compensation, but some residents have been offered houses at undesirable locations. You do not have to fear the Government. I don't care if they demolish my factory. I'm not frightened. Whenever there is a chance to voice an objection, I will join in.



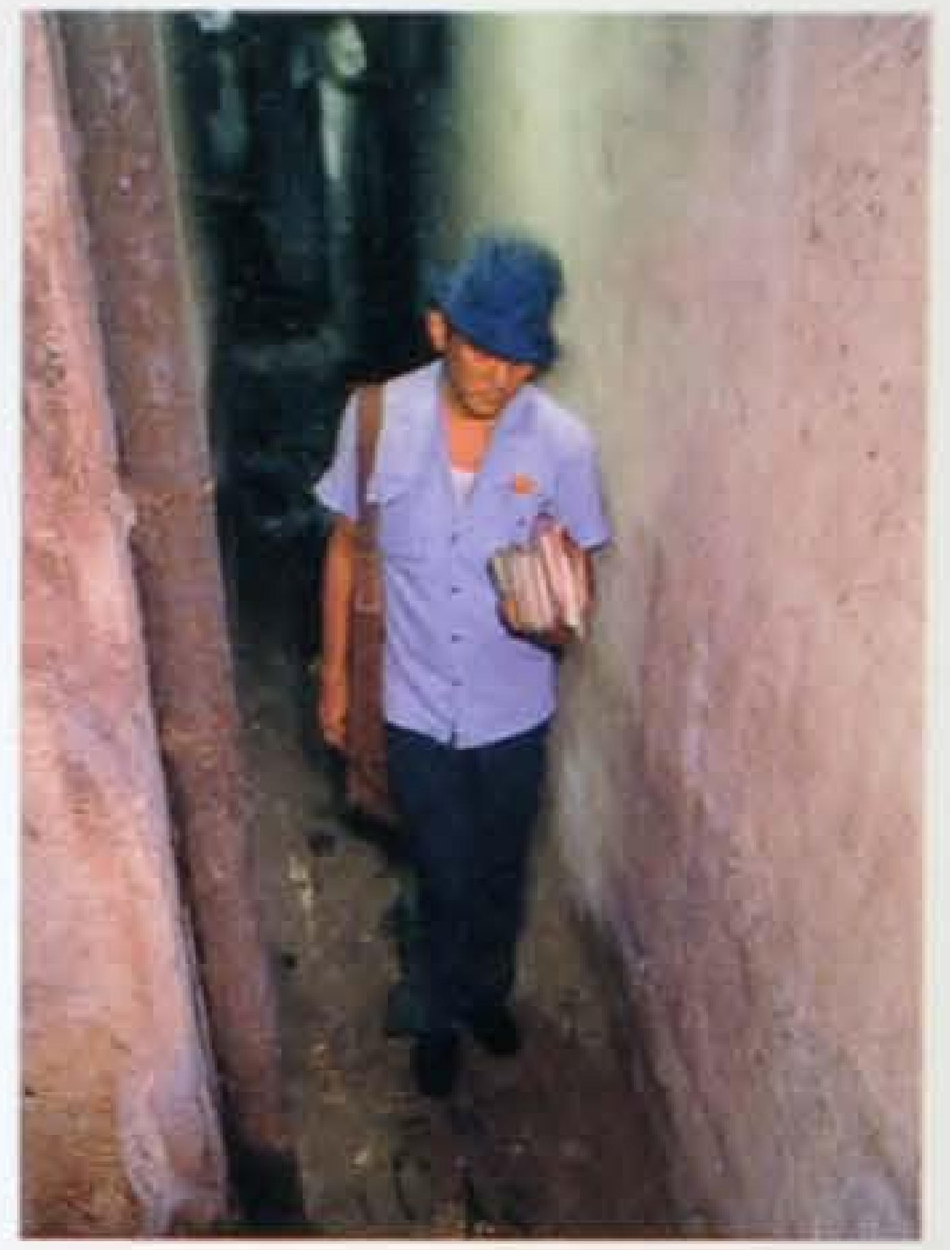
With complete disregard for any recognised concept of zoned planning, factories and family apartments were to be found side by side throughout the City, sharing and spilling out on to communal alleyways. In one corridor, the products of the local plastics factory were being packaged; in another, the family washing had been put out to dry. Following Chiu Chow custom, the lantern over the door of the family apartment [left] *indicates that a baby had recently been born to the family. The third-floor corridor* [right] *was one of the many through-routes traversing the City at its upper levels, and linked stairways in at least four separate buildings. The sign at the end of the passageway informed visitors of the whereabouts of a herbal doctor.*

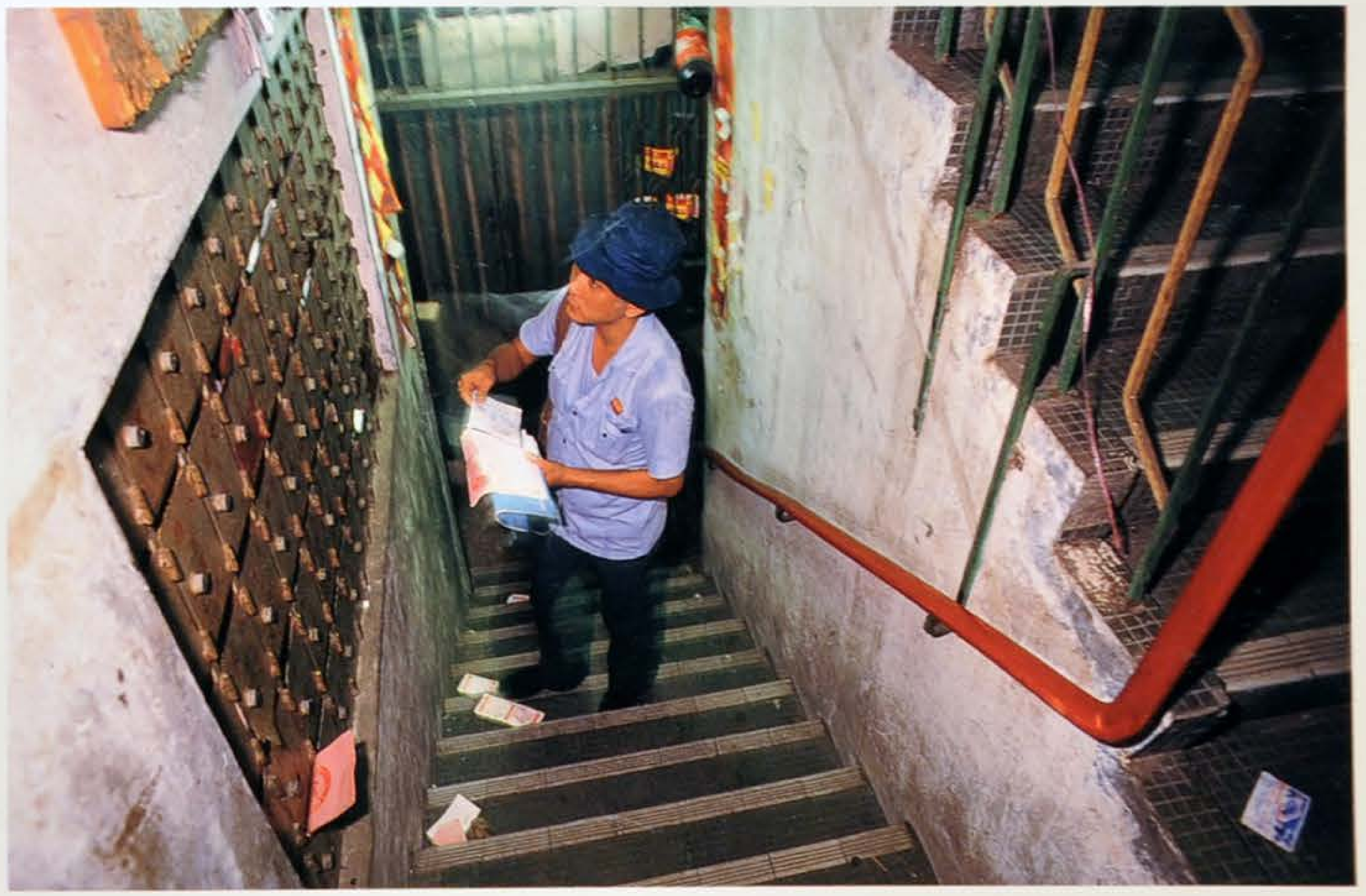






When Mr Lui was assigned to work in the Walled City in 1976, he had little choice but to go: unlike today, the Post Office then made no allowance for one's preferred place of work. For most postmen, the City was considered a round to be avoided at all costs, such was its poor reputation. The working conditions were equally notorious and a hat was standard issue against the constantly dripping alleyways. On any normal route in Hong Kong, moreover, a trainee could familiarise himself with the task in a week or so; in the subterranean maze of the City, the same process might take up to three months. Mr Lui, in fact, was regarded as one of the few authoritative guides to the City's layout, particularly during the height of the 1970s' building boom when street patterns and addresses were constantly in flux. His daily round used to begin at a store on Lo Yan Street, from where he would embark on several separate sorties which took him to simple deliveries at collective mail-banks or up through intricate climbs into the dark interlinking stairwells of older blocks in search of obscure drop-offs. On reaching a skylight, he would cross the roof-tops, hopping from building to building, before disappearing down into the darkness again.





As is the case all over Hong Kong, many of the City's apartments were protected by a small family shrine, which was regularly blessed with fresh offerings of food and incense to bring good fortune and steer away evil spirits. The printed posters, seen in these photographs, had been put up to mark the beginning of the Chinese New Year and to ensure a harmonious and safe household over the coming 12 months. Apartments in the buildings on Tung Tau Tsuen Road were considered the most desirable and were undoubtedly the best in the City. They were relatively spacious, had natural light and were accessed straight off the main road, avoiding the problem of having to enter the City proper. Stair-wells were noticeably cleaner than elsewhere in the City and the residents were more acutely aware of – and vigilant against – the ever-present hazard of fire.

鴻禧高照
和順滿門添百福
平安二字值千金

Chung Lo Ying moved into the City in 1958, and lived in various buildings there before buying an apartment on the fourth floor of 82 Lung Chun Road, overlooking the park. She was regularly joined for dinner by one or two of her 10 children, including Chung Kwai Mao (shown here wearing glasses), and Chung Yuk Yee. Lo Ying is shown below wearing a turquoise blouse.

I have lived in the Walled City for more than 30 years, and in this flat for more than 10. Before coming to the Walled City we lived in Hung Hom, but we were robbed and really scared, so we decided to rent a place here. We agreed with a Chiu Chow family, whose wooden hut had burnt down, to build a new house on their land. We would pay for the construction and get the first floor and they would keep the ground floor. That place soon became too small, so we rented another first floor apartment instead. After 10 years or so we decided to buy that place, and then two or three years later a construction company talked us into an exchange arrangement.

The company offered us a first-floor flat in the new building, if they could develop our existing place. The developer asked people with whom I was friendly to negotiate on his behalf and we struck a deal. The old four-storey building was to be redeveloped as a 13-storey unit and the building next door as 14 storeys. A unit like the one we are in now cost around $120,000, sometimes a bit more; the ones in the middle were only worth $80,000. People started buying the flats before they were completed because they liked them. I signed an agreement with the developer at a tea house with a witness. There was no lawyer. There was no real guarantee from the legal point of view, but I was a local and people knew me, and the developer was well known too.

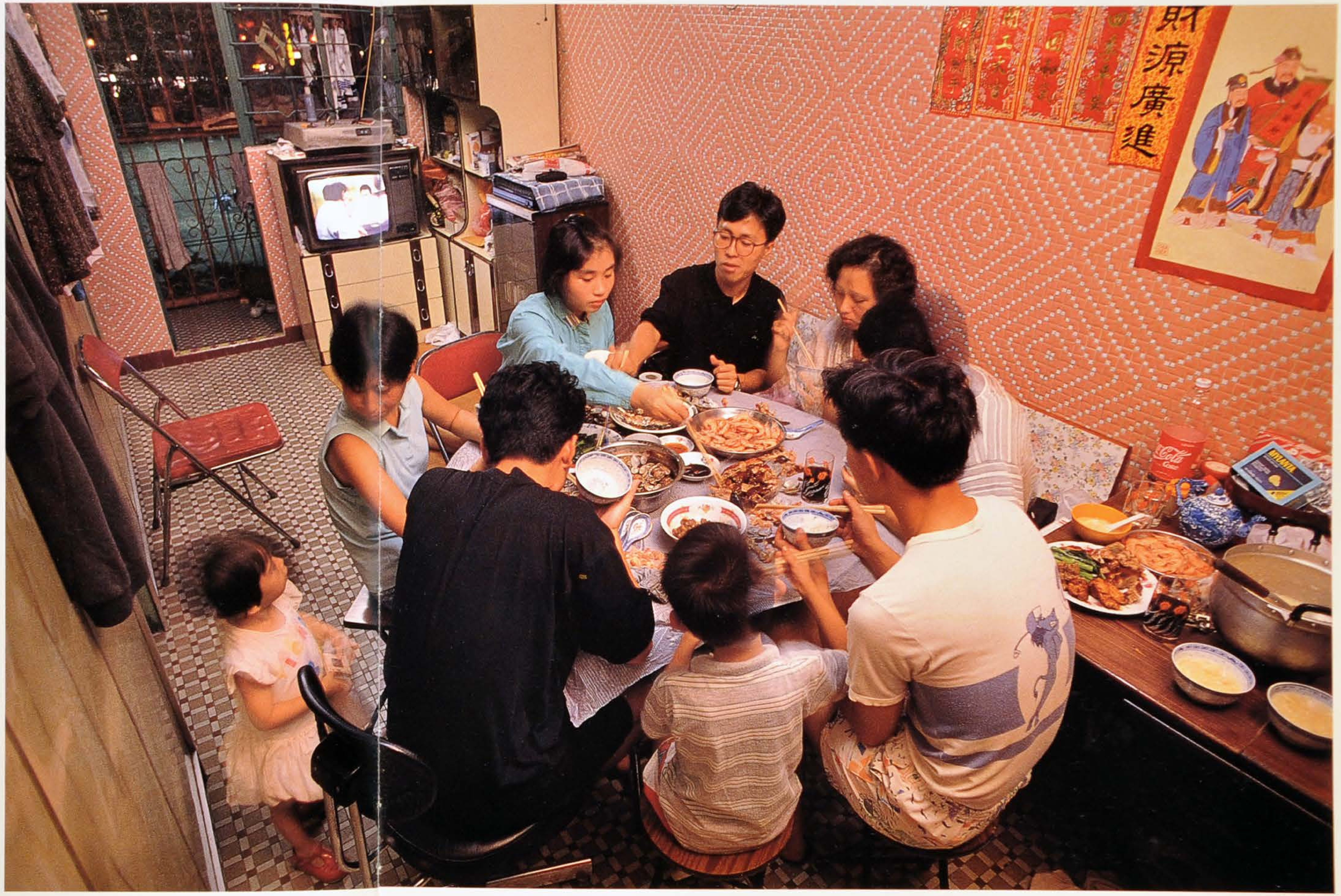
I was also allowed to rent a fourth-floor flat at half price, or $80 a month. Later it went up to more than $100, but by then I could afford to buy it; it cost me about $40,000. I rented one of the rooms with a window out for a while – for $35 a month, the top rent – but when more children came along I decided to take it back.

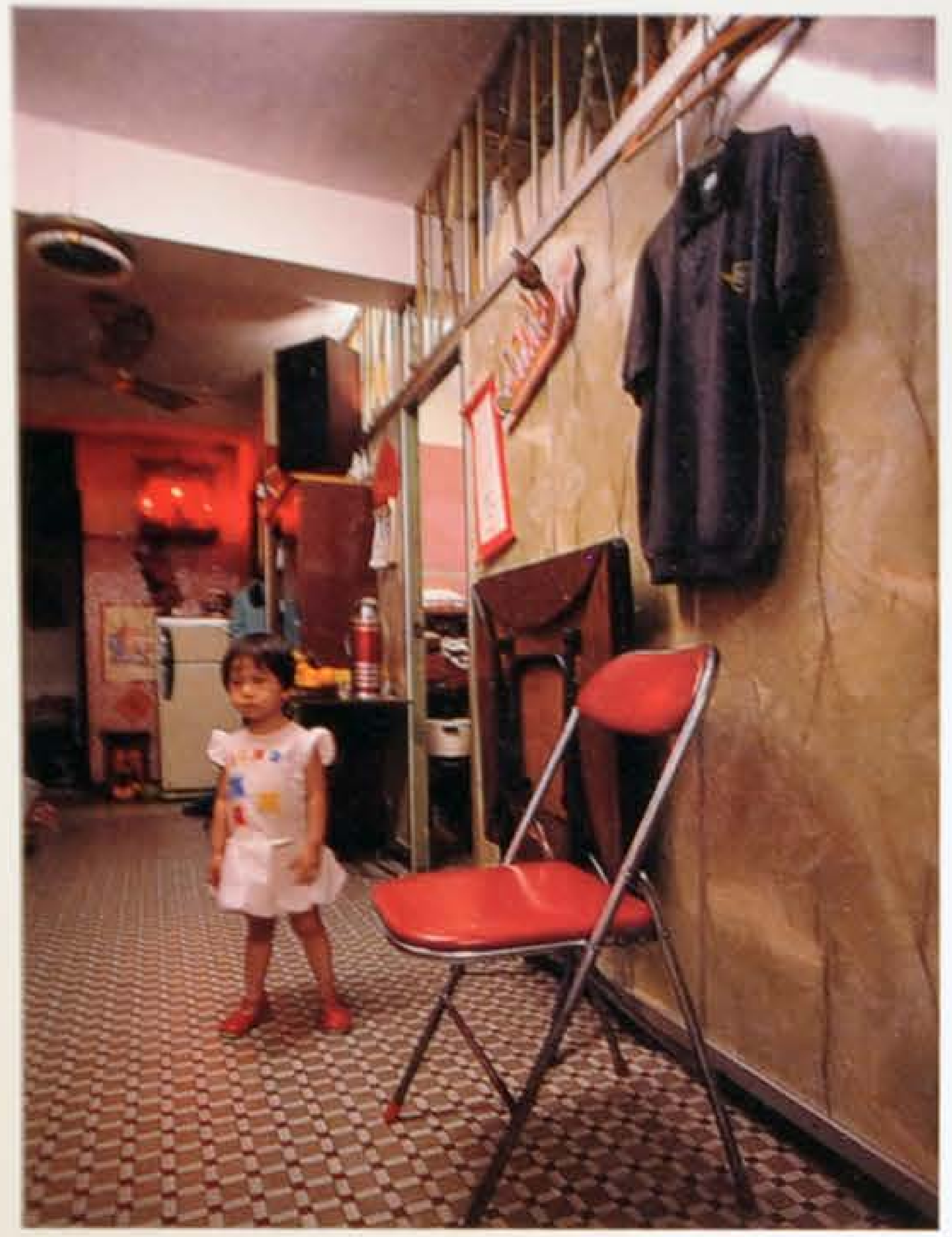
I had heard of the Walled City before moving in, but I was not particularly worried. You got used to it. Getting water was troublesome, and the drug addicts used to quarrel and get into fights. I told my children just to ignore them or stay at home. Usually we were not bothered, although my second daughter was robbed once, probably by an outsider. I have never really explored the place; I just use the main streets. I hardly know the names of the alleys.

The street where we are is relatively wide and quite clean. It is quite good living here. I know the people and we rarely lock the door. We don't have to pay rates. We pay for the water – it comes from a well through ordinary taps. Sometimes, if I'm worried that it's not clean, I get water to make the tea from the stand-pipes outside.

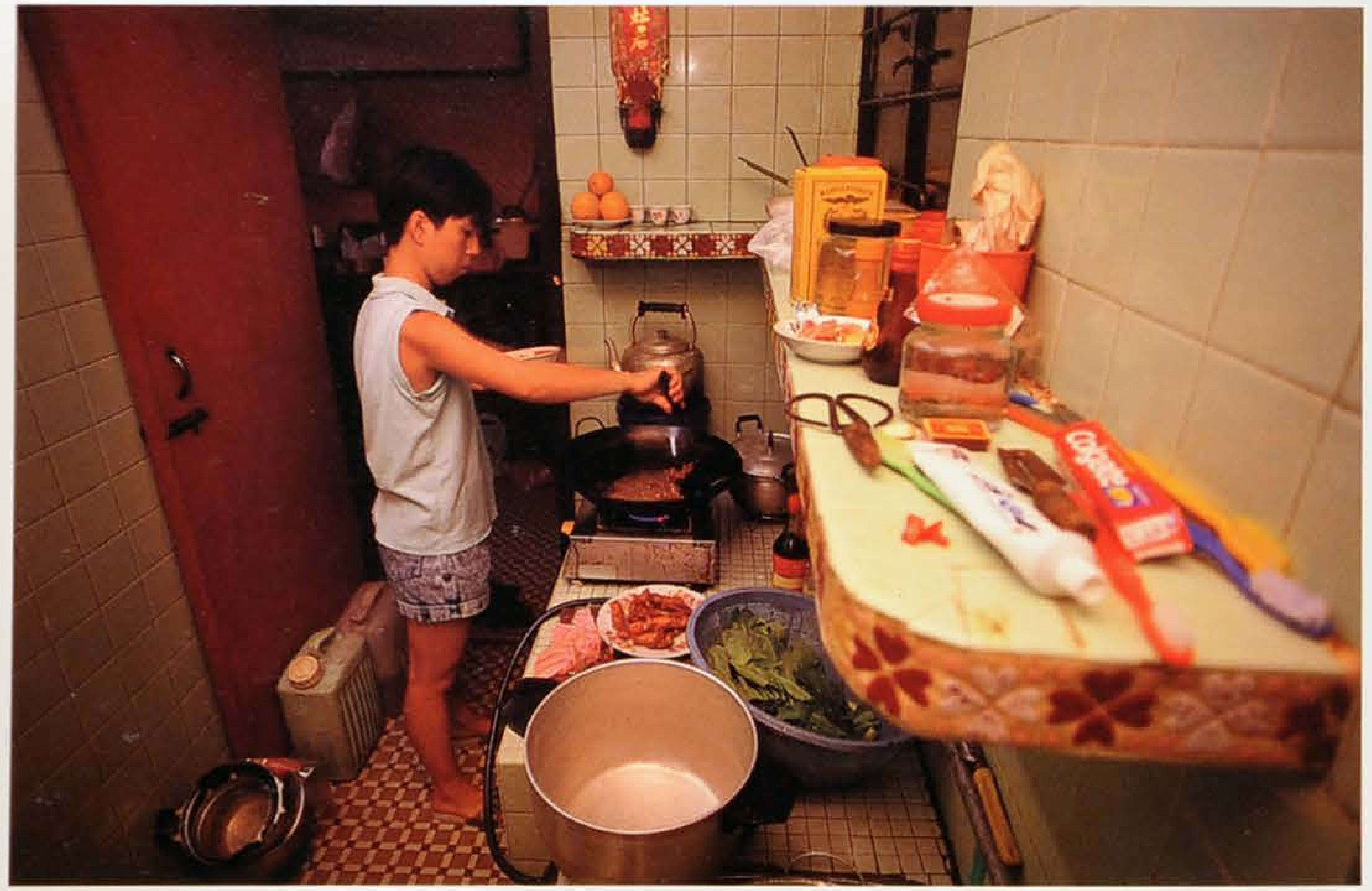
I have 10 children, six of whom have been born since we moved into the City. They have all been good; they don't like to get into trouble. I would worry occasionally when there were big fights and quarrels in other apartments, because I'd heard of people being killed. I would just tell my kids to come home and we locked the doors. When they were out late at night, I might occasionally go out to fetch them and accompany them home.

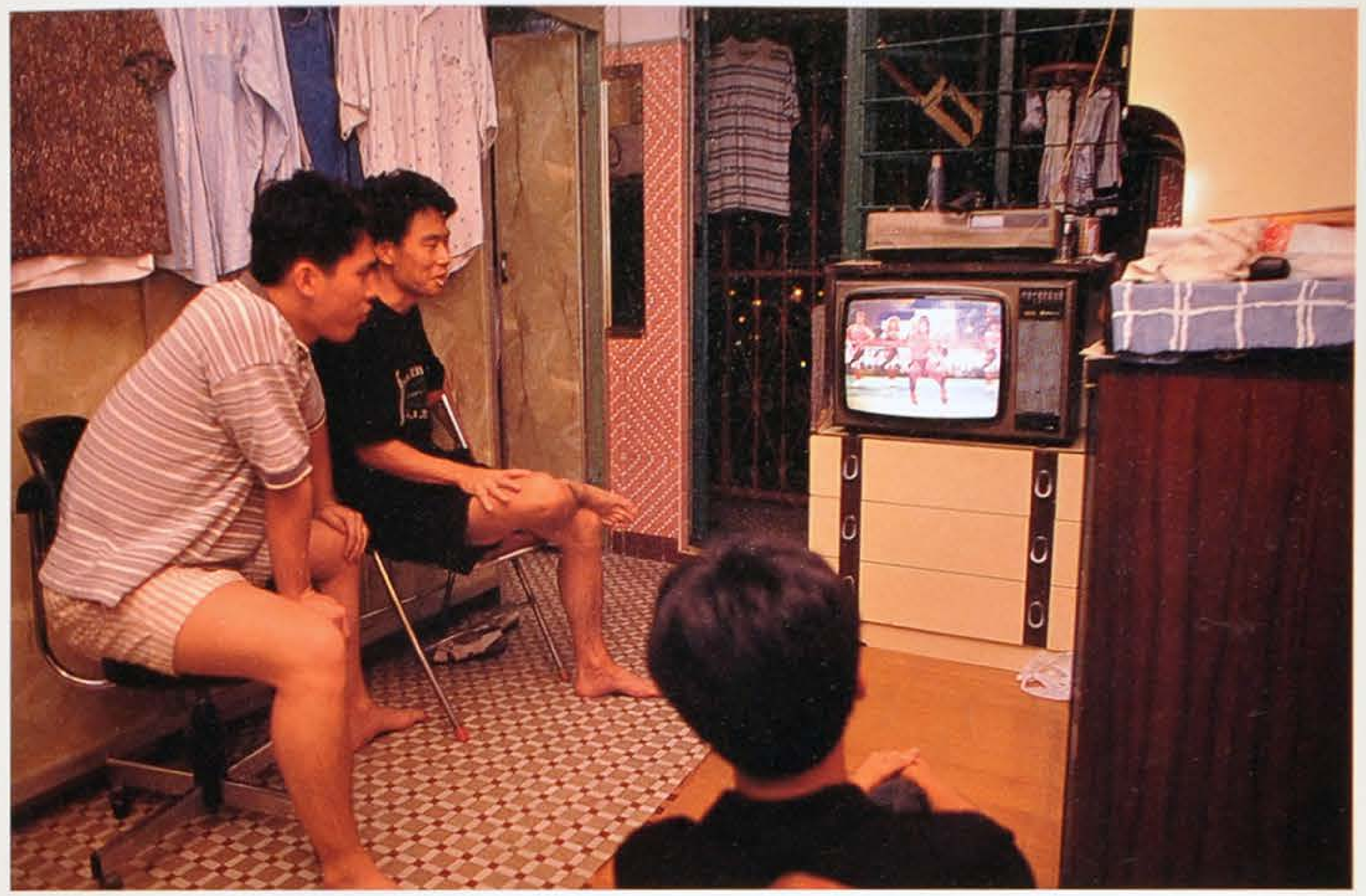
I'd rather they didn't demolish the Walled City, but we'll have to move. People outside think that we have struck it rich, but it's not really so. They take away your house and give you another one. We'll have to buy the new furniture though.



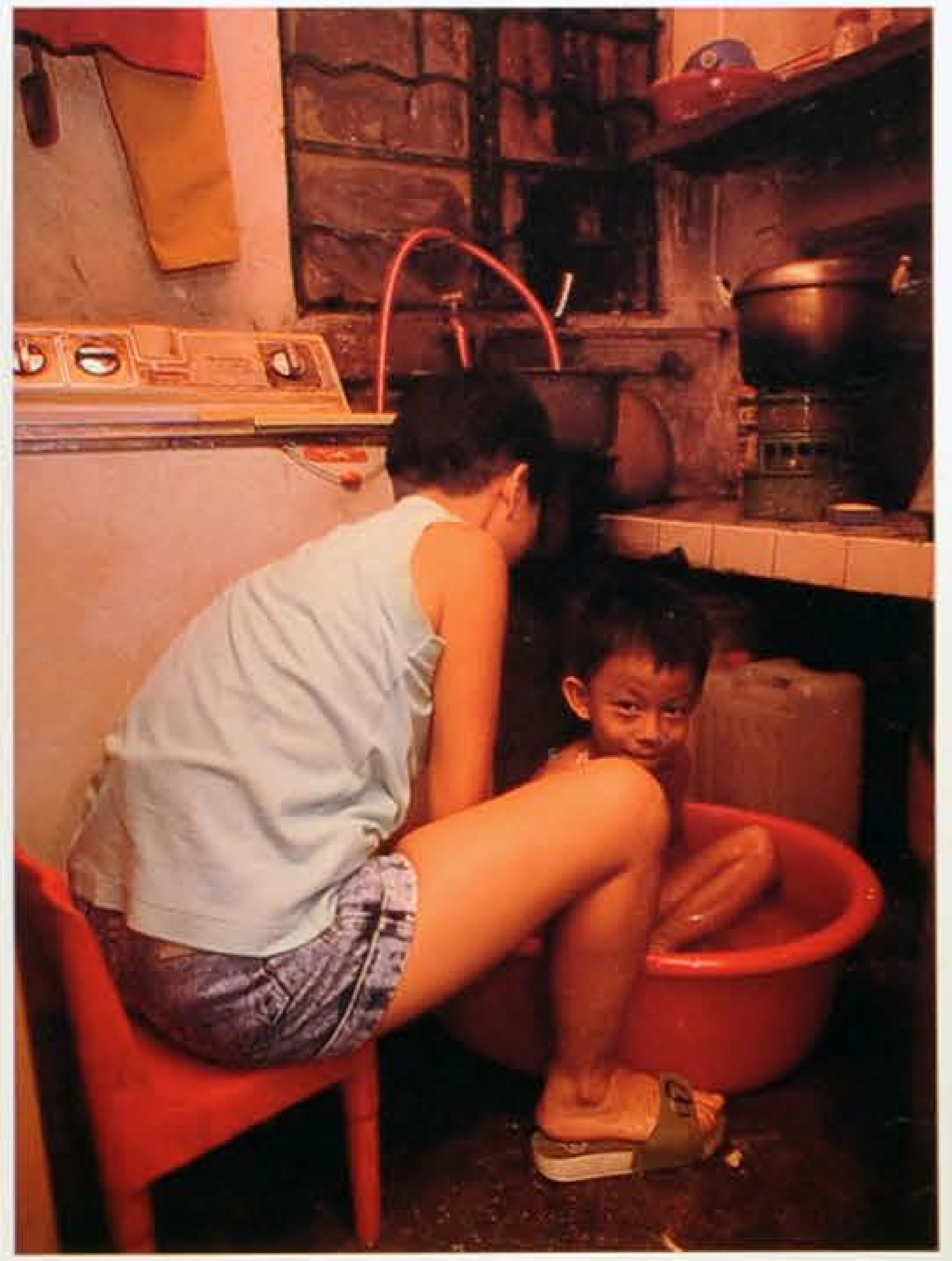


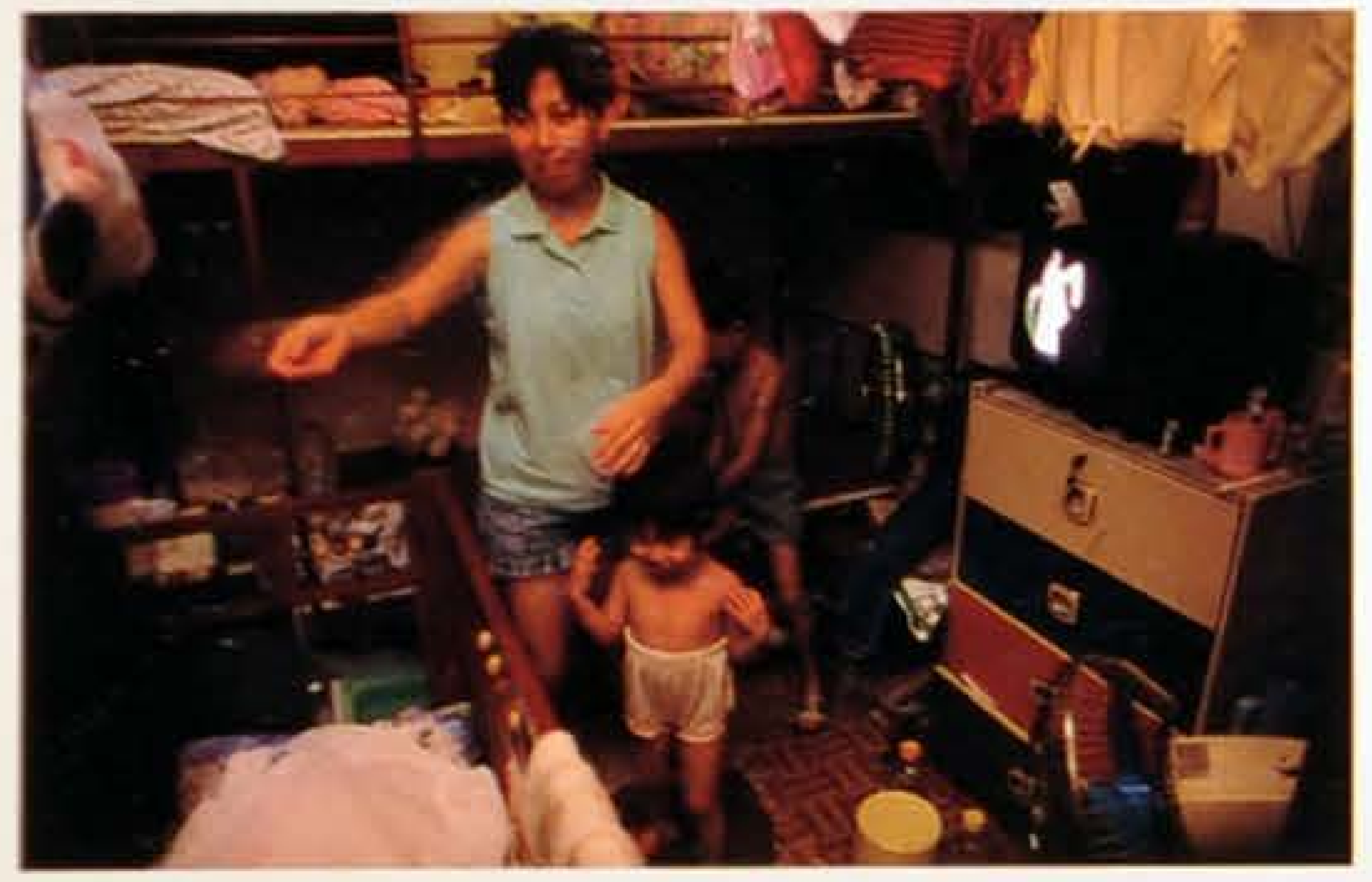
Positioned on the southern perimeter of the City, Chung Lo Ying's small but tidy apartment opened on to fresh air and views of the park, and was certainly an attractive residence even by the standards of similar low-income housing elsewhere in Hong Kong.



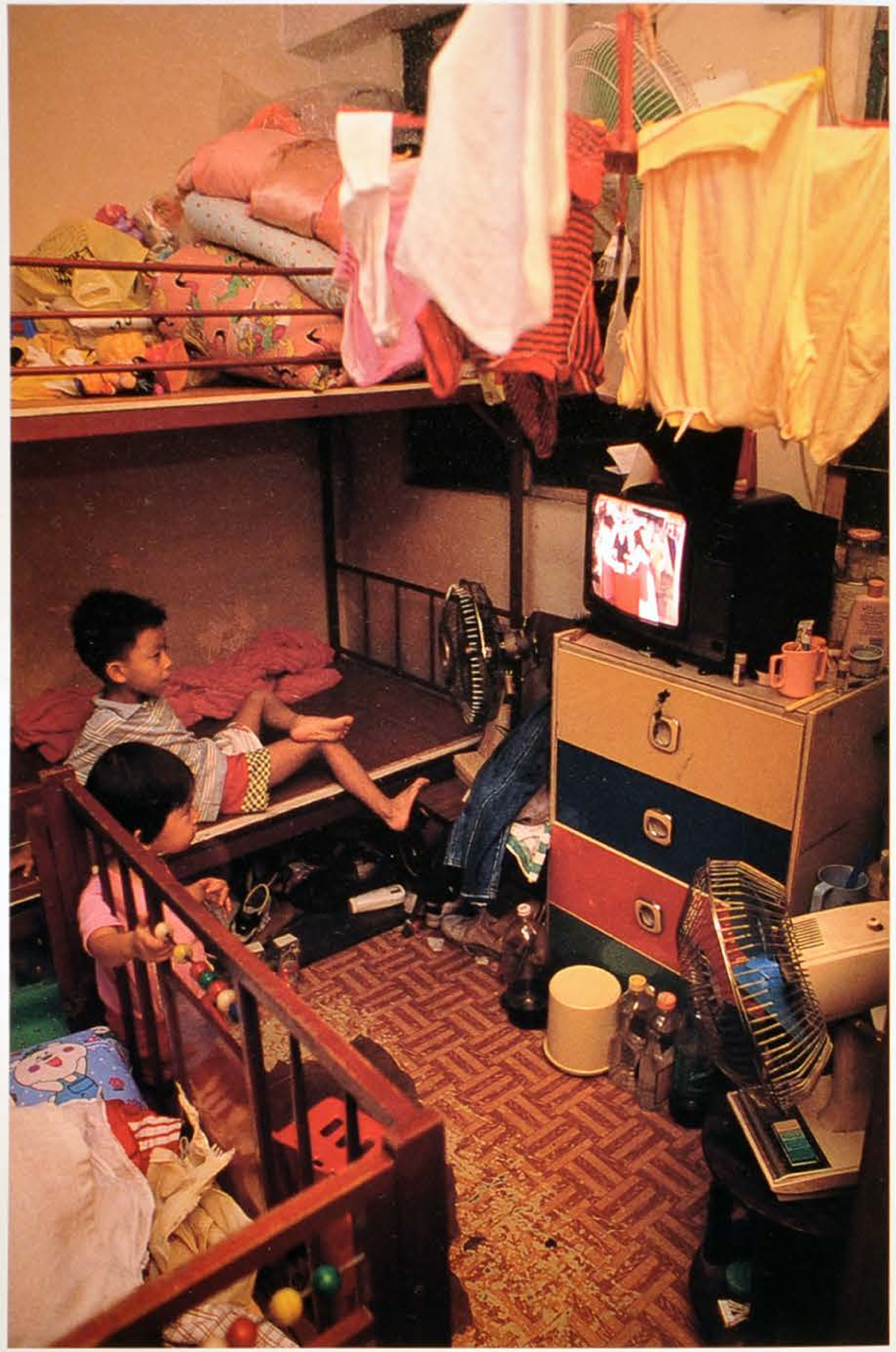


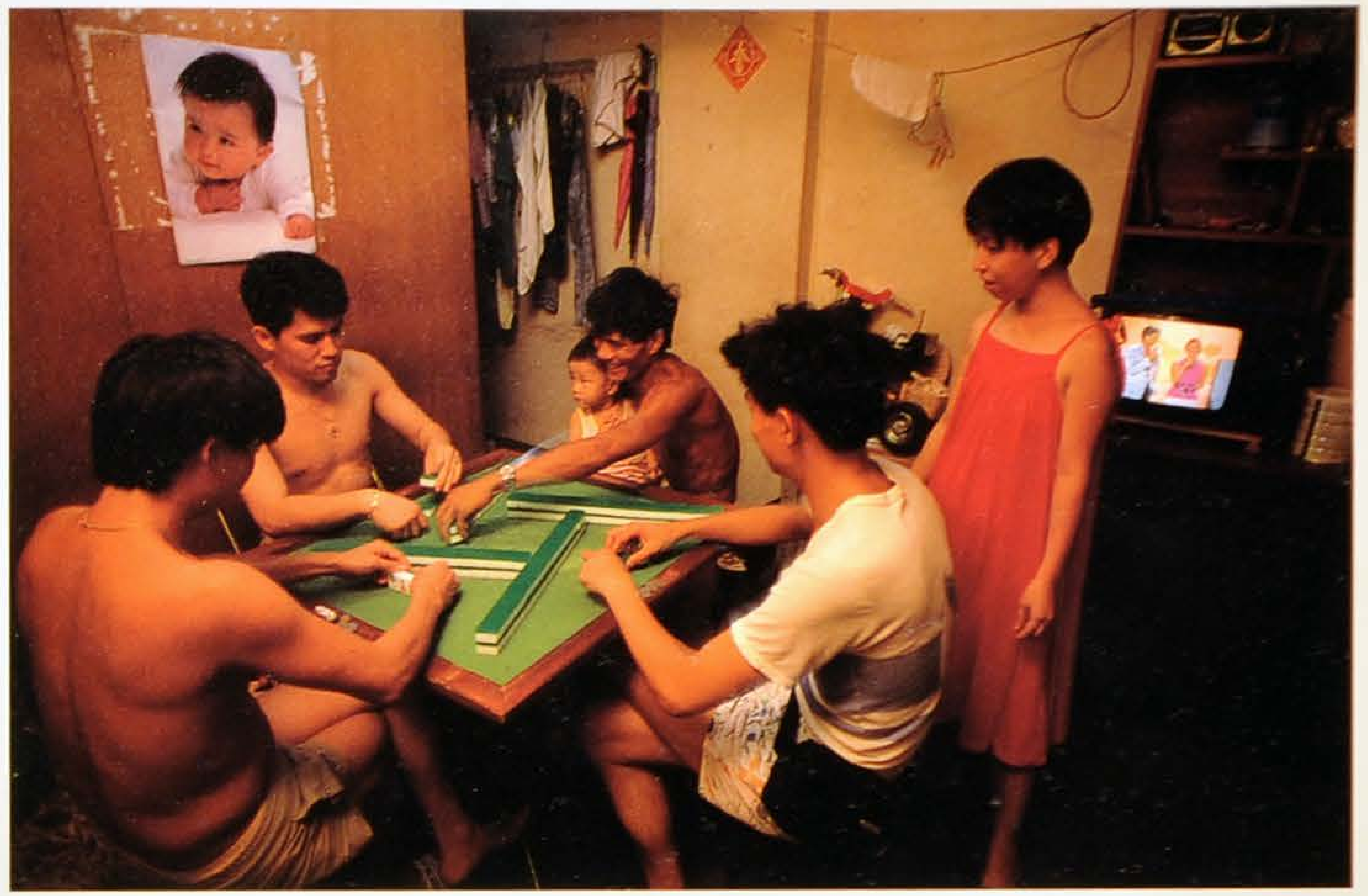
Typically, the ubiquitous television was both the focus and the essential background to the evening's activities, with the men taking a more than momentary interest in a foreign aerobics show. Like many Hong Kong women, Lo Ying's daughter, Chung Yuk Yee, kept the household running, first with the cooking and then, later, in her own apartment, bathing her son and daughter in the murky water piped from ground-wells beneath the City.





Chung Yuk Yee gets her two children ready for bed in the small bedroom they share with their parents. Fans are the only relief against the summer heat.





In contrast to her mother's apartment, Chung Yuk Yee's windowless flat was in the bowels of the City. Only 23 square metres in area, it was divided into two rooms by a thin wooden partition. On one side was the bedroom where she, her husband and two children slept; on the other was a living room where family and friends gathered occasionally to play mahjong. Overleaf: Apartments on Tung Tau Tsuen Road at night.

Chung Lo Ying's daughter, Chung Yuk Yee, lived in the Walled City from her birth, in 1961, until moving out as part of the clearance in 1991. Married, she lived with her husband, son and daughter in an apartment in the same building as her mother.

The Walled City was a very different place when I was young. There were many little houses and some working wells, too, that you passed when walking along the bigger alleys. I didn't like the smaller alleys and tried to avoid those. There used to be quite a few temples as well. I remember going to a big one with my mother once, where there was a lot of smoke and elderly people, stone pillars and stone lions.

The City was a lot cleaner then and I used to move around without fear, even though there were often people taking heroin at the bottom of the staircases. Most of the people living here were a lot simpler then. Rape was little heard of. Of course, there were opium dens, mahjong houses and gambling dens, but there was no messing around. Sometimes, coming down the staircases, we would meet people exposing themselves, but we only had to scream and the neighbours would come out to help, wielding sticks and the like. The majority of the people were from Chiu Chow, and people of the same origin helped one another.

The only real problem was that there were no real drains, so we had to go to the public lavatories at Tung Tau village every morning to get rid of our waste. Also, the staircases in the old buildings were straight and very steep, and I used to be scared of falling down.

Nowadays, though, the problems are much worse. The water supply has definitely got worse; it is slow and there are black grains in the water that stain the clothes when they are washed. It is also much darker in the apartment now, and I can never tell if it is raining. I have to look at the clock to work out what time it is. I worry about the electric wiring in the alleys too — there have been fires in the City before and the poor wiring is always blamed.

The main problem, though, is just how much dirtier the whole place is. There are rats all over the place. Once, I actually saw a rat run over my baby daughter's bed. On another occasion, I was sleeping with her but woke up because my hair was being pulled. I touched my head and felt a rat running away. When I turned on the light, I discovered a piece of bone on the pillow, right next to my head.

We were surprised at the decision to demolish the Walled City. It all happened so suddenly. Officials came and asked how long we had lived here, took some photographs, checked our identities and that was it. Demolition means that we are going to have to move to low-cost Government housing estates. We shall have a cleaner environment, but it is going to be more expensive. It will be much better for the children of course, but it will be difficult to move; for all its problems, we have got used to the Walled City.

織造廠
西醫陳詠蘭
陳偉醫務所
國際診所
國際診所

Kowloon Walled City: Our Place

by Leung Ping Kwan

Leung Ping Kwan grew up in Hong Kong and began his writing career in the early '70s. He has worked for various newspapers and journals, and has published his own magazines with friends. He has written two novels, three volumes of short stories, six collections of essays and four books of poetry, including City at the End of Time*, a recent selection of poems translated into English with the collaboration of the American poet Gordon Osing. He studied comparative literature at the University of California and now teaches at the University of Hong Kong.*

A huge wrecker's ball shatters the walls: Kowloon Walled City is finally coming down. It is an event which gives rise to complex feelings.

A friend of mine spent her childhood in the Walled City. She once said: *"Outsiders always feel that the Walled City is mysterious and frightening but, for us, it's the place where we grew up. When I was a child I played in its streets, and I have a lot of happy memories of the City. There was nothing scary about it".*

She may feel that way, but outsiders most certainly do not. When she gave her address as the Walled City in elementary school, she attracted a lot of strange looks from her teachers and classmates. Maybe she was just being sensitive, but she had the feeling they didn't like her very much. Before long she switched schools. At the new school, she gave a different address. When she first started dating, she told her boyfriend to park in front of a building some way from the Walled City, pretending that was where she lived. She made sure he was gone before she came out again and ran the long way home.

"It took me a long time to be able to tell people I grew up in the Walled City", she says. By then, she had been married and divorced, and had been living outside the Walled City for years. In 1987, after the Hong Kong Government announced plans to tear it down, some of us wanted to go in and have a look round. She offered to be our guide, even though she had not been back for a long time.

"The boys used to wash themselves at the taps beside the road and play ball in the street. They were so naughty; they shot sparrows for fun with their catapults." Though lost in memories of her childhood, she didn't fail to point out how things had changed. *"There used to be two parts to the Walled City; on one side were the tall buildings of Tung Tau Tsuen, on the other the squat wooden huts. My house would have been over there."*

This was her story. She had no personal experience of anything earlier than that, but the old people told us about it. They had been through several earlier 'demolitions': in 1936 they put up resistance and the plan was abandoned; in 1948 a demolition team arrived, but quickly left after the residents started throwing stones.

All this happened before we were born. While we were growing up, we didn't have any history books describing these events. And now a doddering old man was telling us about scenes from the past, with a hint of indignation in his voice. *"Someone went up to Guangzhou to seek support. Guangzhou students demonstrated and pulled down the flag at the British Consulate there, demanding that all demolition cease."*

And so the Walled City was saved, but inside something was quietly changing. By the time of our visit in 1987, when the Hong Kong Government had once again announced that the City was to be torn down, there was no further opposition from the Chinese side. Indeed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its *"complete understanding"*. With 1997 looming nearer, this must have been another of the secret agreements between the two sides in the discussions, Britain and China.

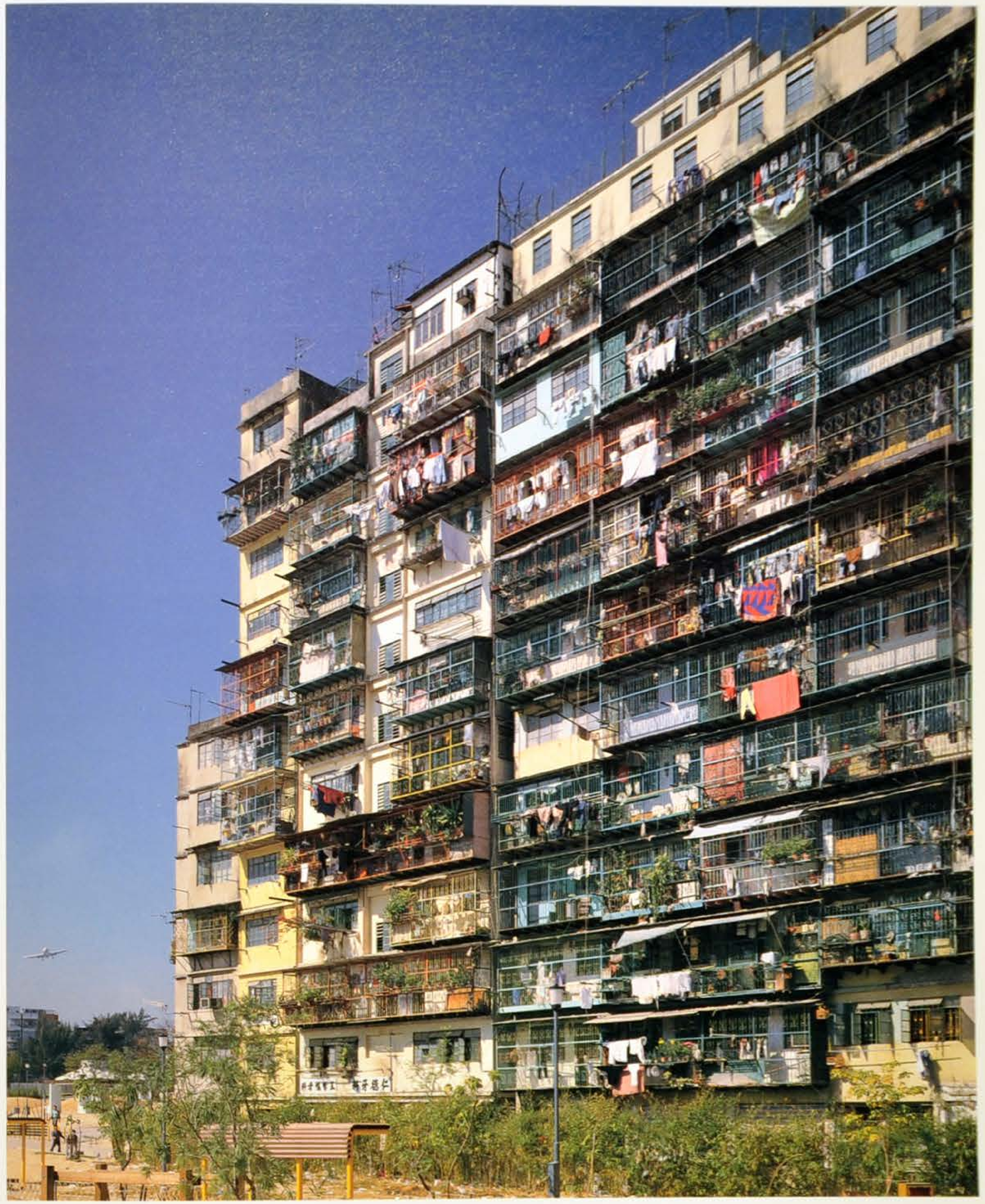
What concerned most ordinary folk was the simple matter of survival. The old man asked: *"Who is there to speak up for us? This time they* [meaning China] *said we should find some legal avenues to fight it ourselves. We're like animals in a cage".*

Is the compensation adequate to rent a similar space outside and continue making a living? More importantly, should a place which is not ideal be preserved or should the status quo be changed? Most people who lived there saw the place as home. They wanted to preserve it, and fought the changes being visited upon them as hard as they could.

