

## Forgotten Photos Show Life in 1940s Chinese City of Tientsin

By Mike O'Sullivan

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**A photo exhibition in California has resurrected images from 1940s China. VOA Mike O'Sullivan reports, the exhibition, called Faces of Tientsin, 1946, is composed of photographs kept in storage for six decades.**



Old China Hands Archive, CSUN

**Street vendor with little girl in Tientsin, 1946**

The photographs were taken by a young officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, Harold Giedt, who was stationed in Tientsin - modern-day Tianjin - after the Second World War. His unit was helping repatriate Japanese troops and civilians after Japan's defeat, and Americans and Europeans who had been held in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

Giedt was no stranger to China. He grew up as the son of a Western missionary in a village in Guangdong province. His playmates were all Chinese and he was fluent in the local dialect. He received additional Mandarin-language training after joining the U.S. Marines. He had worked as a part-time photographer

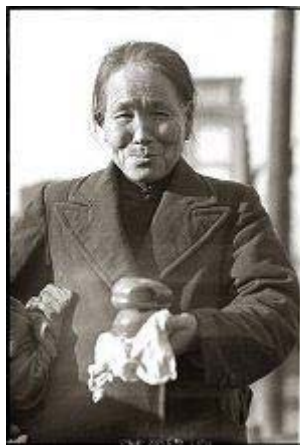
during his college days, and took two cameras with him as he headed for Tientsin in late 1945.

With his language abilities, he found that people opened up as he strolled the streets.

"I would get talking with them, and then ask them if I could take their picture," he said. "And sometimes, especially the adults and the women, would be a little more shy. But after a while, I would say, 'you look very distinguished or very interesting, and people in America would like to know how Chinese look.' And so they would often then say, OK."

The resulting photographs were candid shots of life in one city in post-war China. A woman, her face lined with age, smiles as she displays fresh-baked buns. Men are sawing a tree trunk to make boards for furniture. A young girl examines a box of trinkets as the elderly bearded vendor watches patiently, and a crowd of adults and children views the scene.

Retired geography professor Bob Gohstand directs the Old China Archive at California State University, Northridge, which is sponsoring the exhibition of 36 of Giedt's photographs. Gohstand grew up in



Old China Hands Archive, CSUN



Old China Hands Archive, CSUN

**Sampan family in Tientsin, 1946**

Shanghai's international settlement, and the archive preserves the history of the Western presence in China.

**Lady with fresh-baked buns in Tientsin, 1946**

He says Giedt clearly had a bond with the people he photographed because these portraits capture their humanity. Gohstand, a book lover, describes two of his favorites.



Old China Hands Archive, CSUN

**Boys reading in Tientsin, 1946**

years after he took the pictures.

"There are two very nice images of people reading," he said. "There are two boys nestled against each other, one reading over the other's shoulder, which I think is just a very charming picture, and another of a dignified old gentleman in traditional garb standing and reading. So I think those two mean quite a lot to me."

Harold Giedt went on to become a professor of counseling services at this university in suburban Los Angeles. He always hoped to show the photographs some day, and that day finally arrived 61



VOA photo - M. O'Sullivan

**Harold Giedt (l) with Bob Gohstand**

Bob Gohstand says that treasures like these may be hidden away and ignored in people's homes and attics, and he hopes the best are not lost to history, but are preserved in archives.

"I feel that I am working on just a little corner of a massive conservation effort because we live in an age where information simply inundates us every moment," he said. "But we all are products of our individual and collective past. And I find it very hard to make really intelligent sense of the world we live in if we do not consider where came from and what people were like. Harold's pictures are 60 years old. And really, it is like looking through a looking glass into a different world."

The photo exhibition in the Oviatt Library of California State University, Northridge, will run through August 1.

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