

## Festival for the Pigs

*By Memtimin Hoshur, translated from the Uyghur by Darren Byler and Mutellip Enwer*

*December 1, 2014*

*Soon a rumor spread through the city that a pig was riding on another pig, circling through the streets, commanding the riot.*



[Cecily Brown \(http://www.twopalms.us/artists/cecily-brown/1\)](http://www.twopalms.us/artists/cecily-brown/1), *Color Etching with Brick Wall*, 2003. Etching with aquatint

Parts of our city used to be a swamp. In that swamp, there was a family that raised pigs. They scraped by, also growing vegetables on the drier parts of the swamp. When I saw the pigs splashing in the water, snorting around with their snouts in the black muddy water and rooting for something to eat, I thought that pigs actually ate mud.

The swamp gradually decreased and started to dry up. The family that raised pigs built a wall around their vegetable field. They also built fences around the few plots of empty land that lay unused. One of the city's respectable officials built a house in that area "for his son." Imitating this, people whose houses were not in good condition started building houses, one after another. A retired person opened a store that sold odds and ends. In this way the old swamp became a new neighborhood. We also moved to this neighborhood. We built a house with a few rooms and became neighbors with that pig-raising family.

The senior person in the pig-raising family was a thin and wiry old man. Because of his old age and his status as the first to move to this neighborhood, people would respectfully greet him whenever we encountered him. The old man, considering the customs of his neighbors, no longer let his pigs out, so now we didn't see pigs running outside and rooting everywhere.

His courtyard was spacious. We could hear pigs screaming from behind the walls. I only understood what pigs actually ate after we became neighbors with this old man. At first the old man didn't have many pigs. His children would go out with baskets, collect and bring home weeds and vegetable refuse. The old man would wash and cut the roughage, mix it with the who-knows-what that goes into pig feed and throw it to the pigs. Toward evening, the man would go out with two buckets on a shoulder pole and bring back swill from the restaurants. Later, as his pigs multiplied, the old man's family became an official "pig-raising unit." By this time his sons had grown up; the oldest son bought a motorcycle. He attached a trailer to his motorcycle and installed a metal drum on top of the trailer and carried home the slop from restaurants. The old man's family rose quickly. We were dumbstruck by how quickly they got rich.

Old age finally caught up with the head of the family. The oldest son took over the family business. He demolished the ugly mud walls of his courtyard and built new walls with bright red bricks. They were raising so many pigs that they had to build a separate pen for them. Even the walls of their pigpen were covered with cement. As if someone might scale their walls and carry out a pig, they pulled a barbed wire taut along the top of the pen. On the other side of their courtyard they built a two-story building—a building so magnificent that the beautiful house the respectable official had built for his son paled in comparison. Every time there was talk of how fast their pigs had multiplied and they had become rich, people in the neighborhood would say: "The old man was raising pigs from a foreign breed. If you were to sit next to the pig and pat her head, each litter would number twenty or thirty piglets." Others said, "They have a weird pig imported from Japan that eats cooked food and poops new money." [1] (#fn2)

The person who opened the store that sold odd and ends used to be a math teacher at a school. When he heard such remarks he would say, "My younger brothers, you turn everything into a joke. We should look at the issue from a scientific perspective. The pig-raisers' prosperity is in direct proportion to the number of banquet halls in our city."

"What is this, older brother?" we asked. "What do you mean 'direct proportion'?"

“This means,” the math teacher said, “the more banquet halls we have in our city, the richer pig-raising people will become. Banquet halls are places where aristocrats with full stomachs go. In order to compete for recognition they order a lot of food and stop after eating only a little. The rest will be collected by pig-raisers. If the free feed for pigs increases like this, what else would happen to pig-raisers besides getting rich?”

Now the old man’s son would go near and far in his newly purchased, shiny black car. The old man’s second son drove a truck with a large drum installed. They had a very intimate relationship with the famous grand banquet halls in the city. The leftover food from those places would be carried home in that truck.

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*You couldn’t imagine what kinds of people could  
create all this waste.*

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Truly, if you look at the inside of the oil-covered drum on the truck, you will see things that you have never seen even in your dreams: fried, steamed, pickled, hot, and cold dishes; duck, goose, chicken, quail, partridge, and some other obscure poultry; various foods made out of fish, frog, snake, lizard, insects, dog, cat, beef, lamb; delicate cakes made for someone’s birthday, flaky, pure-white steamed *nan*, layered steamed buns, steamed meat-filled dumplings, flame-broiled meat-filled pastry, oven-baked meat-filled pastry, *ayhay!* If you wanted to write every one of them in an orderly way you could just copy banquet hall menus one after another. You couldn’t imagine what kinds of people could create all this waste.

You might think, “Are restaurants places where hungry people go to eat or where people with full stomachs go to waste food?” Elites with money probably fill their stomachs at home and then order food worth hundreds of yuan, just to sit and look at the food without eating in order to show off their self-importance.