What kind of place are we talking about? The old cannons abandoned in one of the alleys are an indication. In the last century there was a pier for merchant ships near here, guarded by a small stone fort. Later, the pier was demolished and the walls of the fort were torn down to be used in the construction of the airport. The boundaries represented by the wall had disappeared, the line of the old sea-wall was no more, and the boundary between old and new wasn't all that clear – what kind of a place was this?

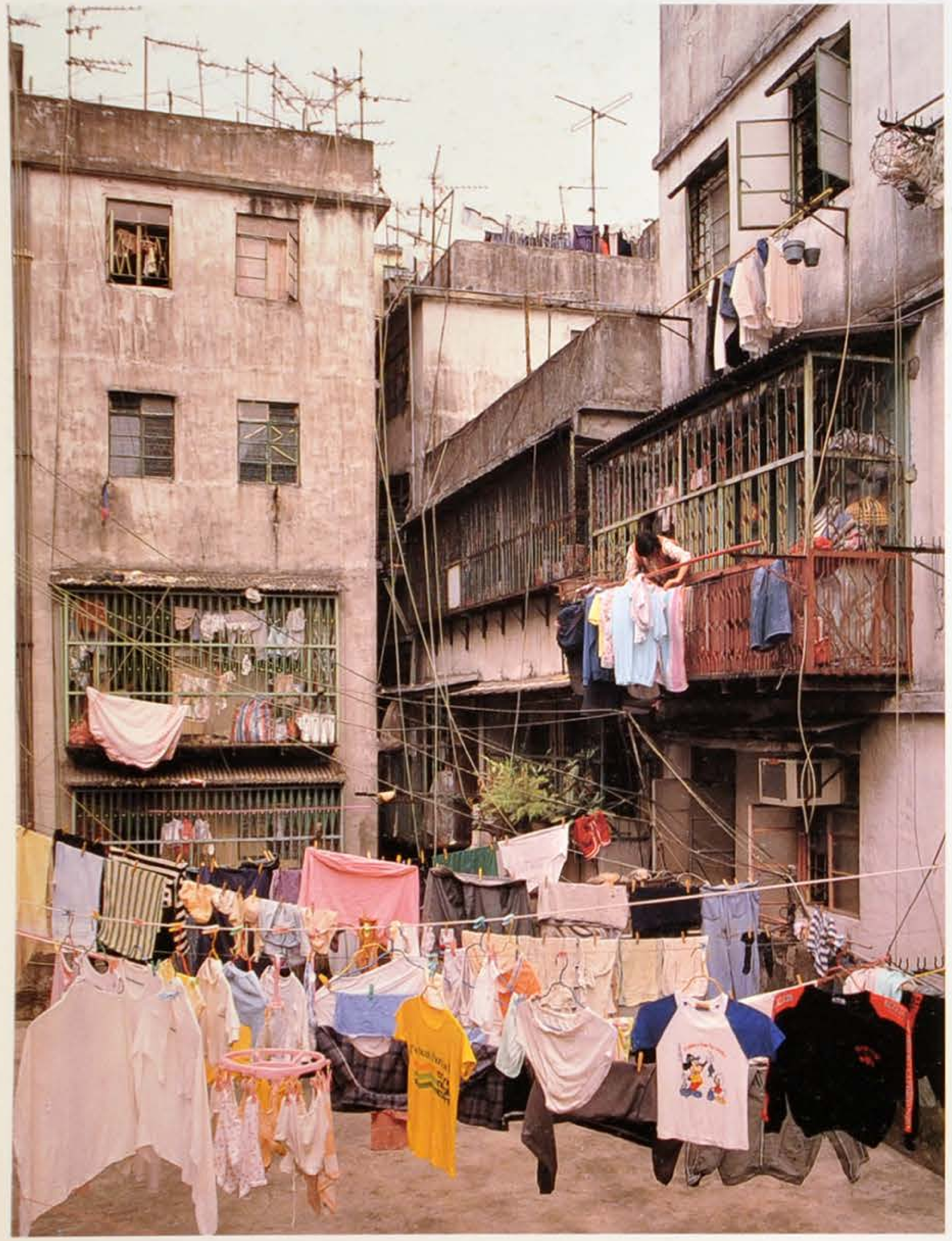
Well, Old People's Street led to the old people's home, and there really was a well on Great Well Street; just about everything lived up to its name. It couldn't have been clearer. But then how could you explain Bright Street? For many years, these brightly lit shops had been the primary purveyors of white powder [heroin]. Prostitution, gambling and drugs; all had their niche here. Not far away, around a few corners, was the place where my friend played as a child – a happy and free place. Here, prostitutes installed themselves on one side of the street, while a priest preached and handed out powdered milk to the poor on the other; social workers gave guidance, while drug addicts squatted under the stairs getting high; what were children's games centres by day became strip show venues by night. It was a very complex place, difficult to generalise about, a place that seemed frightening but where most people continued to lead normal lives. A place just like the rest of Hong Kong.

Never mind that people said it was an area without law, under no jurisdiction. In fact, in recent years, a lot of the crooked businesses had been curtailed. Most people were engaged in making an honest living. The fishball and pig's blood businesses had always been good there. It seems such dirty work, but the resultant products were regarded as the tastiest of snacks in all the highways and byways of Hong



The south-west corner of the City. With its landing gear lowered, the aeroplane in the distance is making its final approach to Kai Tak Airport, less than 800 metres away.

The roofs of the City's older buildings often served as private courtyards for the surrounding apartments. Despite — or perhaps because of — the City's hardships, there was a real sense of community among local residents.



Kong. There was an exceptional number of dentists to be found there too; those from mainland China who lacked official licences could hang out their signs with impunity in the City. This shadowy, obscure zone permitted that sort of 'life in the cracks'. Of course, the people who lived in those cracks were constantly worried that it all might suddenly come to an end.

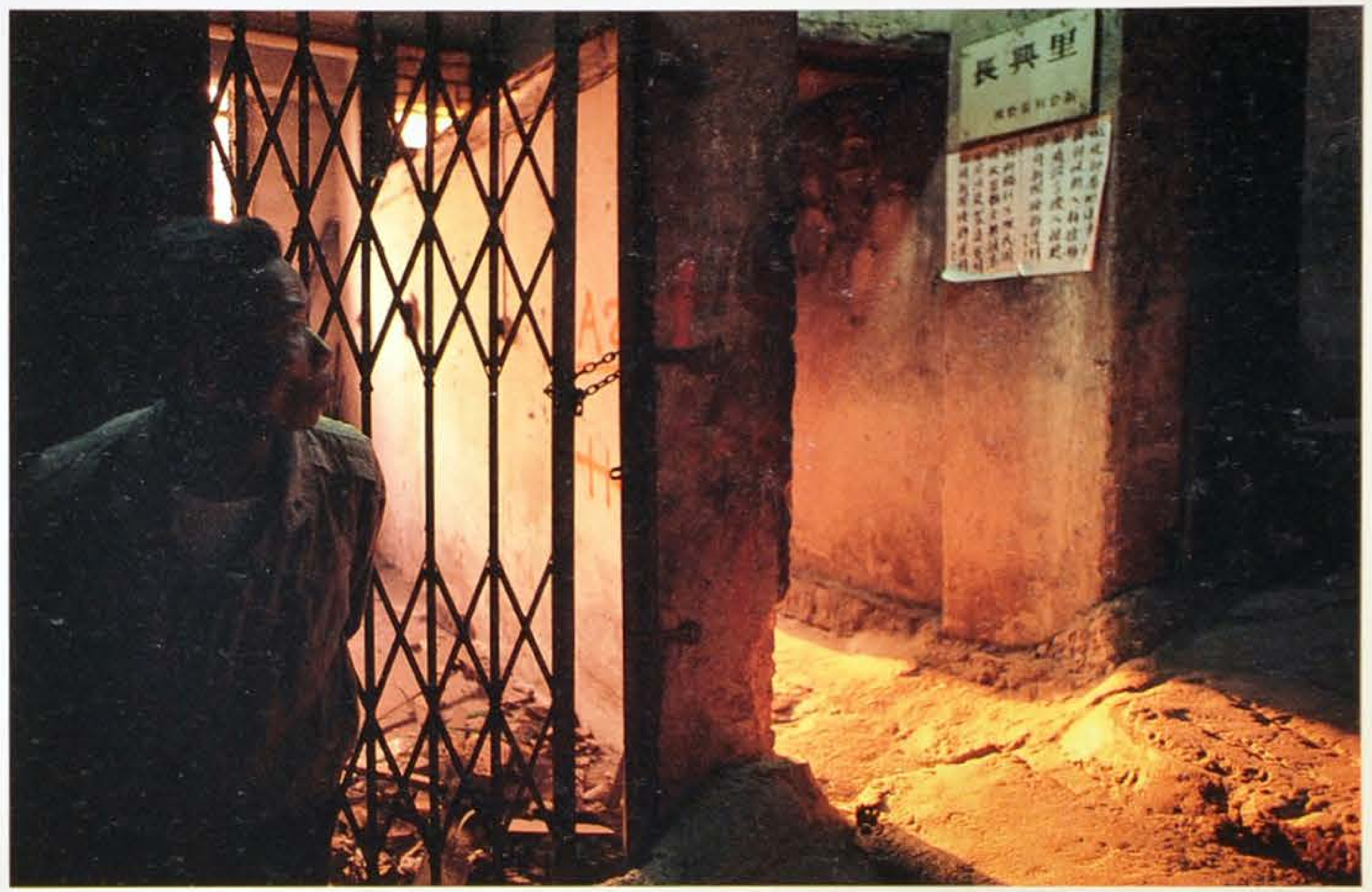
We climbed up to the roof during our visit, and my friend led us from one high-rise building to another by an unmarked path. We ducked under this and clambered over that. In a place where normal rules were suspended, it seemed a matter of course to take irregular short-cuts. We walked above people's heads, feeling as if we were running over an uninhabited barren mountain. The busybodies among us felt as if they had discovered a secret cavern from which to spy on the layers of rooms below — until we looked up into a broken mirror on a wall, reflecting our own images, and were suddenly shocked to discover that we were part of this place ourselves!

I never went back to the Walled City after that visit. My friend has left Hong Kong and says she's not coming back. When I travel abroad, I frequently meet up with friendly strangers, people with a certain air about them, who seem to have come from far away. It's only when they begin to speak that I realise they're from Hong Kong — this mixed-up, beautiful-ugly place. They have successfully managed to disguise their origins. Time and again this has set me thinking, remembering my friend from the Walled City.

When abroad, I've tried to explain to the people I've met that Hong Kong is nothing like as frightening a place as they think; and yet when I return I start criticising everything again, giving offence, consciously or not, to my many friends. When I'm abroad, I say Hong Kong is by no means without culture; but when I get back I can't keep myself from asking why we're always following outside standards, why we can't set standards of our own, establish our own cultural 'space'. I go on and on, and always end up isolating myself. Sometimes, I feel like a stranger in my own home.

For several years now, many of the disputes raised over the removal and demolition of the Walled City have remained unsettled and the opposition has not altogether died down. I often think of the streets I walked through and the people I saw there. How will these people adjust to the changes, how will they take to life in the outside world? Will they have adequate resources and space to live? But then, on the other hand, I think of the narrow dank passageways, the rats running through the cracks in the concrete and the useless ancient cannons that seem to have been discarded by the side of the street. I don't want simply to preserve the place out of nostalgia or curiosity.

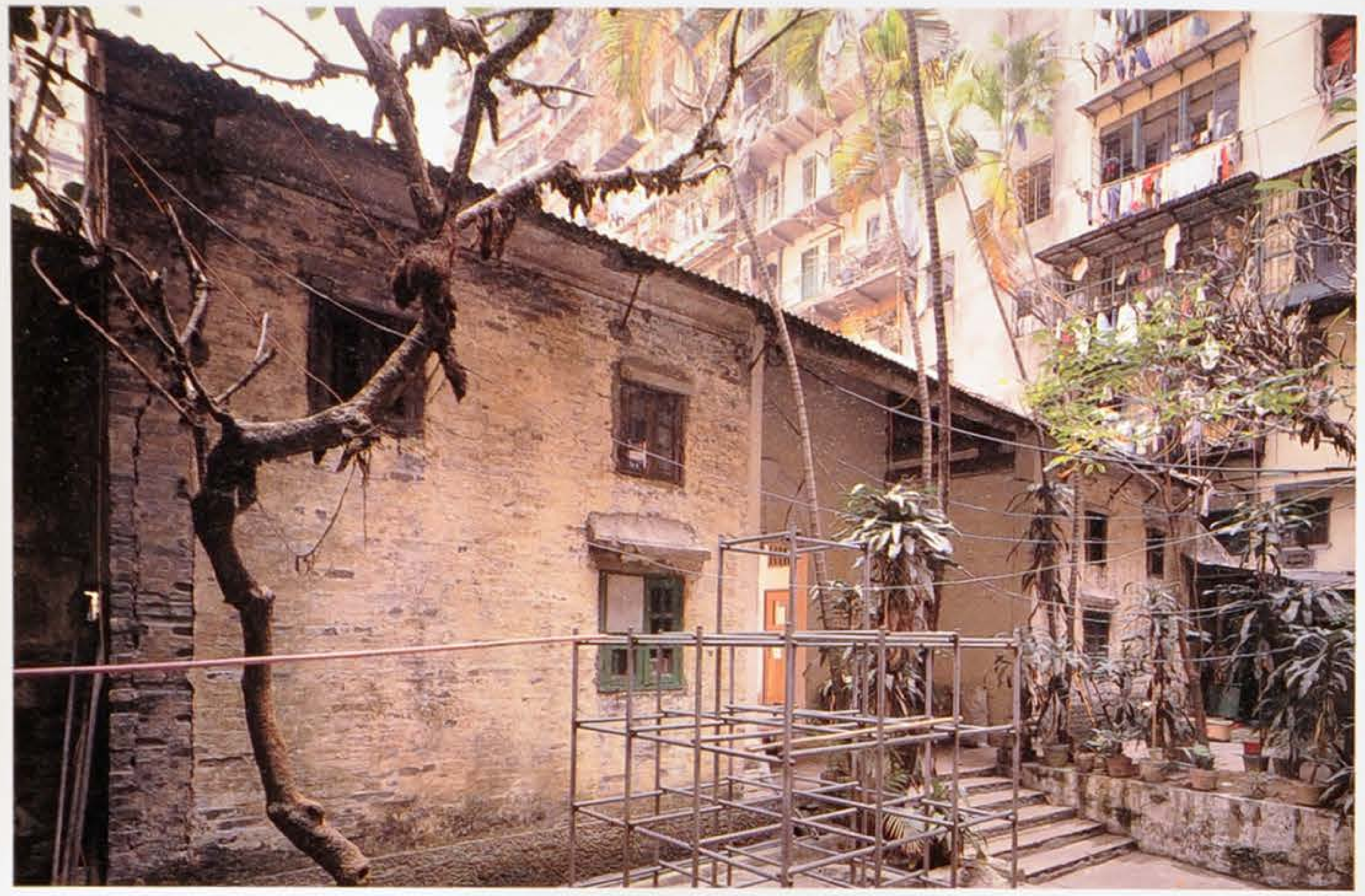
The late afternoon sun streams in through an alley and deserted building on West City Road during the final phase of the clearance. Though long considered a den of iniquity and a dangerous place to visit, the Walled City in its final years was little different socially to many other working-class areas of Hong Kong.

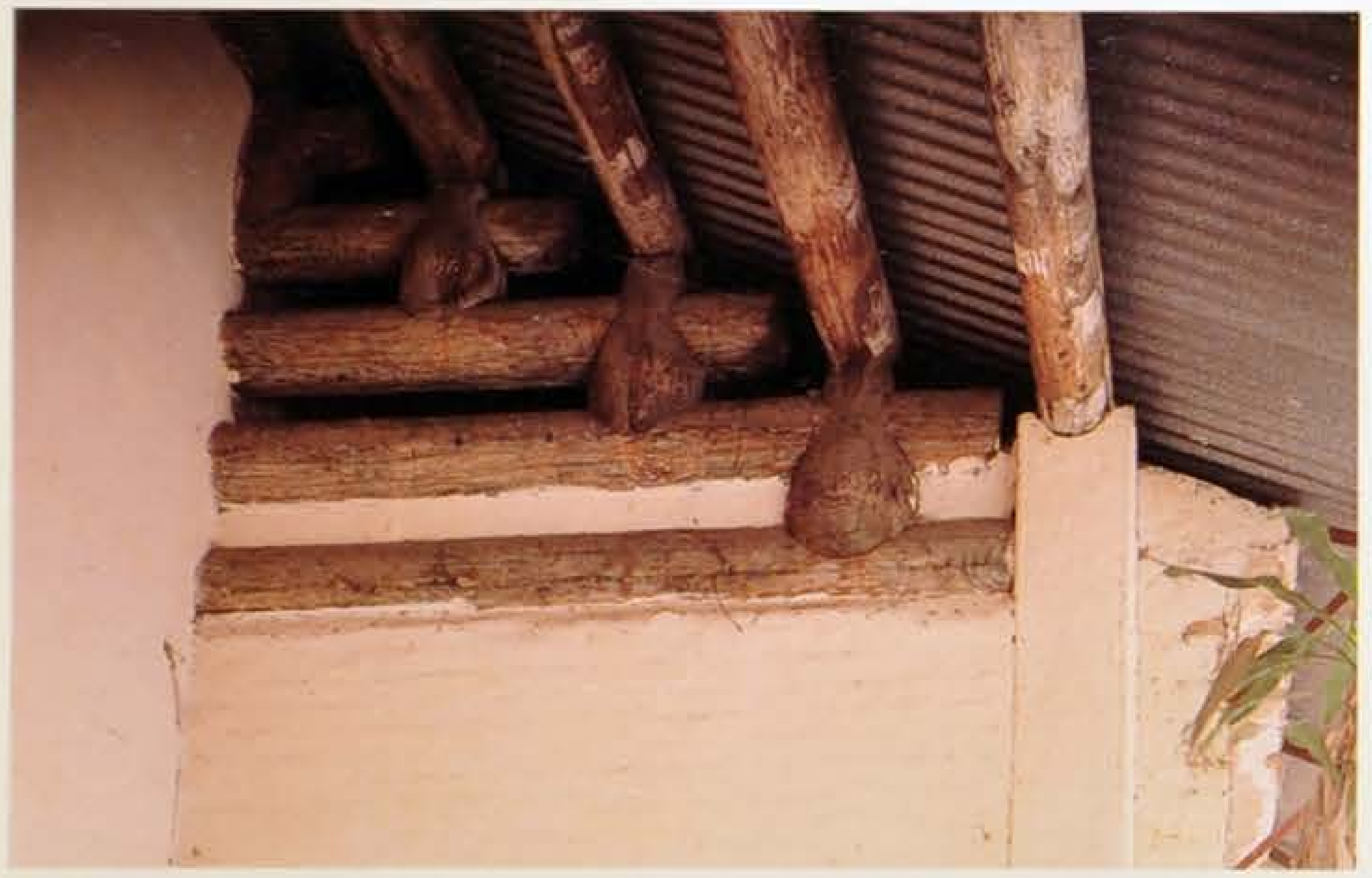


Nostalgia is perhaps a sentiment born of not being able to face up to history. I realise now that when we were there, among the homes of the Walled City, we hadn't seen clearly enough that it was really like our home too — yours and mine. Everywhere, they were chatting about ordinary things: a relative's health, the problems of everyday life. In every street in Hong Kong, under every roof, there must be countless people doing just the same.

Later, just before the clearance was completed, some friends slipped into the Walled City and brought out a variety of objects that had been discarded there. They mounted an exhibition called 'Walled City Debts', at the City Contemporary Dance Company's workshop, in an effort to focus attention on the plight of the Walled City's residents. A photographer took pictures — including some of a nude on a roof — and a friend involved in the theatre said he wanted to stage a performance there. Unfortunately, it never worked out. As I walked among those old things salvaged from the Walled City, looking at the antiquated shop and street signs, the discarded abacuses, the old account books and the yellowing photographs, the phantom of the City in its former days seemed to rise up around me. All kinds of ambiguous signs pointed to all sorts of bizarre possibilities. But I know that these disjointed signs, these scattered artefacts, can never equal the solid place from which they came.

The huge wrecker's ball shatters the walls; Kowloon Walled City is coming down. If now we think about this remarkable place, it is not for reasons of nostalgia, but in order to understand better the places in our own lives.

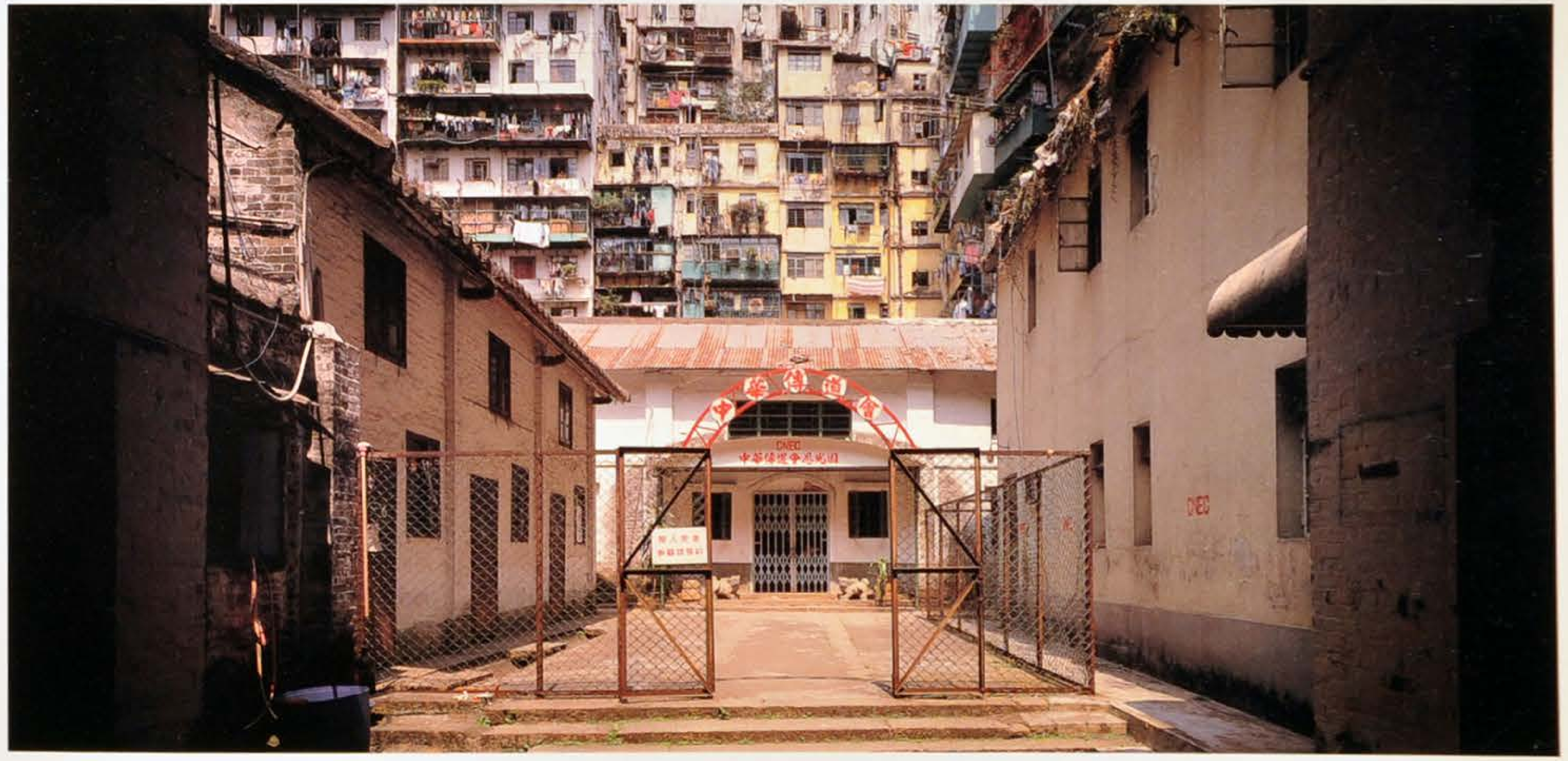




The entrance building of the original yamen [above] dates from the 1840s. The building follows an architectural style peculiar to southern China, notably in the jointing technique of its timber roof [left], and is the only structure in the City that will be preserved after the demolition.

The inner compound of the resident military official, the yamen had been much altered and rebuilt over the past 100 years and, apart from the original entrance building, it was not considered of sufficient historical value to warrant preservation. The entire compound was taken over by the CNEC Living Word Church in the early 1970s, and it is almost entirely due to the determination of Reverend Isaac Liu [page 130], the CNEC's representative in the Walled City, that it was never redeveloped. Despite several lucrative offers, Reverend Liu believed that at least one part of the City should be able to enjoy fresh air and natural light. Although light refuse thrown from the surrounding apartments remained a constant problem — festooned with plastic bags, the tree near the entrance was known as the Christmas tree — the courtyard was a popular meeting place on sunny days.

Nearby residents would bring chairs from their apartments to sit and chat, prepare the evening meal's vegetables, or do a little knitting.



Just one of several missionary societies which used to work in the City, the Salvation Army ran a successful kindergarten at its premises on Lung Chun Back Road for many years. The interview was given by Simon Wong, an officer in the Salvation Army responsible for the Walled City.

The Salvation Army first started working in the Walled City in 1968, after a little girl – aged about seven years – went to our headquarters and asked us to set up a primary school in the City where she lived.

The Salvation Army decided to rent a flat and set up a primary school, together with a church. We found suitable premises, but the landlord forbade us to put up pictures of Jesus or conduct services. At the beginning, he would visit the centre occasionally, and whenever he found a picture of Jesus he would tear it off the wall. Once he'd left, the teacher would put it up again. This nonsense happened several times until the landlord got tired of it and agreed to sell us the flat.

Eventually the primary school was closed down, because our students did not qualify for public examinations and could not go on to Government or subsidised secondary schools. We applied for registration with the Education Department several times, but were not approved. In fact, we didn't even receive an official reply. However, we were told, off the record, that the City was out of the jurisdiction of the Hong Kong Government, so no services provided there by any organisation could be recognised. Because of that, we finally decided to close the school.

Having a kindergarten is much easier. At the beginning all the children had to live in the Walled City, but now we also accept those living outside. Parents do not have to pay a formal school fee, but they must contribute $100 per term if they can afford it. We hope that, by contributing something towards their children's education, parents will feel some sense of responsibility. Also, according to Chinese beliefs, a free school is not a good school. This sum doesn't come close to covering our total expenses. In fact, the annual running costs are nearly $500,000, or around $7000 per year for each child.

Through our schooling we have also become involved in family care. For example, when the mother of two of our students, an illegal immigrant, was suddenly sent back to the mainland, their father – who was working on a construction site – couldn't take care of them. We didn't realise that there was a problem until the children became dirty and lazy. Fortunately, we solved it by obtaining sponsorship so that we could pay a neighbour to clean, cook, tutor and care for them.

We never ask parents to show their identity cards or the children's birth certificates. All they have to do is come along and say their children need educating – we don't want to discourage them from sending their children to school. Some kids here have mothers who are illegal immigrants. Apparently, in the past, one-tenth of the population of the Walled City was made up of such people. The only record we have of our kids is their address, so when Government officials or other organisations ask us about the number of illegal immigrants in the Walled City, we can't provide the information.

It is quite common for our students to have psychiatric problems – some are over-active while others are too quiet and passive. Parents here usually lock them in their flats and don't allow

them to play outside because they feel the City is too dirty and dangerous.

Our school is special in that we have outings at least twice a month. Sometimes we go to the park just outside the City and other times we go to Kowloon Park. We cannot afford more outings because of the cost of transportation and meals for the kids – each outing costs us $1600 for 80 students. The parents don't always appreciate these outings either, as their idea of schooling is for the children to work hard – particularly at reading and writing. I think these outings are very important, however. If nothing else, we just want the kids to enjoy the sunshine more often; they seldom see it in here.

Apart from financial worries, our other big problem is electricity. The environment is very bad and we have to keep the air-conditioning on in both winter and summer. This means enormous electricity bills, as well as high maintenance fees for the air-conditioning units. We try our best to get sponsorship but, because we are not a registered school and the Walled City is a politically sensitive place, our requests are often turned down.

Our only possible sponsors are organisations which already have a close relationship with the Salvation Army, such as the Canadian Club, the American Women's Association, the German Speaking Group and the Dutch Ladies' Committee. We find it much easier to approach foreign organisations as they are more open to a place like the Walled City. In fact, there is one Austrian gentleman, a member of the Kiwanis Club in Austria, who raises money for the kindergarten in Europe and sends us over $100,000 every year.

On Sundays, our premises become a chapel and we usually have 10 to 20 people attending our services. In the past they had to be inhabitants of the Walled City, but since the demolition project was announced some people have moved out. Some of these still like to come back for church, though. Most of the people who come are old or those who cannot travel far from the Walled City – young people prefer to be somewhere where there is sunshine.

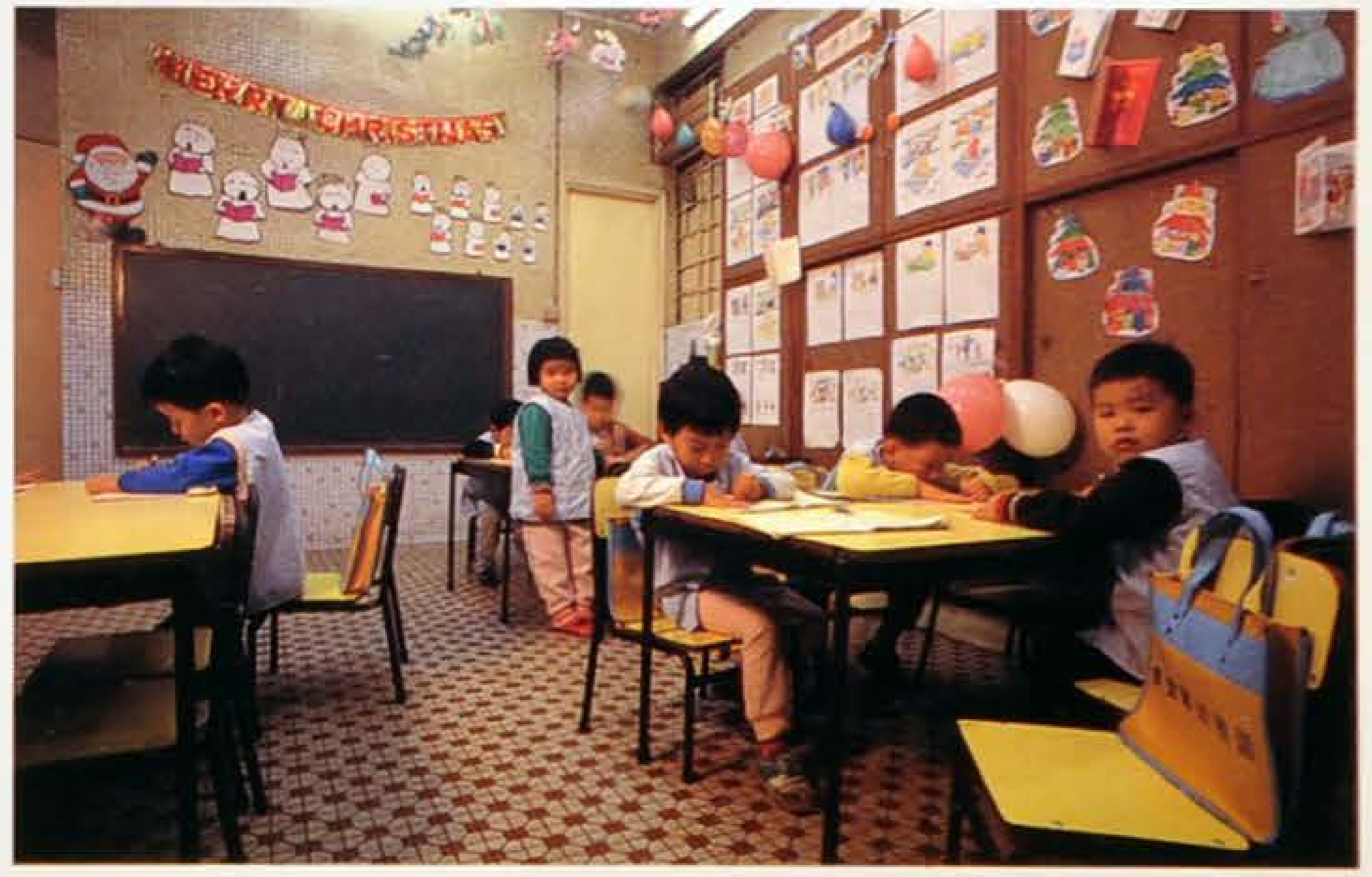
I feel that the environment in the Walled City was much better during the 1960s and '70s when drug addicts were employed by the Triads to clean the place. There were fewer buildings and fewer people during that time, too. Policemen visited sometimes to enforce law and order. People have the impression that the Walled City was a horrible place, but in the past – especially in the '60s and '70s – it was a peaceful community where residents did not even have to lock the door at night. The 'big brothers' were living and working here, so nobody dared make trouble. Since the demolition was announced, however, people keep on moving in and out, and it is reported that crime is on the increase.

Running our school here is fine except for the threat of fire. Since 1988, we have held regular fire-escape practices for the kids. There was a fire in a roast meat factory last year and, although it was finally put out, no one can tell when it might happen again.

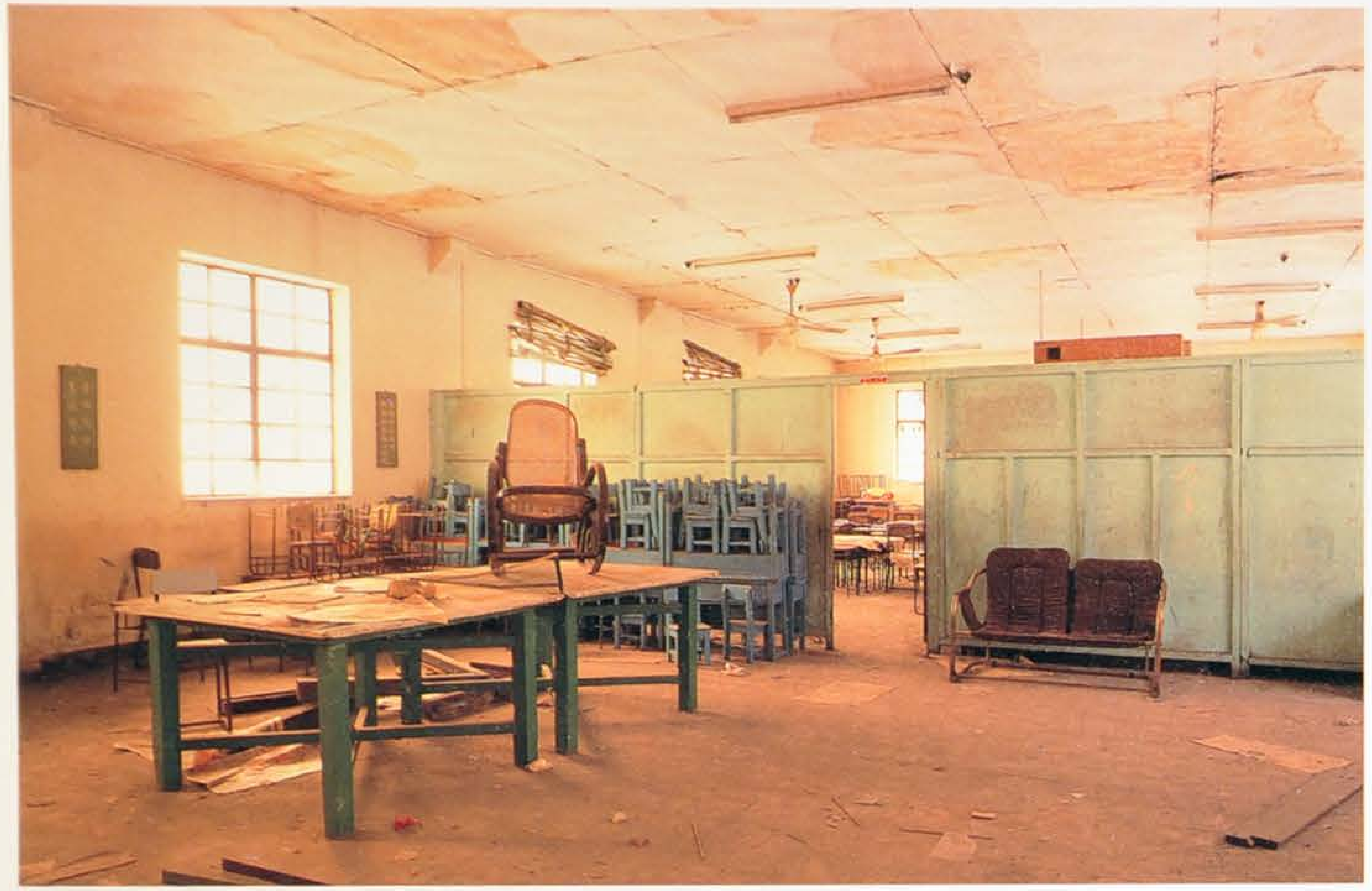
We have power failures occasionally, too, and we have had to buy some large torches for the school. Fortunately, the teachers have learnt how to handle the power cuts by pretending that playing in the dark is a game – then the children don't cry.

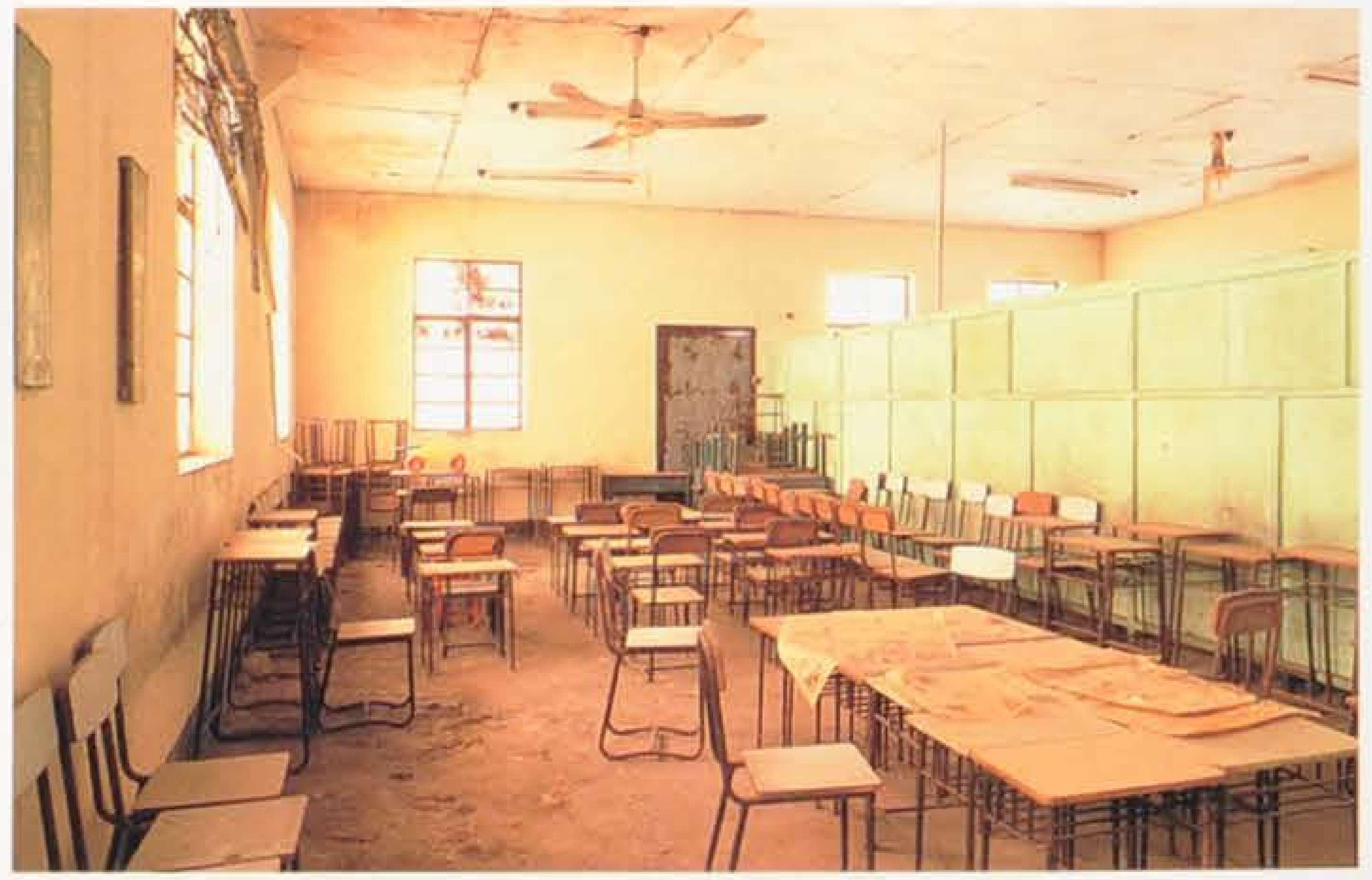
It is difficult to find teachers for the school as many people think the Walled City is dangerous. Our teachers are mainly Christians who have served in a Salvation Army school before, so they understood the working conditions here before they accepted the job.

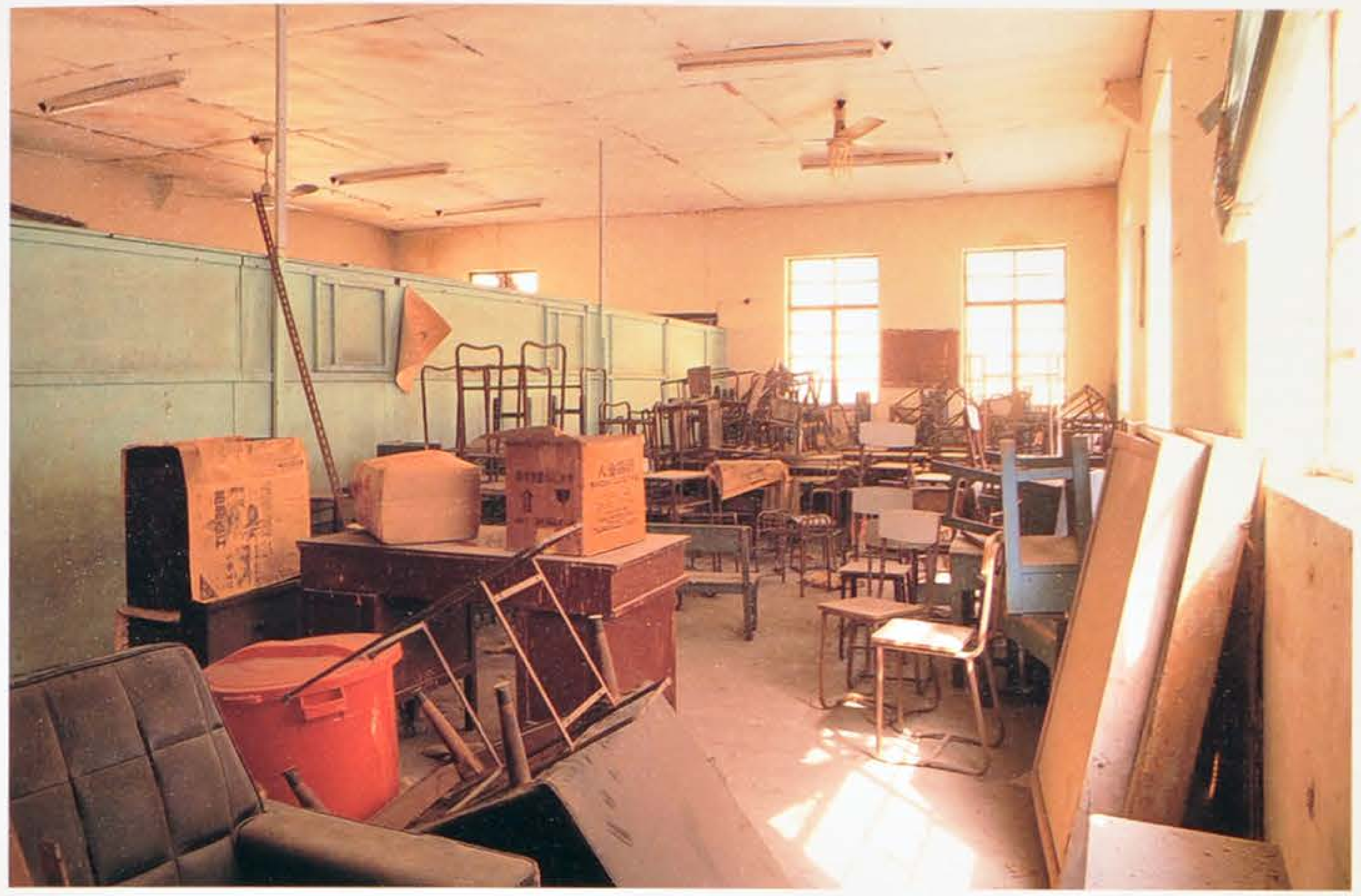
We will probably move in July 1990, but we have not decided what to do afterwards. We did not want compensation, but a new school instead. The Government's response was disappointing as they have suggested that we rent a place on a new housing estate. We thought that was unfair, as we own our place here in the Walled City and will lose it when it is demolished. We want a permanent place for our school, not one that we have to pay rent for.



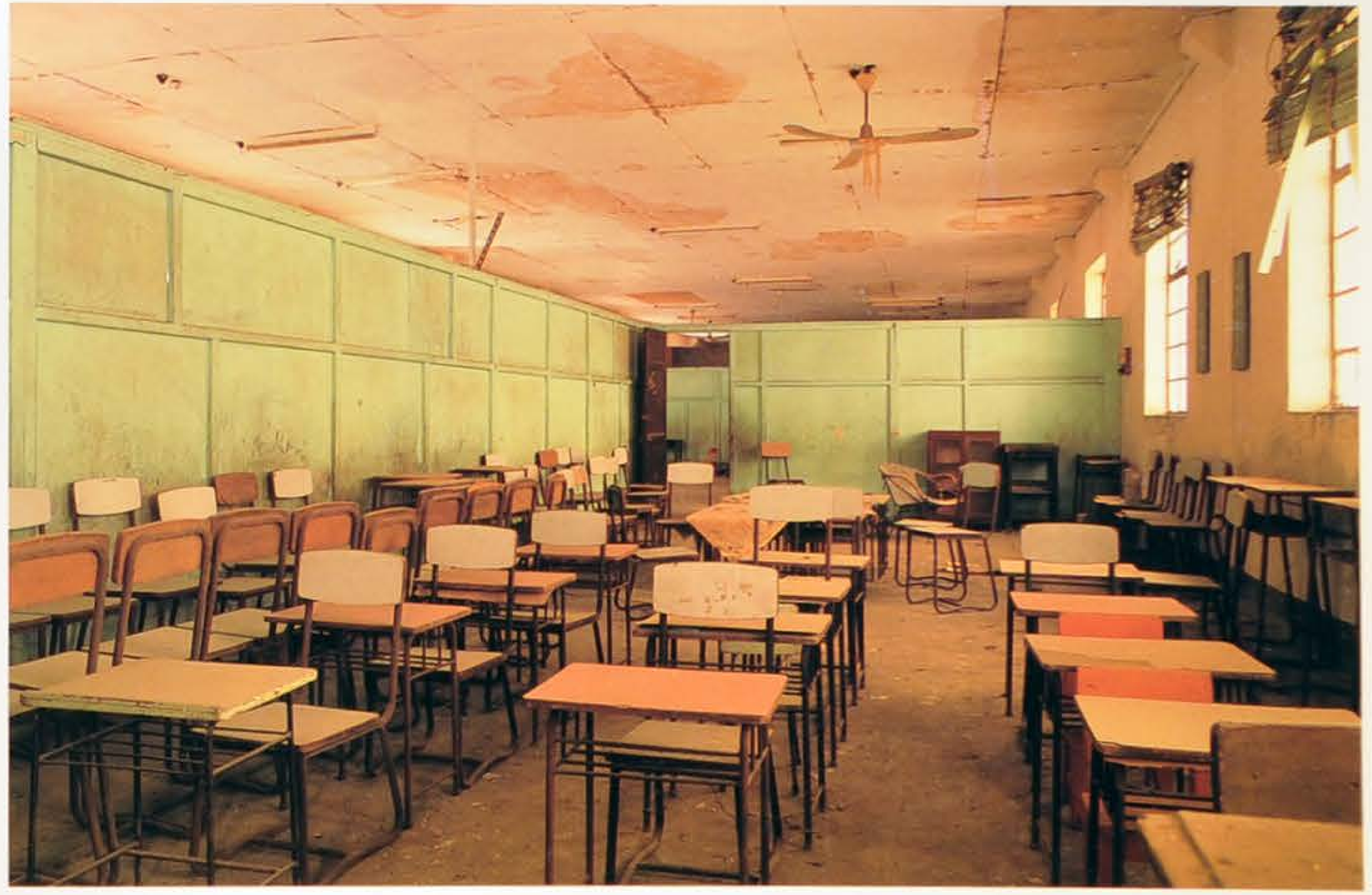
We are trying to give parents information on how to arrange new schools for their children, so that they can continue their studies. We can introduce students to other Salvation Army centres near their new homes and have done that, for example, in Tsuen Wan – where some of our students have already moved. Some illegal immigrant parents asked us to help them get identity cards, but we couldn't get involved. We are helping families with elderly members by introducing them to day-care centres, and we are working with the Social Services Department to organise more child-care centres in the new towns. We believe that if we help a family to solve one problem, it will have a chain effect and will help them to solve others.







