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China Bound: Hedda Hammer

Claire Roberts



CHINA

Deutsches Atelier mit Photohandlung sucht **Photographin** (Süddeutsche), aus nur guter Familie, Lyzealbildung, Absolventin einer staatl. Lichtbild-Akademie. Muß in sämtl. Atelier- u. Laborarbeiten praktisch bewandert, auf allen Gebieten modernen photograph. Wissens perfekt u. im Umgang mit bester internationaler Kundschaft gewandt sein. Englische und französische Sprachkenntn. notwendig. Freie Reise und angemessenes Gehalt. Ausführliche Angebote mit Lebenslauf und Lichtbild wolle man richten an **HARTUNGS PHOTO SHOP, 3, Legation Street, Peking (China).**

Advertisement in *Der Photograph* 43 (May 2, 1933), n.p. FA16.275.

AS A RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED Study (2009–2010), I worked on two intersecting projects: a history of photography in China and a detailed examination of the photographic archive of Hedda Hammer Morrison (1908–1991) in the Harvard-Yenching Library. Each project was large enough to consume an entire year, but the opportunity of having access to the rich library and photographic collections at Harvard was too good to limit myself to either one.

In the case of the Morrison project, the work undertaken at Harvard would build on research that I had conducted in Australia, where Morrison resided for the last two decades of her life. My objective was to study the large archive of photographs that

Morrison had taken in Beijing between 1933 and 1946, as well as related material that she had bequeathed to the university library. I also hoped to confirm some important biographical details.

Hedda Morrison's now classic book *A Photographer in Old Peking* (1985) begins, "I knew very little about China when the opportunity arose for me to go there in 1933. The opportunity was in the form of an advertisement in a German photographic journal for a qualified woman photographer to manage Hartungs Photo Studio in Peking. The advertisement was almost tailor-made for me since it specified a Swabian—natives of Swabia are reputed to be hard workers—able to speak English and French . . . I was anxious to work overseas, as I had no sympathy for the Germany of the time, and the idea of working in far-away Peking appealed greatly to me."¹²

The passport belonging to Marie Hedwig Hammer, now in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, was issued in Stuttgart, Germany, on August 20, 1932. It contains a visa for travel to Yugoslavia, issued on July 10, 1933, and then cancelled, and a visa for China. On August 10, 1933, six days after she received a visa to China, the young Hedda traveled by ship from Trieste to Shanghai and then by train to Beijing. These dates established a time frame to examine "German photographic journals" in the hope of finding the advertisement that was to change the course of her life.

Amanda Bowen, Head of Collections, and Joanne Bloom, Photographic Resources Librarian in the Fine Arts Library, prepared an impressive list of German photographic magazines covering the period 1932–1933: *Deutscher Kamera Almanach*; *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*; *Photo Woche*; *Agfa Photoblätter*; *Das Atelier des Photographen*; *Photographische Korrespondenz*; *Die Photographische Industrie*; and *Photographische Rundschau*.¹³ Sharon Wang, a graduate student research partner, worked with me to look through the eight titles but hours of careful examination uncovered nothing. With the help of German-born doctoral candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations Natalie Köhle, who, like Hedda Hammer, was born in Stuttgart, the advertisement was eventually found in the magazine *Der Photograph* (May 2, 1933).¹⁴ The advertisement, headed "China" in large bold capital letters, stood out prominently on the page. The job description was in fact tailor-made for Hammer and it must have been with some confidence that she sent off her application and a portfolio of photographs, anticipating the day that she would be China bound.

12 Hedda Morrison, Introduction, in *A Photographer in Old Peking* (Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1985), 1.

13 I am grateful to Amanda Bowen and Joanne Bloom for their generous assistance.

14 After Natalie Köhle found the advertisement, she observed that *Der Photograph* was in fact the logical place to find it as the head of the Munich photography school where Hedda Hammer had studied was the editor.

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