



Source: Ian Fisher, 'Deadline set by Palestinian militants passes', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 04/07/06.

Tags: [China](#), [chance](#), [food](#), [streets](#), [art](#)

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When you start a new project, especially in a foreign country, there are always things that you don't understand. For example, when I was in the market yesterday, I saw a woman putting her hand in a bag of rice. Her gestures were unconscious, sweeping her hand back and forth over the rice, then picking at individual grains. I was wondering if this was a test of some sort, a way of determining if the rice was fresh, for instance. But it soon became clear that she was totally unaware of these actions. She bought some eggs and walked away, without once looking back at the rice.

I was in the market with my video camera and I wanted to get some shots of people, but I was shy. As I was shooting the rice, a woman carrying a small child, was leaning over my shoulder, wondering aloud what in the world I was looking at. What could be so interesting? Then, she got it. 'Mi,' she said. 'Mi.' Having figured out that this foolish foreigner was pointing her camera at rice, she turned away. I turned my camera on her little boy.

Whenever I shoot children, I turn the small LCD screen around so they can see their own image. This particular little boy, about a year old, was a bit frightened by the camera, and even by his own image, but when he saw his mother on the screen, he calmed down. He kept coming closer and closer to the lens, trying to touch it.

By this time, we had gathered a small crowd. I wanted to move on, so I turned the screen around. The boy let out a howl. He cried and cried. I felt so bad—I turned the screen back towards him again. Everyone around was laughing. 'Don't cry, don't cry,' they said. But he was inconsolable.

I finally said goodbye to the boy and his mother and left the market. As I was walking down the street, I passed by an open door. It could have been someone's living quarters or it could have been an office. A man was talking on his cell phone, standing near a desk. He had a file in his hand. As he talked on the phone, he opened and

closed the file unconsciously. 'Don't worry,' he said. 'I'll take you to the market and we'll buy some rice.' He pocketed his phone and left the office, without another glance at the file.

I went in. I figured I could always say that I had mistaken this door for another door. Or I could always just pretend that I didn't speak any Chinese. I looked around the dark interior. There was a fedora hanging on a hook on the wall, a suitcase in a corner, the desk, a rickety chair and the file. I moved closer to the desk and carefully opened the file. It was empty.

I slipped outside and saw that the man had stopped to chat with a neighbour. Since no one had noticed my trespassing, I decided then and there to follow the man. He lit up a cigarette, talking in Shanghainese, which I don't understand. I waited.

After a long wait, I noticed that the other man was holding a file, similar to the one in the office. After what seemed like a long negotiation, he gave the file to the first man and left. I followed the man who now had the file.

We entered the market and he lit up another cigarette. I pretended to be interested in some long green vegetable that I'd never seen before. The man held the file against his right side, under his arm. It was beginning to be a nuisance, so he shifted it to his left side, sticking it under that arm. Then, shifted it back to the right...

Finally, a young woman waved to him. She was wearing earphones, attached to an iPod, a short red skirt and a T-shirt that said: 'Close the Door.' He reached out to take her arm. The file fell to the ground. Neither looked at it. They walked off, leaving the file, open and empty. People walked over it. It became muddy. The juices of fruits and vegetables sullied it.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ellen Zweig.*