By the late 1980s, most of the yamen's buildings had fallen into disuse and disrepair. Some were used for storage, and the ground floor of the one major building was used by the Old People's Centre, but most stood empty. This had not always been the case. When the CNEC took over the compound in the 1970s, it had run a clinic for drug addicts and, for several years, a successful primary school. Closed in 1975, when compulsory free education was introduced by the Hong Kong Government, the school could still be found on the first floor of the main building, over the Old People's Centre. Little had changed in the intervening years: the furniture was in place, posters remained on the walls, and wax crayons could still be found on the floor.



The Reverend Isaac Liu became a minister in the CNEC Living Word Church in the late 1950s. Running a school, a clinic and a small chapel, he took over the old magistrate's buildings at the centre of the City in 1971, protecting them from redevelopment over the next 20 years until forced to vacate the premises as part of the clearance in 1991.

老人中心
CNEC AGED PEOPLE CENTRE

The Reverend Isaac Liu ministered to the City's drug addicts, children and elderly for more than 30 years, with his own brand of quiet evangelism and common human compassion.

I was born in 1935 and came to Hong Kong in 1950 from my native village in China. I came because of the changes happening there, following the political upheavals of those days. If you did not follow Government policy, there was trouble. Everyone yearned for freedom and many tried to leave the country.

Life was very difficult when I first arrived; only those who had a job could survive. I did not speak Cantonese and I often felt lonely and depressed. But then, one day, I met a stranger in the street, distributing pamphlets. He spoke in Mandarin: "Come listen to the gospel tonight". That night he talked about life and death with Jesus, and when he had finished he asked those who were interested or who had a problem to stay behind. I was the only one who stayed. We talked and he told me to believe in Jesus. We knelt down and prayed. After that I started to go to church often. I learnt some hymns and sang them when I felt lonely and empty. I also read the Bible, and every time I found the feeling of emptiness disappeared.

Within a year of putting my faith in Jesus, I wanted to tell everybody the good message and let them benefit too, but I didn't know how as I still did not know Cantonese. But then, at one of our meetings, the preacher said they needed someone to help with the preaching. I volunteered and was sent to a seminary where I stayed for three years. It was during my time there that I began to work in the Walled City. To begin with, we rented a few wooden shacks and started a school for the children – mainly reading and writing.

Then, in 1960, we started a Gospel Centre in a four-storey building on Lung Shing Road. On the ground floor we had a chapel – with a small clinic and rehabilitation centre for drug addicts on the mezzanine floor above – and on the three floors above we started the Tak Shing school. At our peak we had more than 420 pupils, from kindergarten to primary Six. We taught the same subjects as other schools and most of our pupils came from the Walled City.

In 1971 we moved to our present premises, which were previously a home for the elderly, in the centre of the City. We continued to operate the school, chapel and clinic, but after a while the doctor moved to Yau Tong; he was upset because the drug addicts he helped kept going back on the habit. The Salvation Army took over his premises for a few years.

Around 1975 the number of pupils at our school began to drop because it was not recognised by the Government and they could not sit the public examinations to gain entry to secondary education. The school was eventually closed in 1978 and, in '79, we started the Old People's Centre.

At first we had very little money. We opened in the afternoons from Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday for worship. We applied for Government grants and when we received some support we started to organise more activities. We distributed pamphlets in the Walled City, but people didn't believe we could offer so many activities for free. Only a few people came to begin with but, as they spread the word, numbers grew. Now we have 184 members.

We are fortunate to have a very good relationship with the Rotary Club. In 1978 they donated several hundred thousand dollars to renovate our premises and, each year, they come with Christmas gifts. They still buy us chairs and pay for necessary repairs.

The Government has offered us a new place in Kwun Tong of about 1600 square feet, but our premises here are three times that size. Only about a third of the elderly have moved out of the Walled City so far. We are arranging for them to join other centres near their new homes, and we will continue to serve the aged in our new district. Some of the elderly who have moved out wanted to travel back each day to the Centre, but we told them it was too dangerous. They complained that we didn't want them any more, but we said that was untrue and that we were thinking of their safety. They wanted to come back because of the close relationships they had established here and because of the many benefits we offer.

We provide afternoon tea including biscuits. The Social Welfare Department doesn't like this as it fears it will encourage some people not to eat lunch. I explained that the elderly want to save money for their children in China and we were just giving them a little help, so the service has been maintained. When we move to our new premises we will not have a kitchen, only a pantry, but I suppose the needs of the residents there may be different.

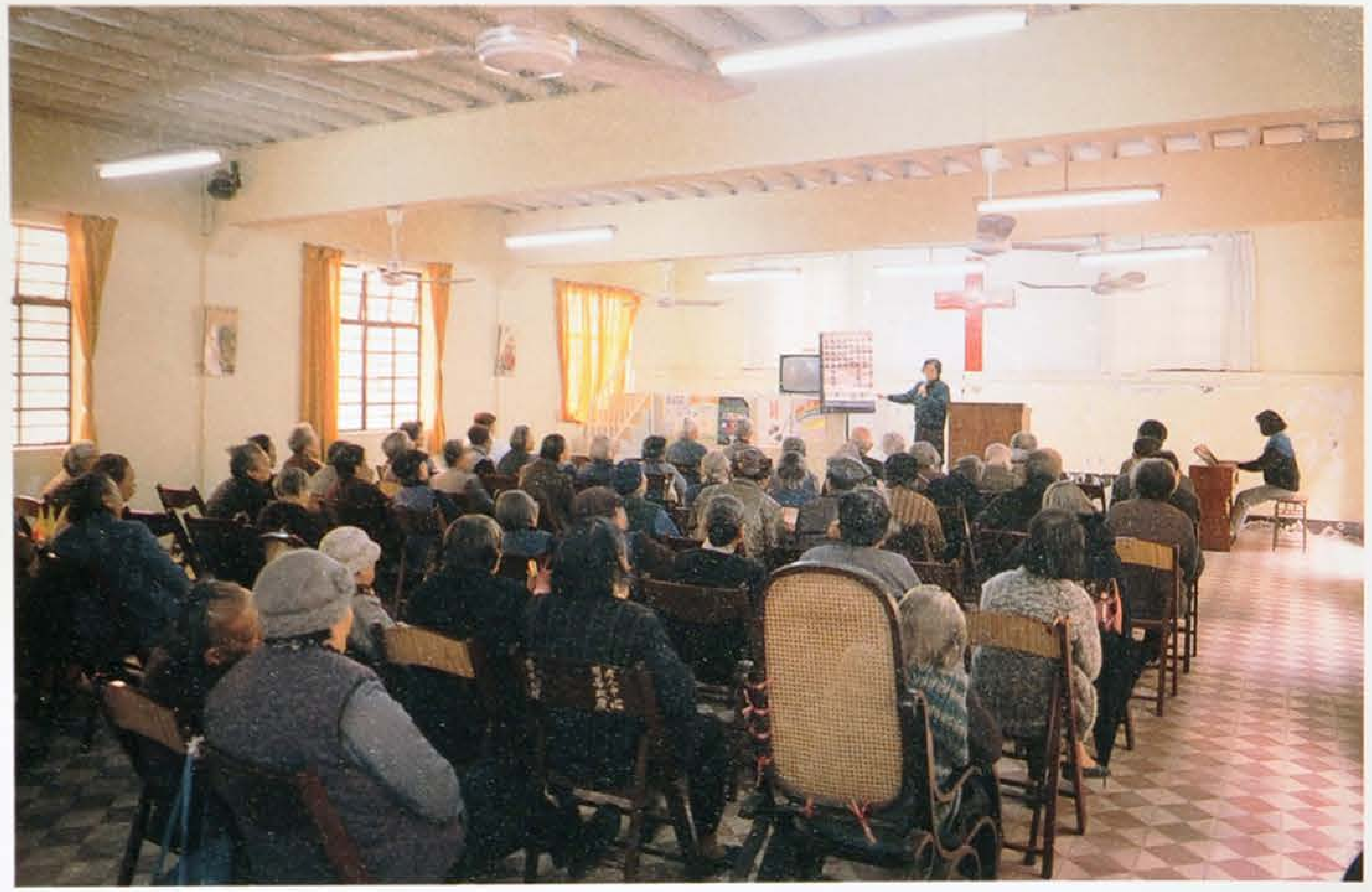
A few years ago we could only raise about $10,000 each year for our activities' fund. Now, however, we receive an annual donation of $30,000 from the Community Chest and other funds from the church. This means we can now pay a salary to the two women who used to help us voluntarily. They are both mothers, but they work very hard and have never taken long periods of leave. And, since last year, we have also employed a supervisor, paid for separately by the Community Chest.

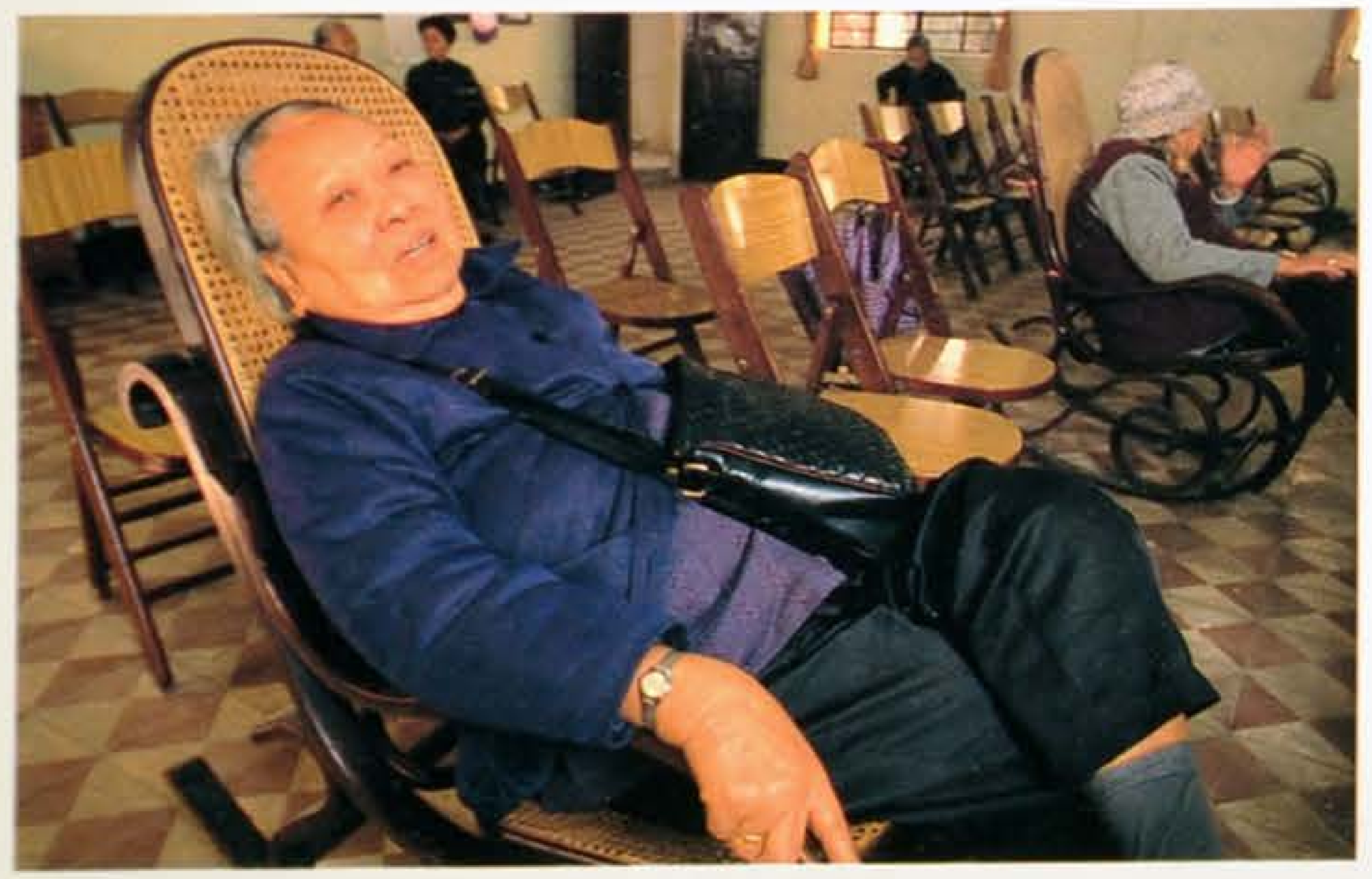
We arrange trips which are always popular. Each time we have around 90 participants and need to hire three coaches. The two mothers and I lead the trips, and we have at least one trip or major activity each season; the old people enjoy eating out most, but we have been to Ocean Park and the circus too. They pay a little and the Centre sponsors the rest.

I began living in the Walled City in 1971. I was not afraid as I had been visiting frequently since the mid-'50s. In the '60s there were many drug addicts – you could always see them from the roof of the school – and there were also gambling spots, vice establishments and live shows, but these disappeared slowly during the '70s. We were not disturbed, as they knew we were operating for the welfare of the residents.

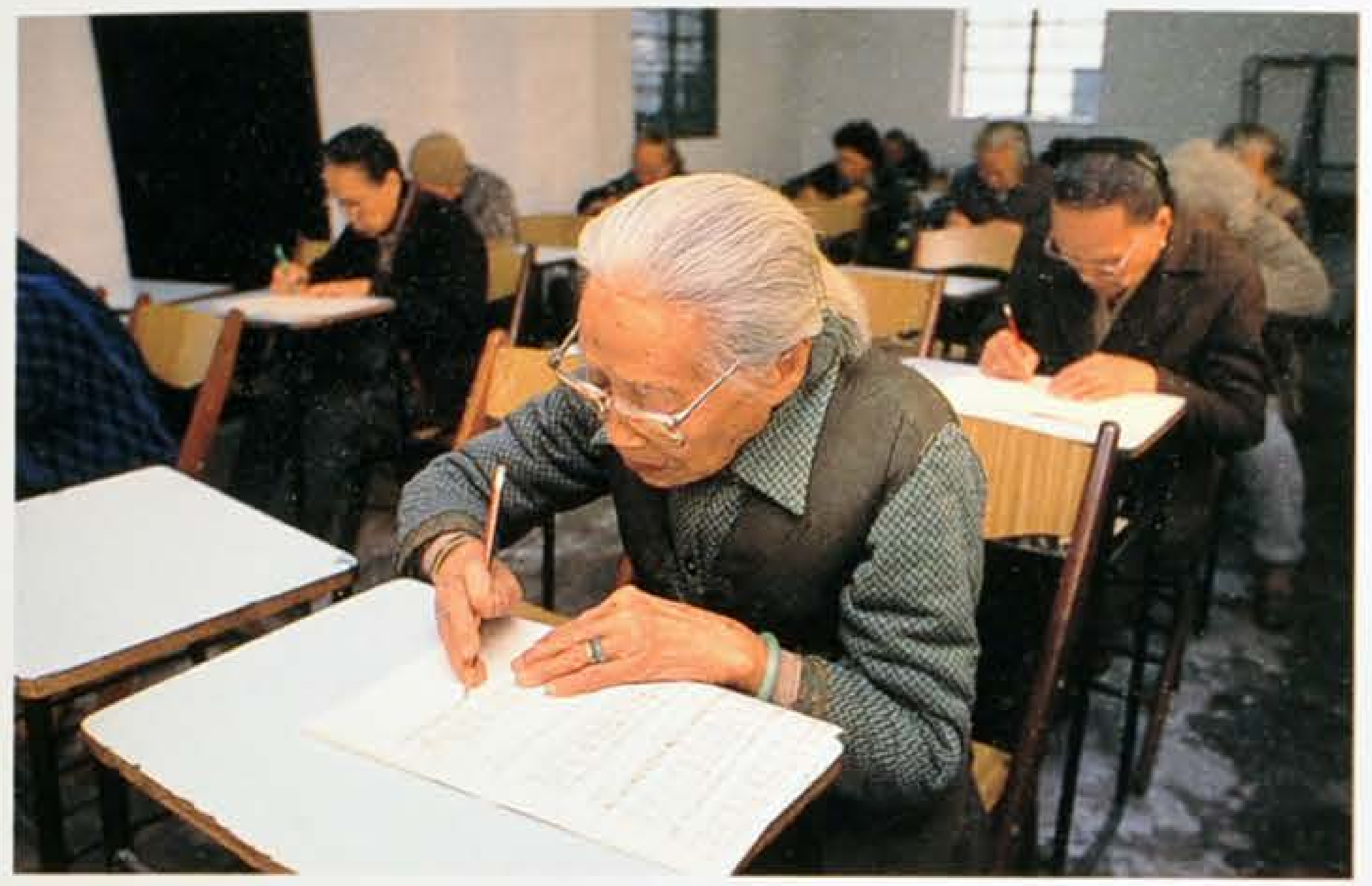
I feel that the primary aim of the church is to preach and I'm happy that about 50 of the elderly in our Centre now believe in Jesus. I will continue to serve the elderly and, if I could have a centre nearby as well as the one in Kwun Tong, I would serve both.

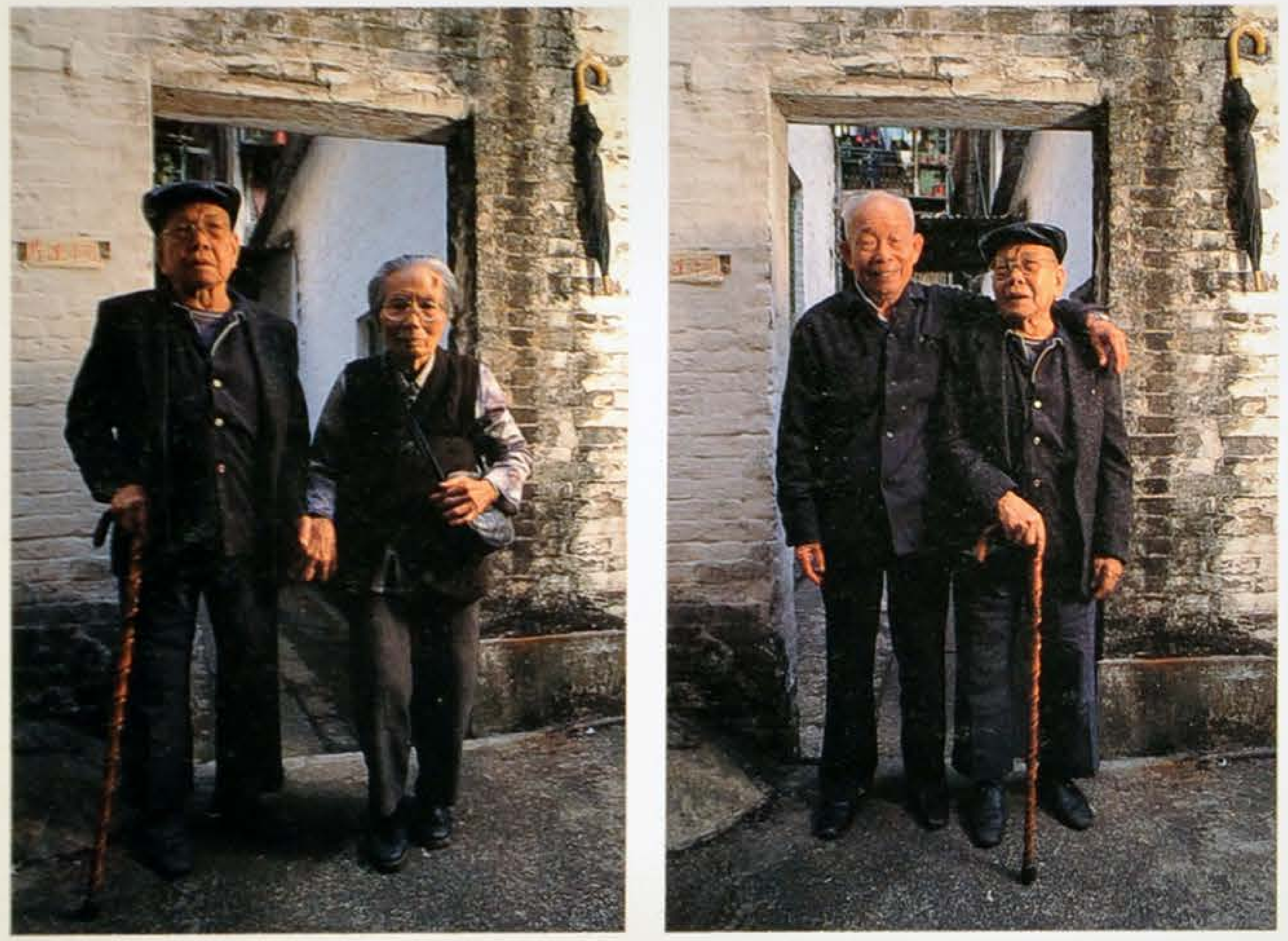
Some of our members are very active, others are quiet and some are difficult to handle. Most are fairly independent and come and go as they please, but some worry that if they don't come to the Centre every day we will have to close down. You have to have more patience when handling the elderly; you can scold a child, but not an old person.





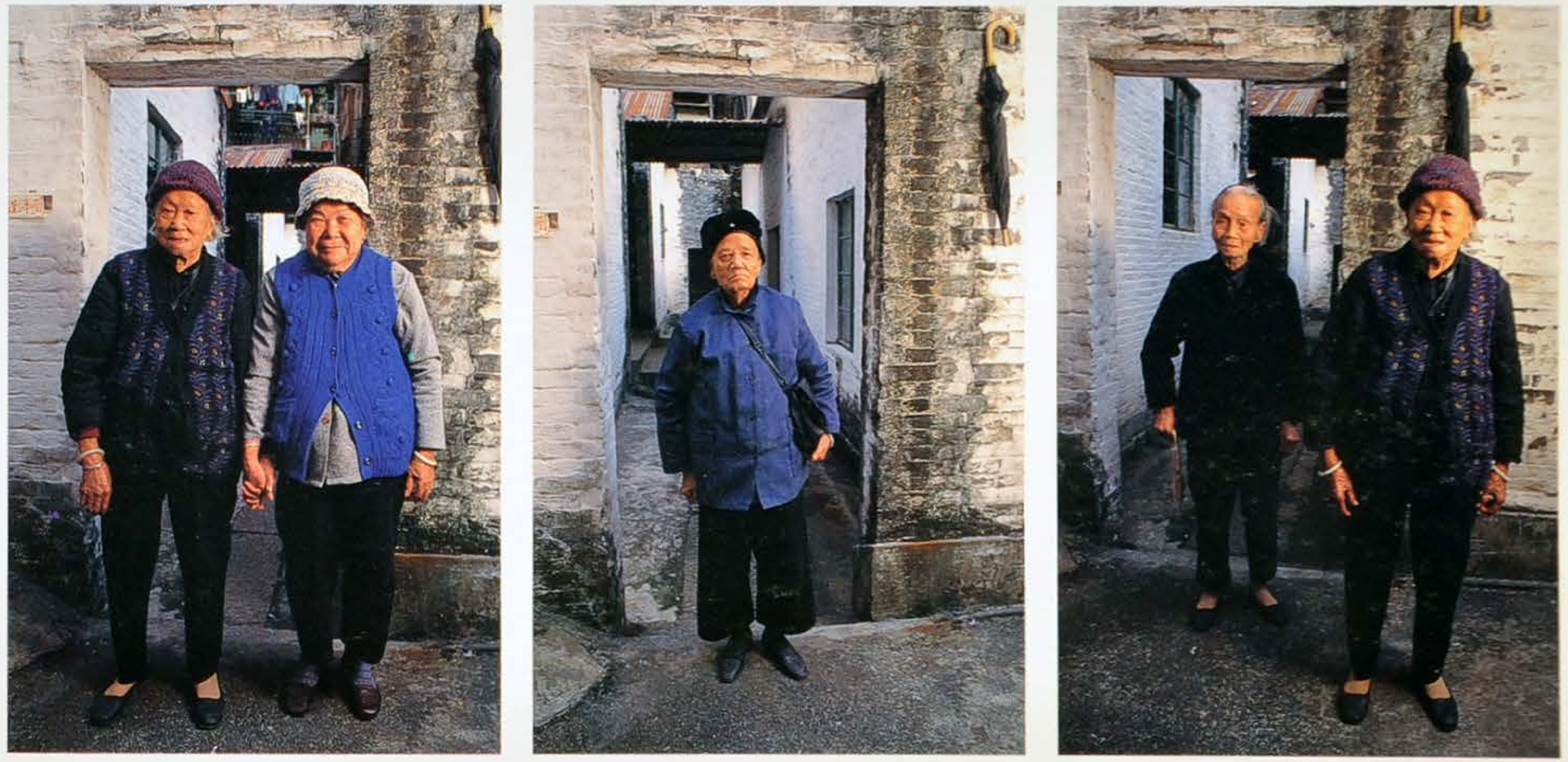
A religious session, with accompanying piano and songs, was all part of the mix of social activities at the CNEC Old People's Centre. Though not all among the predominantly female audience were Christians (it was not a precondition of joining), some clearly were, and not a few admitted to hedging their bets. Secular classes of various kinds were also an attraction — including calligraphy classes for the many elderly women who had never been taught to write. Most importantly, however, the Centre was a pleasant meeting place, offering companionship, comfort and support, a daily afternoon tea, and television — for many an unaffordable luxury.





Portraits of some of the regular visitors to Reverend Isaac Liu's Old People's Centre. Informally, the Centre operated as a welfare service: anyone absent for a day or more would arouse concern among friends and staff, setting in motion a discreet check-up at their home.

A high proportion of regulars at the Old People's Centre were elderly women, many of whom lived alone or in small shared apartments. Quite a number had worked as amahs with middle-class Chinese families and had managed to accumulate small savings over the years, sufficient to purchase a cheap space in the Walled City. Others were retired factory workers, and there were a few housewives. For these, and many other elderly people, the demise of the Walled City was a bitter pill. Scattered among the disparate locations of Hong Kong's new housing estates, the loss of the habitual familiarity of the City, and of regular contact with the community of friends and old people at the CNEC, was not always easy to bear.



Though never a resident of the City itself, Kwok Lau Hing was a regular visitor to the Old People's Centre there, continuing to make the journey even after moving to Junk Bay. At the time of the interview (in 1989), she was 73 years old.

My elder sister and I were living on the second floor of a place in Shanghai Street, in Yau Ma Tei. The building was going to be demolished, but we were told that there were houses for sale in the Walled City. So we bought a small flat on the second floor of 5C Sai Tau New Street, the settlement on the outskirts of the City. It had four rooms into which you could just about fit a bed, a table and a couple of chairs. If you walked down our narrow street, you passed by women soliciting men and through shops selling dog meat.

The flat cost about $4000 then. My cousin contributed a quarter and took one room. My sister also put up a quarter, but she rented her room out for $50 a month. I had a half share, so I had two rooms, one of which I rented out. Water and electricity were supplied properly there and I paid the bills monthly to the right authorities. Residents inside the City used to steal their water. We were actually on the top floor in those days and it was like an oven in summer. We had to sleep on the floor to keep cool. And even that was extremely hot!

Kwok Lau Hing and Chan Ban Fong at the Old People's Centre.

I was in my 30s then; I'm 73 now. I was working for the Jardine Airline Company as a cleaner and general office woman. It was just a half-day job. After finishing around 12:30, I'd leave Alexander House, in Central, and go to Kowloon Park and sit there in the shadiest spot until after dark; I didn't return home until I'd really cooled off. A normal day began at 5am, and I'd get to work in Central around 7. I had to clean the offices, wipe the ashtrays and so on, and then get the tea ready before the others turned up at 9am. My salary was $100 or so a month. If I had a little spare time I'd help assemble toys to supplement my income. That extra money paid for my travelling. The office had air-conditioning, but at home it was like being a fish under a grill.

As I said, I usually went home after sunset. After cooking and eating, I might then go into the neighbourhood to escape from the heat. I never dared to go into the Walled City itself. They were selling dog meat there, and there were men and women – you know, very unruly. I myself had been robbed by a young man down in the street. I gave him the $20 that I had on me at the time: that was how much I usually carried. But he still scolded me. He said: "If you weren't a local, I wouldn't let you get away with so little".

When it was decided that the settlement was to be cleared in 1985, Government officials were all over the place, checking on us the whole time. We had to prove that we were actually living where we said we were, otherwise they wouldn't give us a place on a Government housing estate. We were all resettled on the Lok Wah estate. My son, my daughter-in-law and I were put into a three-person apartment, and my daughter, her husband and my two granddaughters into a four-person place.

When we heard the news that we might get resettled, we were, of course, keen that the people renting our two rooms move out. One didn't want to leave but eventually he went because we agreed that he needn't pay the several months' back-rent he owed us. The other room was rented to an old man. He disappeared suddenly one day. We thought he might have been murdered for his identity card: people said that a Hong Kong ID card was worth $10,000 then. The old man's son never could find his father, but he paid us five months' rent anyway before he cleared out the room.

I was married before I moved near the Walled City. My husband had passed away though, and I was left with two sons and a daughter. My son had to be sent to an orphanage in Wu Kai Sha. He later graduated from high school and, with the help of those at the orphanage, he eventually became a trained nurse in England. He then migrated to Canada. I visited him there when Jardine Airlines gave me my 15-year long-service award; they gave me $6000 to go on a trip overseas.

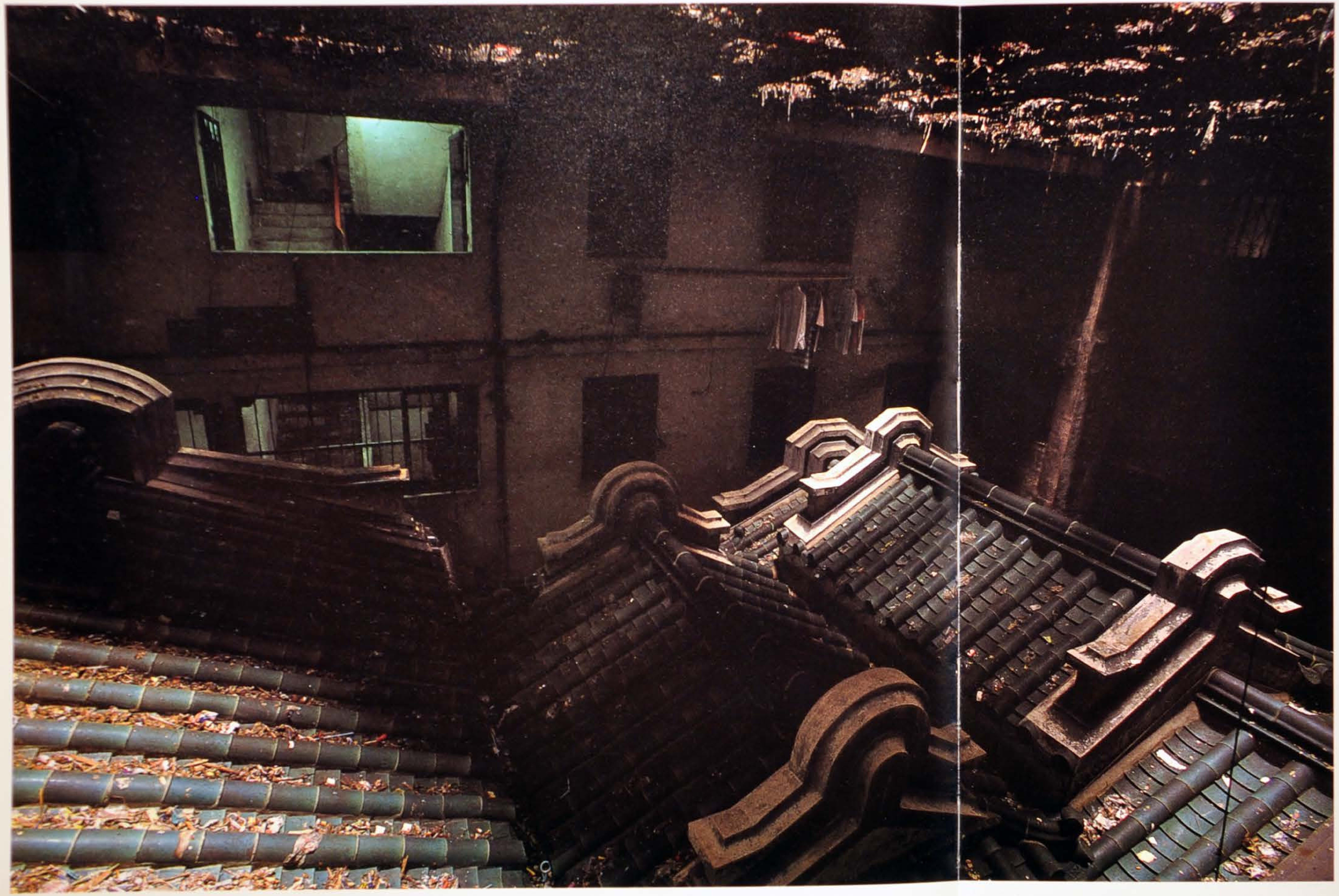
My younger son didn't want to continue school after primary Six. He became an apprentice to a Chiu Chow man. He told me that he went along to paint toys. I followed him one day and was relieved to see that he was actually working! After a while, he switched to renovation work and painting houses as he felt there was more future in that.

I didn't know about the Old People's Centre in the Walled City until I noticed people I knew from church walking down the alley leading into the City. I became curious and asked. And I discovered there was this Centre, so I went along. I had already retired; I worked until I was 65. I could only turn up in the mornings for the first year because in the afternoon they provided *congee* and limited the membership. The Centre organises lots of activities. There are courses such as cookery; I joined one to learn to write. I also joined the handicraft and embroidery activities. We are a happy bunch – and now I have *congee* in the afternoon too!

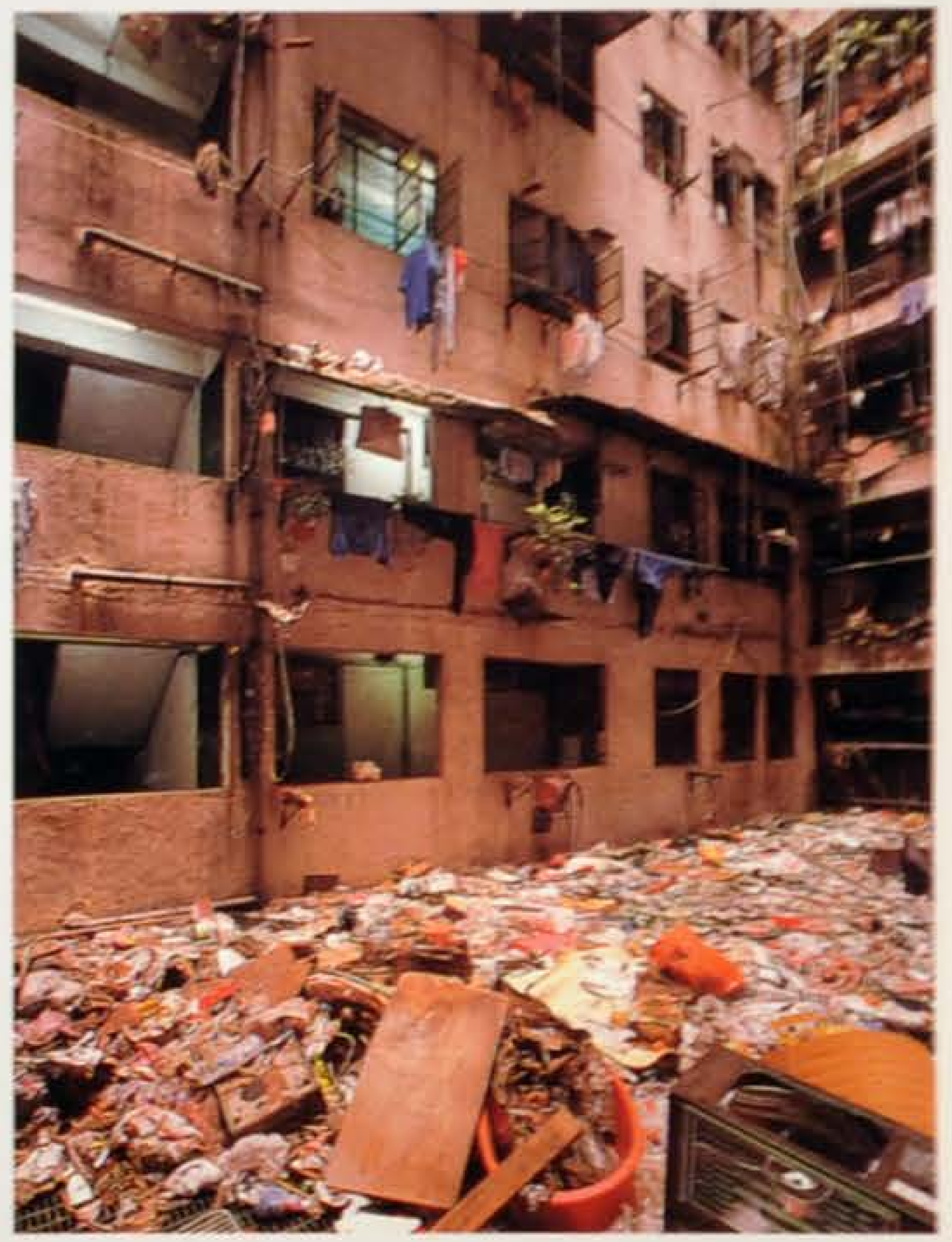
With the help of Father Fan at the church I managed to get a place in a hostel for the elderly. You see, one day at the Centre I had a bad cold and I fainted, so they decided I should try to get admission. Then we heard that the Old People's Centre was going to be disbanded, though there is a possibility of it being set up elsewhere.

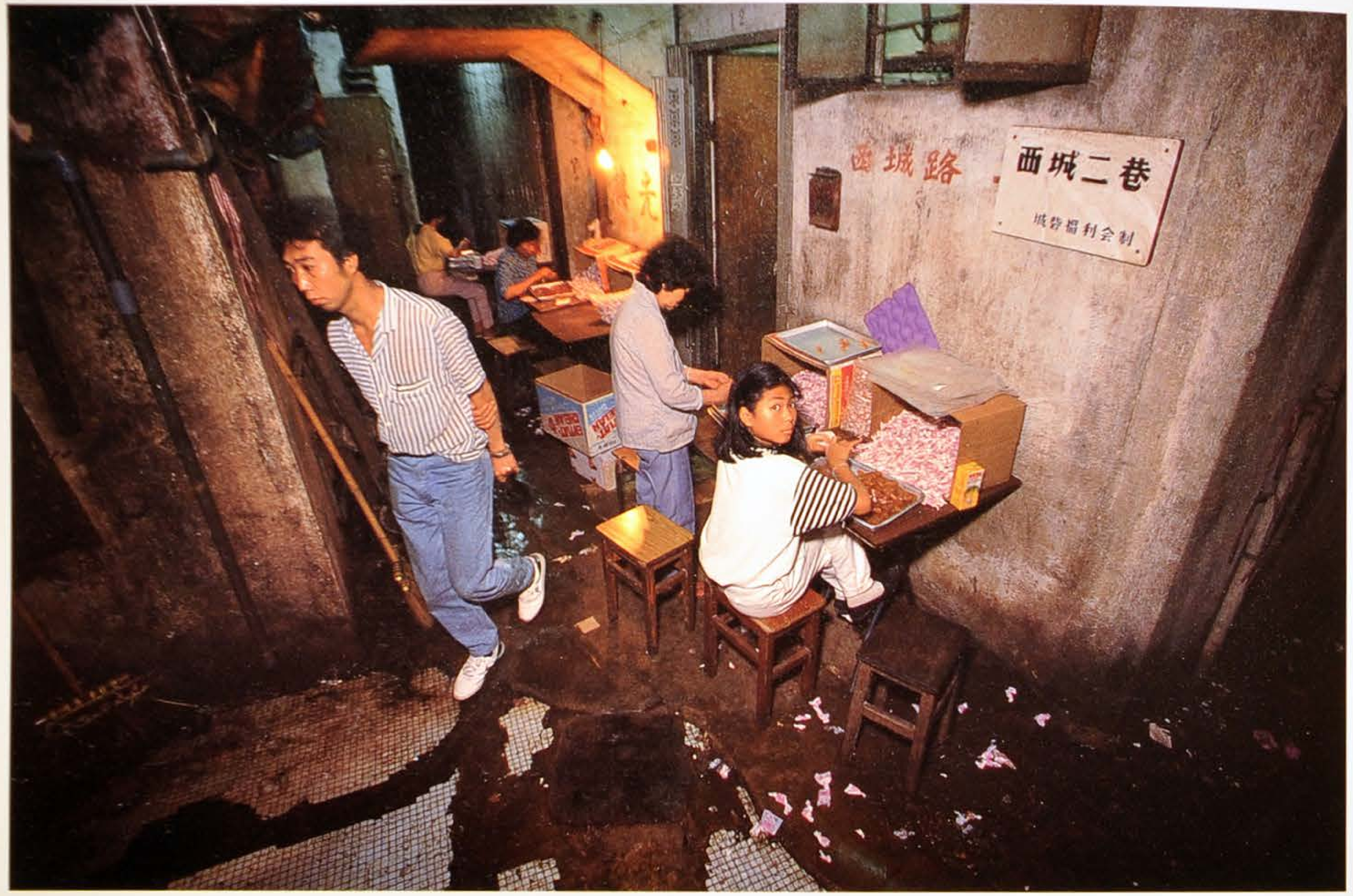
It was a little sad hearing that the Walled City was to be pulled down. I saw the place grow, with ever taller buildings being put up. And I remember the fires there coming so close to our house, and the worry of always having to be ready to escape from them. There was always a big fire risk living in the City. But to the poor, the houses there meant shelter after all.

Sweet congee, a thin rice soup, was a real attraction for Kwok Lau Hing and her companions. "The Walled City", she remarked, "has changed over the years, but I have no regrets that it is coming down."



Daylight barely penetrated the rubbish-strewn grille over the City's Tin Hau Temple. Built in 1951, on an alley off Lo Yan Street, this modern structure was a replacement for a temple that had once stood in a nearby coastal village. The earlier building had been demolished during the Japanese occupation, to make way for the extension of the airport, but local community leaders had managed to arrange the safe-keeping of the main shrine. Temples dedicated to Tin Hau, the patron goddess of fishermen, are usually found close to the sea. With its large community of Chiu Chow immigrants – once fishermen themselves – the Walled City, however, made an ideal alternative. It was a simple working temple, guarded by an irascible dog and protected by a mesh grille against the litter-happy residents who occupied the surrounding buildings [right].




西城路
西城二巷
城砦福利会制

A successful family business, Lee Yu Chun's candy factory had to expand its operations on to the adjacent alley, West City Road. Like many other business people, Yu Chun was particularly dissatisfied with the Government's compensation offer; for their part, the authorities said they would compensate businesses in proportion to their profitability as long as verifiable records could be produced.

Lee Yu Chun worked in the family's candy business from its beginning in 1964, when she was not yet 10 years old. Established in Sham Shui Po, the factory was moved into the City a few years later, and to its final location at 12 Sai Shing Road in the early 1970s.

My family opened their first sweet factory when I was a kid. My father came back to Hong Kong from abroad and began manufacturing soap at first, but I liked lollies. We were living in Sham Shui Po and I used to buy sweets for myself from a neighbourhood factory; I think this inspired him to start his own sweet-making business.

We used a charcoal stove in the early days and then later switched to a kerosene one to melt the sugar – about 10 pounds or so at a time. We didn't have any machines and so pressed the sweets out manually. We didn't have many customers either, so my elder brother would go around introducing our products. Our company is called Chui Fung and it's very much a family business, although other people in the neighbourhood are employed to help. The first few years we worked in Sham Shui Po. Business improved and we even applied for a licence, but we had to move before it came through as our place there was going to be demolished. That was when we moved to Tse Wan Shan, where the family still lives today. We took over two shops there, but they weren't suitable for a factory. Dad looked around and, through some customers, found suitable premises in the Walled City. That was in 1967.

We started renting two floors of a cottage: the ground floor was for melting and pressing, and the first floor for packaging. We only worked in the Walled City then, and continued to live in Tse Wan Shan, although later I came to live here as well. We moved to the present premises when the cottage was demolished. We rented to begin with but eventually managed to buy the place for $40,000.

When we first moved to the City, much of the work was still done manually. Then we bought a machine that held the hot syrup and cooled it. This made everything much quicker; a 50-pound batch took about half an hour to boil up and only 15 minutes to press. Now the process is continuous as we use automatic machines. We actually have six of them which are worth quite a lot of money, but we don't have enough people to operate them at the moment because so many people have moved away.

Our products are sold locally, mainly to wholesalers, and some go to Macau as well. We have sales people now, including my brother, and they take care of the deliveries, hiring mini-vans or lorries when we need them. We usually keep 1000 pounds or so in stock, but otherwise prefer to deliver as we produce. We don't operate with much capital, supplying on the basis that the last order is paid for before the next delivery is made. We supply toy factories too; the sweets are put inside the toys, so we don't even have to package them.

We don't carry a large stock of raw materials either. The main ingredients we use are sugar, colouring agents, aromatic oil, and coconut oil. We use a lot of plastic bags and paper. The paper comes from Japan now as British paper has become too expensive.

It's still a family business. We all share the work and take part in the whole production process. Even our 70-year-old grandmother helps. We tell her not to bother but she says that she would be bored at home.

The children who work here are usually from the neighbourhood. It's almost like a school. Generations of children come to work here and then leave, just like graduating. They are teenagers and the work is fun for them. They are free to come and go and sometimes work for only half an hour at a time. They are paid a piece rate: 40 cents for packaging one pound of sweets. Twenty years ago, it was five cents a pound.

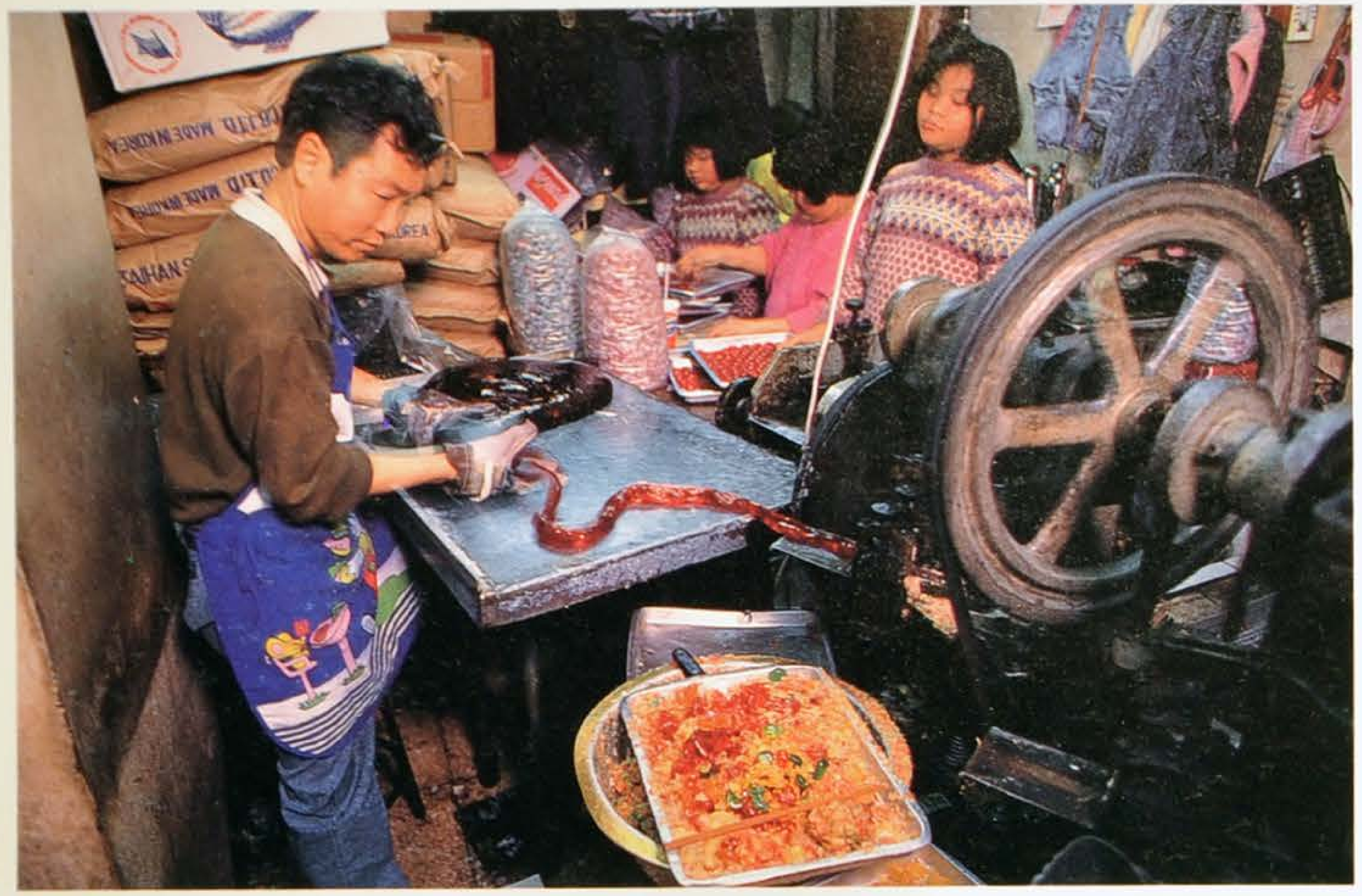
All the kids have their parents' approval. Often their mums come round to chat and check that their children are, in fact, working here. The kids do not come from poor families – they are here to earn spending money which sometimes they use for books. Some of the kids who worked here have graduated from university now and gone overseas, but they still keep in contact with us and come back to visit. Officers from the Labour Department come to visit the factory now and again, to check the number of workers, and they certainly see the kids around.

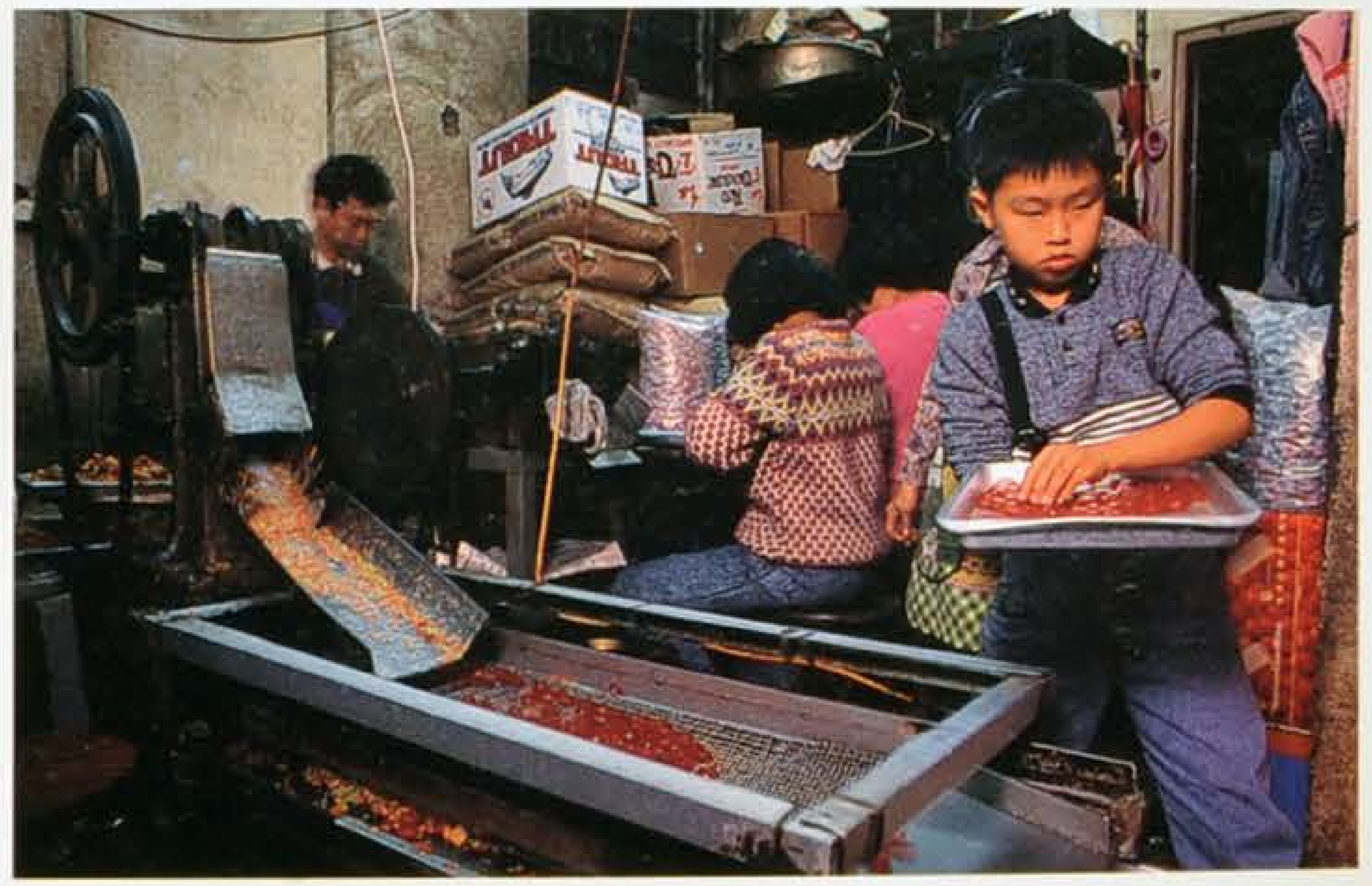
Normally we start work at 7am and finish at 6pm, but the packaging continues until 9pm. It is our own work and the hours are very flexible. We stop when we are tired. We earn a little more than a salary from the business, although we don't take regular payments. There is no argument between me and my two brothers. We just work and take what we need. We submit tax returns, but our profit is not so large as to require us to pay tax. We've been told that our investment in machinery means that we won't have to pay any taxes for three years.

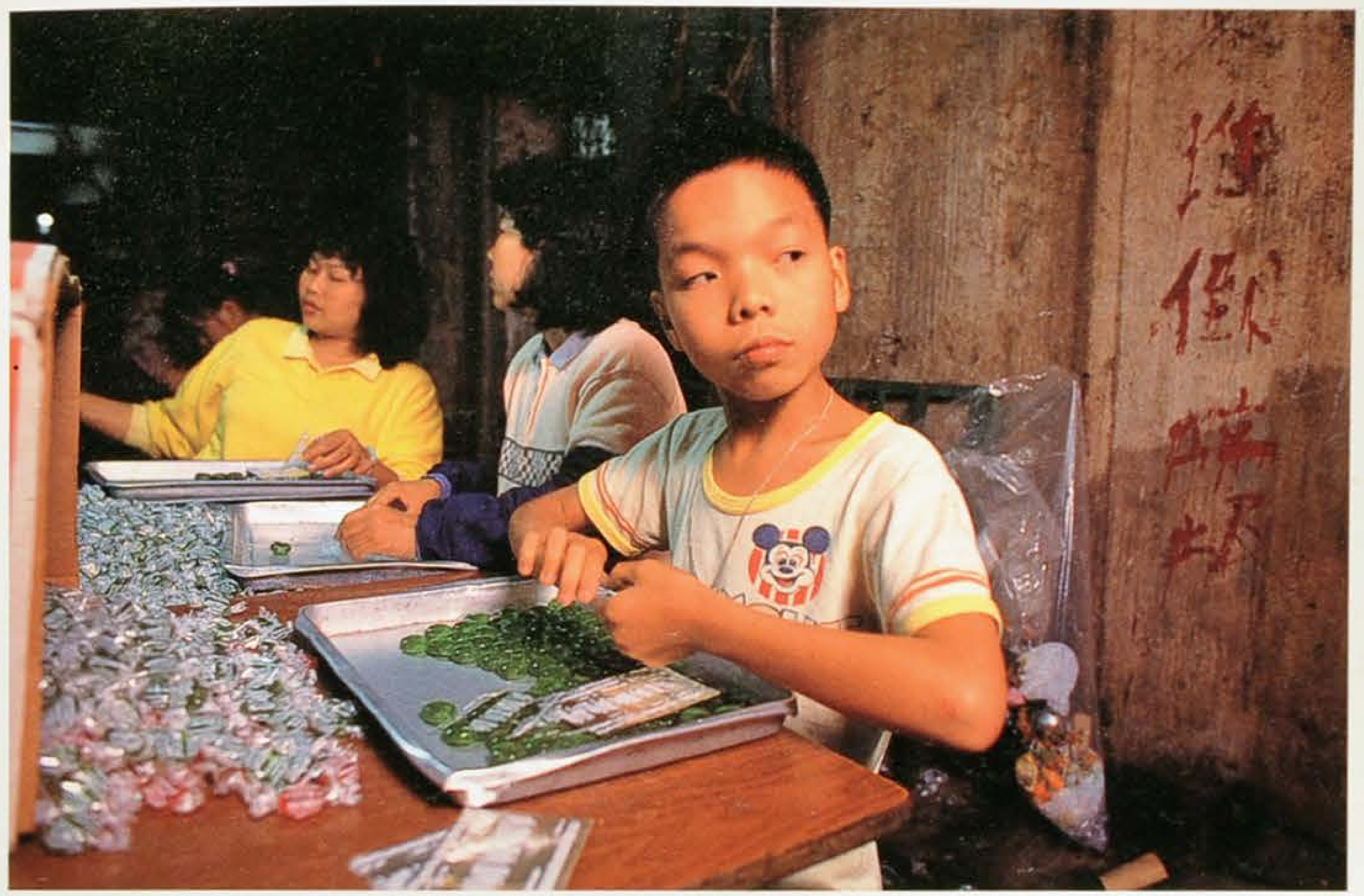
Our sweets have different flavours – strawberry, lemon, orange, banana and coconut. No one enforces any quality control or standards from the outside. We make sure our products are up to standard ourselves – we would not have so many customers if our products weren't good. We specify the ingredients we use in accordance with recent legislation in Hong Kong and we have gone metric. We adhere to the requirements laid down outside. For example, we used to use a certain pink colouring, but when it was discovered that it contained mercury we stopped using it. Certainly, you won't find any poison in our sweets. You can take them for chemical analysis and you will find that we use no preservatives.

Now we have to move, but I hope we will be able to set up elsewhere. The cost of running the operation here is small and we don't need to pay rent. We don't have any capital and leaving here will mean a significant drop in our competitiveness. Even if the compensation is sufficient to help us relocate our factory, we will still have to find student workers, and costs outside are so much higher. Most people are selling at $8 or $9 a pound, while our price is $5; it is difficult to estimate the profit we make on one pound of sweets. We would have to revise our prices to cover the rise in the cost of living.

It was my father's philosophy that we should go out and see something of the world, and 10 years ago I worked in an electronics factory for several hours a day. My brother worked in a plastics factory too, but there is more freedom here, working for ourselves. I only studied up to lower middle school, so if I have to work in a factory I'd prefer to work in my own.







The factory was a family enterprise; Lee Yu Chun's husband fed the candy mixture, while her grandmother, her twin daughters and her son collected the newly pressed sweets. Lee Yu Chun [shown above, wearing a yellow top] supervised the wrapping. At its peak, the factory employed 10 full-time workers and up to 20 temporary sweet wrappers, many of whom were children who would drop by after school to earn some pocket money. They were allowed to wander in and out, and were paid according to the number of sweets wrapped. The sweets were made using local well water but there were never any complaints, apparently because of the very high temperatures of the boiling process.

CHINA LIGHT & POWER COMPANY, LIMITED
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Arriving in Hong Kong at the age of 26, Chan Kwong worked as a hawker and in a plastics factory before opening his own golf-ball factory, in Kowloon City, in 1970. Two years later, he moved to Tai Chang Street in the Walled City.

I am originally from Shantou, Chiu Chow, and I came to Hong Kong with my brother in 1948; the rest of our family followed later.

My company is called Tai Kwong Plastic Factory and before I moved into the Walled City, in the 1970s, it was in rented premises at Shing Ngam Road. I would manufacture anything – hair clips, toys, ornaments, plastic flowers. Now we are making golf balls.

When I first started my factory I employed five or six men, but after a few years I started to use automatic machines. At times, I was operating 24 hours a day. At one stage, I also employed 30 or more female workers who worked at home.

With the golf balls, I started off by doing just a few hundred, then a few thousand, then more than 10,000. Now I make golf balls for many countries – the USA, Japan, France and so on – and I deal with big companies, including one from America which is up in the top 10. The Trade Development Council acted as the intermediary for my golf-ball production and I got to know my business partners from abroad through them.

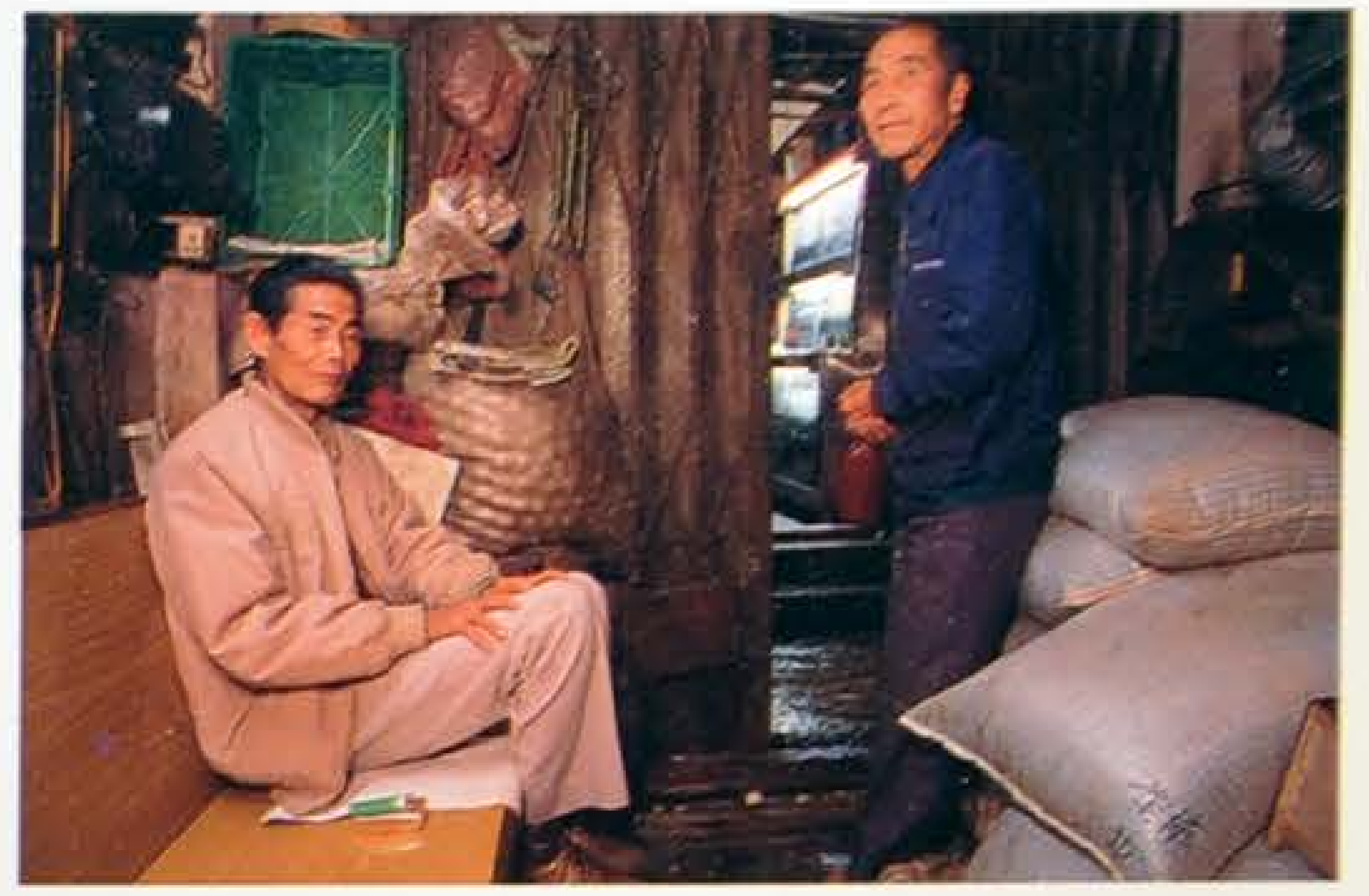
Golf-ball manufacturing requires a lot of experience. Sometimes I am sent specific designs. I do the packing myself, but a freight company organises the shipments. American buyers have visited my factory. They were very impressed by our ability to produce 10,000 or more golf balls a day. If your product is up to standard, they trust you to do the job – once they offered me more capital to expand.

My business was most prosperous in the 1970s, making $300,000 or so a month. There was one contract worth $700,000 that we completed within two months. As the cost of production is low, our prices are very competitive. Female workers are paid in accordance with the number of buckets of golf balls completed. There are 12 dozen in a bucket and we sell at $30 per bucket. Now that the Walled City is to be demolished, however, I am taking my business more casually and not producing as much as before.

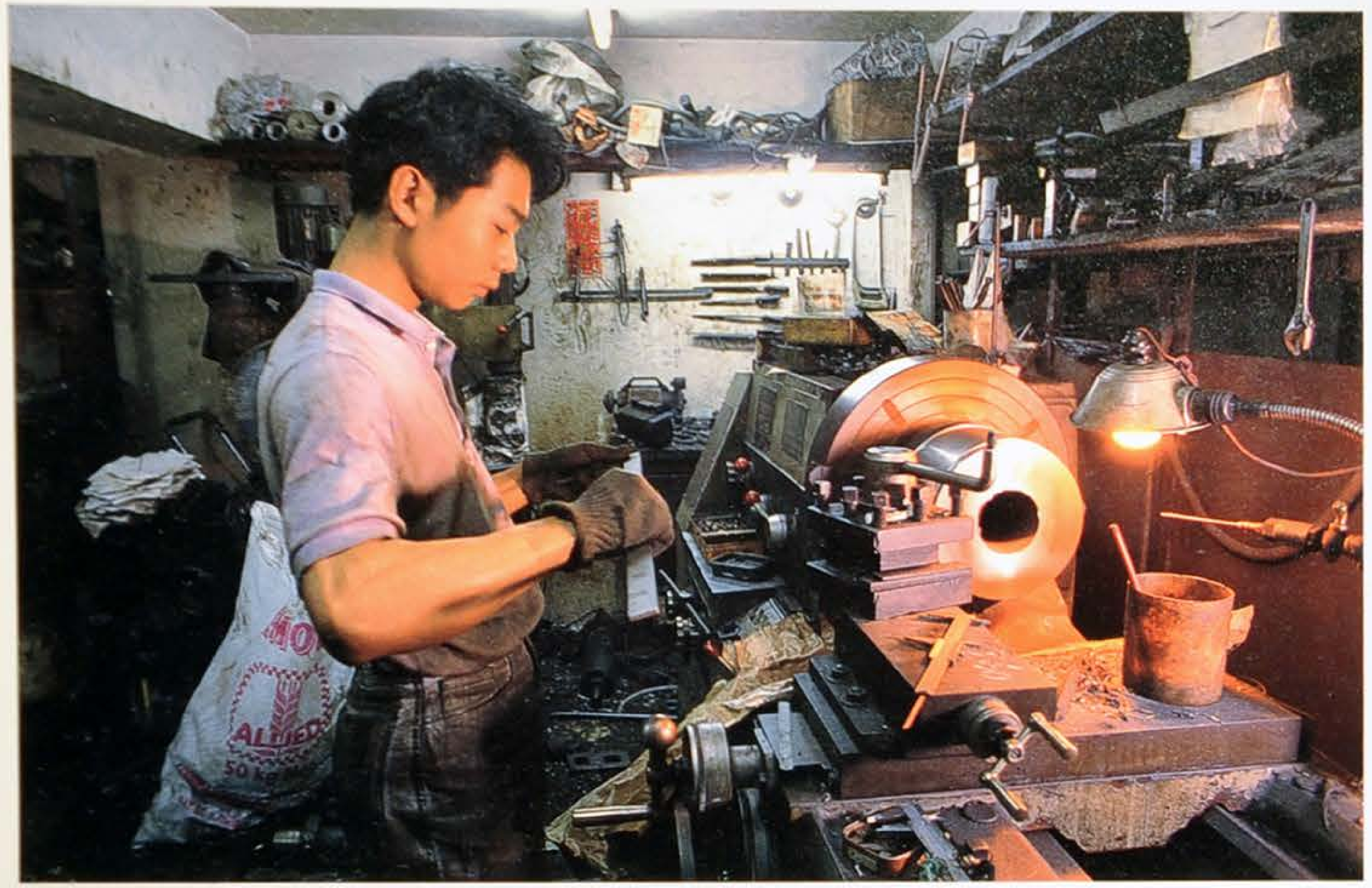
When my factory was outside the City, I had a business licence which I kept when I moved. It is a lot easier to do business in the Walled City – fewer inspectors from the Labour Services Department and greater freedom. I did not have to take out insurance policies for employees or pay extra for public holidays. There was no problem with the banks. As long as a company has a good reputation, it can obtain an overdraft or letters of credit. The TDC people have also visited my factory.

When the City is demolished, I will go back to my old home on the mainland where I still have some relatives, although I will probably visit Hong Kong every now and then. My son and daughter do not wish to take over the business and so I have no successors. My wife is still working, but in a garment factory. She does not like plastics manufacturing.

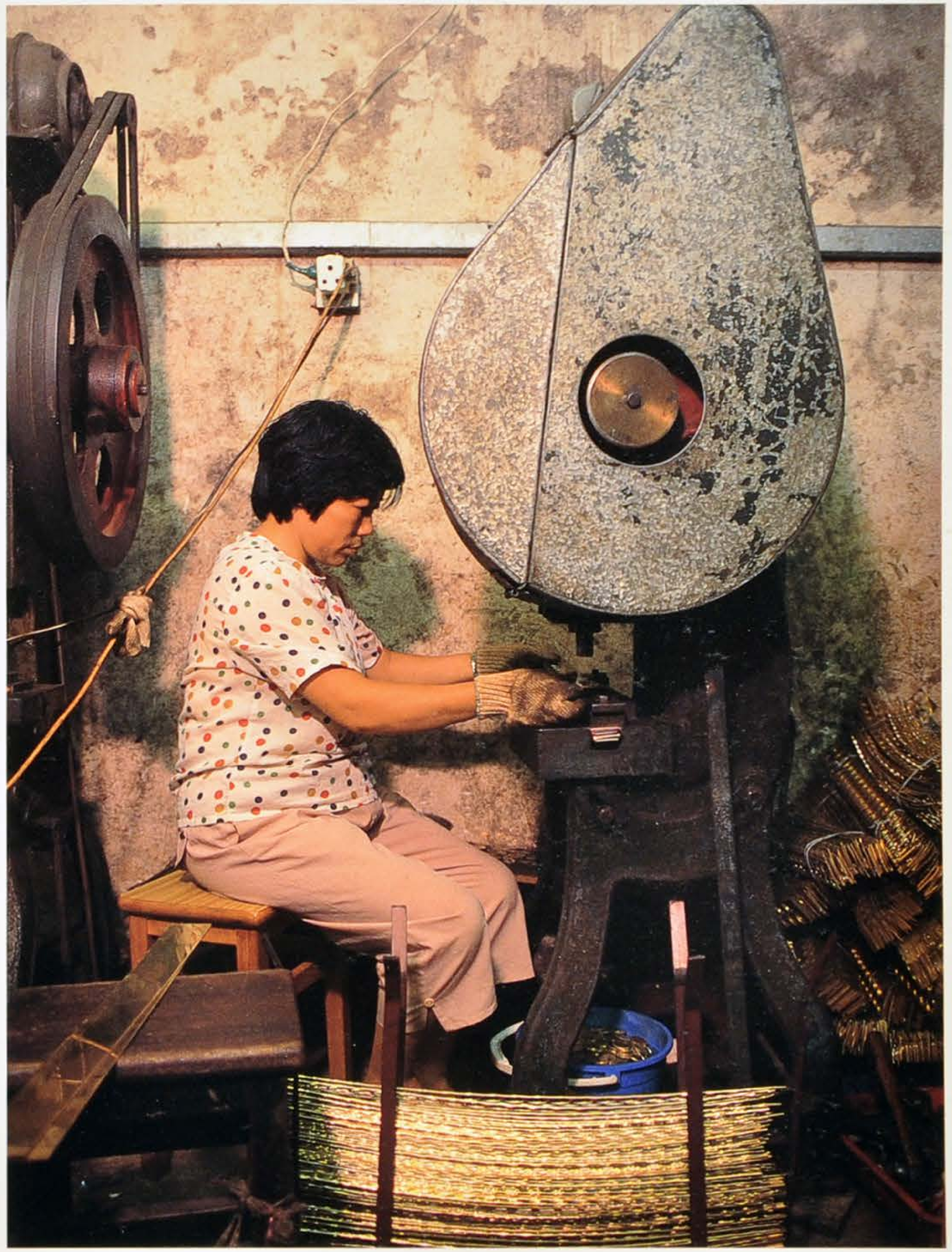
Demolition is coming at the right time, just when I am contemplating retirement. However, the Government is offering just $300,000 compensation for my site and $30,000 for relocation. Look at this electric cabling – the installation of that alone cost more than $30,000. I am 67 years old and was told to apply for compensation for permanent closure. It was approved, but now they've changed their mind.



Chan Kwong [standing] with a friend at the entrance to his factory. Stored to the left of the metal door, underneath a chest expander, is a sack of golf balls.



Metal-working factories made up a large proportion of the City's 700 or so industrial premises. A significant number could be found between the first and fifth floors, a few even higher, depending on access requirements. Bottom: Machine-repairer Yu Kwok Fai was one of many workers who kept a bird in his small workshop.



In addition to metal works, plastics factories were abundant, particularly those pressing simple moulds or tooling cheap toys. The storage and use of highly inflammable chemicals in such processes presented serious fire risks, and neighbouring residents and businesses would occasionally unite to voice their concerns if such operations were perceived to be dangerous. Factory workers were often non-residents, coming to the City from elsewhere in Hong Kong.

Born in China in 1916, Lam Tseng Yat arrived in Hong Kong 10 years later, with his father and four brothers. In 1947, they bought a small property at 25 Tai Chang Street and opened their first store.

I came to Hong Kong with my father when I was 10 years old, and I've been here now for more than 40 years. We lived down near the old market in Kowloon City at first, selling groceries. Then we moved to Sha Bo Road, to the new market, and stayed there until the War came and the Japanese demolished it.

We had purchased a house inside the Walled City and, soon after the War, we began running a business there. It was a two-storey stone hut, but it was later redeveloped into a seven-storey building in a joint venture with other people. The land belonged to us.

People bought peanut oil, rice, cigarettes, alcohol and fruit from us. Customers came from all walks of life, but we were treated fairly and never had our things stolen; we never paid protection money either. I knew everyone in the neighbourhood. The most prosperous street was ours – Tai Chang ('Big Well') Street. The others, like Lo Yan ('Old People') Street, Kwong Ming ('Bright') Street and Lung Shing ('Dragon City') Road, were also busy.

HUDSON'S
DRINK
雪山雪糕

Our business exceeded that of the shops along Nathan Road. This street was always crowded with people coming for fun, even at midnight. Many people came to the City for food; there was snake everywhere and dog meat was famous too. Everyone came here for that, but I don't eat it myself. Ours was a father and son business, though in the past we employed some part-timers to make deliveries. At one time we had the largest grocery business in the City.

We used to buy in bulk: beer in crates and 50 to 60 sacks of rice at a time. There are rats here, of course, and they eat everything except the canned goods, but we keep cats and dogs. Our dogs are good at catching rats.

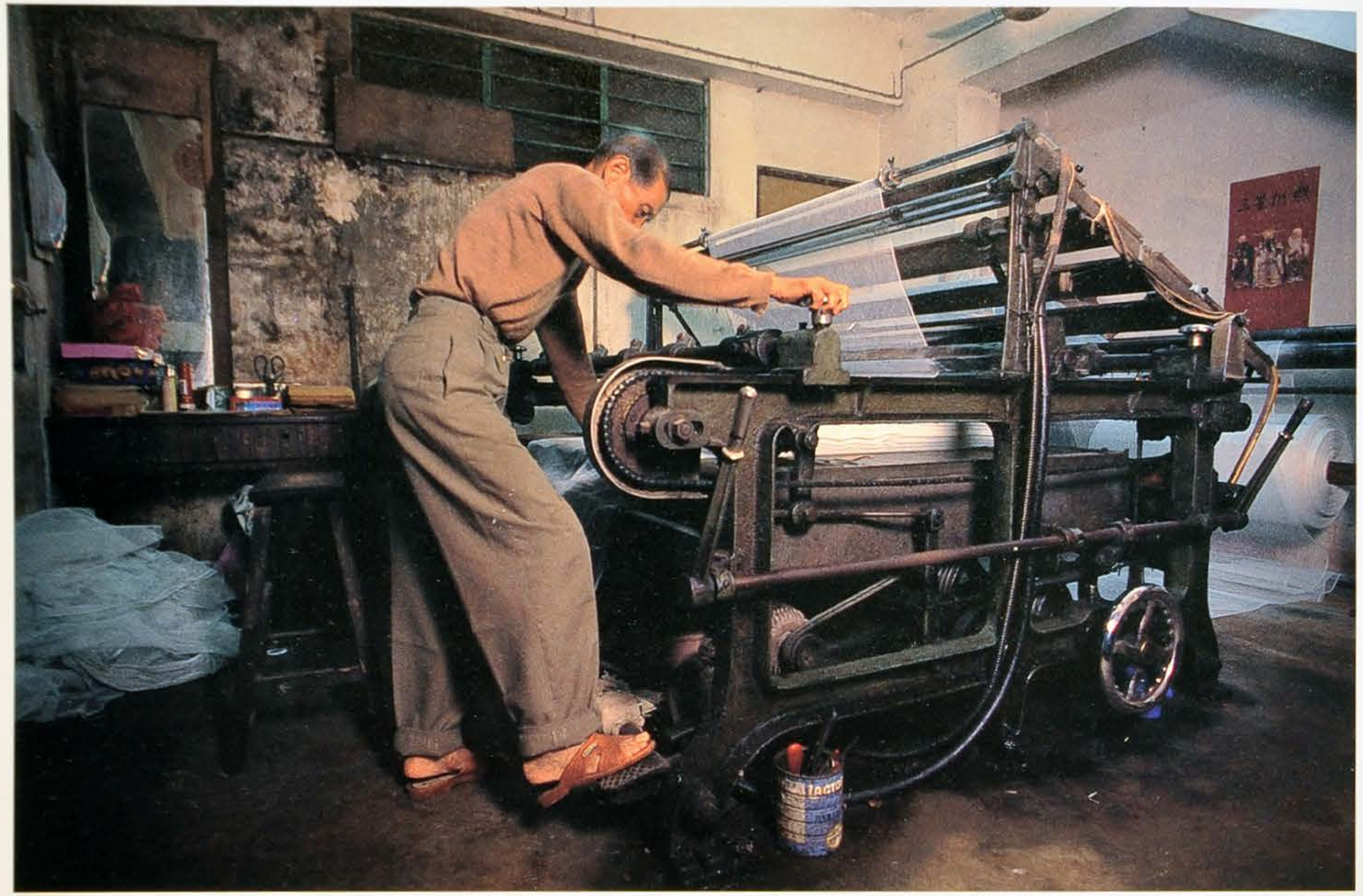
Our business has been registered with the Government for more than 20 years, and our shop has existed for more than 40. We registered because it meant we could make use of the facilities offered by the banks, but it's not really necessary.

The demolition is a real problem. From the outset, we have demanded a shop for a shop, and living quarters for living quarters from the Government. The compensation is such a small amount of money; how can we survive outside? It isn't even enough to set up another shop. We shall be jobless. If they won't give us a place for a new shop, they should give us sufficient money to buy one – and that means nothing less than $1.5 million.

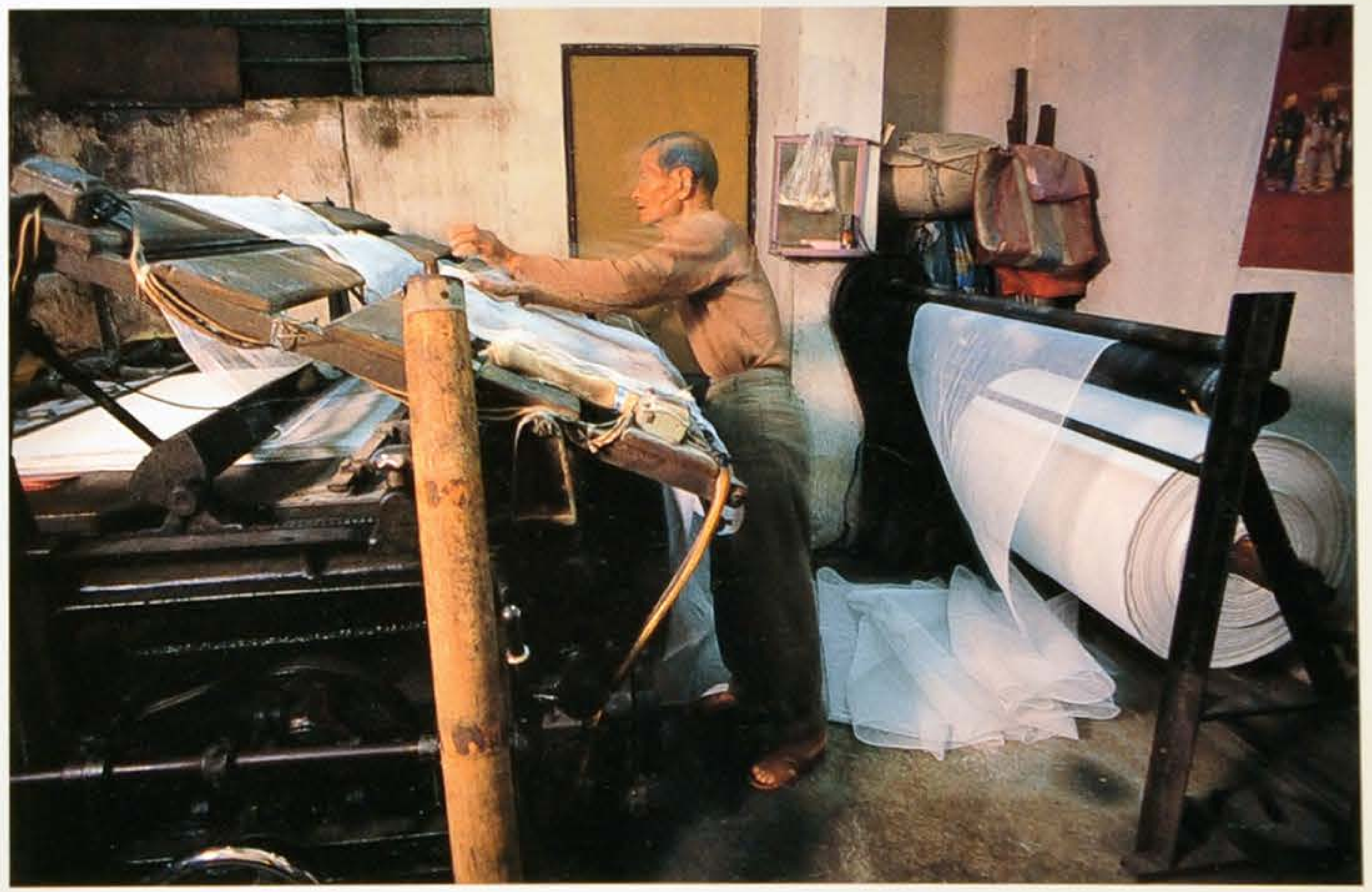
I have lived here all these years, with my wife. All my children were born here; they were married here. We lived on the first and fourth floors of this building, but when my children moved out we sold them and now I live in the shop. My fourth brother has 12 children and they lived in the City too.

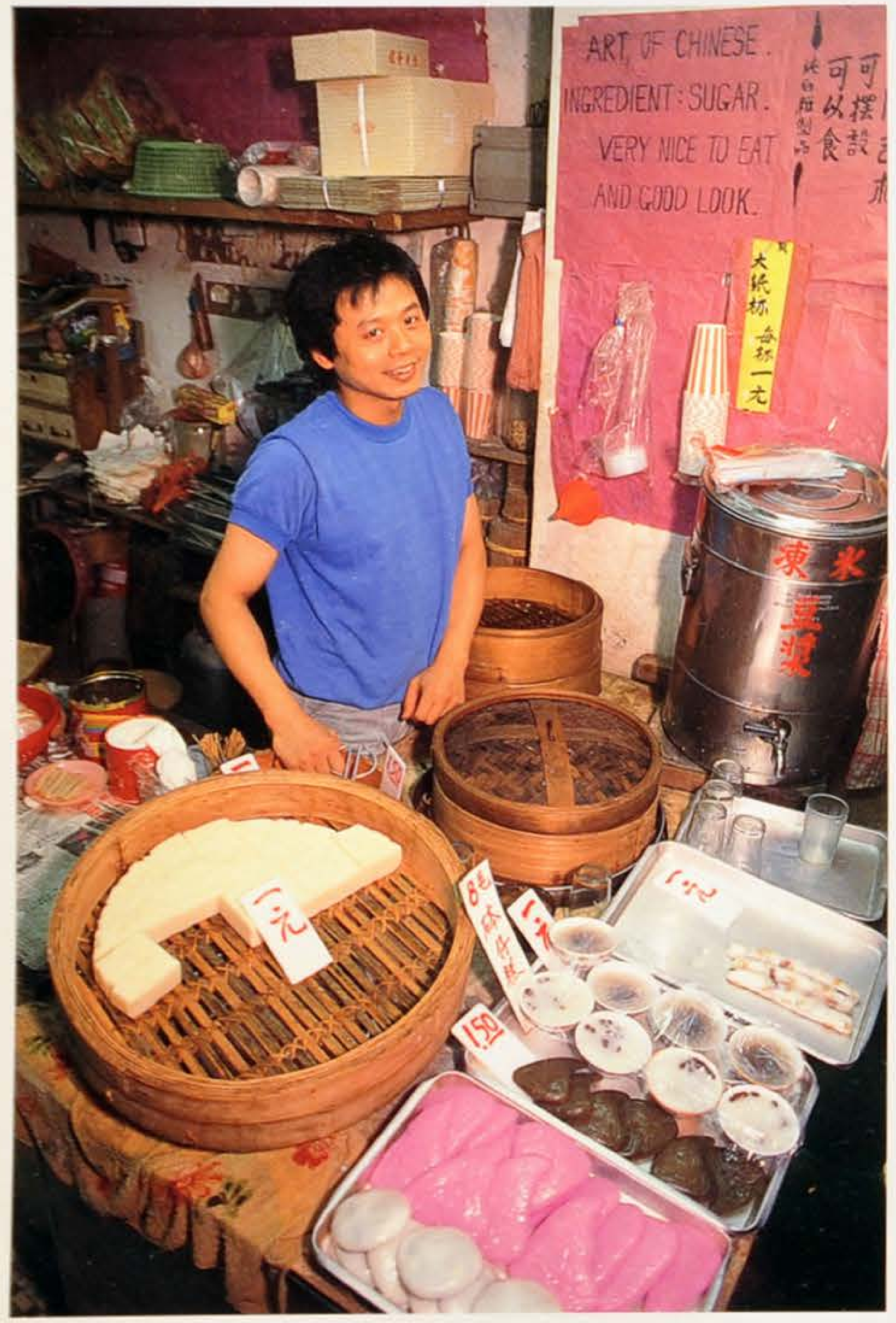
We shall stay on even if there is no business left, and I will never accept the offer of $210,000. Of course, they can find ways to drive us out. They can pull everything down, but the demolition of the Walled City isn't the same as getting rid of ordinary squatters. The whole world will know about it. I told the guy from the City Administration Office that if the compensation was not right, I would not move. We will not move, even if we are machine-gunned.

HUDSON'S
DRI
Coc
雪山雪糕



Still working at 86, Yu Hing Wan was the last of the City's muslin makers, at one time a major industry there before the emergence of synthetic materials. Like most other factory owners in the City, Yu Hing Wan chose his location on Lung Chun Road for its cheap rent, particularly given his need to accommodate large machinery and store cloth. Outside the City, he felt, the business would not have been viable, and he would not have been a factory owner. A long-term resident of 18 years, Yu was originally from the Hakka community of Guangdong province, and therefore in a minority among the City's mainly Chiu Chow population. Though his factory premises were neat and clean, he suffered most, after long years of hard work, from the debilitating noisiness of the ageing machinery and from the factory's complete lack of ventilation.




ART OF CHINESE
INGREDIENT: SUGAR.
VERY NICE TO EAT
AND GOOD LOOK.

Chau Sau Yee was born in Chiu Chow and came to Hong Kong when he was six years old. In 1968, at the age of 14, he left school to help his father in the family bakery business.

Our first shop was on Tung Tau Tsuen Road in Wong Tai Sin, but it was demolished soon after and we had to move. A friend suggested that we move to a new building he knew of in the Walled City. He said there was a Kai Fong Association to take care of the purchase agreement and that it was not at all risky.

We thought the matter over and decided that it would not need a licence. We had not heard anything about the demolition of the City, otherwise we might not have dared to buy the premises. We could never have imagined that there would be compensation, or that it would be worth more than the value of the premises.

The Kai Fong Association prepared the purchase agreement for us for a handling fee of $200. We were given a copy of the agreement in the form of an old Chinese deed which we trusted as being secure and safe. The previous owner of the premises had intended to operate a noodle shop and had arranged power and water, a metal gate and other renovation work. We bought all these fixtures too.

Electricity is supplied by the power company and, as this is a new building, the wiring was laid properly and the supply is stable. That is not always the situation further inside the City. There, the wiring is a mess and the power supply is affected by houses sharing the same cable.

We use well water to make our cakes with and to drink. There are several well-water tanks in the Walled City and we installed a meter and connected our premises to one of them. Some of the families who do not like the brackish taste of well water carry water from the nearby stand-pipes to make tea. The water here costs $100 a month, no matter how much we use. A store is estimated to use less water than a residential flat.

We make a wide variety of traditional cakes and our ingredients come from different countries – 'Lucky Jim' flour from the USA and glutinous rice flour from Thailand, glutomate from Holland and sugar from Korea. There are other shops making similar food to us, but not so many different kinds of cakes. Most of the cakes are cooked by steaming, although some are baked. We make several hundred cakes a day and many more on festival days.

Some are sold to retail shops and some to temples for ceremonies. The temples usually want New Year cakes and glutinous rice dumplings. We cut these using thread, not a knife. When there are ceremonies for the dead at one of the temples, we estimate the number of orders required about seven days in advance. Orders for cakes to celebrate the birthdays of the gods are also normally placed a few days in advance. We often have to work overnight during these occasions, and at New Year we work for several days non-stop. Other customers include noodle shops and Sunday stores which sell traditional Chiu Chow food. About a third of the people living in the Walled City are of Chiu Chow origin and some Chiu Chow families from outside also come to buy cakes.

We use pigment in some of our cakes, although we have no idea of the standards set by the Government. Our supplier says they are edible and as we use very little pigment, and the cakes are not eaten as frequently as rice, I don't think they will be harmful to health. No one has ever complained. Sometimes, when the food has been displayed for one or two days or when we notice a slight change in the colour, we throw it away.

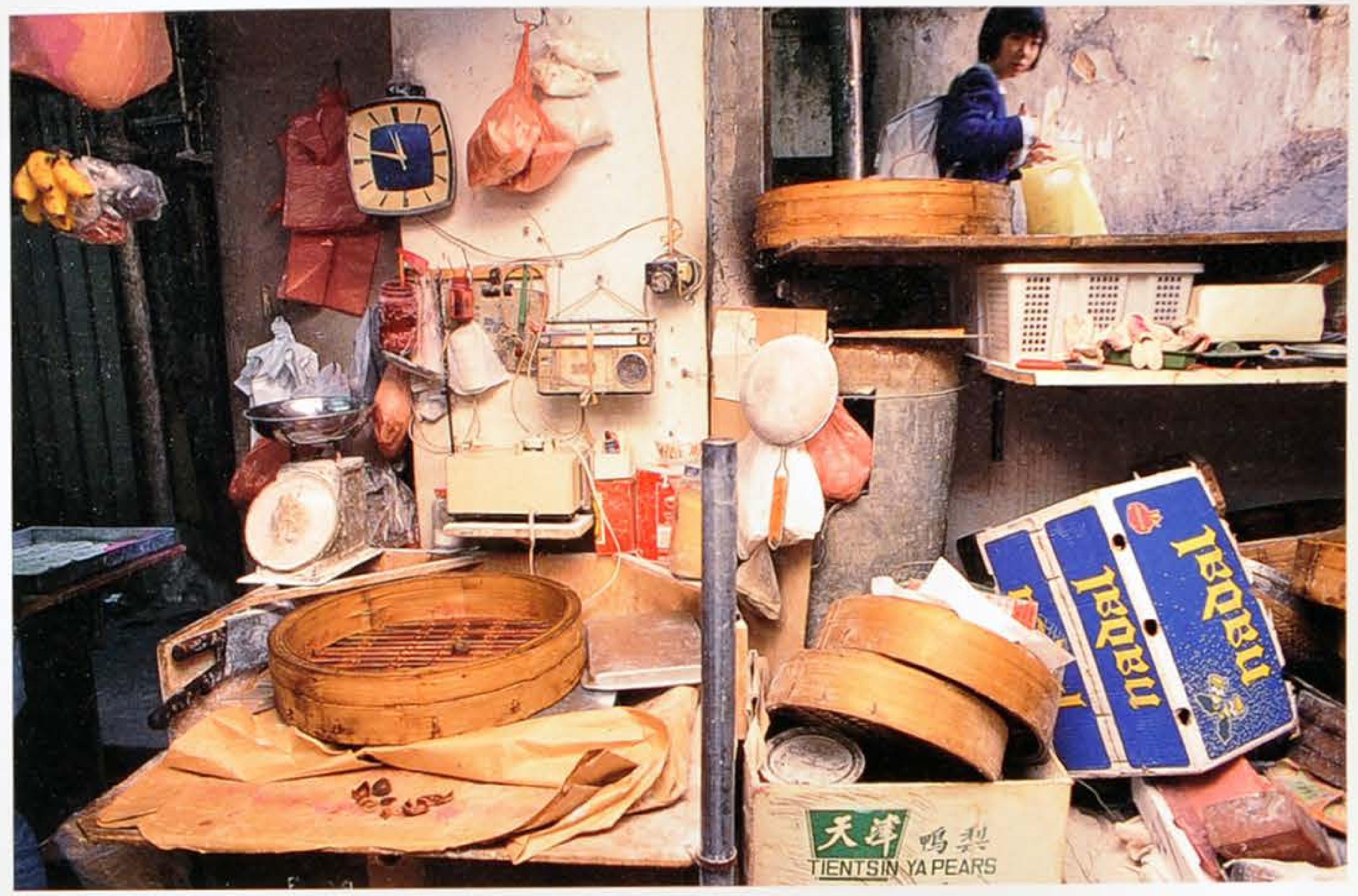
When we are very busy we employ some elderly women of Chiu Chow origin on a daily-rate basis. We are just about able to cope with the number of customers we have at present and we don't make any effort to promote our cakes.

We could have applied for a licence for the shop, but we didn't as we would then have had to pay tax. Doing business here is no different from doing business elsewhere except for the shop front. If I look for another shop elsewhere, the shop front has to meet the requirements and standards set for the issuing of a licence.

In the time that I have been here, I have not experienced any problems. No gangs have approached me for money and I have not witnessed any crime, although I have still not toured round all the Walled City. I have seen police patrols catch illegal immigrants and lead them out of the City, and I know there are crooks here sometimes, but then there are crooks in other districts too – so the Walled City cannot be blamed. At least here, we feel free and are never disturbed.

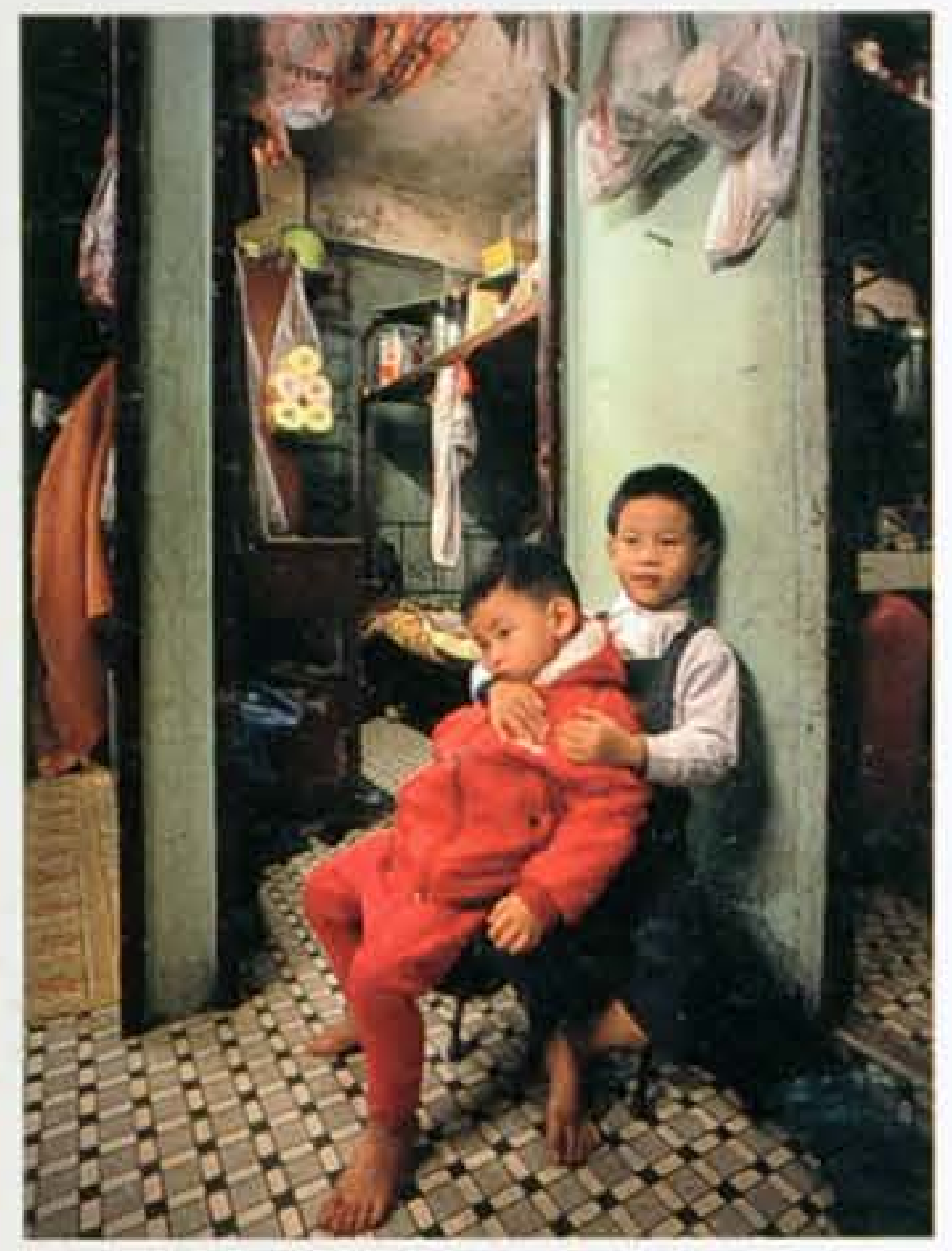
I do feel, however, that sanitation is a serious problem in the inner part of the City. We have found rats in my shop eating the flour and we definitely have ants and cockroaches. In the inner part of the City there are rubber hoses and electricity wires everywhere; it's a real mess. West City Road, which this shop is on, is the cleanest alley; the conditions in other alleys are awful.

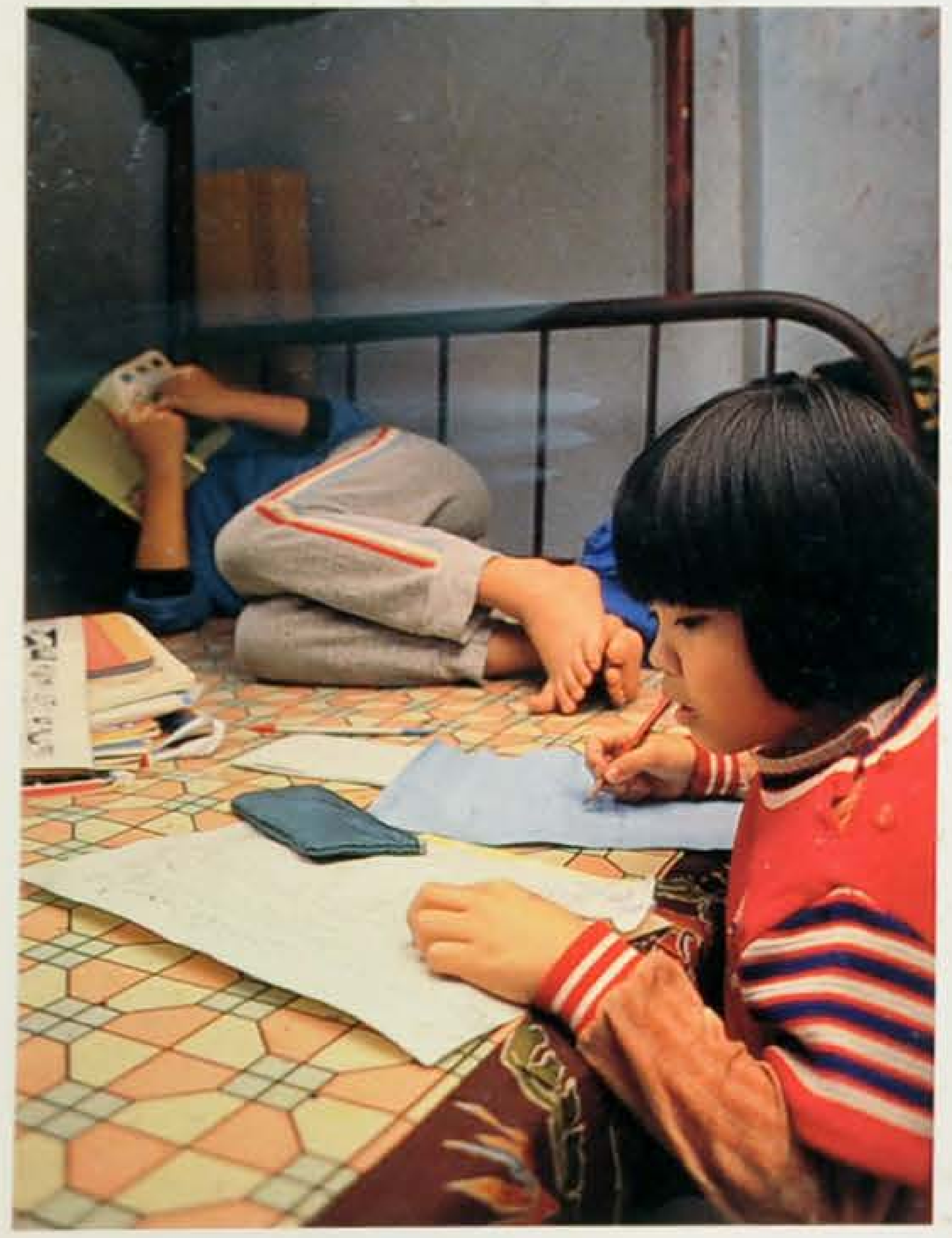
The demolition of the Walled City is important to me, even more important than the approach of 1997. I am always thinking about it. It will be difficult to start a business again elsewhere and I lost a lot when my previous shop in Wong Tai Sin was demolished. I will have to get a shop, either by tender or by purchase, similar to my present one in order to continue the business, and this is worrying me. Most likely, I will continue to make cakes in the future. I don't know what else I can do.

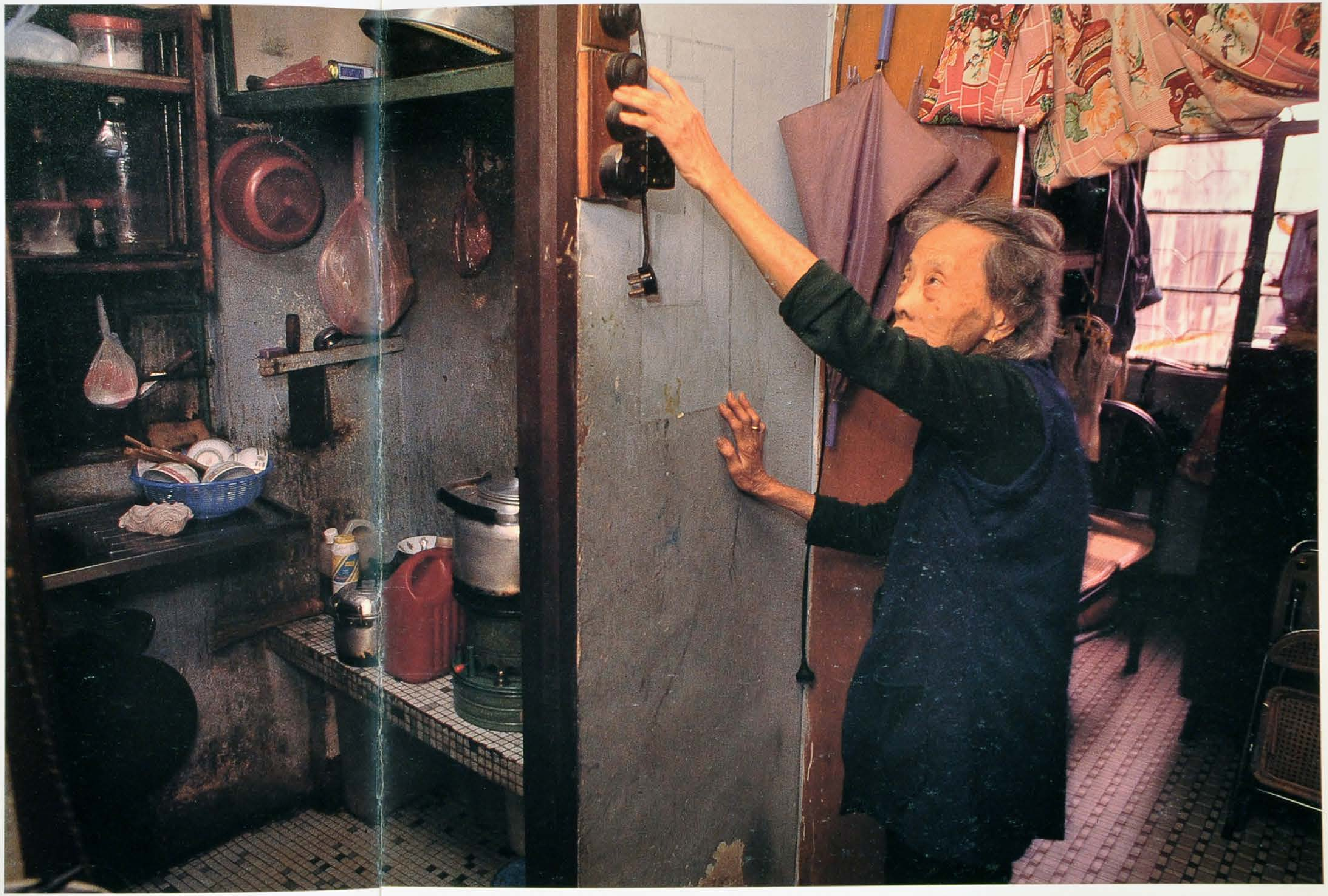


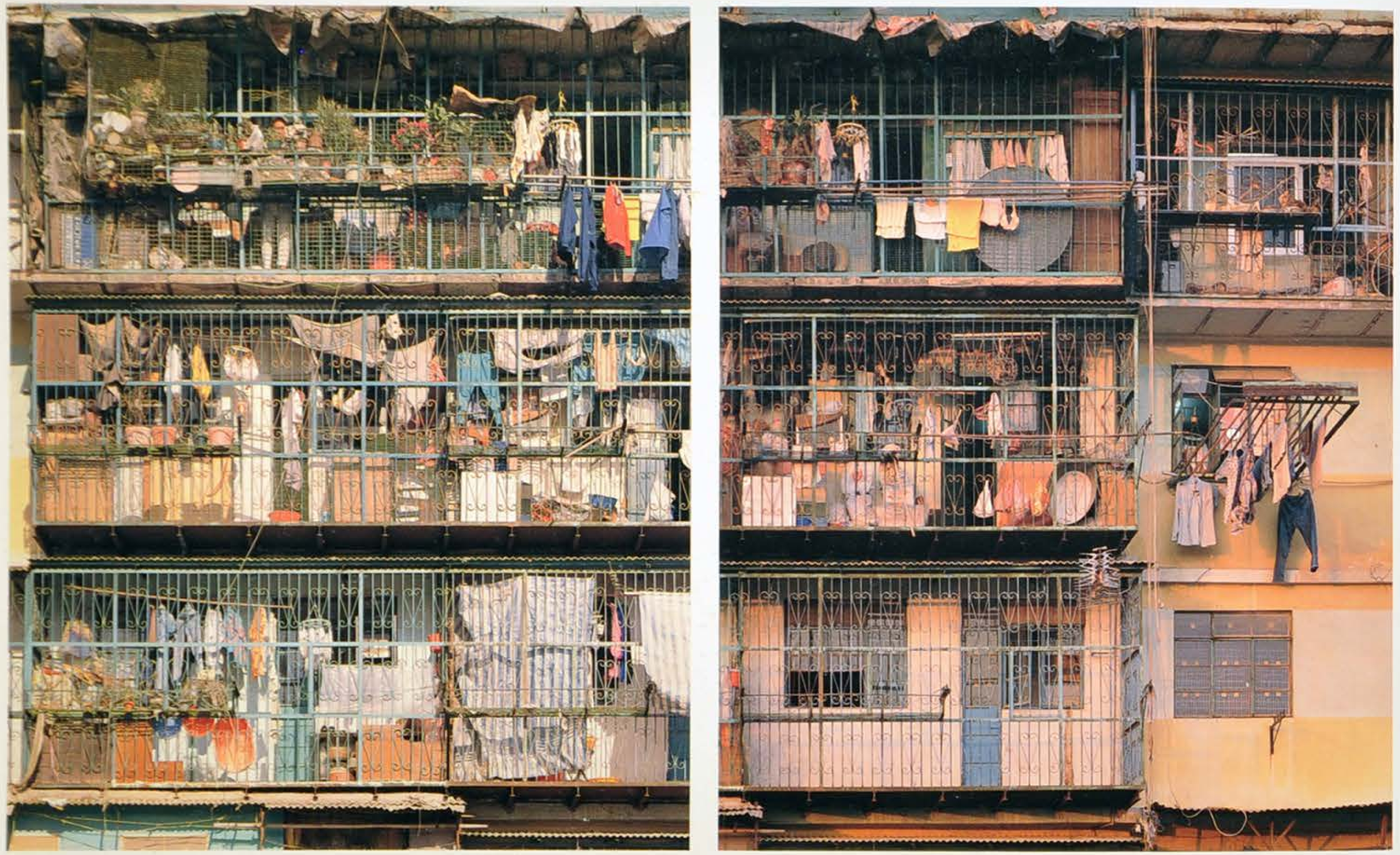
Somewhat incongruously, Jelly Chau's cake shop on the north-west corner of West City Road became a regular stopping point for groups of curious foreign tourists. After the clearance was announced, in 1987, guided tours of the City became increasingly popular. Part of the Chiu Chow cuisine, his sweets and cakes were usually based on rice flour, were very sweet and tended to be quite glutinous.

In Hong Kong, it is common practice in lower-income families for both parents to work full-time. However, this practice depends heavily on the continuance of the extended family. Thus, it remains the custom for one or other grandmother to care for the children during the day or after school. Mrs Low [right] collected her two grandchildren from school every day and took them back to her own flat for the afternoon, where they often did their homework on her bed. Their parents would drop by to pick them up on their way home. The close-knit nature of the City's community meant that, within any one building, a grandmother or housewife might take care of several of the neighbours' children as well as her own. Stair-wells and landings were often alive with children playing, though in recent years parents had become more reluctant to allow younger children out of their sight unless they were accompanied.

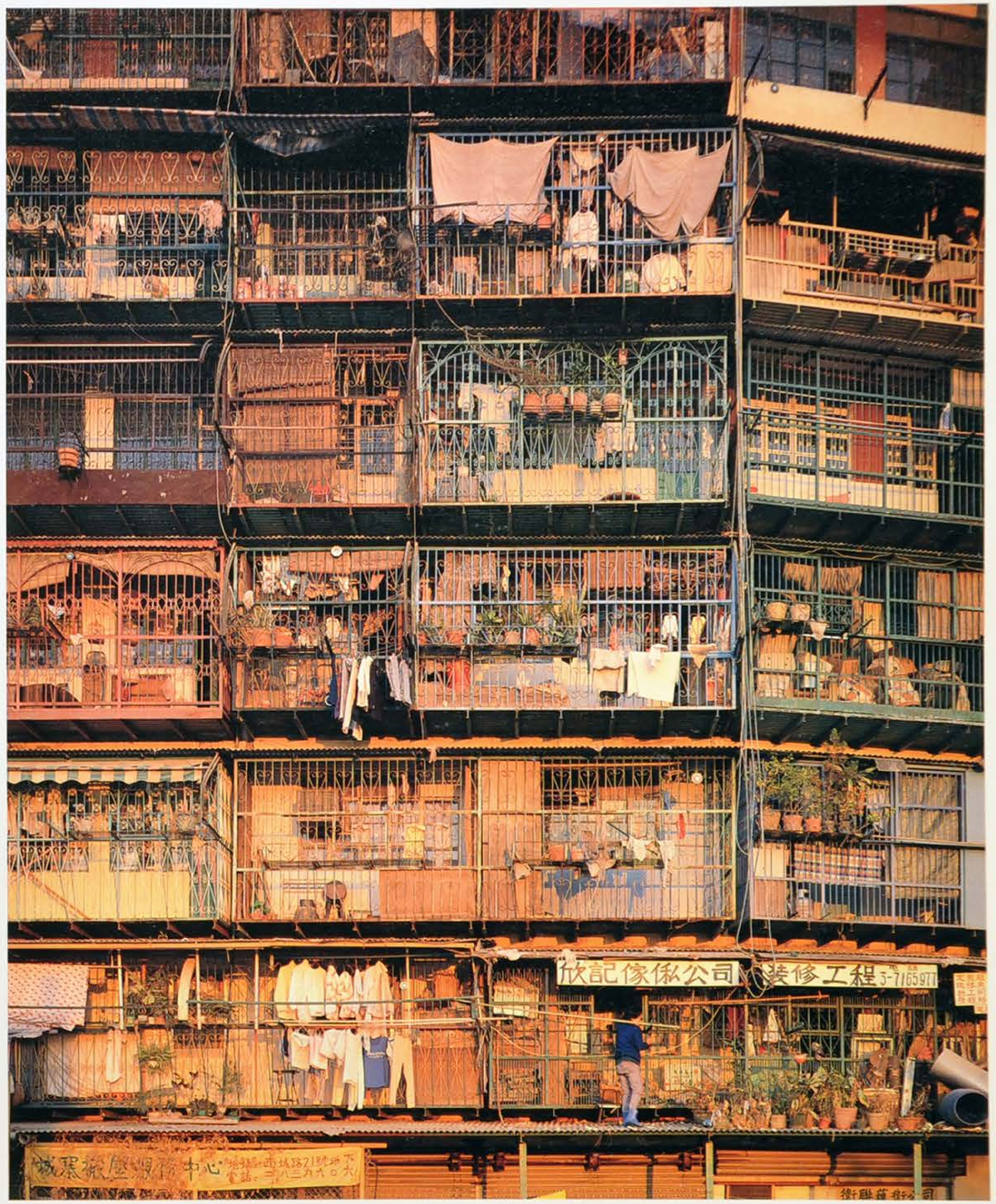


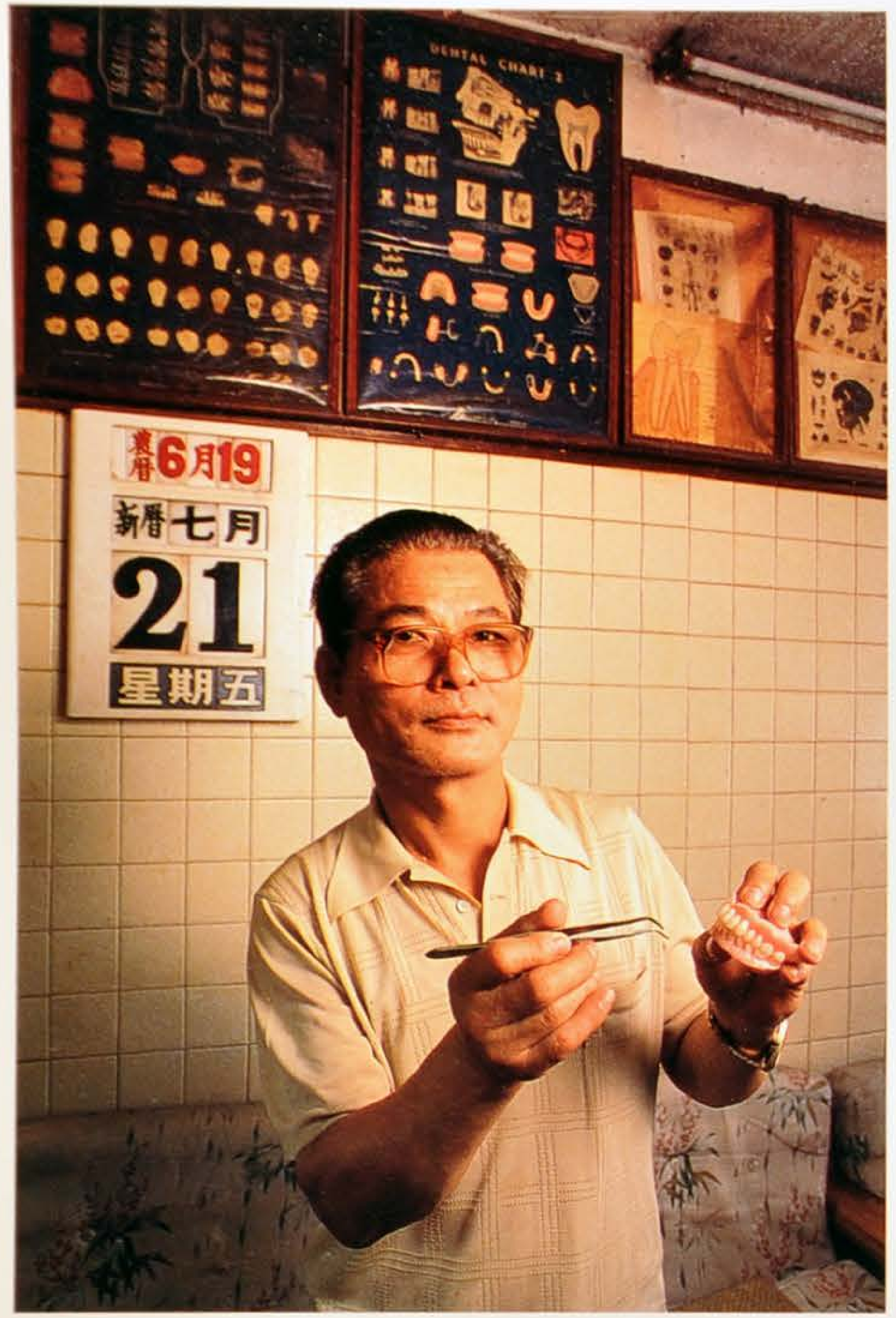






Bedding out to air, washing out to dry, plants, birdcages and seats for taking in the view: whatever use these 'buildings on buildings' – as illegal balconies were known – were put to, they expressed the zest for life characteristic of the Hong Kong Chinese. Residents had their own colloquial terms for many of the City's features: 'lovers' buildings', for example, described the many buildings which appeared to lean on each other, while the 'devil's paradise' referred to the open courtyard at the centre of the City, where the Old People's Centre was to be found. Previous page: A rusting dentist's sign midway up the south elevation.



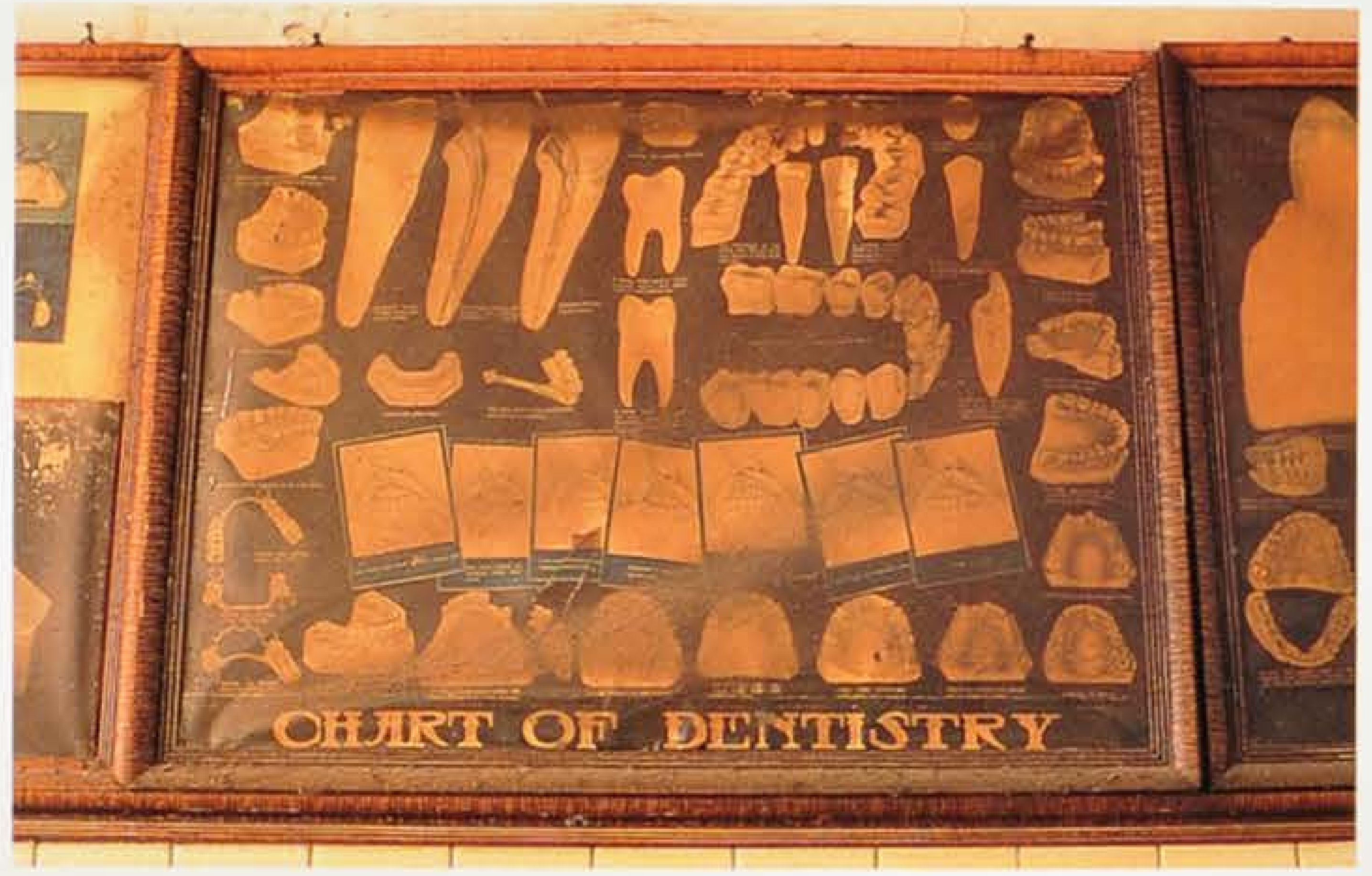


Like many of the City's dental practitioners, Wong Yu Ming's main source of work was shaping and refining dentures, often under contract to registered dentists outside the City. A certificate of accreditation [far right] states that he was also a trained herbal doctor.

Born in 1930, Wong Yu Ming fled to Hong Kong with his wife and children in the late 1950s, opening his dental clinic on Lung Shing Road within a few months of his arrival.

I studied medicine in China and learnt to be a dentist and herbalist both from my father, who was a dentist also, and by studying myself.

I came to Hong Kong from Chiu Chow after my children were born to start a new life, because the Communist Party said I had bad thoughts – I can't remember which year. I came by myself and, at first, worked on Hong Kong island. I could only speak a little Mandarin and a little Hakka and could hardly communicate. Nobody understood what I was saying. I didn't know anyone and it was hard to start a business. During the first year, I frequently used to hide in the lavatory and cry.



After a few months in Hong Kong, I moved to the Walled City and rented these premises which I bought a year later. I have been here now for nearly 30 years. When I was here on my own I wasn't afraid, although I was bullied at first. But after my wife and children came, I was worried for them and became more cautious. As a rule I never bother anyone and hope that no one will bother me.

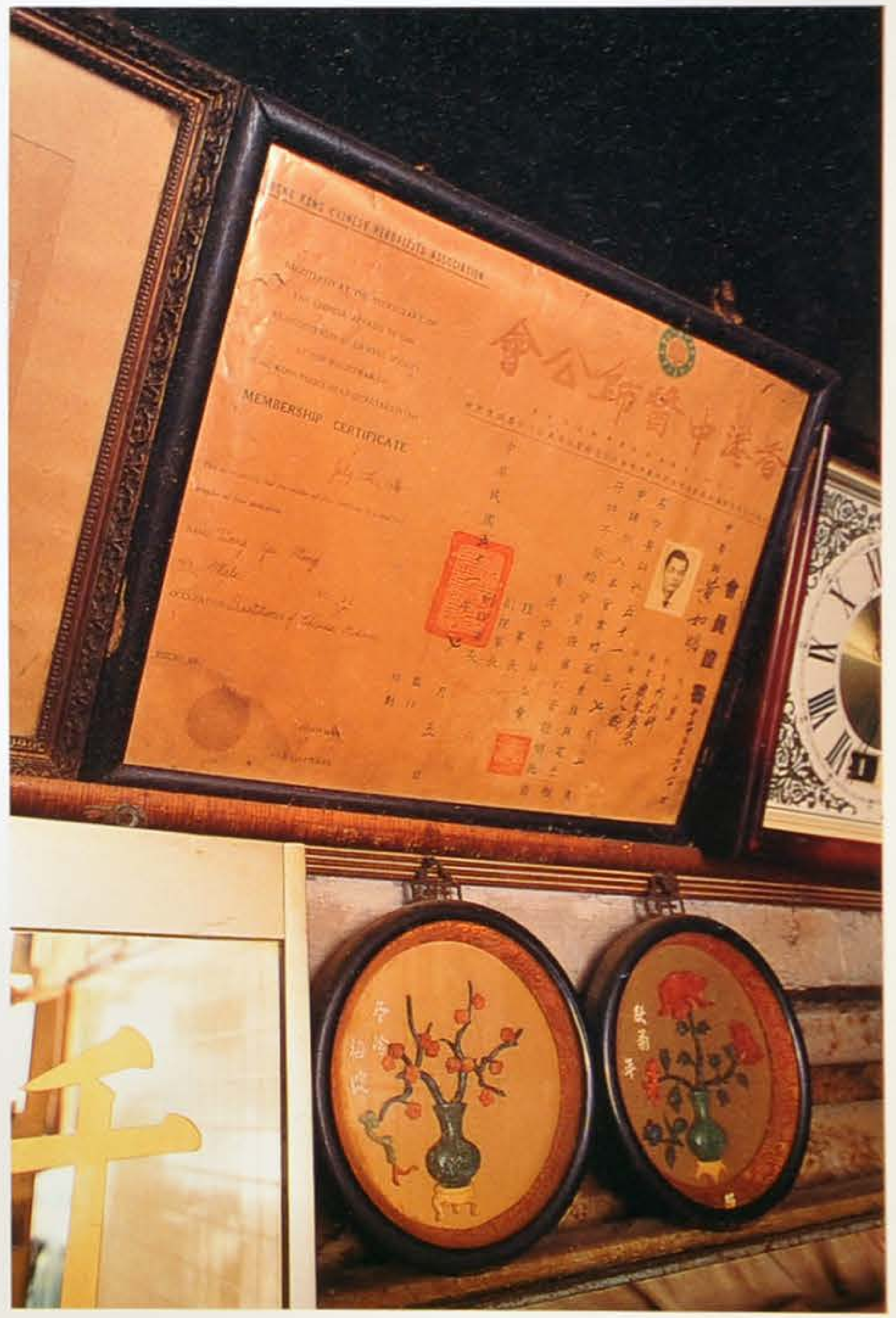
Business used to be very good. I had three employees and we always had a full house, but now I am getting old and don't want to work any more and my assistants have left. I have only worked as a dentist here, extracting teeth, doing fillings, making false teeth and so on. My customers are mainly from outside the City. If they don't talk a lot or ask too much I will do the work, otherwise I turn them away. Nowadays, though, I usually only work for regular patients or their friends. Patients have confidence if you are skilled. They don't care whether you are a registered dentist or not. Some dentists charge their patients high prices, but my prices are very reasonable.

I work and live here 24 hours a day. I seldom talk with other dentists in the City, not even to the people next door. I have seven children in Hong Kong, but they live with their mother. Sometimes my wife comes to see me when she has time, but then she goes away. The children give my wife money, but they don't pay me at all. Still, I have never asked my wife for a single cent.

THE NAKAI DENTAL SUPPLY CO.
OSAKA-TOKYO-KYOTO-FUKUOKA

My wife's name is on the deed for the house so she will share some of the compensation from the Government, but I don't care. She says she is saving up the money for our son to further his education in a Western country. Money means nothing to me. I let my wife deal with it.

When the City is pulled down, I may start a small business if I have enough money. If not, I will just forget about it. I won't buy a house. I can survive. I do not eat much and with a little money



I can survive for years. I don't gamble and I don't take drugs.

My generation thinks very differently from today's. My son cannot talk to me and I haven't much to say to my children, just like I didn't have much to talk about with my father. My wife likes to talk, but sometimes, if she calls me on the telephone and there isn't much to say, I just hang up.

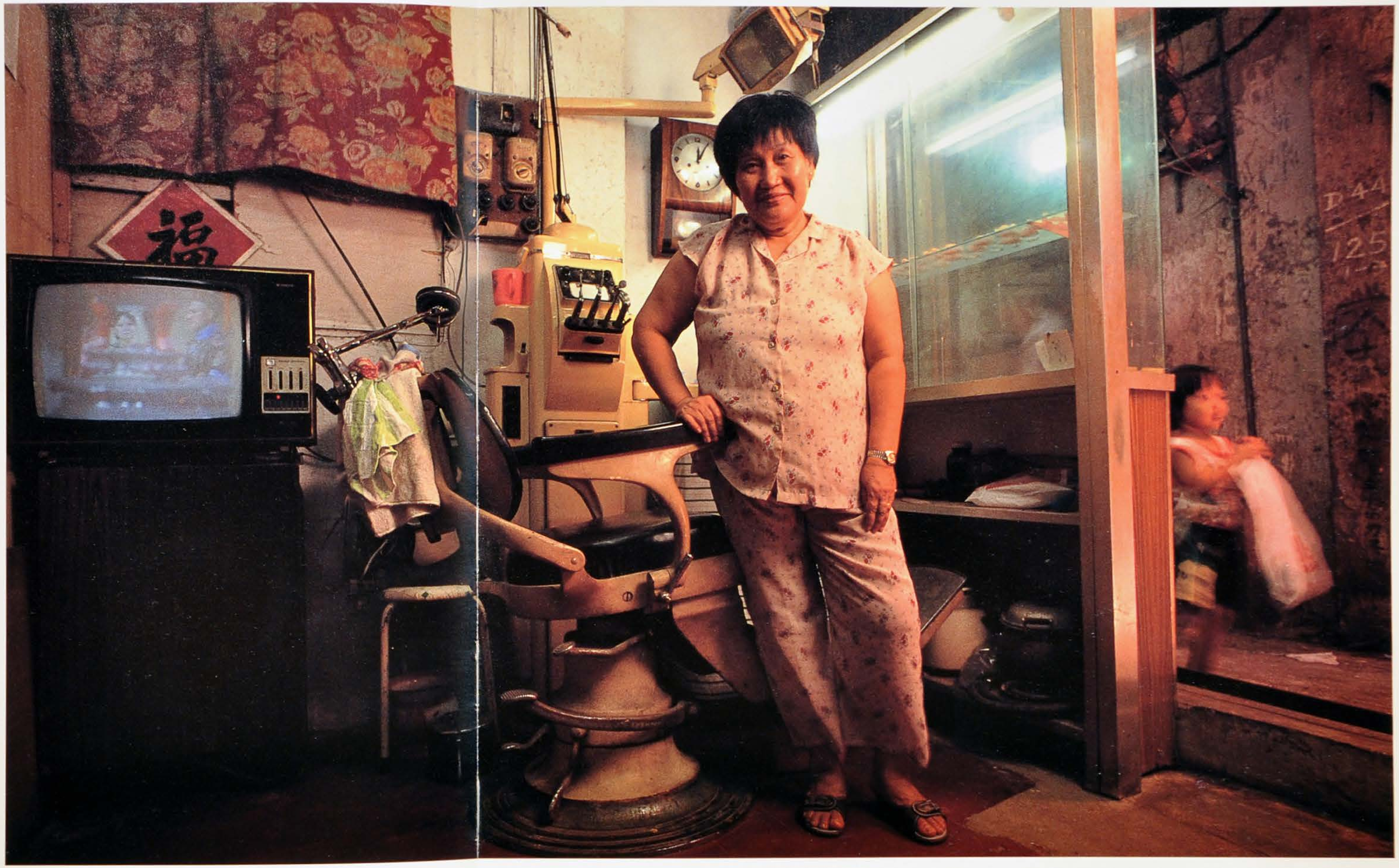
I haven't been to my wife's flat and I don't know if she will let me live there when the City is demolished. If I want a flat, the Government will deduct some money from the compensation and my wife and son will get less. The demolition is a matter concerning all of us here, but we have no say – just like the old days in China. Some people haven't accepted the Government's offer, but they have no choice. We are against the whole thing, but nothing can change the Government now.

They have measured my flat – the rate is fixed and I cannot argue with them. Some people said the compensation would be over $1 million, but that's not true. I shall divide the compensation for my work as a dentist into three parts: one share for myself, one for my wife and one for my son.

People think unregistered dentists make a lot of money. My sons think I have saved up a large amount of cash, but that's wrong. Some dentists have used their savings to invest in building flats in the Walled City and have become rich. Others haven't made any investments so they have no money: just like me. I couldn't save because I had to spend my money on my children's education. Since I had so many children, it cost me a lot. It gave me a headache and I have had to work hard to meet all their requests.

When I was young, I didn't care much. I took each day as it came. Now I am getting old, I worry more. The fact is, I am unhappy after working all these years. My wife and my children do not live with me and I feel lonely.

I will do whatever the Government says. I don't know what kind of business I will do in the future. I stay in this shop 24 hours a day and I don't know much of the outside world.



Dental assistant Cheung Mei learnt her trade from her husband, Wong Yu Ming [previous page]. *In the City's heyday more than 150 illegal dentists were thought to be practising in the City, though the figure had dropped to 86 by 1987. Professional standards were usually poor, but most dentists seemed to be aware of their limited capabilities and concentrated on simple dentistry such as teeth cleaning, small fillings and denture work. When it came to more serious operations, such as pulling out teeth, many would make a referral to qualified practitioners elsewhere, fearing the risk of complications. There were clearly a few who crossed the line, however, and stories of patients being admitted to hospital with heavily bleeding gums were not uncommon.*

Having talked to us without proper authorisation, the interviewee – a police officer with several years experience of patrolling the City – asked that we not identify him. The photographs are of other police patrols, met by chance in the City.

I joined the Police seven years ago. I was first stationed in Tai Kok Tsui, then I became a Blue Beret and was transferred to Kowloon City.

The Walled City used to come under the Mobile Police Unit assigned to the area, but now it's under the Task Force. It was a sensitive area, of course, but it's been a long time since the City was out of bounds. Government authorities have been working inside since the late '60s. In fact, there was a precedent-setting case at the time. A guy who was wanted for burglary was arrested inside the City. The judge ruled that the Hong Kong Government was administering the Walled City on behalf of the Chinese Government and so Hong Kong laws applied equally there. [Before this finding, those who sought refuge in the City could claim immunity by arguing they were on Chinese soil.]

I was posted to the City in 1985, and have patrolled there now for five years. I adapted to the place quickly. I was older and quite used to having contact with the sort of people you come across inside. Police work was similar to our work elsewhere, except that two or more policemen would have to go on patrol together, and there had to be a memo from the Regional Command Centre stating the names of those going in. Now that's changed; any policeman can go it alone. When the Sai Tau Tsuen settlement next to the City was being demolished, in 1985, there were just six of us responsible for the Walled City area – two people on each of the three beats a day. Now there are more. When we went on patrol, we had to sign 11 report books, while on a normal beat outside the City you'd sign just two or three. My feeling is that there needs to be a Chiu Chow person in the patrol for the police to work best in the City – a Chiu Chow knows the character of other Chiu Chows best.

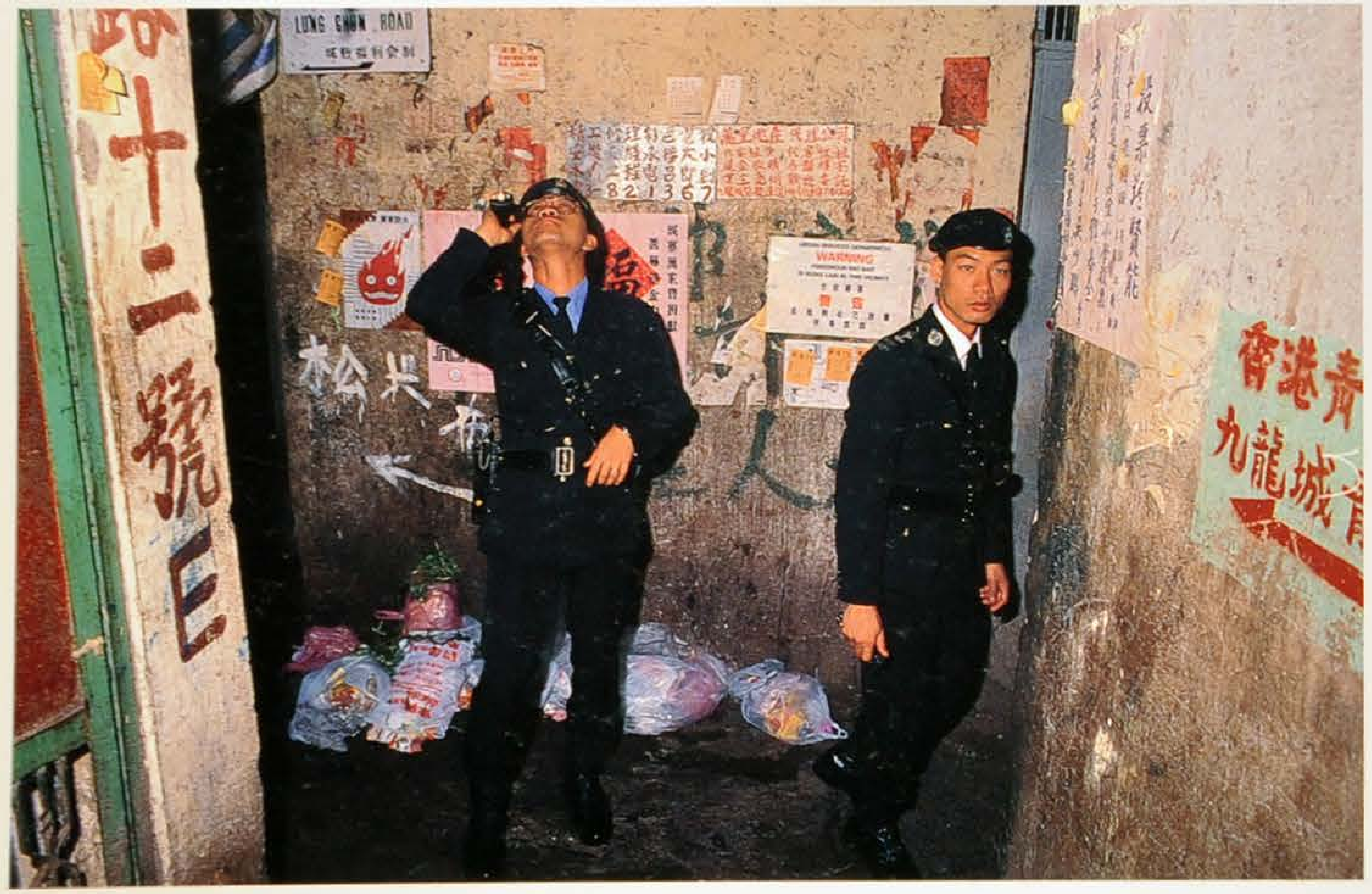
After Sai Tau Tsuen was demolished, there was no obvious thoroughfare leading into the City, and we had to make our own inroads. One of the unforgettable things for me was when there had been heavy rain, the low-lying area around Hong Lok Street would always be flooded. We policemen had to rescue old women through chest-deep water!

When I first took up my assignment, the City was still thriving and everything was very much out in the open. It's become so quiet these days! There were prostitutes soliciting on the streets; they usually had their regular spots. There were child prostitutes as well. Now, only the older ones are left. Yes, there were quite a few goings-on then that are probably best left untold. For example, a colleague arrested some men for possession of bombs brought in from China; no one seems to have heard anything about this!

The City has never been that much different from other areas, though. In some ways it's actually quieter and less sophisticated. One special feature about the place is that the roof-tops of the buildings are connected to one another, so you can just 'fly' here and there! The unusual conditions there mean that there are few car thefts, but there are more burglaries and robberies. We are aware of the black spots for crime, of course, and patrol them more often. The incidence of theft is high; the most troublesome time to be on shift is between 3pm and 11. There are regularly three or four reports of theft during that shift.

At one time there was also a lot of drugs – all completely open again, both in terms of selling and manufacturing. Packets were sold in the streets. I believe there's still some of that going on. As policemen, we can't just barge into people's premises, but we pass on information that we hear and leave it to the Narcotics Bureau to sort out. They operate there as well.

There used to be close contact between the police and people inside the City, including those who had special connections. The younger policemen nowadays don't have much of a clue about this. The people who hold the power in the Walled City are the Chiu Chows. There was this one guy in particular, Chan Sup, the 'big brother' of the Sun Yee On Triad. He died recently and there have since been lots of fights between those carving up his interests.



I quite respected Chan; we knew each other and he was kind of loyal to his friends and those he knew well.

Things used to operate differently in those days. When a problem needed sorting out, we asked for the 'big brother' and he would promise to do something to fix the matter. Working with some of the criminal elements in the City, we could usually settle quite a few problems. Occasionally we didn't even need to go into the City to get things done. Take, for example, some of our drug-busting. Whenever it became necessary, we'd inform people inside that things needed to be done and the police would get their guy. At other times, we'd feel quite helpless. Methods that worked outside the City might not always be applicable inside.

You could say that some Triad groups had their origins inside the Walled City – groups like the Sun Yee On and 14K. It's true also that some policemen were on the take, but since the setting up of the ICAC [Independent Commission Against Corruption] that's pretty much stopped. The City had fabulous pieces of what we call 'fat pork' and, in the past, the police did things very differently. They had their own groups and factions that were responsible for the area. There might still be a little of it going on. I can't tell for sure.

We used to find quite a few illegal immigrants working in the factories. Like the criminals, they tried to claim the Walled City was Chinese territory and that they were immune from arrest. At times, the factory owners themselves informed us of such immigrants so as to avoid paying them. That's human nature, I suppose!

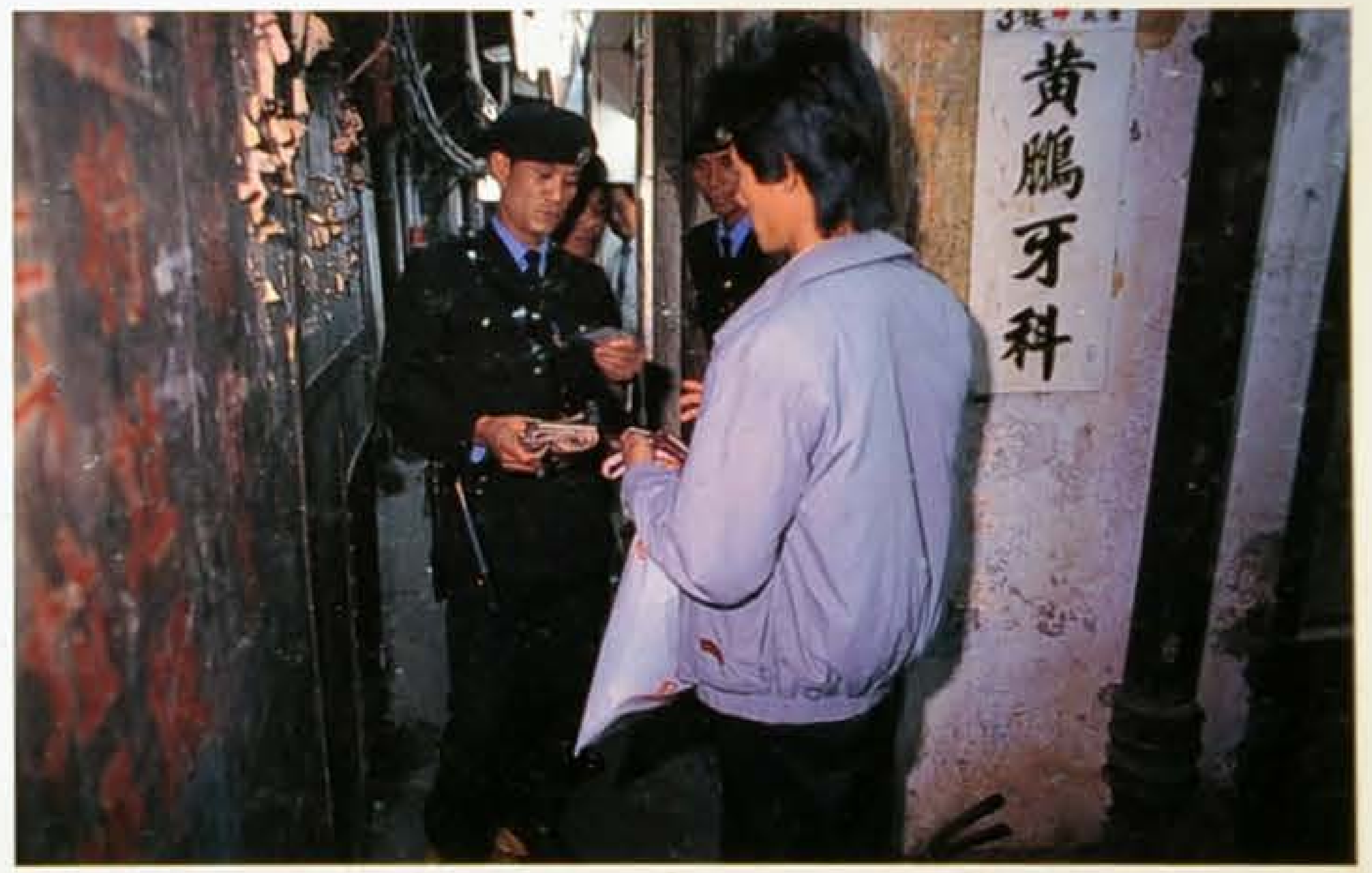
There was a time when new migrants, the legal ones, were respectful towards us. Now they're rather nasty and feel that they're superior to us. They're forever saying they'll report us! Quite a sizeable proportion of the City's residents are new migrants.

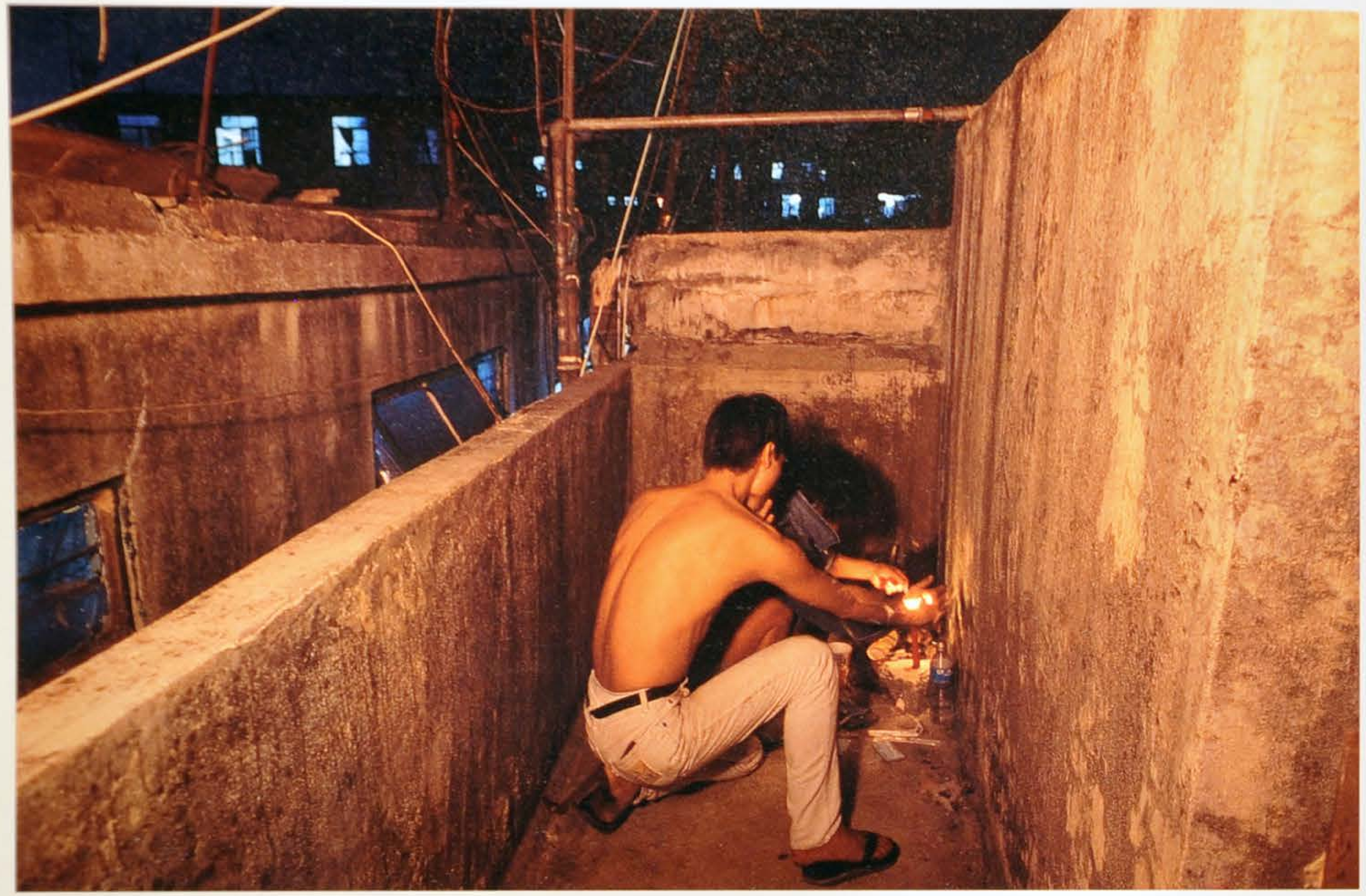
I knew Mr Chan, the secretary of the Kai Fong, well. He was friendly towards me. He passed on information somewhat nonchalantly, and I nonchalantly picked it up! The Kai Fong used to act as a mediator in disputes and promote solidarity. Now it's involved with various arrangements arising from the impending demolition. It used to be run by older people.

It took 36 hours for Government officials to register all the residents and housing units following the announcement of the clearance. Actually, on the evening after the announcement, dozens of lorries brought furniture and other things back to the City. Some people tried to offer us a pay-off to testify that they had been a resident for a certain length of time!

How did I like working in the Walled City? I have to admit I have enjoyed my time there – I got to see and understand things you don't find elsewhere in Hong Kong, like opium dens with people lying on the floor smoking. I saw them but couldn't do anything. I also got on well with the residents – I even played mahjong with them sometimes.

Members of a police task force on regular patrol. During the City's final decade, serious crime was lower than in many other parts of Hong Kong; the most common offences were burglary and the possession of drugs. Contrary to popular belief, police had patrolled the City as far back as 1961, though it did not cease to be the 'den of iniquity' it was known to be until the formation of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in 1975, which broke the back of syndicated police crime there.





A few heroin addicts remained in the City until the end, but during the past decade or so dangerous drugs were no more prevalent there than in similar areas of Hong Kong. The era of drugs, prostitution and gambling, for which the City was notorious, was confined mainly to the 1950s and '60s, two decades when, undeniably, residents lived among the most extraordinary depravation. "At its climax", The Nineties magazine said ruefully of this period, "there were 27 gambling halls, 19 opium dens, 17 heroin dens, four strip-joints, more than 30 brothels, three wine smugglers, three stolen goods companies, 15 unlicensed mahjong parlours, 20 dog-meat stands, five pornographic cinemas, four loan-shark companies and four drug factories." The only visible remnant of this when the clearance was announced were a few elderly prostitutes on Lung Shing Road, who still gave their favours to regular customers for $50 to $100 a time.

Peter Chan was first attracted to the 14K Triad as a teenager. After a difficult childhood, the Triad way of life seemed to offer a sense of security and belonging that was based on a rich history and strong traditions. Established in the late nineteenth century, the 14K Triad had its first headquarters at 14 Po Wah Road in Guangzhou – from which it took its name. Originally a republican secret society opposed to Imperial Manchu rule, the Triad soon turned to more dubious activities as a way of raising funds.

Chan was initiated into the Triad in 1960, at the age of 17, and quickly became an active gang member. Over the next few years he was involved in drug-dealing, robbery and fighting in the Wong Tai Sin and Mongkok areas of Hong Kong, as well as in the Walled City. In 1965 he received a two-week jail sentence for robbery, and served further short sentences in 1968 and 1970. He had become disillusioned with the Triads by this time, but found it impossible to leave because of a growing dependency on heroin and other drugs. Only in 1974, after he had met an ex-Triad member who had found strength in God, did he find the courage to leave the Triad himself and move into a rehabilitation centre run by the St Stephen Society.

In the 19 years since, Chan has worked tirelessly as a social worker, helping drug addicts and Triad members resolve their problems and start a new life. He received the Hong Kong Government's Outstanding Young Person Award in 1987.

This area was just like a market with several hundred people 'doing' drugs. People died every day and we just took them and dumped them by the roadside. That way, the corpses became the responsibility of the Urban Council. I saw students – healthy and spirited when they first came – who then died. There were so many of them.

Rats would come around as well. They were addicted too, and they twisted and turned, longing for a fix. Dogs were addicted as well, and there was one guy who gave drugs to his pet monkey and trained it to climb into people's homes and steal.

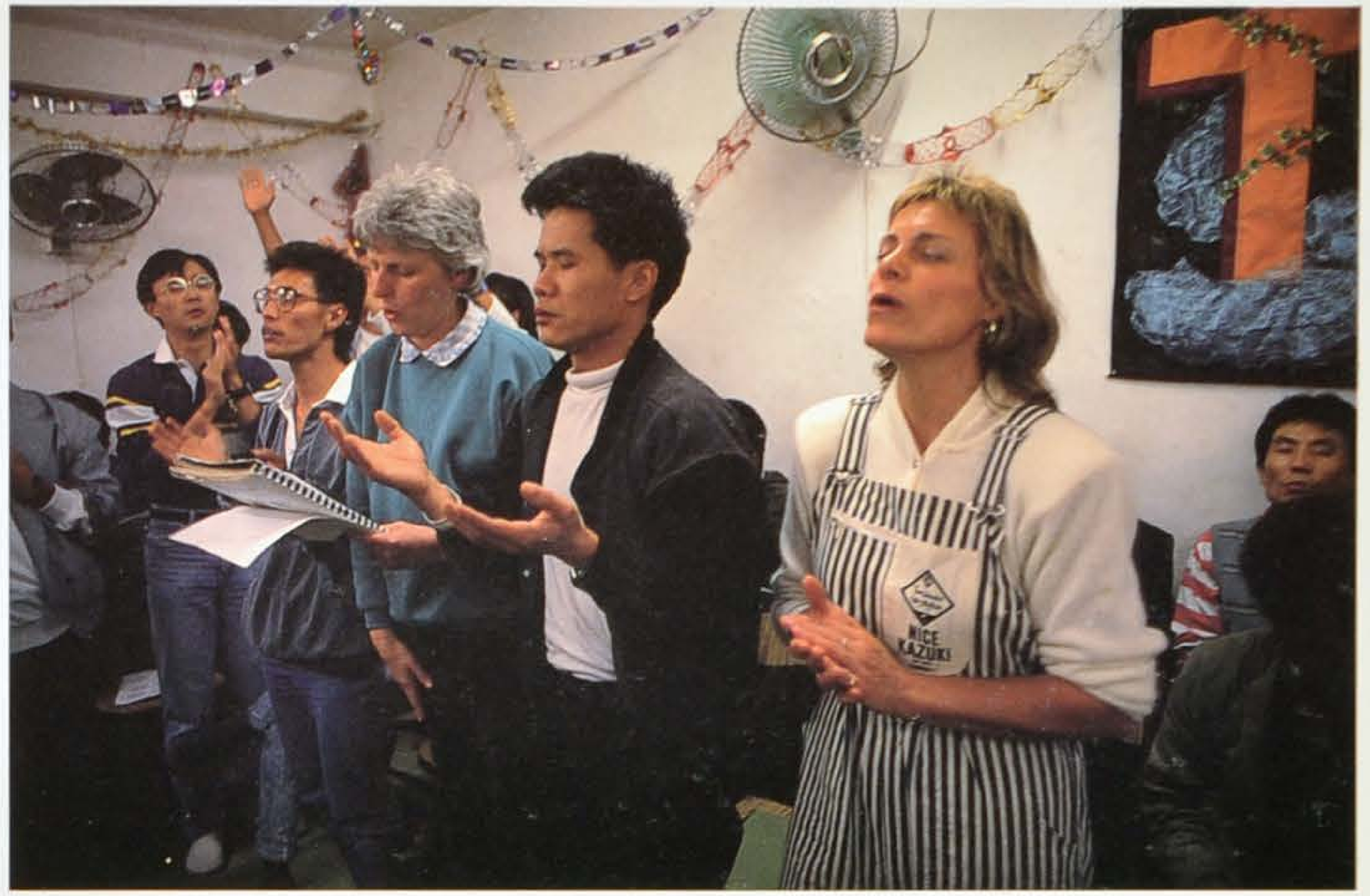
The police only started patrolling in the Walled City after about 1970. Before that, people would take refuge here and the police would back away. I remember when the police first began to patrol, they came in groups of seven – an inspector, followed by a sergeant and five constables. We started paying protection money then and certain areas, such as the heroin dens, were out of bounds to them. Once, they raided a protected place and we engaged them in a fight. I was hit on the head with a police baton and had to be taken to an opium den where I was treated with some powder that stopped the bleeding. We did not usually go to hospital.

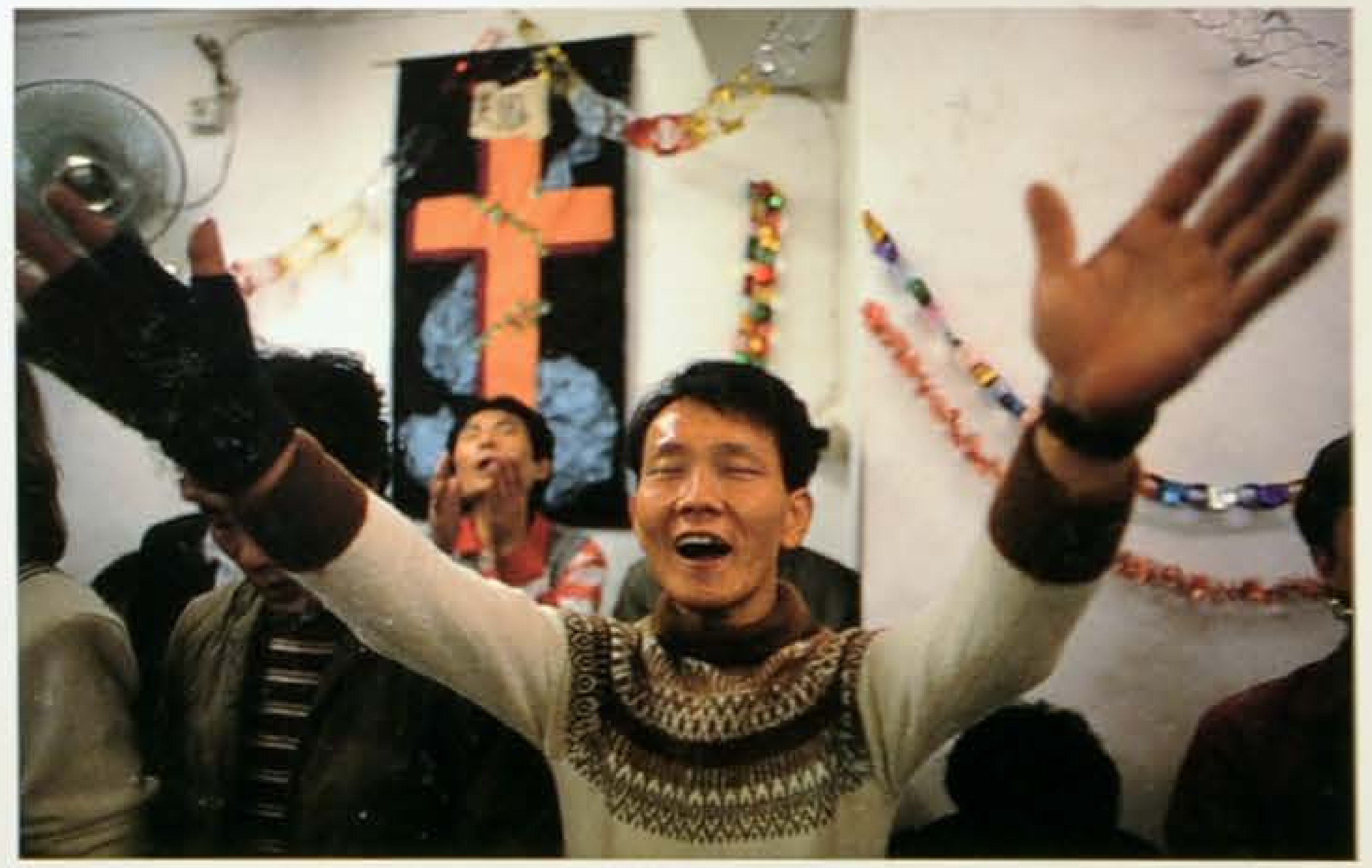
In the old days, when we ran out of money, we would occasionally steal a car or rob a few people walking in the streets. We didn't get involved in anything big; we didn't have the necessary connections. We robbed outside the Walled City and then quickly got back inside.

I was known by different names, including Chan Pak Keung, Chan Wah, Chan Yee Wah, and Heroin Wah. There were the 14K, Four Bigs, Wor Kee and Chiu Chow Triads. I was responsible for a drug den of the 14K. It was a small place, just 200 square feet or so, but usually there would be several dozen people there taking their drugs. That was years ago, but we survived – although an old friend of mine, Cheng Tsai, is still addicted.

This narrow street, like an underground pass, leads into the heart of the Walled City. There used to be plenty of gambling and mahjong dens here, as well as places selling dog meat – like Tai Look Chu Chiu Kee Fragrant Meat. You can still find dog meat here if you know where to look. In this place here, there was a striptease joint, rooms for prostitutes and various gambling dens. Upstairs was for red pills, and also for some girls who had been sold and so weren't permitted to go out at all.

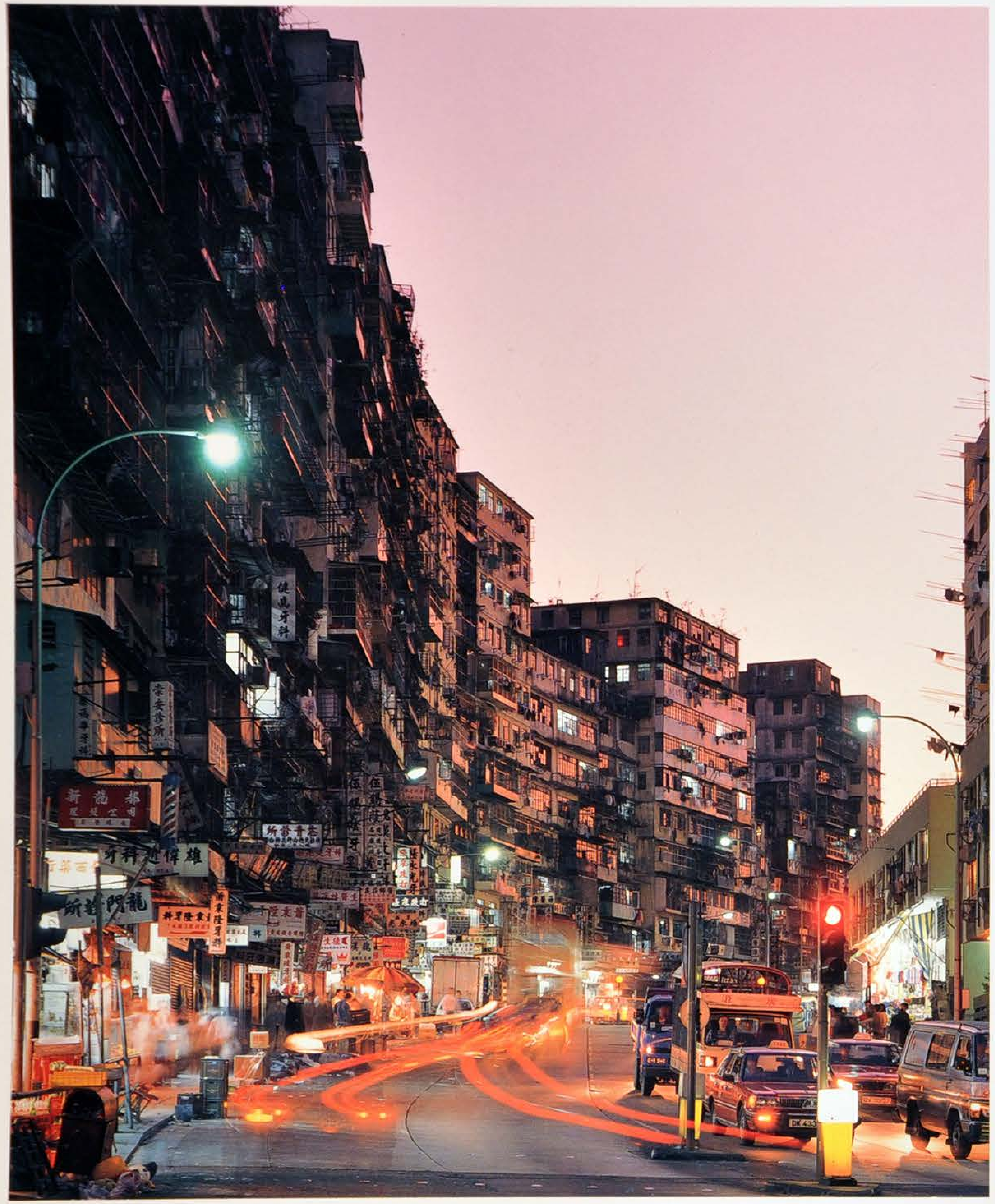
During the 1960s, heroin addicts invariably congregated on Kwong Ming Street – better known as 'Electric Station' Street in those days, after the local expression used for the wooden stalls found there around which the addicts inhaled their heroin smoke. Cheap and readily available, heroin remains a working-class drug in Hong Kong today, though the younger generation of addicts prefers to inject the drug.



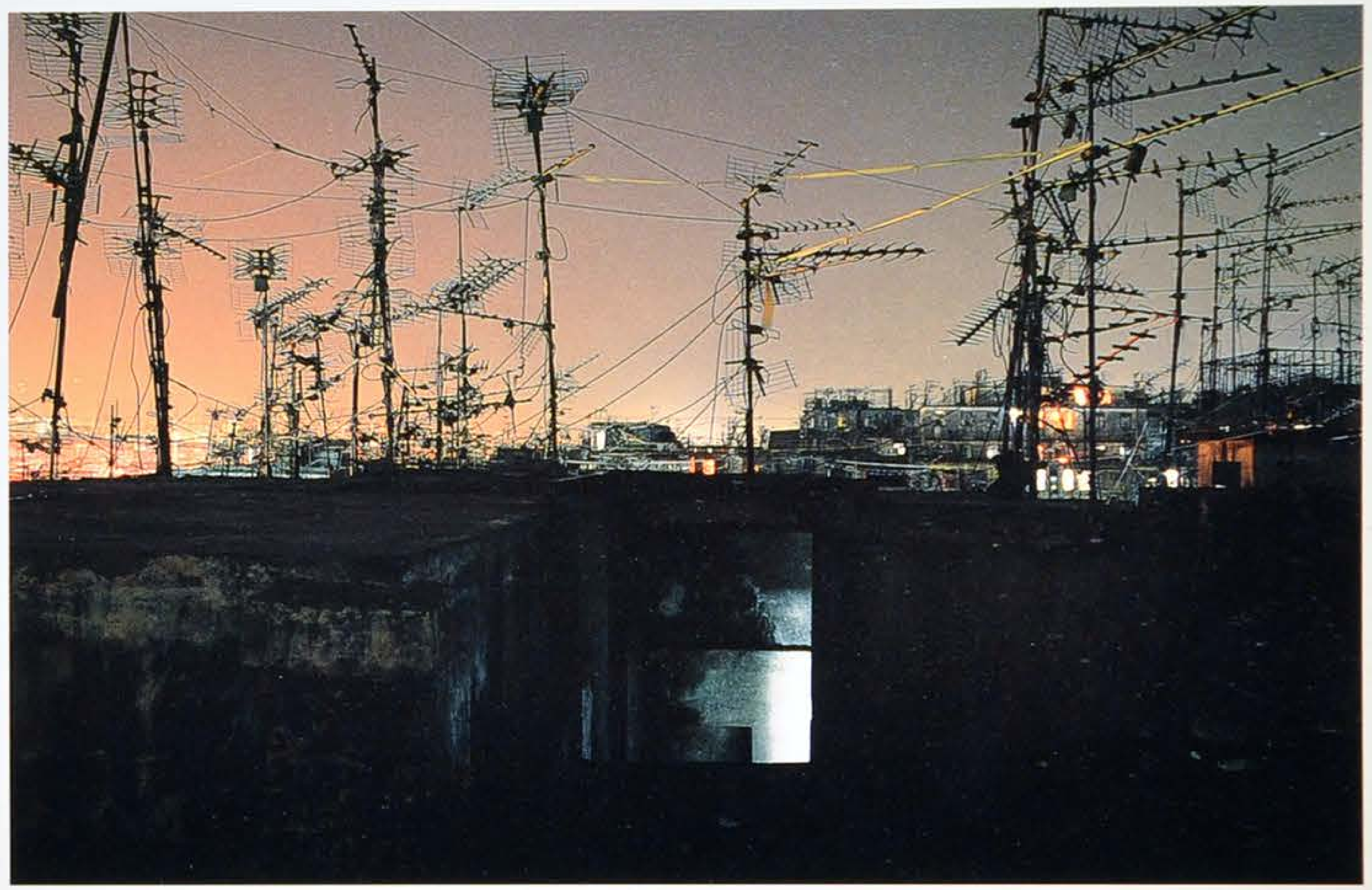


Healing hands, hymns and open confession to God were the essential elements of daily prayer at 'The Well', the religious meeting place established by Jackie Pullinger [above, far right] *in 1973. The congregation at this evangelical mission of the St Stephen's Society was mainly made up of drug addicts trying to give up their debilitating habit. The voluntary programme – which attempted to replace the vacuum created by withdrawal from heroin with God – claimed some considerable success, particularly when compared with the orthodox, Government-run, drug rehabilitation programmes in other parts of Hong Kong. Of all the foreign missionaries who ventured into the City, Jackie Pullinger was undoubtedly the best known, and the one who received the widest acceptance in the tight-knit community. This was not achieved easily and, indeed, it had taken some time to gain the trust of both the addicts and the Triads – with whom, as someone reducing their client base, she had a tense relationship. It certainly helped, however, that a number of her earliest recruits were Triad members looking to kick their own heroin habit. A few, like Peter Chan, would have nothing to do with their former gangs after they had reformed, in itself a courageous act. Local and expatriate volunteers helped with the work, many staying for several years at a time.*

Missionary work had been pioneered in the City, during the late '50s and early '60s, by indefatigable foreign women such as Mrs Clarke, who set up the Child Care Centre in 1959, and Mrs Donnithorne, the wife of Hong Kong's then archdeacon. Though their work was overshadowed by Jackie Pullinger's, three nuns – one a Korean, the other two Italian – also remained in the City to the end, living on Lung Chun Road and caring for many of the elderly in the area. Shortly after the clearance was announced, Jackie Pullinger moved to Mongkok to set up a similar drug rehabilitation programme there.



Dusk on the Tung Tau Tsuen Road side of the City [left], *and the ambient light of Hong Kong and Kowloon visible at night from the roofscape* [right]. *Although, in a strictly limited sense, the Walled City could be called a slum, a more considered view reveals it as a fully functioning community, with its own shops, productive enterprises, water suppliers, welfare associations, nursery schools and, of course, doctors and dentists. It was fashioned by those who lived there, free from overbearing authority but with its own ground-rules and organisation. The City was, in fact, the victim of an oversimplification. In Hong Kong's popular culture, the myth of Hak Nam — the City of Darkness — and all it stood for was perpetuated, even though this was a side of the City that had all but disappeared by the end of the 1970s.*



Chan Hip Ping

Though no longer a resident of the Walled City, Chan Hip Ping continued to represent the concerns of the local community through his work as vice president of the Kai Fong Association, a position he had held since 1966.

The Kowloon Walled City Kai Fong Association (KFA) was established on 1 May 1963 to serve the residents living in the Walled City and to help improve the living environment through mutual effort. These premises we are sitting in now were bought when the KFA was being formed. I was very young then and didn't have any administrative duties, but I did help with menial tasks such as boiling water and serving at receptions.

Previously, there was some co-ordination among different streets in the City, and time-reporting and fire prevention teams had been formed as early as the 1940s. There were also joint celebrations held for different festivals.

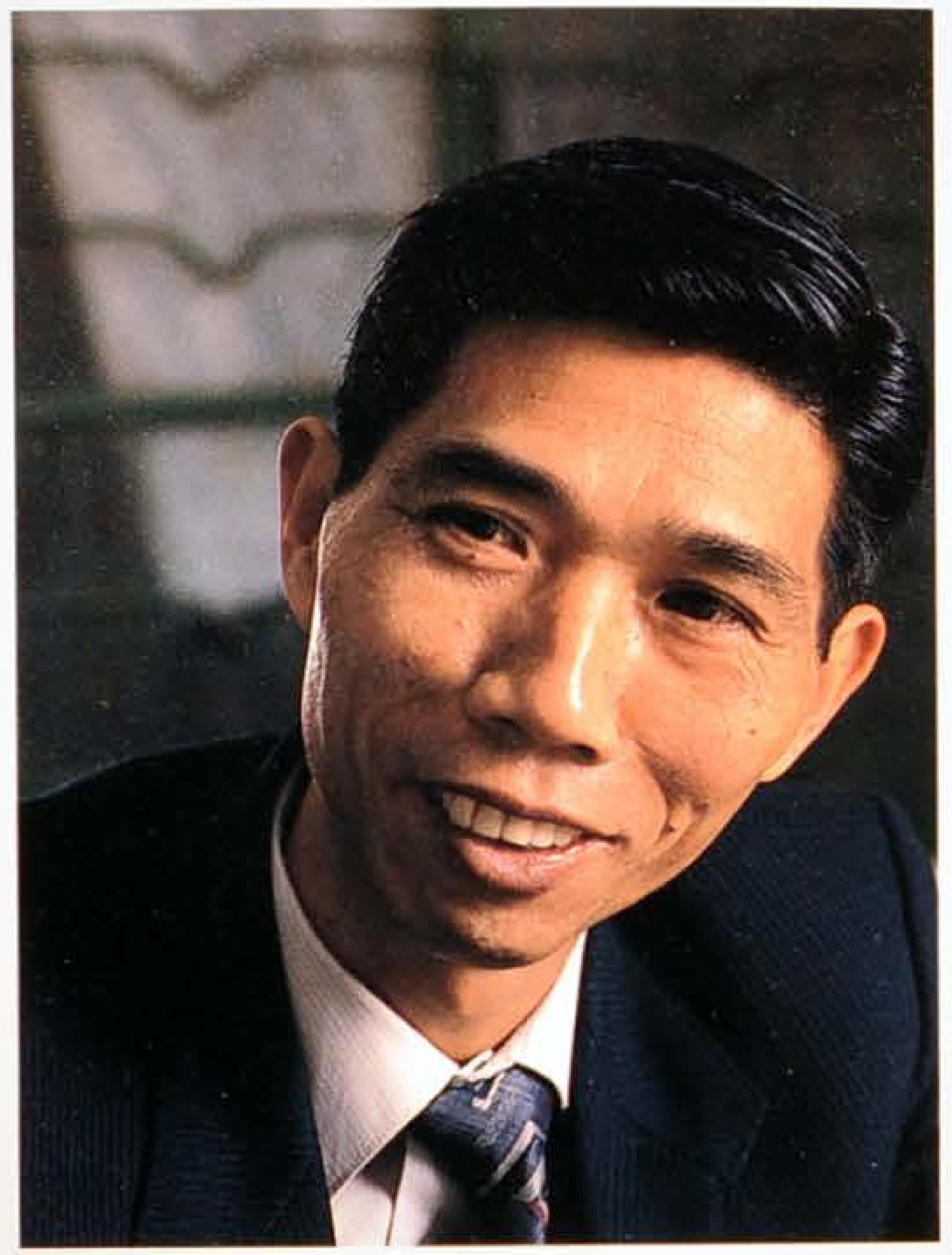
In the early days, the KFA focused on improving hygiene, and on fire and burglary prevention. We bought some fire-fighting equipment. The time-reporting team was used more for burglary prevention since, by the 1960s, most families had clocks. It would patrol from 11pm until dawn as a deterrent to thieves and helped as a lookout for fires. Both the time-reporting and fire-prevention teams operated on a voluntary basis and were discontinued in the 1970s.

In the early days, buildings in the Walled City were only two or three storeys high, but as the population grew and more high-rise structures were put up, the problems of hygiene and fire prevention became more serious. As a result, the Association's workload also became heavier. During the last 20 years we have focused more on cleaning the alleys, clearing the drains, removing garbage and maintaining the main streets. In the 1970s, we started to install road signs and public lighting. We are now responsible for more than 200 lights which are switched on 24 hours a day, all paid for by the Association.

We have organised many activities for the elderly, especially in the last few years. About a third of the Walled City residents are over 60 years old, some of them single and destitute. Many of these are unmarried amahs who got together and bought houses in the Walled City to use as communal residences on their days off and when they were sick. As most have nowhere else to go after retiring, they moved into the houses to spend their remaining days here.

On one tour to Aberdeen, which we organised for the over-60s in 1987, we expected to fill three coaches, but ended up with 10 full coach-loads. More than 10 of the participants were over 90 years old. Last Chinese New Year we organised a 'Respect for the Aged' gathering and more than 400 old people took part. About 300 of the tickets were collected from our office in the Walled City.

We also arrange other activities such as sight-seeing tours for families, recreational pastimes for young people, residents' dinners to celebrate certain festivals and even tours to mainland China. Then there is the day-to-day work of the office. We often help residents resolve conflicts and problems using reconciliation. The high population and the numerous high-rise buildings in the City create many problems, but we believe in the spirit of living peacefully and working happily.



I have to say public order in the Walled City has never been as bad as reported; it's actually quite good. In the 1950s the three major criminal activities that could be found here were pornography, gambling and drug trafficking, but these were mainly initiated by outsiders and not by residents. Outsiders took advantage of the fact that the City was not administered by the authorities, but the same crimes were being committed throughout the territory, not just in the Walled City.

The police started patrolling in the City in the early 1950s, and by the 1960s many of the drug trafficking and gambling gangs had been eliminated. I'm not sure, however, if they came into the City only for special operations or on a regular basis. Today, of course, the police are often seen in the City.

In the past we had little to do with the police, but in recent years our contact has increased, mainly over burglary prevention. We have also provided the police with information on street layouts and so on. If you look at the police statistics, there are fewer serious crimes in the Walled City than in other districts, but minor crimes – such as burglaries – are more frequent because the closeness of the buildings makes them easier.

We have had increasing contact with the District Boards in recent years. We have talked to them about our environmental problems and they have relaid some streets and installed some public lights for us. We also have frequent contact with the Urban Services Department. We liaise over cleaning up during Chinese New Year and over the clearance of garbage. Only two buildings in the City have lifts, so you can imagine how difficult it is to remove all the garbage from every apartment and factory. It's hard to find people to take on this task, especially as the condition of the alleys is not very good. We have asked the residents to take their garbage to the refuse collection station before they go to work, but that is a bit unrealistic and it is not fair to blame the residents entirely.

Our publicity includes putting up notices and posters about garbage and trying to educate residents to keep the environment clean. We do the same regarding fire prevention. Every family here uses an LP gas cylinder, which is a bit like keeping a bomb in your home. If it exploded, the effect would be catastrophic and we have a campaign to encourage families to be careful.

There is quite a number of dentists in the Walled City and we help them to organise activities when required. Most of them learnt their skills through traditional apprenticeships, but medical services have developed so quickly that they have to update their technology from time to time. They have organised seminars and exhibitions of dental equipment at the Kai Fong Association's office. This has helped to promote their business and, by introducing the dentists to the latest technology, has also improved their service.

The Kai Fong Association has a President, Executive Committee and a General Committee comprising the local Kai Fongs of the Walled City which support the aims of the Association. The Executive Committee is elected every two to three years. Except for a few permanent staff who handle routine matters, our work is voluntary.

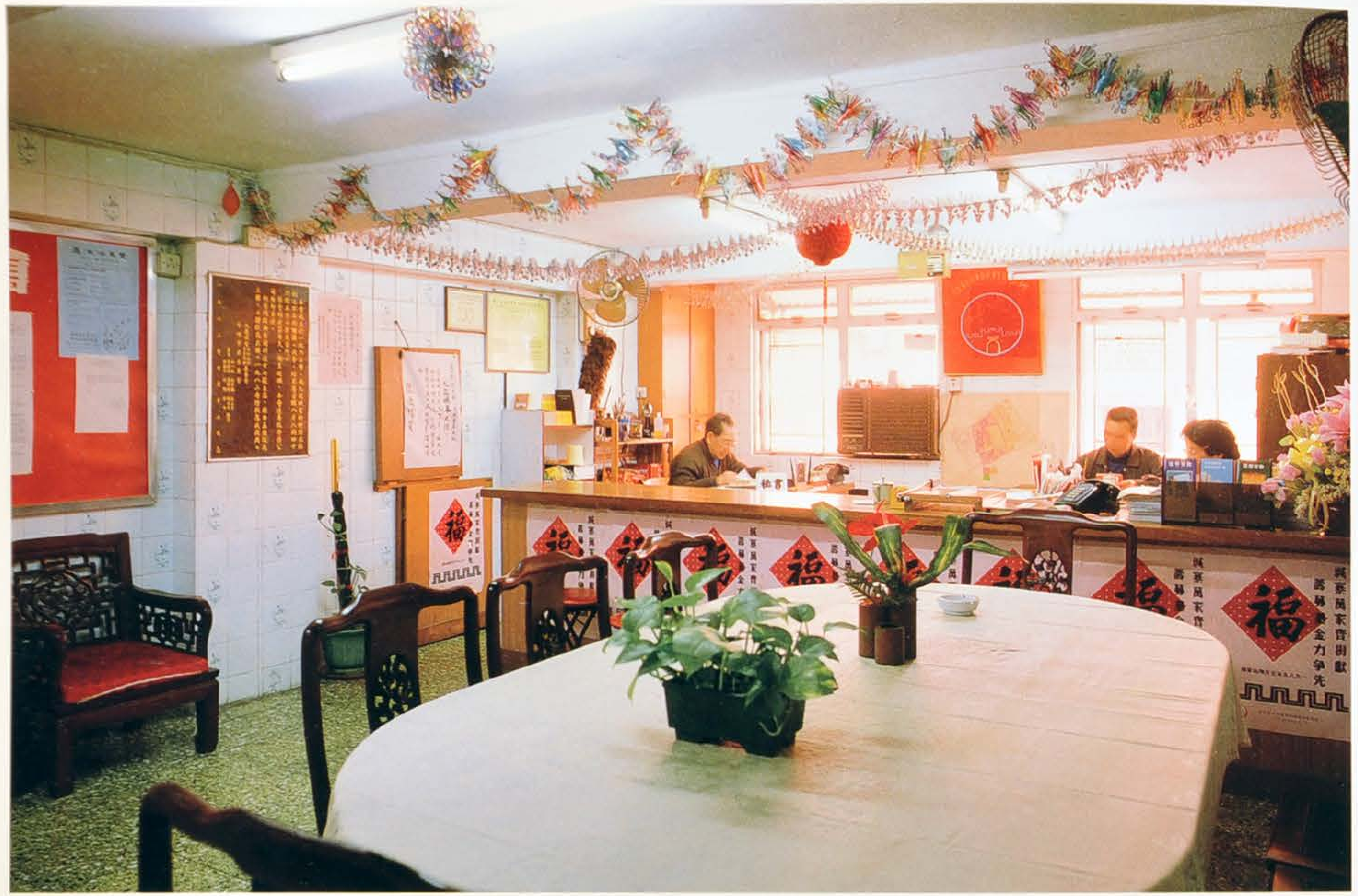
From 1968 to1979, the KFA ran a school in the City. At one stage it had more than 1000 pupils. Some came from the Walled City, the rest from other areas where there were few schools. The number of pupils dwindled, however, when the Government implemented its policy of nine years compulsory free education. A drop in the birth rate and geographical changes in population also had an effect, and the school was eventually closed.

In the 1960s, the Government proposed demolishing the Walled City. There was no announcement, but officials came in the middle of the night to register residents. No compensation was offered and the residents objected strongly to the plan. A 'Demolition Objection Committee' was formed and the proposal was eventually dropped.

The Government began the present demolition project on 14 January 1987, giving reasonable cash compensation and resettlement opportunities. A 'Special Committee on the Kowloon Walled City Demolition' was formed to handle all related matters. The present project is very different from that of the 1960s and so the response from the residents has been entirely different.

Everyone knows that the Walled City has a peculiar historical background. Handling the matter properly will benefit everyone, and we thought a calm approach was required. We called emergency meetings to gather the views of our own members and those of the residents. We collected their demands for rights and benefits, and conveyed these to the Government. We also served as a bridge between the authorities and the residents. We made arrangements for more negotiations on the levels of compensation, as we believe that the only way to solve differences is through greater understanding among the parties involved.

At first the reaction of the residents was rather emotional, as many of them had expected to live here for some time. They had spent large sums renovating their flats, sometimes more than the purchase price, and the demolition would mean a waste of their money and effort. We received



九龍城寨街坊福利事業促進委員會

The Kai Fong's offices on the third floor of 16 Tung Tau Tsuen Road were open every weekday, during normal working hours, with two full-time secretaries ready to help with residents' problems and concerns. A large room off the office itself was the scene of many official functions, including an annual Christmas party for elderly residents.

many written views, and more than 3000 residents came to the KFA to express their concerns. At the peak, we were holding nine meetings a day.

We have no especially strong views on the demolition. We believe that if it can really enhance life for the residents and the compensation is acceptable, then it is not a bad thing. The decision to demolish the City was inevitable. It had already been acknowledged by the Chinese Government and what we had to do was try our best to get reasonable compensation and safeguard the rights of our residents.

We had to present our views in an objective manner, as any inaccurate guidance would have had an undesirable effect. A small proportion of residents could not understand why we did not object more strongly, but most agreed with our policy and the clearance is progressing smoothly. We will have to wait until it is completed, however, to conclude whether or not it has been satisfactory.

I would like to say that the views of those outsiders who have said that the levels of compensation are too high are incorrect. The residents certainly do not think so. The rates of compensation should ultimately improve the living conditions of most of the residents, but the cost of living will be higher for them in future. For example, most of the residents live in relatively small flats, around 200 square feet. The compensation for this, plus the relocation allowance, will only be around $200,000. This is just adequate to buy a converted Home Ownership Scheme unit in the New Territories. Most residents in the Walled City work in the urban areas and they have a strong sense of belonging here. Even if they can move to an apartment in Junk Bay, say, they will need money for renovation, removal and buying new home appliances.

If residents who anticipate difficulties after they move approach us for help, we will discuss their case with the Government and see if other departments, such as Social Welfare, can help. We will help all residents as far as possible according to their individual needs, but it will be very difficult to ask for more compensation.

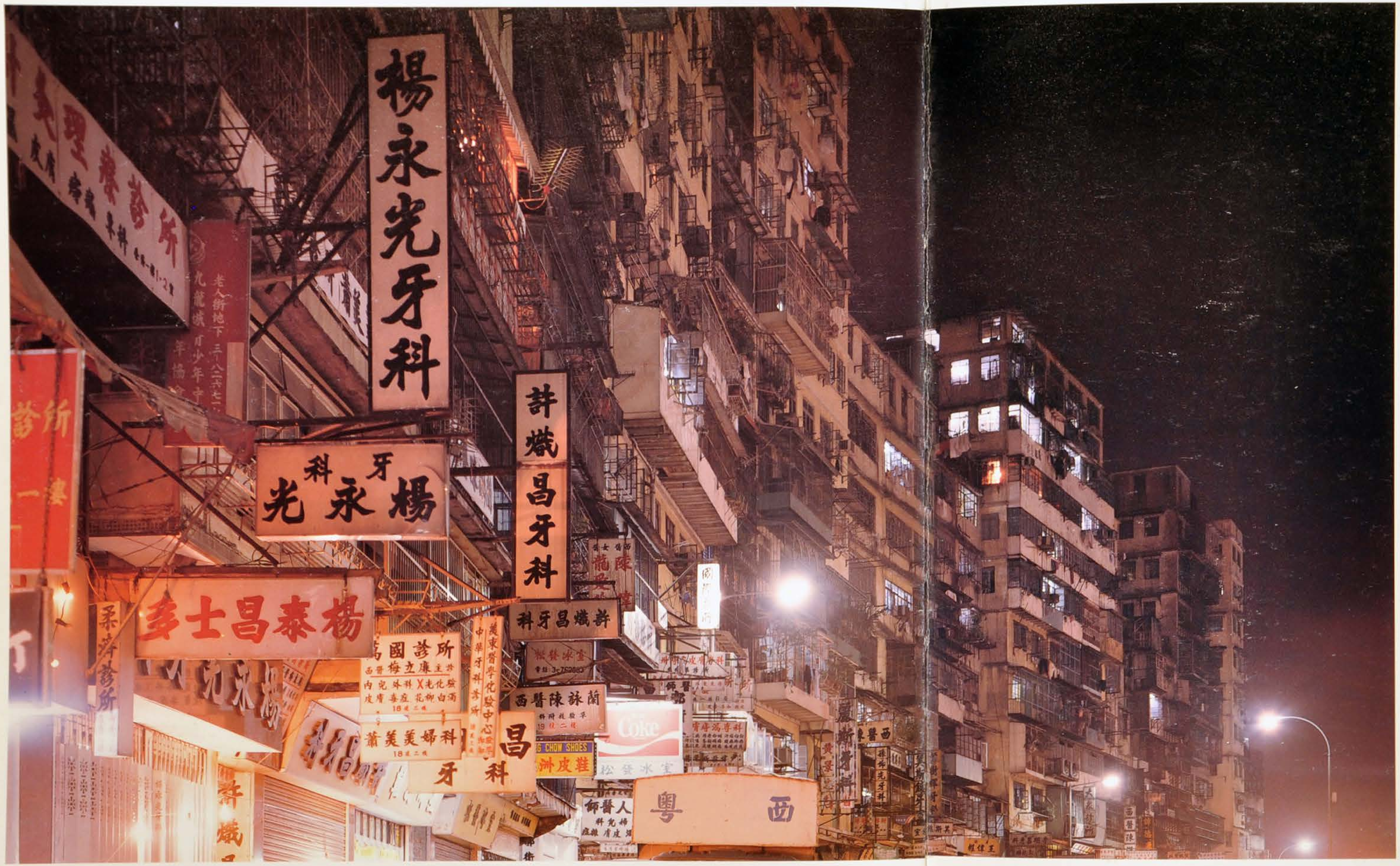
We hope to continue our services in the future, even after the demolition. We have been here for so many years, we know each other well and we have a close neighbourhood relationship. Certainly, we have received both praise and criticism for our services, but most residents are satisfied with us, especially over our handling of the demolition. We upheld our principles and we didn't do anything which might have been a waste of time or effort.

In the immediate period after the announcement of the demolition, some residents proposed resettling the Walled City in a new village and an office for the KFA was included in that plan. Putting aside the feasibility of the proposal, it reflected the residents' concern for our Association and their relationship with it. Last year we conducted a seminar on the future of the Association asking if there was a need for it to continue. About two-thirds of the replies supported the KFA's continuation and we have formed an 'extension committee' to make preparations, and applied to the Government to establish a new organisation.

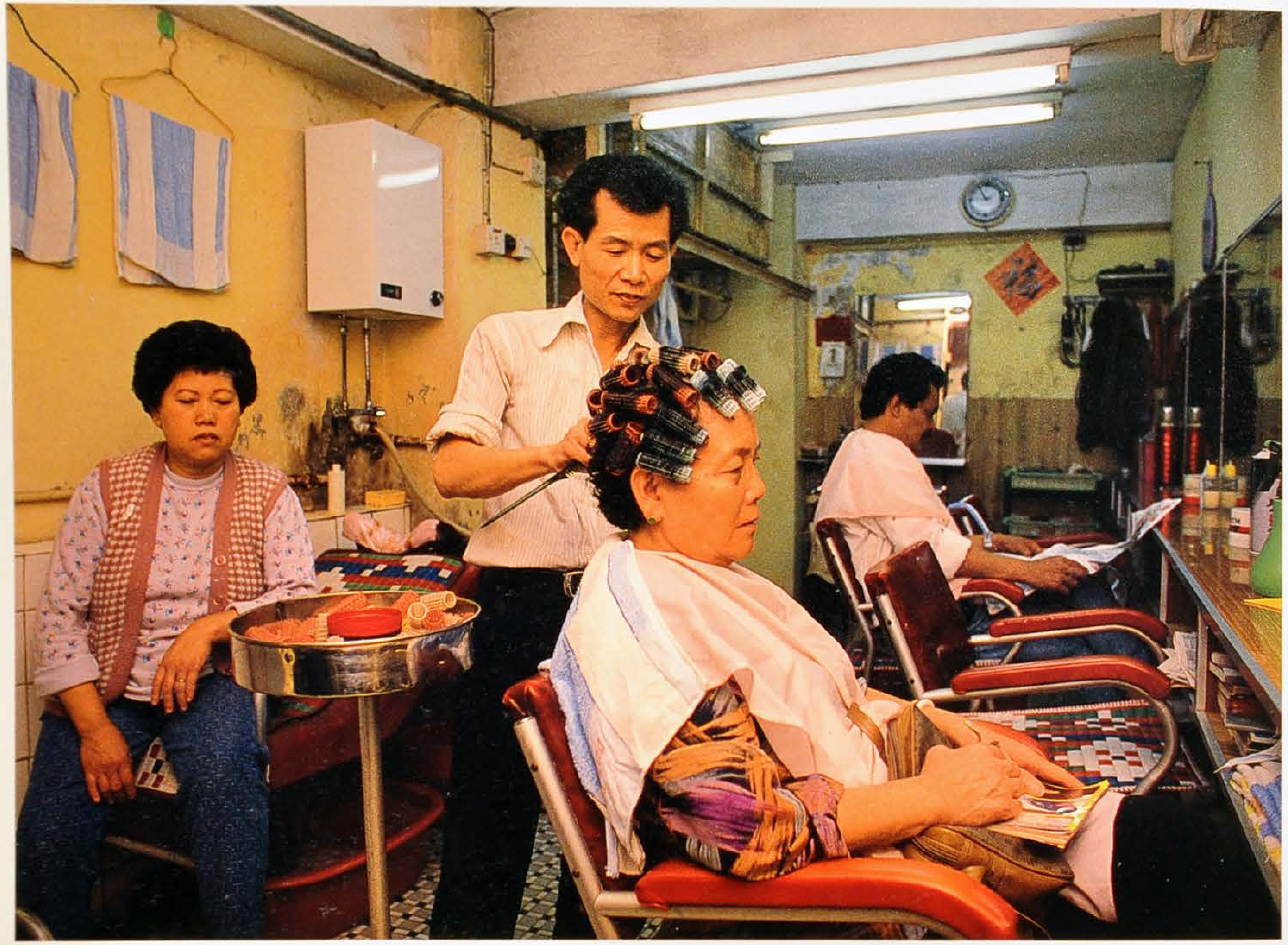
This group was given the working title of 'Committee to Achieve the Extension of the Welfare of the Kowloon Walled City Residents'. Exactly what it will do is still undecided, but we have prepared some guidelines. These include helping residents to adapt to their new environment and keeping in contact with the aged and poor.

The community of the Walled City is like that of a farming village. We want residents to feel that there are still people around who will look after their concerns and help them with their new homes. It will be difficult to maintain communication in future as the residents will be scattered in many different places, but we will try to choose an office close to as many of our elderly residents as possible.

In the future, we can also participate in serving other districts, and promote the spirit of service. We have not found a new office for the Association yet. At present, we have to focus upon the immediate problems facing our residents and the long-term problems of the Association have to come last.



Tung Tau Tsuen Road at night, alive with the signs of dentists and doctors. The City's fearsome image hid a protective community that was relatively safe for its own members, even in the 1960s. "We used to play marbles in the streets", recalled one resident, "and sometimes we played on the roofs. It was fun to move from one roof to another and watch things happening far away. I remember the drug addicts, of course. There were opium dens all over the City in those days and sometimes, just for fun, we would barge in to look at the people lying there taking their puffs."



With its entrance fronting the darkness of Tai Chang Street, formerly the most notorious lane in the City, Ho Chi Kam's barber's shop was a small but prosperous business. Customers were almost entirely local residents, and low prices for cuts and shampoos meant the occasional queue for service.

Though he had lived in the City for much longer, Ho Chi Kam only took over the running of the barber's shop at 10 Tai Chang Street in 1985. He was unhappy about the clearance and would only give a short interview.

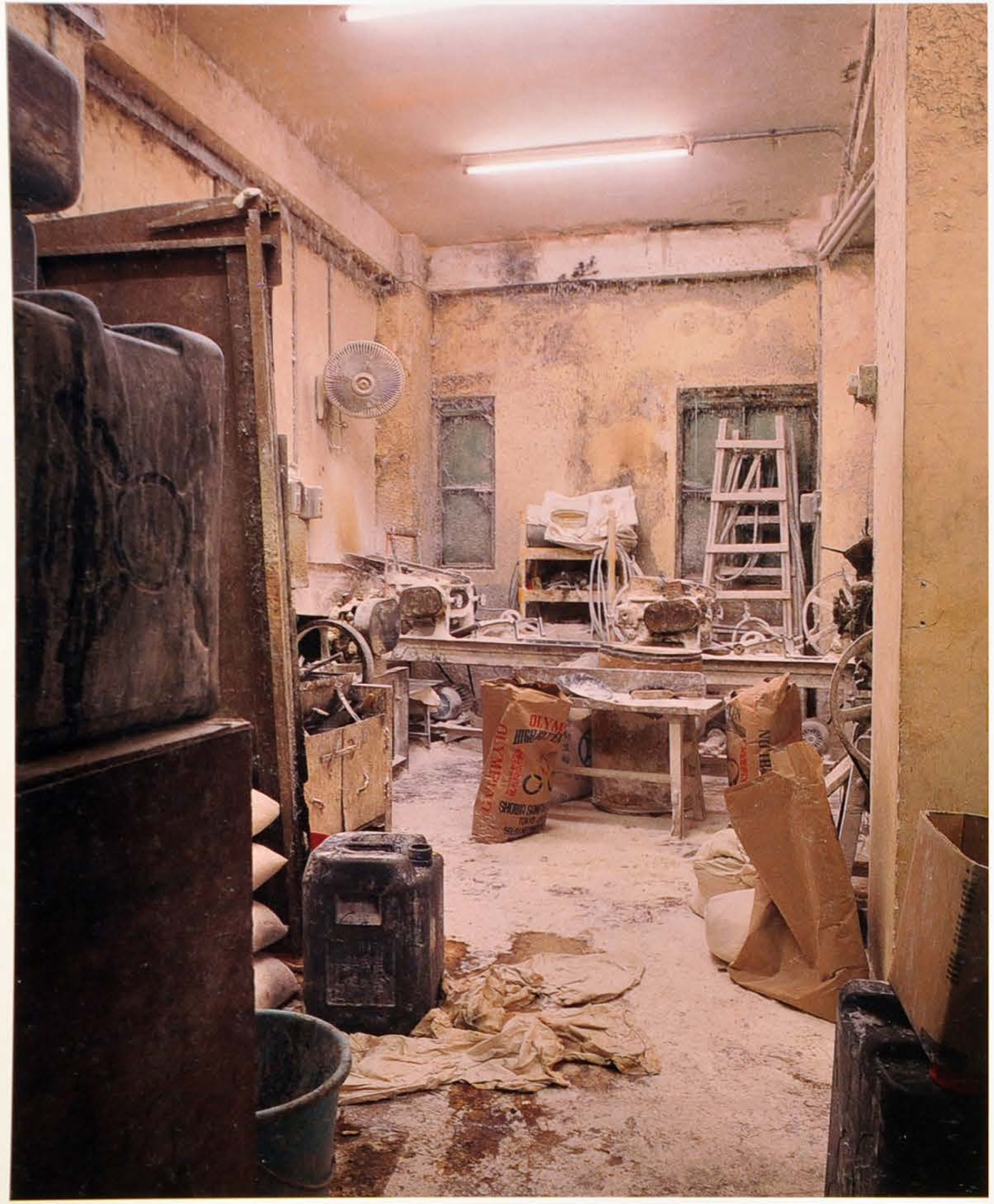
I first read about my flat in the *Shing Pao Daily News*; I bought it and moved in at the beginning of 1974. The flat is on the Tung Tau Tsuen Road side of the Walled City, so I didn't really have to come inside the City until I started running my own barber's shop. Then I came every day.

Before that, I worked in the same trade for other people. This place belonged to a friend who offered it to me when he decided to leave. I had to borrow some money to set myself up, but I've been here for five years now and I am the sole proprietor. We are the only hair parlour inside the City and my customers are people living nearby.

So many people used to live here that if only one in a hundred came to me, I would have had enough business. We set the prices as we liked, but we were cheaper than the barbers outside. My wife and I both worked, and sometimes there was a lot of business. We used to open at 9am and close when there were no more customers – it was very flexible. There were no problems with supplies as we paid on delivery.

Now that the Walled City is to be demolished, I have started working for others again and only come here on Wednesdays, my day off. Of course, from the point of view of my business, I'm not happy about the demolition. Running the barber's shop here didn't make me wealthy, but I didn't have to worry about my next meal either. Now, working for someone else, I only receive 30 per cent of every $100 I earn. I have to bring in $300 for the boss before I get $90. Here, I would be able to earn that doing just one head.

However, there is no choice. We have to move whether we like it or not. The only problem is that it's not possible to start up a similar shop outside, because I couldn't afford the rent.



A coating of flour on every exposed surface was a common sight at nearly all of the City's noodle-making factories, their owners satisfied that only the most cursory of sweeps was necessary at day's end. Such attitudes made food-processing premises a haven for rats. At street level, these tended to be of the large sewer variety, while smaller species were commonplace on the upper floors. The Urban Services Department carried out a successful rat-baiting programme during the clearance period, preventing what neighbouring estates feared might be a mass exodus of the creatures when the final demolition began.

An immigrant from China in 1947, when he was only 18 years old, Chan Wai Shui operated his own noodle factory on Lo Yan Street for more than 10 years.

I set up this factory in the Walled City in 1979, after my old premises in Wang Tau Hom were demolished to make way for the construction of the MTR. I bought the premises for $200,000. The property market was at its peak then and prices outside the Walled City were too high. My business was small and I could not afford to pay them.

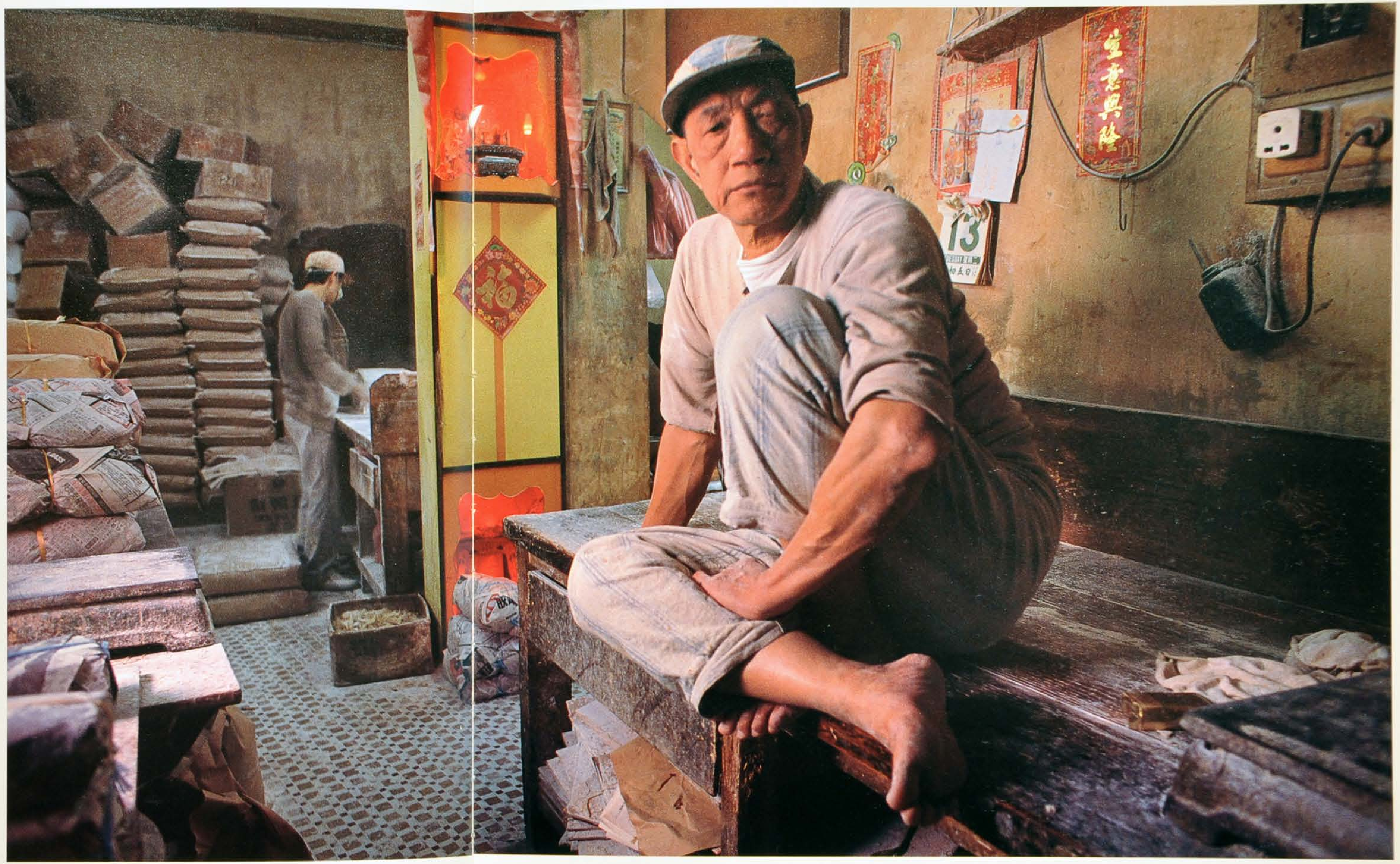
There were no formalities to complete when I came here. I just registered the purchase with the Welfare Association, which served as a witness, and paid them a small sum – not a fixed fee, just whatever I wanted to give. You need to have licences outside the Walled City from the hygiene and fire departments, but these are not required inside, making life a good deal easier.

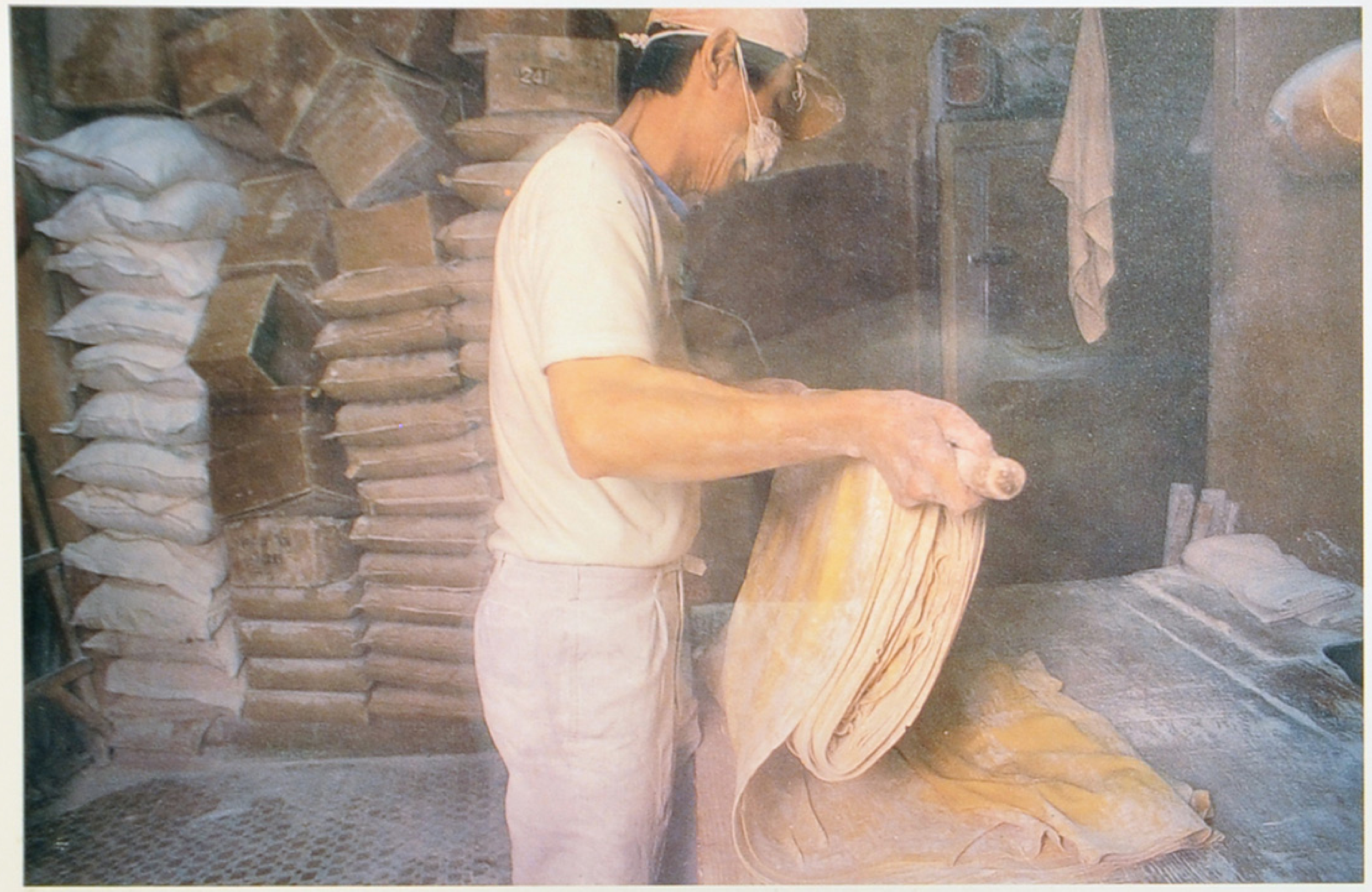
Originally, there was no electricity supply and I had to arrange for cables to be laid. For a while, there were frequent blackouts as there was only one overhead cable for many households, but then a sub-station was built and since then the supply has been very reliable. Charges are made according to a meter located outside the City.

A private contractor provides water at a fixed price per month. There is no meter and no guarantee of supply and sometimes there is no water for several days. Then we have to carry it in from outside. The quality of our water supply is not that good. I just use it for washing myself, not for drinking.

We make our noodles with eggs. I learnt the business from my uncle. First we mix flour and eggs, then put in more flour and soda water. The process takes about half an hour for one bag of flour, out of which we get more than 50 catties of dough or around 450 noodle discs. The whole process is done half by hand and half by machine; the noodles have to be cut and sorted manually. We also make *won tun* pastry – about 3000 pieces in two hours. On average our daily production is about 10 bags of flour, which makes 500 catties of noodles and 50 catties of *won tun* pastry. We prepare the dough

Chan Wai Shui [centre] with his co-workers, Mr Shum [left] and Kwan Tsin On [right].





Masked against the flour that filled the air, Mr Shum rolls up the freshly-made pastry 'sheet' ready for cutting into the small squares that would become the outer wrapping for won tun, the popular meat dumpling put in soups. "I have been making won tun pastry for years; previously I made noodles", Shum reminisced. "I was responsible for making more than 100 pounds of pastry every day. We used a machine to stir the flour, but rubbed it manually and flattened it by pressing on a long pole. I had to sit on the pole, which wasn't comfortable at all. It was hard work too, and I was often soaked to the skin. I'm old now and younger people are more efficient and productive. I never measured how thin the pastry was, but it was better than that made by machine. Won tun made by hand are always better."

first and make the noodle discs when we receive orders, as different clients may ask for discs of different sizes.

We have about 40 or 50 regular customers, but the quantity they need each day varies. Our customers come from both inside and outside the City, and most order about 40 catties a day. We deliver every day in a car as the noodles cannot be stored; if they are made in the morning and even one dirty piece is mixed with them, the whole batch will be rotten by the evening. We have a big fridge, that cost more than $70,000, in which we store all the ingredients. Sometimes, if we have some dough left over – such as during a typhoon when there are no orders – we store that as well.

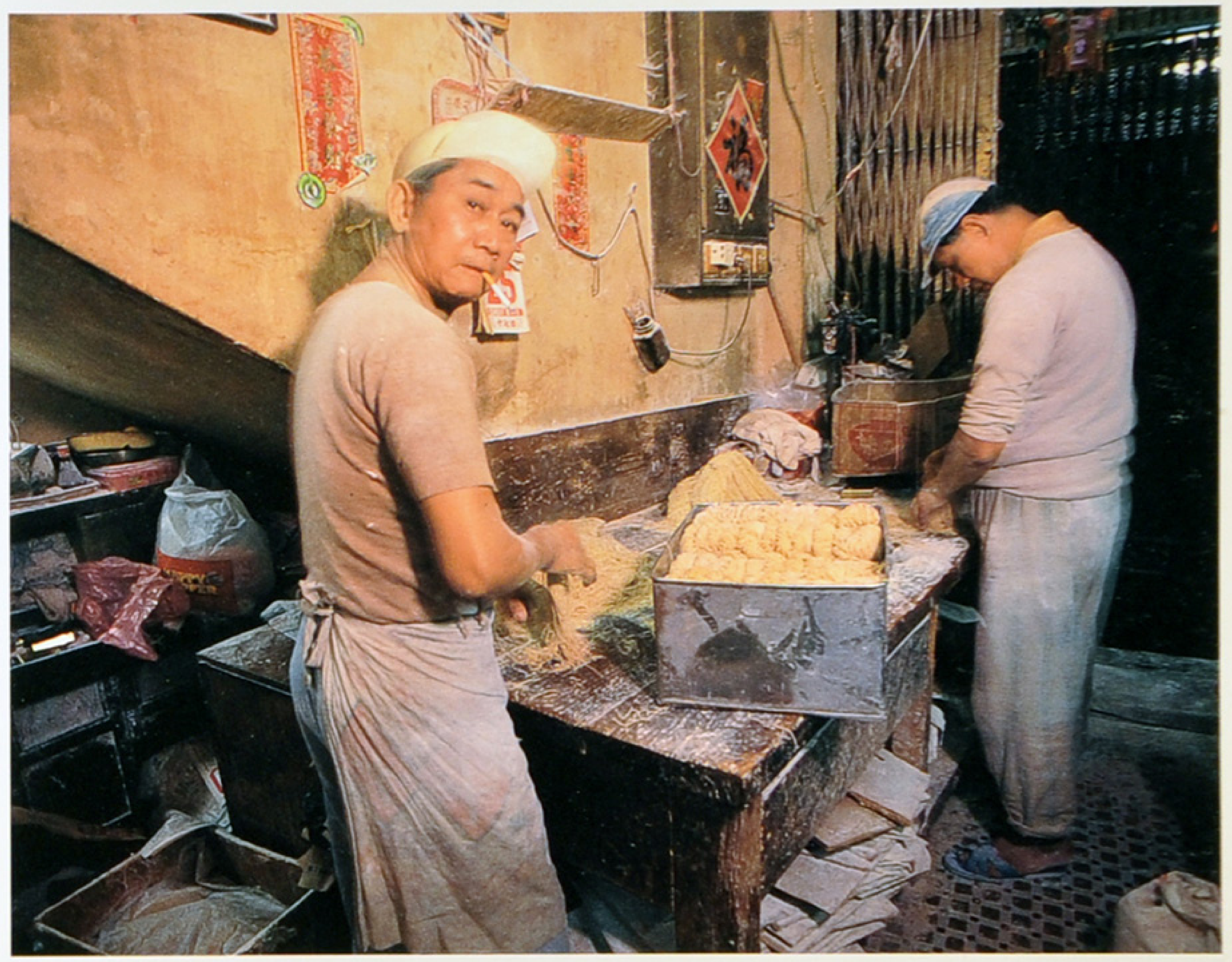
The main difference between doing business inside the Walled City and out is that it is cheaper here. Labour costs and rents are much higher outside.

There are four of us. We were partners together before we moved into the City. We work about nine hours a day, starting at 8am, plus one hour for our meal break. I seldom sleep in the factory overnight and I have not thought of living here just for the convenience of coming to work. If it wasn't for earning a living, I simply wouldn't come to the City at all.

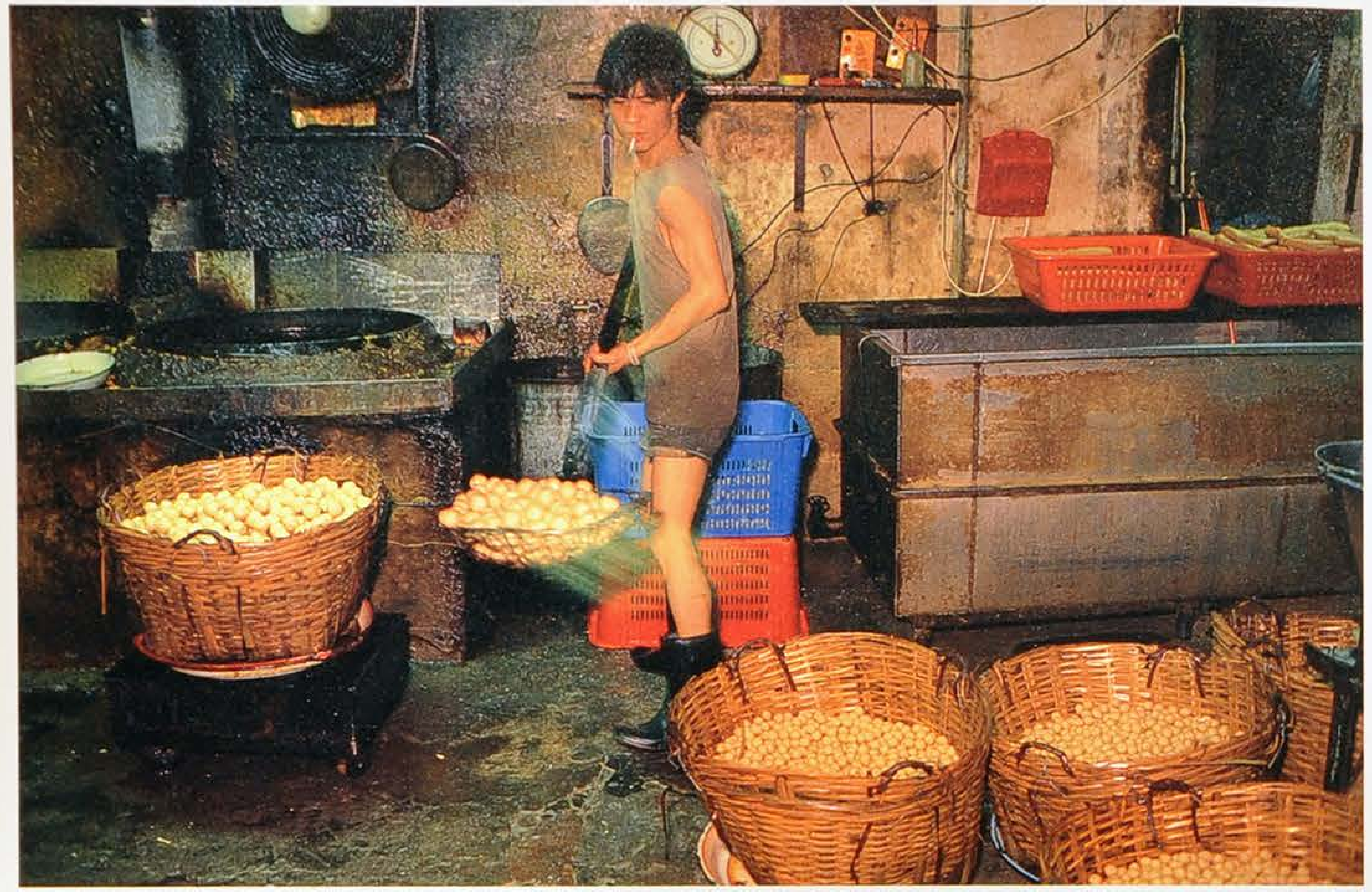
When I first moved in, the air was better as the electricity supply was not able to support air-conditioners. Now there are too many of them and their exhausts seriously pollute the environment. Water dripping from the air-conditioners also soaks the alleys which makes them very slippery.

If we can find a suitable place after the City is demolished, we will carry on. If we can't, we will have to close down. Even if I receive $1 million compensation, I'm not sure I can buy a factory to replace this one. Even if I can, I will need to pay several hundred thousand dollars to buy all the fittings, so I need about $1.5 million altogether.

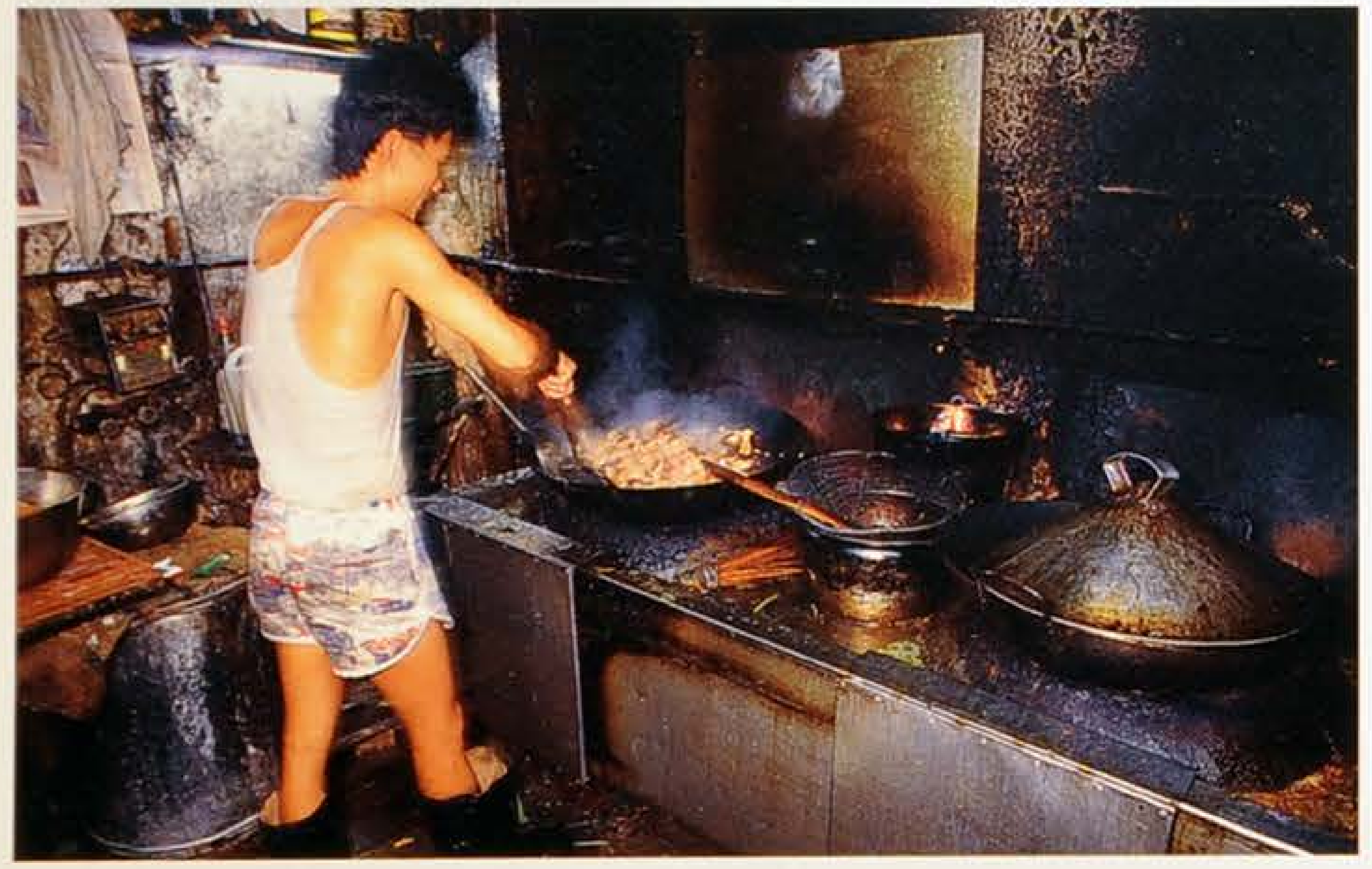
If I have to invest $1.5 million again, what's the point of working so hard? I'd have to wake up early and work late. Even if the compensation is $1 million, I would have to borrow $500,000 from a bank. What's the point when I could easily find a job and earn a few thousand dollars each month?



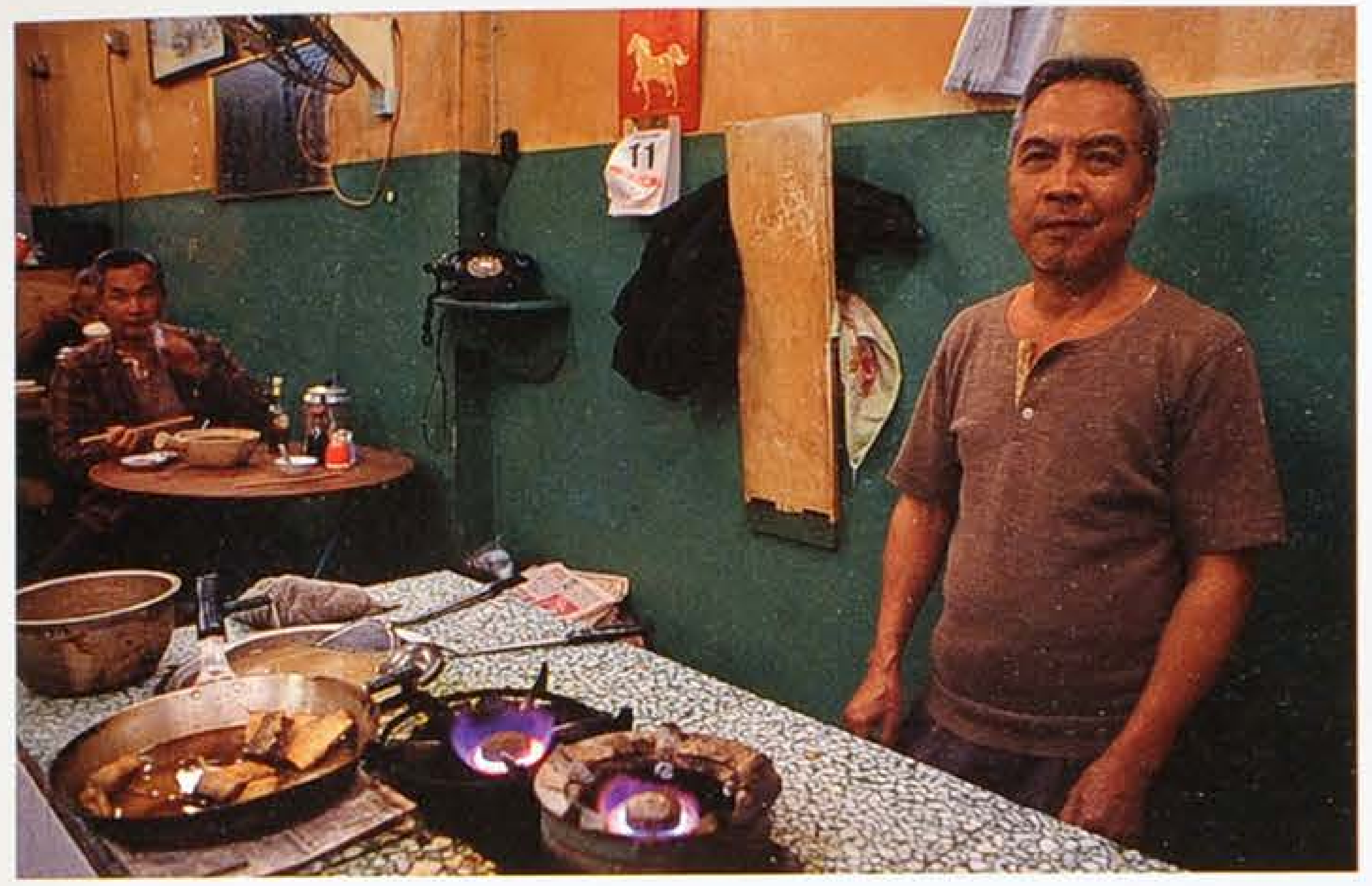
Chan Wai Shui and another colleague, Mr Siu, pack noodles for delivery. The ingredients – flour, egg-whites and water – were measured solely from experience.



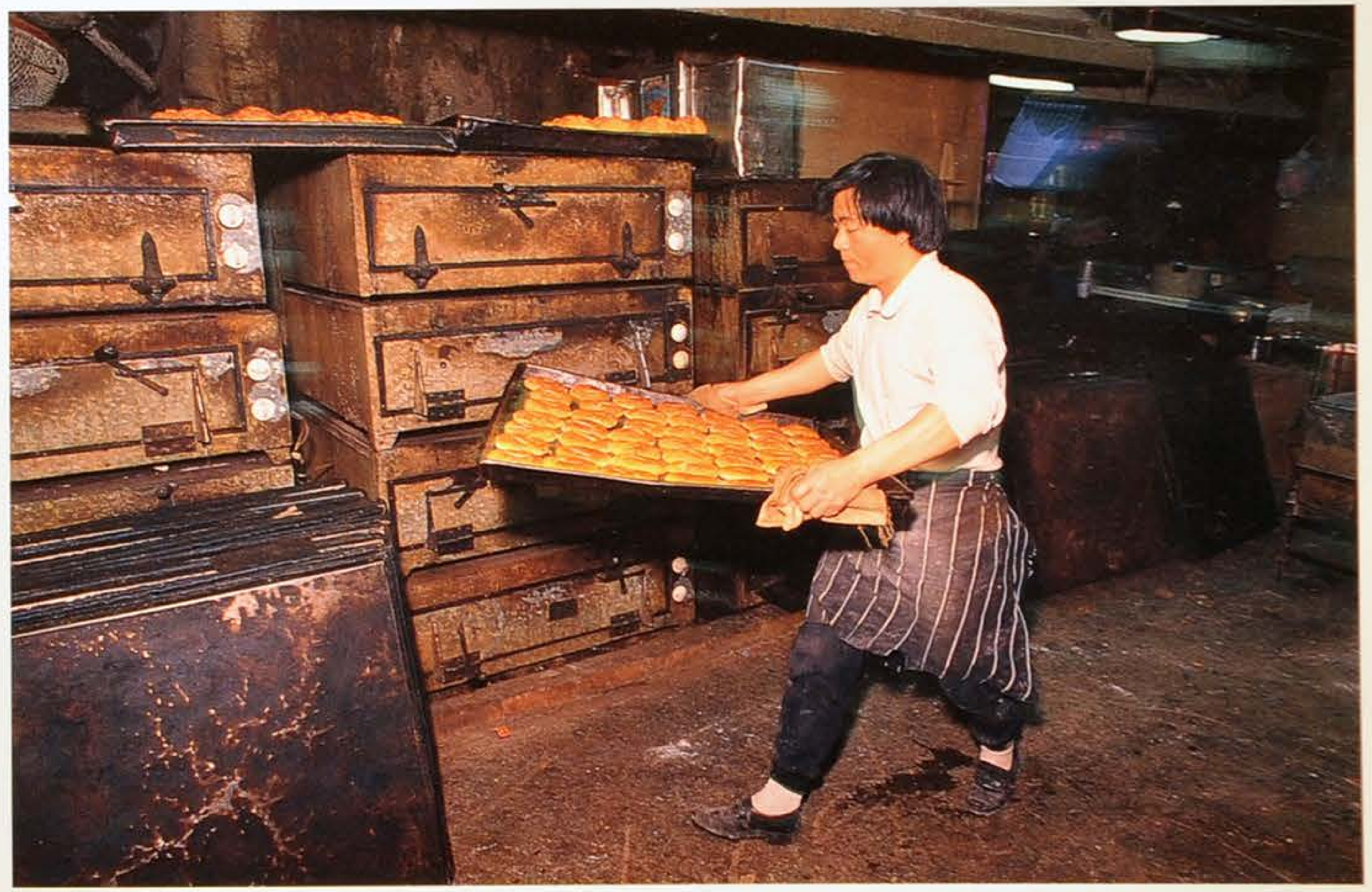
Stir-frying food for delivery in lunch boxes to factories and small businesses in the Kowloon City area.



Employee Kwok Tsang Ming [above] *ladles a batch of fried fishballs into a basket in a small factory off Kwong Ming Street, where most of the City's fishball operators were located. A quintessential part of Hong Kong's diet, whether with soup, noodles or chewed from wooden skewers at hawker stalls, more than 80 per cent of the territory's fishballs originated in the Walled City – a fact which would surprise, even appal, many aficionados.* Left: *Workers prepare cheung fun and steamed sweet dumplings.*



Above and below: *Ng Kam Mui's brother at work in his bakery behind the Chung Fat café* [see pages 84–85]. Left: *Mr Yung's* da bin loh *(hot-pot) restaurant. With an air of the Dickensian sweat shop, the City's restaurateurs and food processors made few concessions towards Hong Kong's hygiene regulations – their premises typically filthy, rat-infested and disease-prone. Even so, the conditions rarely seemed to deter customers.*



Cheng Koon Yiu came to Hong Kong with his family in 1948, when he was five years old. His father ran a small business and they lived near the Walled City.

I first went to school outside the Walled City, but then one of the teachers – who was a retired Kuomintang soldier – opened a school inside and we went there. It was a private school called Chung San and it was located on Lung Chun Road. I was about eight or nine years old by then and was studying in primary One. I stayed at the school until I graduated from primary Six, when I was 14.

Each classroom had an area of about 150 square feet, and there were 20 to 30 students in each class. A teacher of the higher classes would teach two or three subjects. We studied Chinese, English, mathematics, civics and correspondence, and the fees were $8 to $10 a month.

When I was 14, one of my father's relatives – who was a dentist – needed an apprentice. The Chiu Chow dialect for 'rice shop' sounds very similar to 'tooth shop', so I thought my father had said I was going to a rice shop and was worried about how I, as a thin boy, would ever carry those heavy sacks!

Anyway, I became a dental apprentice at 14 and have now been involved in dentistry for 32 years. And, after all these years, I'm at the same clinic where I started off; I rented this shop from my teacher who is still practising nearby. It was originally a two-storey building, but it was demolished years ago and rebuilt.

Being an apprentice was hard work. My starting salary was $25 a month, but it rose a few months later to $35. I started by making moulds from plaster of Paris, but my most important task was to keep the whole place clean, including sterilising the forceps after use. The master who owned the clinic seldom taught me – I learnt from another person who had successfully completed his apprenticeship of three to four years.

I lived on the first floor above the clinic, which was quite normal in those days for apprentices. Of course, my family lived nearby and I visited them often, but I enjoyed the freedom of living away from home.

In those days the clinics were known as 'teeth installation establishments' and were a little like those run by herbal doctors. They were common in China and in the early days of Hong Kong. However, the Government preferred Western dental medicine because it made use of injections. In the early days, liquid solution was used instead of injections and dental care could be provided by anyone who had the necessary skills and the money to set up shop.

I remember how my hands trembled when I had to take out my first tooth. They really shook when I administered the injection, but the master was beside me giving the necessary help and advice – just like a professor would do. It had taken me three years and four months to reach that stage, and I had a good understanding of all the basic treatments and procedures by then, but not much experience.

By the time I completed my apprenticeship, I was earning $80 a month. That must have been about 1960. I was less than 20 years old and I was unsure about my career prospects. At that time there was a factory in the neighbourhood, run by the Chinese Refugee Relief Agency, which was producing decorative birds made out of cotton. The workers there were making $200 a month, so I signed on; my job was to dot the eyes of the birds. The factory closed soon after, though, and I returned to dentistry.

I went to work at a clinic in the New Territories where I stayed for three or four years, but in 1963 I went back to the Walled City to work with a friend whose eyes were no longer that good and who needed an assistant. I worked long hours then, from 9:30 in the morning until 9:30 at night, with only a short break for lunch. If there were lots of patients, I worked on them; at other times I made false teeth. Business was good. A lot of our customers came from outside the City because our prices were cheaper, but our workmanship was not inferior. Indeed, many dentists outside the City placed orders with those inside. In the 1960s, a metallic false tooth made inside the City would cost about $11 but $20 outside. A job costing $500 in a registered clinic would cost only $200 here.

I was earning a comparatively high salary of $500 a month by then, and I was trusted and had responsibility.

Pragmatic and proud, off-the-peg dentures were prominently displayed to advertise a dentist's workmanship. In Hong Kong, there is little of the embarrassment or social taboo that is attached to the subject in the West.

However, I could see that one good job enabled the owner of the clinic to cover my wage and, after four years, I decided to start up on my own. It didn't cost that much: the equipment cost just over $5000 and could be obtained on hire purchase. The down payment was $1000 and the monthly instalments around $200. Other items – such as forceps and moulding equipment – could all be obtained on credit.

When I started off, I was able to pay the rent by producing false teeth for the friend who leased me the premises. After two years, the lease ran out and I moved into a vacant room that belonged to my teacher. I gradually built up my own loyal clientele.

There were certain operations that most of us would try to avoid, such as taking out wisdom teeth and anything else that might lead to complications. Should such operations result in bleeding which couldn't be stopped, the patients would panic and, instead of coming back to us, go to a hospital which would then report us. Similarly, none of us operates on total strangers and I never take out any teeth in the evening to avoid patients panicking at night, if they are still bleeding.

I try to avoid just cleaning teeth for customers as well – taking out a tooth is so much quicker and easier. I don't like customers bargaining much either, although it does happen.

The clinics around the Walled City are quite well equipped. In the past, firms supplying the latest dental technology actually organised exhibitions at the Kai Fong's office for us. As for medicine and drugs – some of which are class one poisons – we buy them from intermediaries at a price fractionally higher than the market rate.

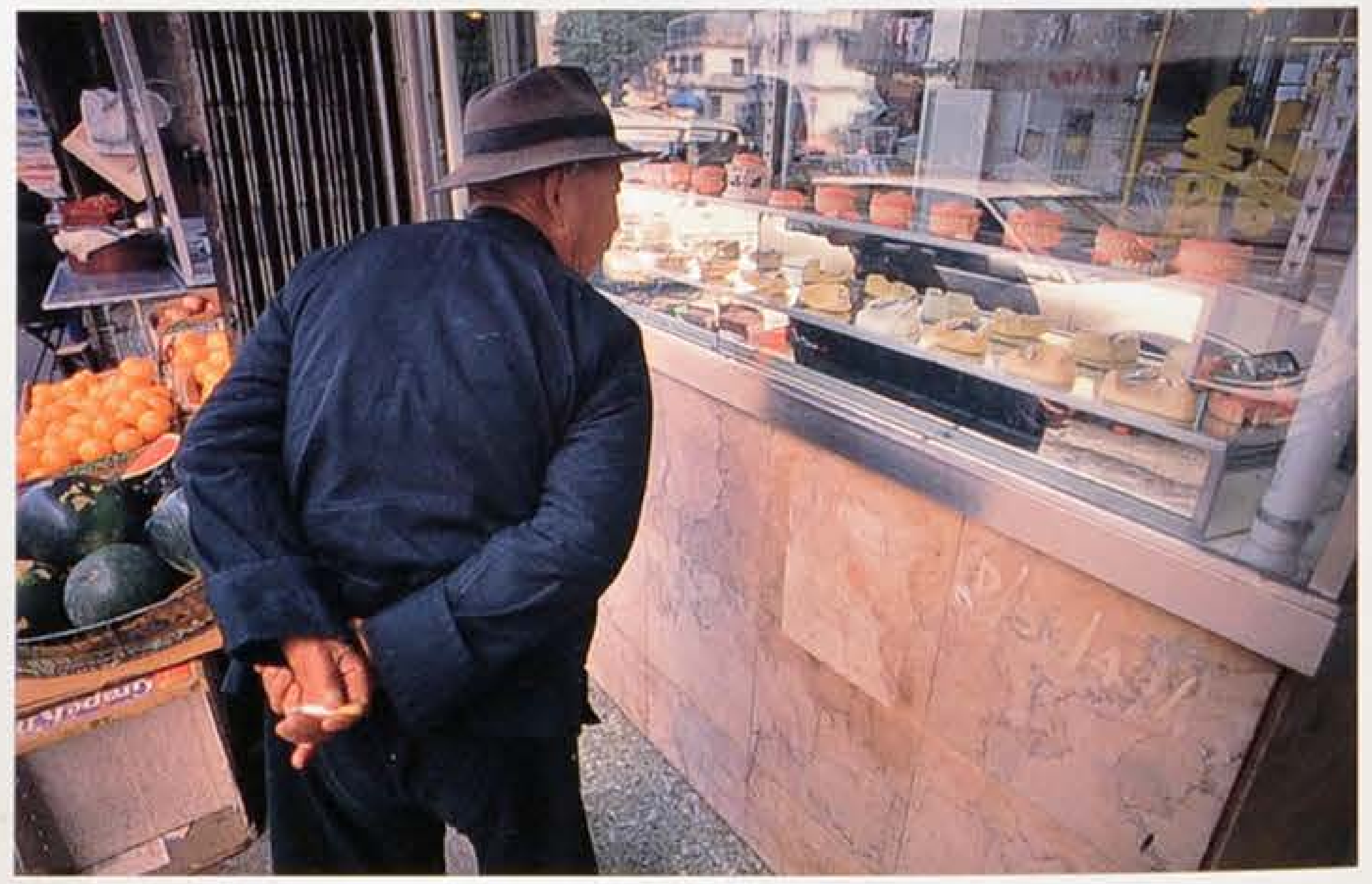
My clinic opens at 10am and closes around 6 or 7pm. When I started, I worked seven days a week, but now Saturday is my day off. Sometimes I don't have any business for a day or two, at other times I am working flat out. The monthly rent for this place was $450 when I first moved in, but it has gone up gradually over the years and, since 1987, it has been $2000.

I do not employ an assistant as my wife is able to help me. Coming from the same type of background as me, she was not frightened when she moved into the Walled City. This place might be scary and filthy at first sight, but one gets used to it. We originally had a bigger place which was spacious and cheap but, after a while, construction work started next door and we moved to the clinic here. It was tolerable to begin with, but has become much less so as my children – two girls and a boy – have grown up. We have to sleep on the floor, but we are forced to stay because, as registered residents of the Walled City, we are eligible for public housing and we are waiting for something good to turn up. My daughter is already talking about the bed she would like to have.

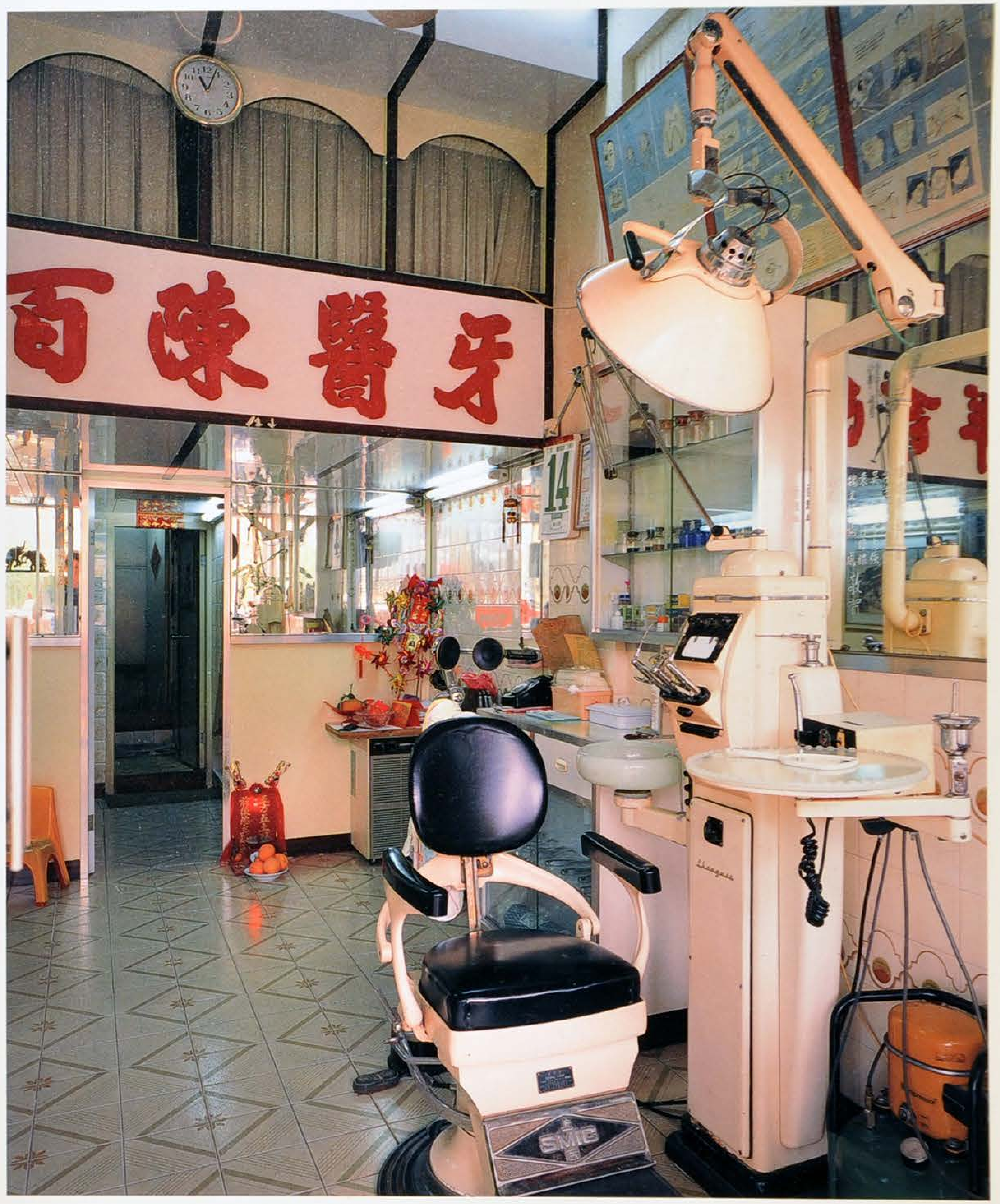
After the announcement that the Walled City was to be demolished, some people thought we were not here any more. When I eventually move out, I will obtain $342,000 from the Government. We organised a questionnaire to find out the views of all the dental workers in the area which revealed that 90 per cent wanted to be able to continue practising dentistry after they moved out. However, the Government told us that we would have to sit for examinations and that it was unlikely that any of us who had been apprentice-trained would pass them, so all we got was the promise of a lump sum.

I don't know what I will do when I eventually move out. I earn $10,000 a month here, but if I can't practise I don't know how I will replace it. Some people are talking about practising on the black market, but there is a rumour that if we are caught we will have to return the $342,000. My younger brother has suggested that we might go into business together in a small way. Anyway, we will stay here as long as possible, until my customers stop coming, or at least until a good housing unit comes along.

MARCH 1989
SU MO TU WE TH FR SA
CATHAY PACIFIC



An unusually clean clinic on Lung Chun Road [right] *which, together with Tung Tau Tsuen Road, was where dentists and doctors tended to locate their clinics so that customers would not have to enter the City proper. Knowledge of hygiene among the two groups of practitioners was generally rudimentary, with equipment often re-used without sterilisation. In a celebrated piece of medical detective work, one doctor was found to have injected a plant-based virus into numerous clients' joints after allowing a pot plant to drip on to the tray holding his syringes. Doctors in surrounding hospitals were confounded by the often serious symptoms for several months, before a consultant at the tuberculosis clinic identified one particular Walled City doctor as the common factor. Drug prescriptions were also somewhat crude, with vitamin tablets and steroids being prescribed as a general panacea for a multitude of symptoms. The use of steroids, in particular, was of serious concern to the medical authorities outside the City. Reducing inflammation and pain, but failing to treat the disease itself, this practice often led to severe complications later.*



Tsin Mu Lam opened his clinic on the second floor of 10 Tung Tau Tsuen Road in 1973, and worked and lived there with his wife and son until it was closed in 1992, during phase 3 of the clearance.

The Walled City isn't a strange place to me. During the 1950s and '60s, before he retired and moved out, my father was a traditional herbal doctor here.

I went to university in China, to the Zhongsan Medical School in Guangzhou, and graduated there in 1961. During the school's winter and summer holidays I used to come back home to Hong Kong, but once I had taken a job in China, and began practising, my work made it very difficult to visit regularly.

Then, in 1969, during the Cultural Revolution, I was 'sent down' to the countryside for three years – to Dongguen. After my 'release', my parents successfully applied for me to return home, and I arrived back in Hong Kong in 1973. But even though I'd been away more than 10 years, I still recognised a lot of people in the neighbourhood.

Later that same year, after a six-month stint in a medical unit at a factory on Tsing Yi island, I started my own clinic in the Walled City. I had to return here simply because I hadn't qualified in a Commonwealth country and was therefore unable to practise anywhere else. The City was Chinese territory, and there were already many Chinese-trained dentists openly practising here. If they could, I thought, so could I!

Dr Tsin Mu Lam and his wife – who was also his assistant – at the entrance to their second-floor clinic off Tung Tau Tsuen Road.

The location of the clinic was great – right next to the main road. Rent was just $500 a month, relatively more expensive perhaps than a place further inside the City itself, but still cheaper than premises elsewhere. This area in 1973 was very much as you see it now, though that's nothing like it used to be when I was still at school.

In fact, this space was already set up as a clinic when I took it over; all I had to do to open up shop was to stock it with medical supplies. I was a one-man band at first – there wasn't even a nurse – and it took some time for me to establish a name for myself.

I treat all the common illnesses and diseases, but I don't perform surgery – except once in a while when I will take care of minor skin diseases. But that's all – I refer most patients needing surgery to a properly registered doctor.

We tend to play safe here. I also don't perform abortions. There are, of course, those in the City who do. Now and then I get the odd enquiry, naturally, but I refer them on to doctors outside or else recommend a trip to Shenzhen, where abortions are more readily available.

I treat a few VD cases as well, both young men and women. Generally they are people from outside the Walled City – most find their way to me by word of mouth. At one point there seemed to be quite a number of these cases, though there are definitely fewer now – maybe youngsters are fooling around less since Aids has been around. There are still a few old prostitutes in the City, though maybe they've stopped working now – I haven't seen them around for a while.

Very occasionally, I get people coming in covered in blood, after they've been in fights. In most such cases I explain that I just don't have the facilities to treat them properly, and refer them to registered doctors – I can't afford the trouble. I've never encountered any one with a gunshot wound, though.

Of course, the difference between operating on the outside and here is that outside our brand of medical practice is deemed to be illegal, so if we did choose to work there we would have to do so in secrecy, under the constant threat of being discovered. Apart from this I don't think there's any problem with my patients not having faith in me. After all, they usually come to me as a result of a recommendation by their friends or relatives. People, I think, probably find Walled City doctors different because we are generally more friendly than the average doctor.

If I know a patient well, I might visit them at their home if necessary. I've been woken up in the middle of the night and dashed to someone's home to treat them for an asthma attack or suchlike more times than I can count. On one strange occasion, a man phoned asking if I could rush round to help him withdraw his penis from his girlfriend! I told him there was no need for a doctor to be present, and asked him to try relaxing. Later, another doctor warned me that it could easily have been a ploy to get me round to the house so they could accuse me of assaulting or raping the woman!

Actually, I've been very careful over the past 16 years – particularly when choosing my patients – so I've never been in any trouble. Of course, there have been times when a patient has reacted negatively to an injection. But usually there's no cause for panic; it's often no more than an allergic reaction.

I've never had any real problems obtaining drugs either; generally salesmen can supply us with what we want – particularly if it's antibiotics and the like. Usually, they invoice us without spelling out the exact name or nature of the drug; this way they can conceal what they've sold from the authorities. Sometimes we have to pay a 10 per cent surcharge for our supplies. Of course, there are some drugs – particularly heroin substitutes or certain painkillers – that we are simply unable to buy. Drug addicts have, on occasion, stopped by to see if they can obtain some of these, but I've always just told them to go away. They also used to come round during festivals, asking for 'lucky money' in red packets.

My patients come from both inside and outside the City, though mostly from outside. I open from 9am to 1pm and from 3:30 to 8pm, Monday to Saturday, and on Sunday mornings too. As a matter of fact I'm still engaged as the company doctor for the factory on Tsing Yi as well, and I treat many of its workers and their families. Often these workers come for the Sunday morning surgery, usually with minor complaints like colds, coughs and flu. If a company provides medical benefits to its employees, it's quite common for them to visit the doctor at the slightest sign of discomfort.

Our fees in the Walled City are cheap. Compared to doctors on the housing estates, we charge perhaps a third less. For consultation and medicine I charge $30 to $35, or $40 with an injection. The smaller fee is for the less well off. Generally, I treat around 30 patients a day, though when it's busy it can be as many as 50. Naturally, this helps me survive quite well; I've bought the clinic outright and the daily expenses are not really that large.

To be honest, I'm really happy that I've been able to make use of my training over the past years. I've successfully treated asthma cases, and my patients keep coming back to see me even after they've grown up – some even after they've emigrated! Here in the City the relationship between doctor and patient is far closer; we are friends. Often they bring me cakes during festivals, and I sometimes extend credit to those who can't pay. One man I remember suffered from a serious liver disease, but was unable to afford treatment. He passed away still owing me more than $1000 in medical fees.

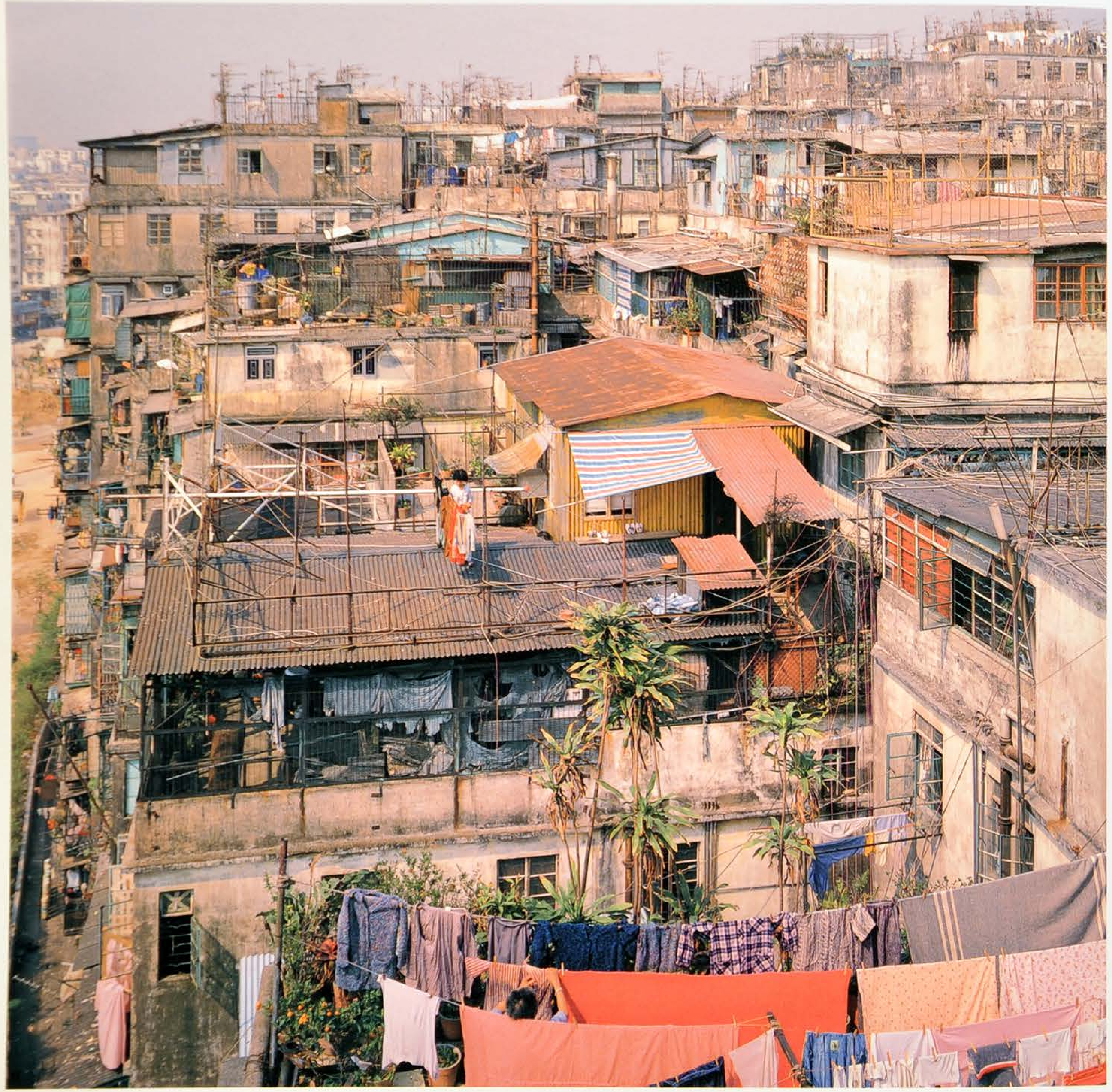
Now, of course, the Walled City is to be pulled down and we won't be allowed to practise any more. Interestingly, the City's medical practitioners had never got together until we found out about the demolition. To our surprise, there were more than 80 of us – both doctors and dentists – and 60 clinics! We also discovered that all of China's medical schools were represented – though most of us were graduates of Zhongsan, Beijing or Guangxi.

The group elected me as their representative to serve on a Government appointed sub-committee dealing with the future of doctors and dentists in the City. We examined a number of proposals which would enable us to continue our practices outside. In 1964, the Government approved a number of clinics that employed Chinese-trained doctors and we hoped we might be able to join these, but all our proposals have been rejected; the Government insisted that we discontinue our work completely.

In the end we were left negotiating for compensation on the loss arising from the permanent closure of our businesses. I had to attend a lot of meetings which cut into my working hours. On occasion, meetings starting at 7pm would not finish until midnight. After a really hard fight, each clinic is to get $340,000. People had asked for – and clearly expected – a lot more, some as much as $1 million; a few think I have betrayed their interests.

Personally, I still have a little more than a year here, after which I suppose I'll have to find some other kind of work. But what can I do? I don't want to be an illegal doctor, and I'm in my 50s. It'll be difficult trying another career at this stage. And $340,000 won't really go that far.

牙醫陳國祥



The topography of the City's roofscape [left and previous page] *had a life and dynamic all its own. Numerous illegal structures added to the top of buildings set the tone. There were small private gardens, tangles of television aerials and cabling, washing lines, makeshift water tanks, and a myriad crevices and cracks of all sizes between the buildings. Rubbish, as always, and a devil-may-care dilapidation were ubiquitous, and weeds grew profusely on the few roofs that were inaccessible. During the final clearance, teams of masked and suited workers were seen stripping the corrugated asbestos sheeting, so prevalent on the roofscape and elsewhere in the City, to make the demolition process less hazardous.*

Chan Kwan Leung moved into the Walled City in 1981, while working for Hongkong Telecom. He left his job shortly afterwards and began breeding racing pigeons on the roof of his apartment building.

My early years were spent in Shek Kip Mei. There was a huge fire in 1954 that destroyed a lot of squatters' houses and the Government built the first resettlement estates there. That's where I was first brought up. My parents were poor teachers, but their working conditions improved over time and we eventually moved to the New Territories where we had a two-storey house.

We were close to nature there and had our own fish pond; we also kept tropical fish. In fact, our place was like a botanical garden with all sorts of animals – including pangolins, eagles and owls – most of which were looked after by me. I had few friends during my childhood. When we lived in Shep Kip Mei, my parents didn't allow us to play outside for fear of bad influences.

It was not until I was 24 years old and working for the Hong Kong Telephone Company that I moved out of my parents' house. After I started work, I became more concerned with my appearance and less concerned about my pets. I became a cigarette smoker and was initiated into sex by a boarding school student who was younger, but more experienced than myself.

After a few years living away from my parents, I moved into the Walled City where I bought a flat for $68,000. I'd been to the Walled City once before to watch blue movies, but I have never eaten the dog meat for which it was famous. The Walled City was like a village then. When I first moved in, of course, it was all very mysterious and I tried to be cautious, but people quickly recognised you and wouldn't bother you. I met my wife here. Friends would come to visit and we'd enjoy great meals together. She was one of them and she liked my cooking.

After we married, I got to know my wife's family well and one day her mother gave me a pigeon which had flown into her house. I took it home and kept it for a few days. When I set it free it disappeared, but it started an interest in keeping pigeons and, soon after, I had a cage built in my apartment which was more than 10 feet long. I bought 20 pigeons from the market but after a few days, when I decided they could be released, all but one flew away.

Pigeon racing was not really a big sport in Hong Kong then, though there was one shop that kept racing pigeons worth hundreds, even thousands of dollars. Most people were more used to eating them, so they could not imagine spending money on a pigeon that you then set free. For me, though, it was great fun. I enjoyed looking at them and they looked back at me – each of us having quite different thoughts.

I began keeping a lot of pigeons. Then, one day, I met two kids trying to sell a pair for $160 outside the pigeon shop. I bought them as they were in good condition. The kids wanted to come to my place and see my other pigeons, so we came back to the Walled City. We went up to the roof and I realised then that it would be a good place to keep them. I asked the owner of the flat below if I could build some cages there and he agreed. However, after I put the cages up, other people complained. There are always problems with who has rights to do things on the roof-tops.

It was around 1981 or '82 that I built my pigeon cages on the roof. I became a fanatic and actually quit my job to take care of them. At one stage, I had more than 1000. I didn't tell my parents or my wife that I had quit my job. I survived on money from the Telephone Company's provident fund and some cash that my parents gave me after selling their house and land in the New Territories.

The roof here was an ideal place for rearing pigeons. It used to be very quiet. Occasionally kids come up, and I meet a few policemen. They are transferred to new beats every three months and are often new to the Walled City, so I have to show them the way. After 1986, more mainlanders began appearing – trying to avoid the police – and, of course, more people come up here on hot summer evenings. Boys and girls come up for dates sometimes too, but the pigeons aren't too worried.

Anyway, I soon became involved in buying and selling pigeons. People passing by would notice scores of them flying around and make enquiries. I was selling my pigeons for a profit, though I didn't keep any accounts or records. I was also learning the theory and practice of rearing pigeons and pigeon racing from overseas magazines which I subscribed to.

We set up a pigeon racing club of which I am both secretary and treasurer. We go into China for races. We take our pigeons to Xiamen and release them just before the ferry reaches the customs area. We race quite a lot and my pigeons often win the majority of the first 10 places.

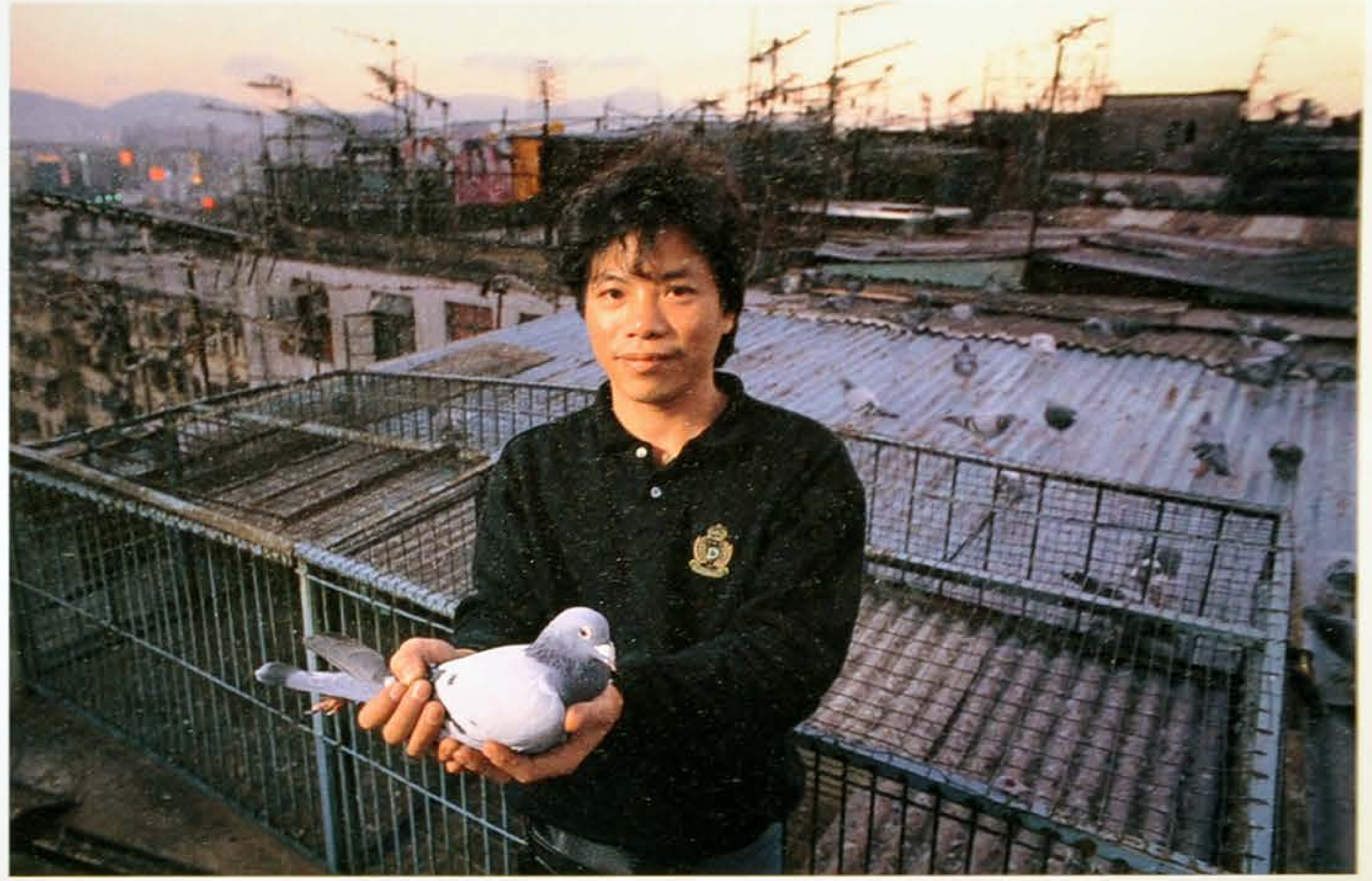
Each pigeon is given a special ring with a number, and their different colours are noted. A second ring has two numbers, one on the outside and one on the inside. The number inside is a secret code that the participants don't know. When the pigeons return home, you have to catch them, find the secret code number and then inform the race organiser by telephone.

Sometimes the pigeons come back injured, after being attacked by eagles for example, and we have to treat them. I give mine vitamin K and use fishing line to sew up the wounds, or spray antibiotic powder around the injured parts.

Since the opening up of China we have raced from Shantou, Xiamen, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai and a few other places. Pigeons can fly at speeds up to 70 kph, so a race from Shanghai might take two to three days depending on the weather. There are actually quite a few pigeon clubs in China, but they all expect a financial contribution from Hong Kong clubs. Participants in races have to pay an entrance fee according to the distance of the race. For example, it might cost $10 for one entry. If there were 800 entries but expenses came to $10,000 – most of which would be payment to pigeon clubs on the mainland – then the loss would have to be covered by the surplus from other races.

The Belgians are pigeon fanatics and probably produce the fastest pigeons. However, the Americans have also improved their pigeons in terms of their ability to remember routes. There are people who are prepared to spend several hundred thousand dollars on one pigeon. I might buy a pair for $6000 which will produce four pairs of chicks. Each pair can then be sold for $2000 and the original pair might be sold on for the original price as well.

I have lost some of the pigeons that I loved. There was one which I bought from a friend for $5000 and 10 cents. I kept it for eight years without being able to make it reproduce so I decided to set it free, hoping that this might bring about a change. Instead, it flew away and never came back.



The City's racing pigeons were quietly tolerated by the authorities, despite a law prohibiting the breeding of animals within urban Hong Kong. Pigeon owners usually chose mid-afternoon to exercise their charges, as there was a lull in the number of landings at Kai Tak Airport at that time.

I start training my pigeons 20 days after they hatch. They start imitating their parents from the very beginning, but it takes at least a year before they are ready to race. I always whistle before I feed them. The young pigeons follow the older ones when they fly around and my whistle is a signal to them to come back for food. They also look out of their cages and see the sky and surroundings, and gradually they learn to recognise the way.

Preparation for racing begins as soon as a young pigeon becomes independent. I take it to the New Territories and then release it to make its own way back. Next, it is taken out of Hong Kong for further training, flying 100 km, 200 km and 300 km on different occasions, with at least one week of rest in between. Then it is ready to race and attempts 500 km, 800 km and 1300 km races one after another.

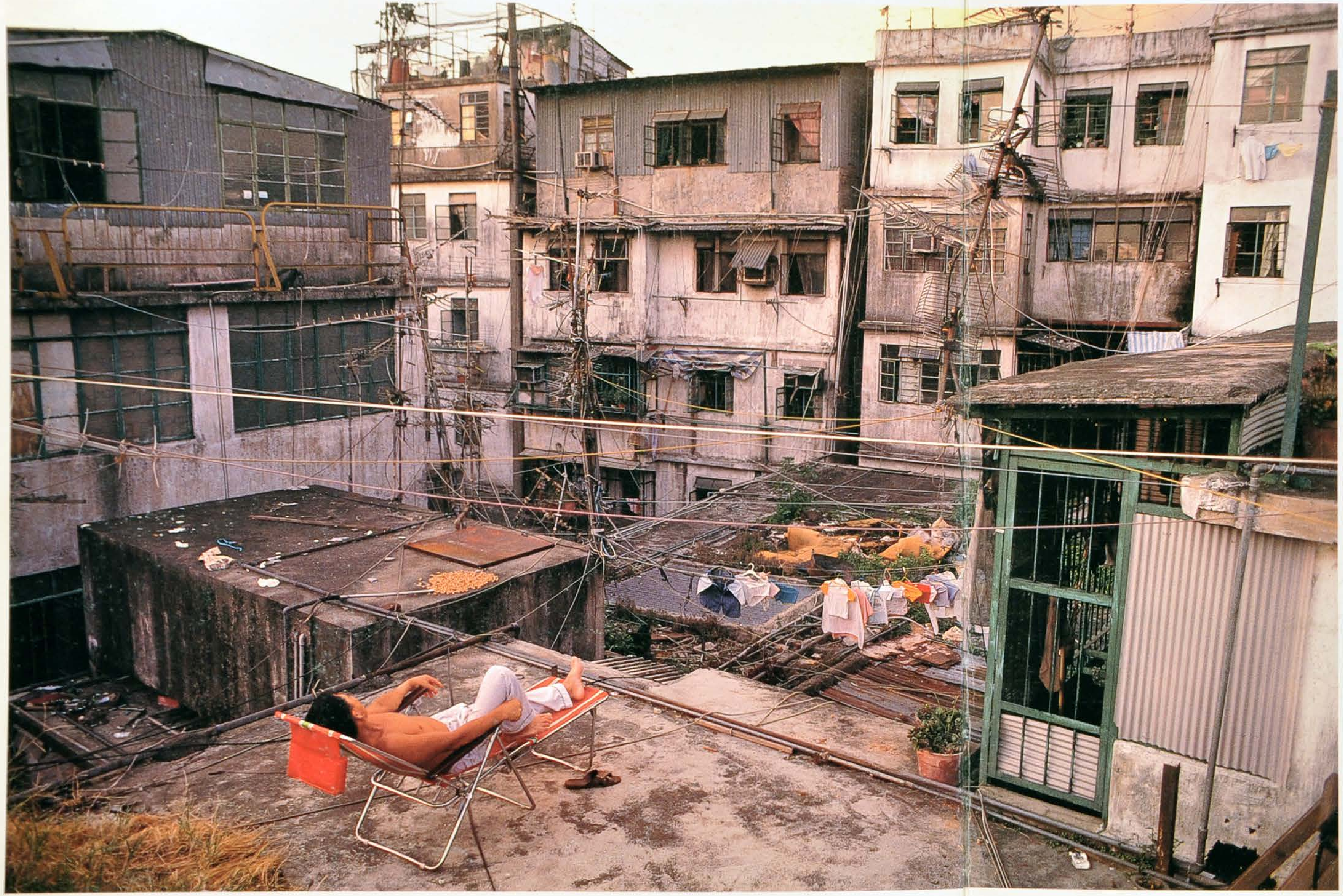
The roof costs $1500 a month to rent and grain for the pigeons costs $2 per catty. A pigeon eats about 40 cents worth each day. If I have 1000 pigeons, they will cost me at least $300 a day or around $9000 a month. I have to have drugs and medicine for them, and I import special sand to mix with their food. When they race, they are also fed three special tablets, each costing $18.

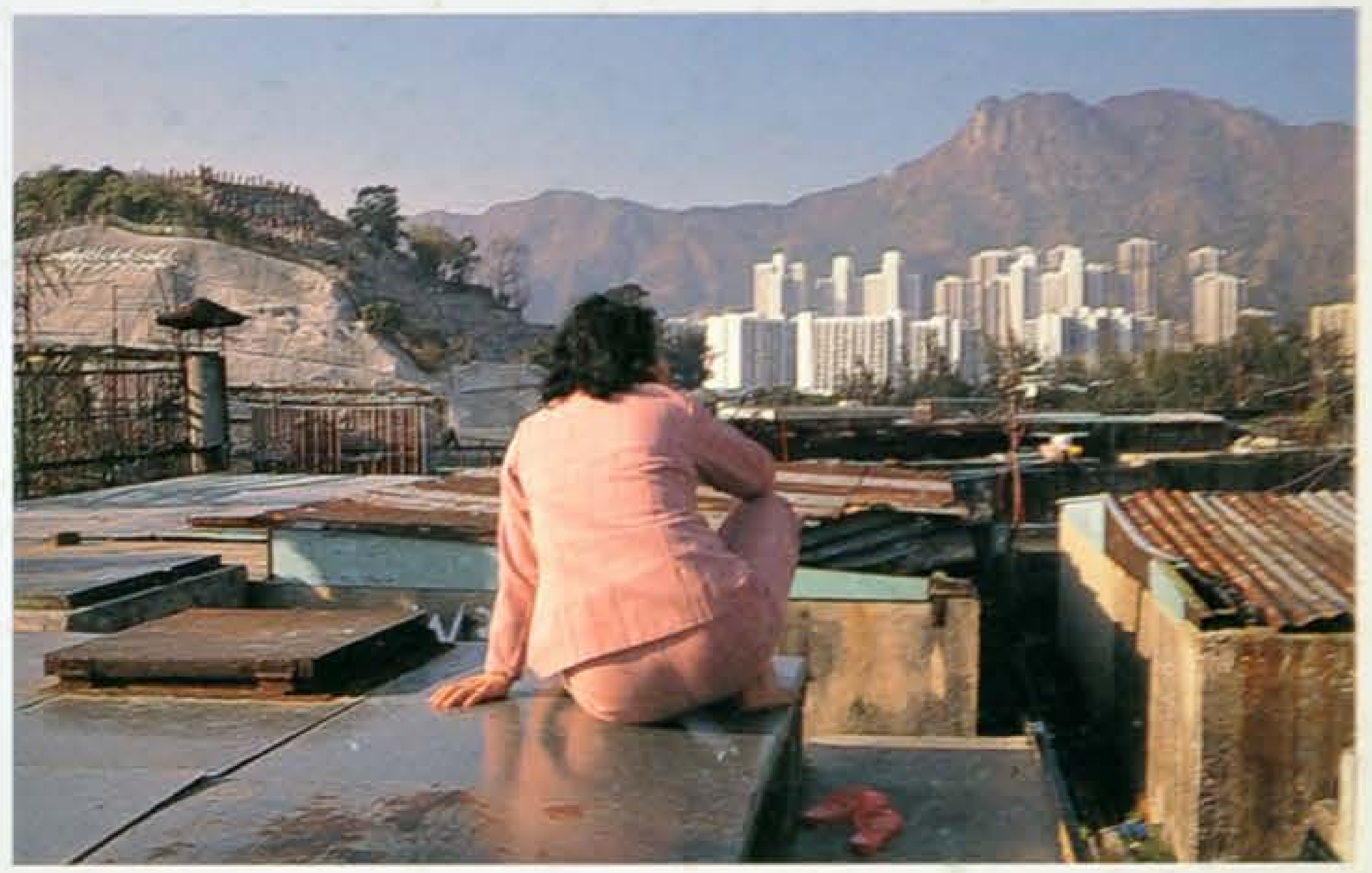
My pigeons race with half-filled stomachs to make them fly home quickly for food. Lately the practice in China has been to feed all competing pigeons with food and water, but this affects the performance of my pigeons. Furthermore, the tablets which I give them have a stimulating effect which often gets them into fights when they are on their way to the gathering point and some of them get hurt.

I decided to close my pigeon business in January 1987, on the same day that one of my pigeons returned from Shanghai. I was so happy, but the same day the Housing Department came to register me as a resident of the Walled City and announced the clearance. Now I don't know what to do or when to move.

I don't think it will be possible to find another place which is as good as the Walled City to keep my pigeons. Government officials say they will only compensate me $4000 for the two cages, even though I told them that it was my business – that I bought and sold pigeons. I would like to carry on keeping pigeons when I move away, even just 30 or 40, but neither my wife nor parents really like the idea. They want me to get a regular job.

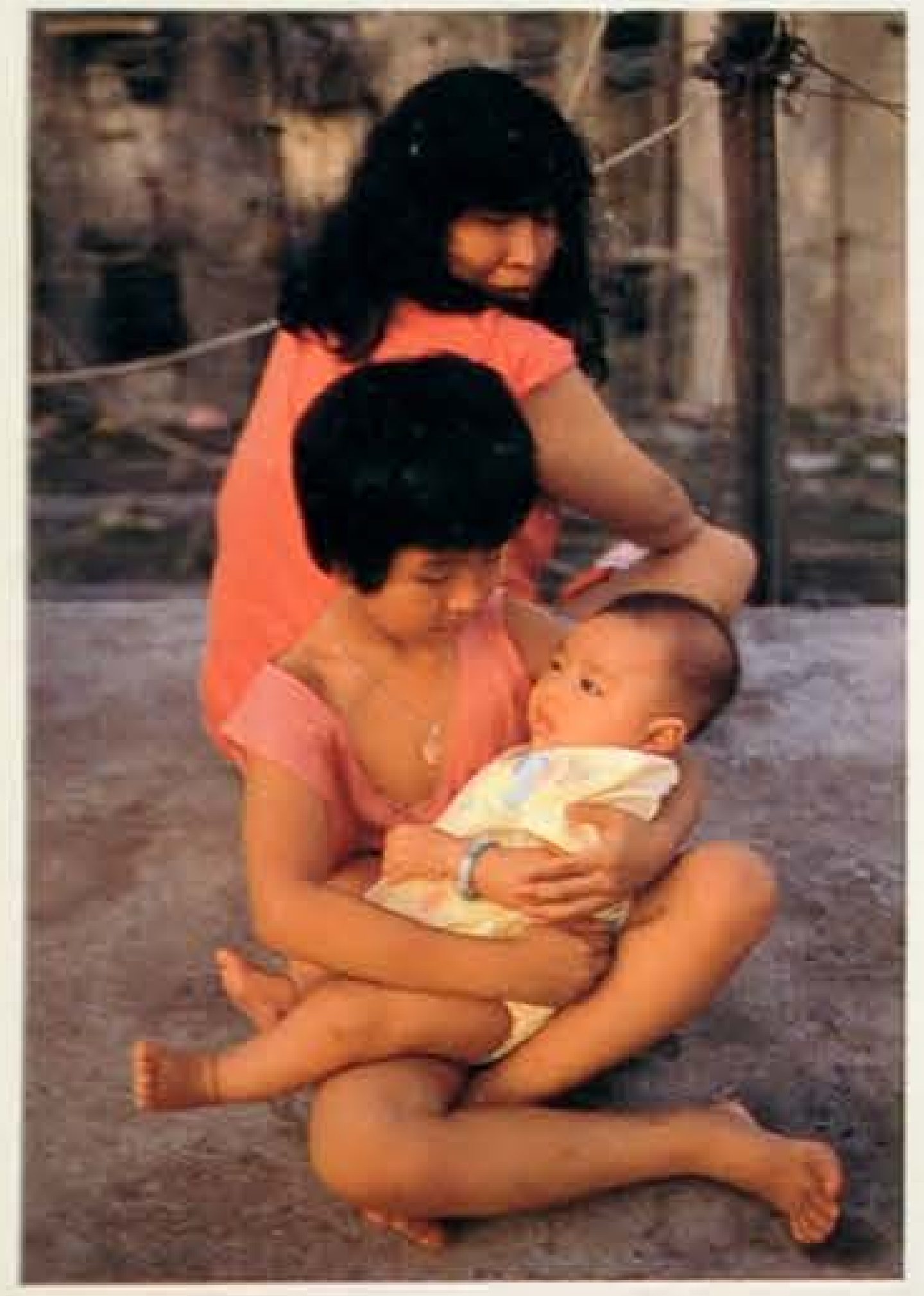
I am quite eager to get a farm in Yuen Long. I would make a really big cage like the ones you find in the Botanical Gardens. I would keep a big fridge with lots of food in it. People could come to stay for months without having to go out. We would grow our own vegetables and rear our own chickens, but I would make sure my wife had a good sum of money. This would give her a sense of security. And, whatever happened, I would once again keep some tropical fish.



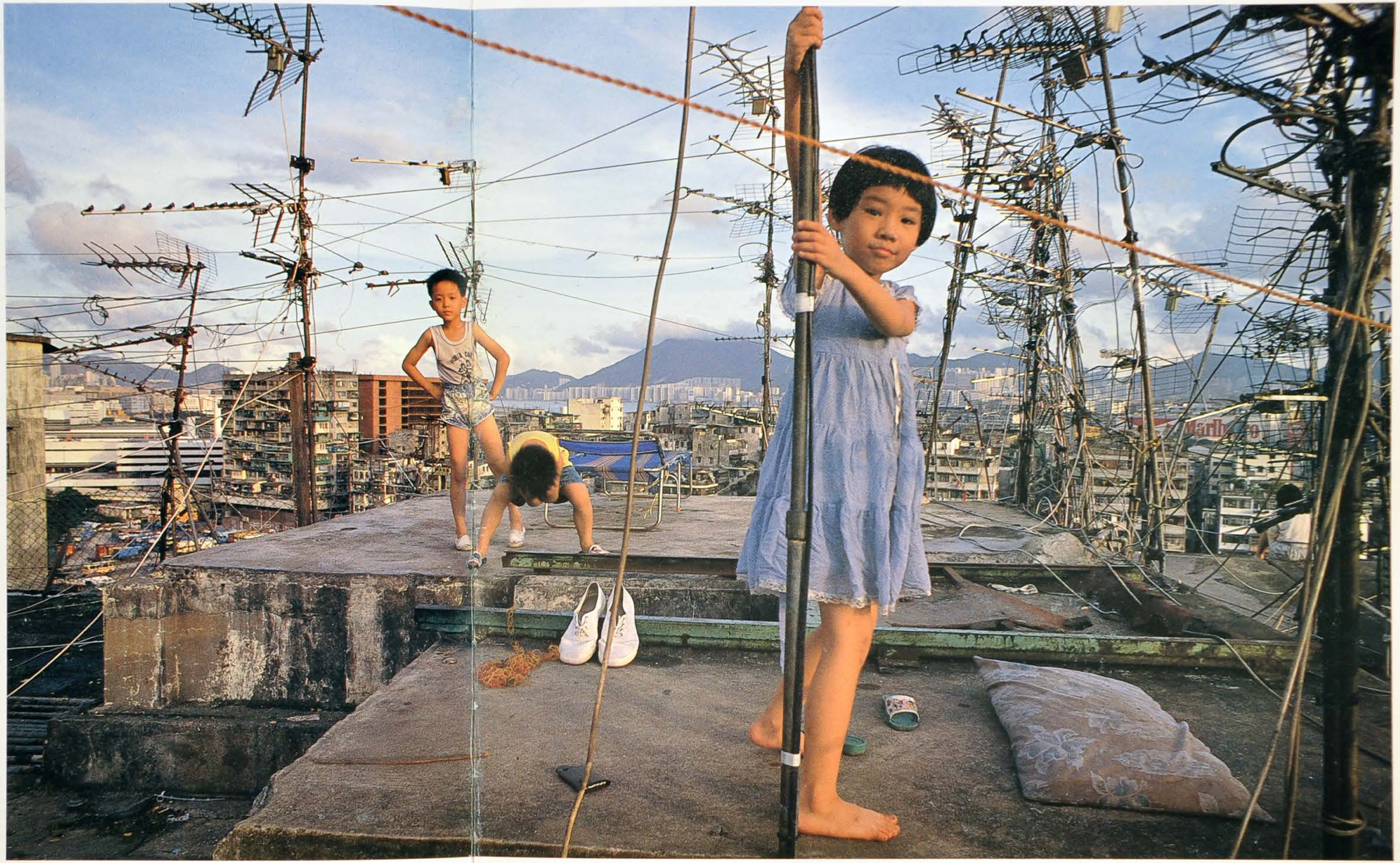


For residents of the upper levels of the City, in particular, the roof was an invaluable sanctuary: a 'lung' where they could breathe fresh air and escape the claustrophobia of their windowless flats below. Although the broad roofscape was angular, harsh and strewn with waste, it gave parents the opportunity to stretch out and relax, indulge a passion, or just sit back and contemplate Lion Rock to the north of the City. It was possible to traverse the City via the roofs of different buildings, either by jumping from one to the other or by following a crudely appointed thoroughfare, marked with rusting metal ladders and makeshift steps.

Early evening brought whole families up to the roof. A grandmother would keep her eye on her own grandchildren, as well as the children of her neighbours, while her daughter prepared supper in an apartment below. An exciting playground, the roof thronged with children out of school hours, either playing noisily or sitting quietly to one side doing their homework.



The shrieks of children playing on the roof were frequently drowned by the scream of jet engines as aircraft powered through their final precarious turn – 100 metres above the City's south-west corner – on to the runway at Kai Tak Airport, just 800 metres to the south. Being so close to the flight path, mandatory height restrictions – one of the few laws to be strictly enforced within the City – limited the upward thrust of the buildings to 45 metres or 14 storeys. Even so, the hills of Hong Kong island could be seen in the distance.



The Clearance

by Charles Goddard

A private security company was hired to guard and patrol the City as the clearance proceeded in three phases from west to east. Although employed to ensure there were no break-ins and to deter squatters, an increasingly important part of the brief was to secure the City against vandalism. Keys handed in by the residents of phase 1 were hung in neat rows to ensure that quick access could be made to the vacated buildings and apartments in the event of fire or other problems.

It was the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, the bilateral agreement returning Hong Kong's sovereignty to China, that laid the groundwork for the clearance of the Kowloon Walled City. The British had tried to sweep the area away before, but their efforts had always failed. Whether out of wounded national pride or sheer political expediency, the Chinese authorities had, over the years, stood stubbornly by their claim to the City and refused to allow the Hong Kong administration to pull it down. With Hong Kong's prospective return to China, however, the Walled City ceased to be a sensitive issue. Almost overnight, its veneer of political protection was stripped away and the City could be seen for what it really was: an embarrassing and anachronistic slum. It simply had to come down.

Such an 'institution' had no place in a modern city; on this, both China and Britain were agreed. The Walled City was a physically unsafe structure crowding people in insanitary and hazardous conditions. It functioned outside the usual recognised regulations in a way which, while fascinating, might be said to have put its own occupants – not to say the rest of the community – at risk. The health hazards from unregulated food factories were just one obvious example. In short, the City was a major liability for any Government, whether British- or Chinese-led, whether before or after 1997.

China and Britain agreed on the principle of the clearance itself in early 1986. By mid-year, just six months before the public was informed of the plan, a core team of senior, trusted housing officials was set up to conduct a top secret assessment of the City's vital statistics. Not a great deal was known about the City at the time; what information was available had been collated rather unsystematically by various municipal agencies for their own limited use. Led by Gregory Chan Tak Ping, an assistant director of housing who had extensive experience of squatter clearances and rehousing, the team was briefed to make estimates of how many residents and commercial premises there were, as well as detail the physical layout of the City – particularly the number and location of entrances and exits. The Government needed to know what kind of place it was dealing with before it embarked on a pre-clearance occupancy survey to determine the exact number of people residing or making a living there.

Secrecy was essential, indeed critical. If word escaped of what the authorities were up to, it could have triggered an influx of outsiders to the City looking to cash in on rehousing and compensation schemes. Fortuitously for the administration, Gregory Chan's clandestine observations of the City went unnoticed, though more perhaps by luck than by design. Civil servants are rarely masters of disguise and Chan, it seems, was no exception. As he explained in an article in the *South China Morning Post* after the clearance was announced: *"I decided not to wear a tie when I went, and asked the Government driver to drop me off some distance away from the squalid slum. But after two trips I thought it was still not secretive enough, so I took a taxi on later trips".*

With the operation failing to arouse suspicion, the Walled City went about its business unaware of the clearance plans taking shape. Foremost among the administration's tasks was to make a definitive survey of the City's population. At 9am on 14 January 1987, this was set in motion when the Government made its first public announcement that the Walled City was to be cleared. Fifteen minutes later, China's Foreign Ministry in Beijing issued a message of support for the clearance: *"An actual improvement in the living environment of the Kowloon Walled City not only accords with the vital interests of the inhabitants . . . but also with the interests of Hong Kong inhabitants as a whole".* There would be no court of appeal.

Just 20 minutes after the first announcement, at 9.20am, 30 trucks arrived at three assembly points near the City. Some 400 Housing Department officials disembarked and grouped themselves into 60 teams, each led by a police officer. The need for secrecy was still such that the survey teams had only been informed of the day's 'mission' at 7.30 that morning, when they reported for work. And a mission it was. At 10am sharp, one hour after the announcement, the teams descended on the Walled City with military precision, cordoning off each of the 83 entranceways and spreading into the dark interior to begin a comprehensive door-to-door survey which would continue until every household had been interviewed some 24 hours later.

The sense of disbelief in the unsuspecting City was strong. Despite a pervasive, nagging knowledge among residents that, one day, the City would be cleared, no one could quite believe it was happening. Yet there was little resistance. Surveyors were met mostly with shocked resignation and compliance. *"Even God cannot help us now"*, storekeeper Tsang Kam Kwan was reported as saying, summing up the residents' mixed emotions. *"A decision has been made. It's now entirely up to the Government to do what it likes with us."* The dismay of residents was tangible, their uncertainty for the future great. The prospect of dispossession was particularly acute among the longer-term residents and the elderly. *"I've lived in this City from the age of one; I'm 76 now. This is my home and this is where all my friends are"*, explained Law Oi Chu. *"But then times have changed. What can old people do?"*

Undoubtedly, the most anxious sections of the community were the small business and factory operators, and the dentists and doctors. Many of the former had moved into the City to escape what they perceived to be costly Government hygiene and labour regulations, while the latter were illegal medical practitioners to whom the authorities had turned a blind eye. *"I don't know if I can operate anywhere else"*, one dentist said. *"It's an open secret that all of us from China are unlicensed."* A vocal minority, most of whom made their living in the City, would later challenge the authorities to evict them. The first signs of this disaffection appeared shortly after the occupancy survey. Anonymous posters appeared on the City fringes demanding that compensation be paid according to Chinese practice. The Walled City, the posters read, was built with 'blood and sweat', and while to outsiders it might be a 'cancer', to those living there it was 'heaven'.

But what exactly had the survey found? Perhaps its most surprising revelation was that the number of residents in the City was some 33,000; previous estimates, in the mid-1980s, had frequently put the population as high as 40,000. Of course, this didn't exactly make the City spacious. Figures released just prior to the deadline for the clearance of phase I, in November 1991, itemised 10,742 households in the City as a whole, living in 8494 premises in roughly 350 buildings of 10 to 14 storeys. The tally for businesses – mostly small food-processing, metal-working and plastics factories – was 718. About 170 of these were restaurants or shops. In addition, there were 75 medical and 86 dental clinics.

Concurrent with the occupancy survey, a 'Special Committee on the Clearance of the Kowloon Walled City' was created under the Housing Authority. It was to be assisted by a Special Duties Office which brought together officials from the Housing and the Building and Lands departments, and the Registrar General's office. Once the initial survey was complete, the next step was to submit a detailed compensation, clearance and demolition plan. By the end of 1987, the Legislative Council had approved a $2.76 billion package which would see all residents and businesses moved out of the City in four phases by June 1992. The demolition of all

structures, with the exception of the old magistracy or *yamen*, would take a further 18 months, ending with the construction of a park over the site by early 1995.

The compensation and rehousing of residents was to be a two-tier affair. First, there were the tenants: people who could prove they were living permanently in the City before and up to the survey on 14 January. They were to be given a choice either of relocation in public housing, or priority status to purchase much sought after Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats with their own savings. Second, there were the property owners and owner-occupiers. Here, the key principle of compensation was that owners should get no less than the fair market value for their premises – providing they had documentary proof of ownership. Owners who lived in their flats would be given the additional option, either of public housing plus a cash equivalent of the free market value of their premises, or a cash payment towards the purchase of an HOS flat. The principle was that owner-occupiers should be given the opportunity to maintain that status, though this presented problems since the value of property inside the City was much lower than comparable property outside.

The final formula tied compensation to bringing the cheapest HOS flat within the reach of the owner-occupier. Based on a unit size of 23 square metres, the size of some 60 per cent of all flats in the City, owners in the first phases were to be given $320,000 – though this would later rise to $380,000 in the final phase, in line with the inflation in house prices outside.

A woman leaves her flat for the last time as it is padlocked by a member of the Special Duties team during the final phase of the clearance. Empty flats were quickly stripped of flammable materials to minimise the risk of fire.

As for businesses, their compensation was to be based either on the losses and costs incurred in relocating their operations outside the Walled City or, if a business was to be extinguished (as the Government termed it with finality), according to their level of profits. Those unable to provide evidence of their profitability would receive a set compensation in the region of $340,000 to $450,000. For doctors and dentists, a special working group ruled that they were to be disallowed from practising once outside the City. Unless they were able to establish claims for higher levels, a lump-sum payment of $342,000 was to be offered for loss of livelihood and retraining.

By the closing date for the registration of property, in November 1987, ownership claims accounted for roughly 97 per cent of premises. Since few had formal legal documentation, owners verified their claims by presenting the traditional, elaborately decorated rice-paper deeds, authenticated with the chop of the Kai Fong Association at the time of the property transaction. For the vast majority of these cases, claims were settled promptly and residents began moving out when HOS flats or public housing became available. Only those not resident in Hong Kong for seven years – approximately 3000 people, or 8 per cent of the total population – were ineligible for one or other of the rehousing schemes. They were offered places in temporary housing areas instead. As the deadline for the clearance of phase I neared, in November 1991, just 457 households in the entire City had failed to reach agreement over compensation.

As residents moved out, the Special Duties teams moved in to strip the vacated premises of hazardous inflammable materials, and chain and padlock them against intruders. The thousands of sets of keys were then logged and hung on the walls of an office in West City Road, just in case access was needed quickly. Rubbish was also cleared from the stair-wells, the streets were cleaned and, as each phase was cleared, metal gates were placed on entranceways and accessible windows meshed. A campaign by the Urban Services Department to eradicate the City's enormous rat population also got under way, as experience in similar clearances had shown that rats simply jumped ship to nearby housing estates when their own habitat was threatened.

Though the vast majority of the 33,000 residents accepted the rehousing and compensation package offered – with many leaving the City for new housing well before their allotted deadline – a small minority of just a few hundred vociferously rejected the clearance as illegal and immoral. The few who refused to vacate were forcibly evicted.

But there was a lingering problem which would leave a bitter after-taste to the clearance. A small percentage of households – 'difficult clearees' as the Government euphemistically labelled them – continued to hold out against the compensation offers. Most of these were small family businesses – notably dentists and shopkeepers – that had failed to produce their books, either because they simply did not keep them or because they were reluctant to reveal their profitability for fear of reprisals by the Inland Revenue. Some, clearly, were hoping for more compensation, while others were genuinely upset by the difficulties imposed on them. To their calls for justice and fair compensation, the Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs Philip Chok Kin Fun, the man overseeing the clearance, could only reply that the Government could not provide compensation for all the advantages they had enjoyed in the past.

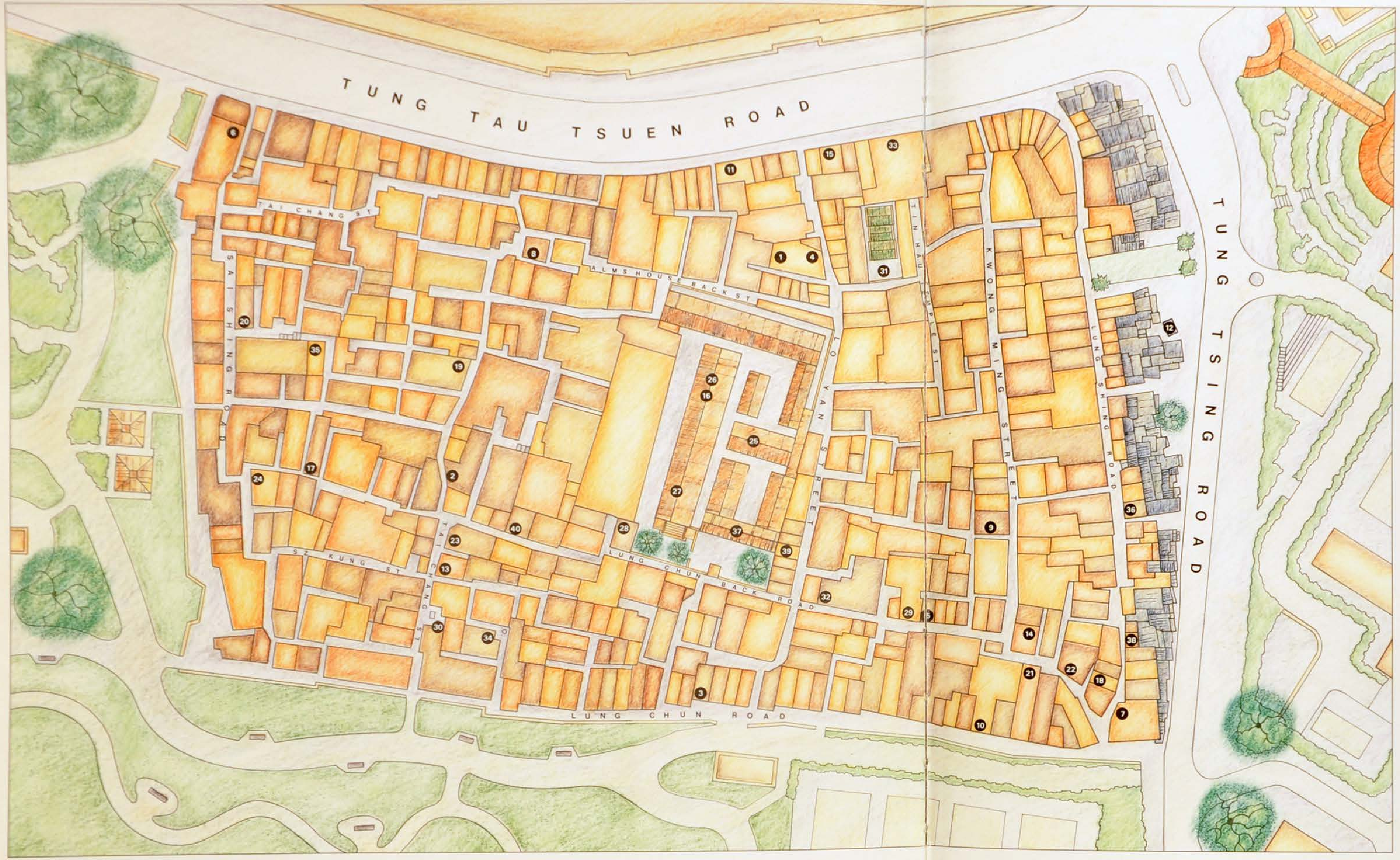
When the time came for the final clearance of phase 1, the Government found itself on the defensive for the first time, its mandate for the clearance – which many in the broader community had felt to be over-generous – under pressure. An emotive demonstration in front of the Legislative Council ended in the burning of an effigy of Philip Chok. But it was clear worse was to come. A small but determined minority had vowed to stay put in the City, despite warnings that they would be evicted if they were not out by the deadline set for the clearance of their respective phases.

Although nearly all of the 33,000 residents had moved out peacefully and only a few hundred were holding out, it was not the public relations exercise the Government wanted. On 28 November 1991, housing officials, accompanied by officers of the police tactical unit, carried struggling clearees out of the City. Similar scenes occurred during the other three phases, the police being forced to break into flats and forcibly remove 16 households across the four phases. One irate resident, his door opened, managed to chop two policemen and a housing official before being subdued.

With a tinge of ambiguity as to their role, the authorities closed the City in July 1992, removing 20 defiant protestors from a pavement encampment in the final eviction. The process of demolition was about to begin. Ironically, the streets were first thoroughly cleaned before being sealed off with metal doors and chains. A private security firm continued to patrol the City to ensure no squatters tried to move back in while pervasive asbestos sheeting was cleared from the buildings and rooftops, and while the demolition experts made their surveys.

Rumours of the Walled City disappearing in the world's biggest controlled explosion were soon quashed when it became clear that something much more simple and far less newsworthy was likely. In April 1993, to the fascinated gaze of assembled residents from the City's neighbouring estates, a giant ball and chain – operated by a company brought in specially from the USA – began swinging at the City's outer walls. Only the old *yamen* will be left standing when the demolition is completed, a reminder to future visitors of the site's extraordinary history. After nearly 100 years, Kowloon Walled City, this "question left over from history", will become nothing more than a park.

Demolition of the Kowloon Walled City began in earnest in March 1993. When the rubble is cleared, the site will become a public park, with the old yamen — the only building to be spared — as its centrepiece. Sadly, little else will be done to preserve the memory of this once extraordinary community.


TUNG TAU TSUEN ROAD
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The Map

1	Chan Kwan Leung	pigeon breeder	200
2	Chan Kwong	golf ball maker	144
3	Chan Pui Yin	herbal doctor	80
4	Chan Wai Sui	noodle maker	184
5	Chau Pak	storekeeper	22
6	Chau Sau Yee	cake maker	152
7	Cheng Koon Yiu	dentist	190
8	Cheng San	ruler maker	104
9	Chiu Chow Music Club		28
10	Chung Family	residents	112
11	Chung Fat Café		84
12	Fuk Tak Temple		26
13	Ho Chi Kam	hairdresser	180
14	Hoi Tung Choy	noodle maker	20
15	Kai Fong Association		174
16	Kwok Lau Hing	retired maid	136
17	Lam Leung Po	fish dumpling maker	102
18	Lam Mei Kwong	retired dentist	24
19	Lam Tseng Yat	storekeeper	148
20	Lau Yeung Yiu	weaving factory	50
21	Law Kim Kwong	cake maker	100
22	Law Yu Yi	retired maid	30
23	Lee Pui Yuen	storekeeper	54
24	Lee Yu Chan	candy factory	140
25	Reverend Isaac Lui	missionary	130
26	Old People's Centre		132
27	Old School		128
28	St Stephen's Society		170
29	Salvation Army Kindergarten		126
30	Standpipe		36
31	Tin Hau Temple		138
32	To Gui Bon	rubber factory	98
33	Tsin Mu Lam	doctor	194
34	Well		36
35	Wong Hoi Ming	herbal doctor	32
36	Wong Yu Ming	dentist	160
37	Yamen		124
38	Yau Lap Cheong	retired storekeeper	16
39	Yim Kwok Yuen	cooked meat factory	92
40	Yu Hing Wan	muslin maker	150

Acknowledgements

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The colour photographs in this book were taken by Greg Girard or myself. In general, Greg photographed the people and I photographed the 'architecture'. We occasionally exchanged roles, but we believe this is an adequate description for now.

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