“Hey, you say this,” explained the oldest son of that old man while getting out of his sedan and greeting me one day, “but many under-the-table and in-the-sleeve business deals are done around those tables of food. The people of this city should be very happy for us. If we don’t take care of all this leftover food, this whole city will sink into rotteness. People with money squander it, and we gather the waste and turn it into new meat.”

Now the old man had relegated everything both big and small to his oldest son and didn’t get involved in any household affairs. He still wore clothes made out of simple cloth and smoked the cheap cigarettes that he had always smoked. For breakfast he ate two or three deep-fried dough sticks and porridge. Although his household was very prosperous, he still had someone cook simple vegetable dishes for him and savored steamed cornmeal buns.

His kids mocked him, saying, “Our old man is a person from the old times. His brain has also stayed in the old state.” Some days the old man would go into the pigpen and smoke while staring intently at the pigs rooting with their snouts in all that leftover banquet food. After all, he was a farmer. He must have been considering the hard work of those farmers who cultivated the vegetables and raised livestock. He must have been thinking about the posture of the farmers who tirelessly bent down to pick up the wheat from the ground, out of which those pure-white steamed *nan* were made. It might have crossed his mind that some poor families would never—even in their dreams—see the sort of food through which those pigs were rooting. Sometimes, in order to have a chat with the old man, I would go into their pigpen. To my eyes, those pigs looked different from the pigs I saw when I was a child. Because they ate the food that humans ate, even their manure looked like human manure.

Also, their temperaments had become similar to those of the people who wasted that food in the first place. The way they lay under the sun looked exactly the way some socialites lie bloated on sofas after stuffing their stomachs. Some of them would come and stare straight into your eyes as if to say, “What are you bragging about, have you even dreamed of the things we have eaten?”—it sent a jolt through your body. Some sows shook their butts and sashayed just like lusty ladies who scurry to all kinds of licentious parties. You would see the boars who had eaten the leftover food from lecherous rich men circling and rubbing against those flirtatious sows.

There was a special dappled pig among them who walked as though he was holding his hands behind his back and pushing out his chest. When you saw him strutting like a big official, you almost subconsciously bowed down to greet him out of fear.

## 1.

Recently, before a certain festival, city authorities sent a notice requiring all restaurants and banquet halls to suspend business for one week for sanitation maintenance. It was specifically written that whoever disobeyed would be fined heavily and their business license revoked.

It was necessary to do such inspections, because when you went into restaurants or banquet halls, usually all you saw were grandiose rooms and delicious food. You would have never imagined the dirtiness in the back of the house where they kept this-and-that: rats, flies, and food scattered about. But then if all the food venues suspended business for a week, what would the pigs that have been fed the slop from these places eat?

Nobody thought about this problem and this is how the tragedy started.

The first two or three days of the week passed uneventfully, but by the fourth day, the pigs got restless from hunger. They didn’t even look at the feed that was made from the barley, corn, wheat, vegetables, weeds—and the who-knows-what mixed together by the pig feeders.

I was passing by my neighbor’s residence, and I heard the pigs screaming angrily. “Do you

know what they are doing by closing the restaurants and banquet halls that prepare our food?” shouted one pig.

“What are they doing?” asked the other pigs.

“It’s said they are doing sanitation, sanitation,” the leader responded. “Think about it, what is the source of all filth? Humans! Humans never think about the necessity of first cleansing their spirit. It is said that humans are trying to achieve sanitation by exterminating rats, flies, lice, and fleas. But who is actually polluting the whole land today?” This pig delved into such deep discussions that he must have carefully selected food left over by university professors.

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*“They make all kinds of dishes out of our meat, eat whatever they want, and throw us their leftovers. Who knows by now how many of our brothers’ meat we have eaten.”*

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“As if that’s not enough,” said a second pig, “they consider themselves to be the highest species of all. They always hook us with their eyes, and enclose us in cage-like, narrow cement walls. When they get into fights, they curse each other with the epithet *pig*. They make clothes out of our skins and wear them unashamedly. They make toothbrushes with our bristly hair and put them in their mouths when they brush. They make all kinds of dishes out of our meat, eat whatever they want, and throw us their leftovers. Who knows by now how many of our brothers’ meat we have eaten.”

“Ah, our time in the ancient forests, when we roamed around freely,” mourned another pig. “How pure and natural our food was then!”

“Have you heard,” said another pig, “one of the humans’ big leaders said that no one should waste food. We should not leave any of our food for the pigs. Wasting is now a big crime.”

The speech with the most incendiary content was given by that spotted pig on top of the cement wall. “Do we have to go hungry forever?” he yelled. “Who destroyed our ancient homelands where our ancestors lived, changed our natural living conditions, and our nutritional diets? Brothers, the time has come to show them who we are.”

After hearing this talk, oh my God, I held my collar in clenched teeth.

The sanitation inspection ended before the festival. Our city received commendations from the inspection team. From street corners to the doors, windows, tables and chairs, floors of restaurants, banquet halls, and department stores, the city shone like glass.

On the morning of the festival day, all of the restaurants opened their doors and resumed business. Smoke began to gush from the chimneys of restaurants. Cleavers *tak-tak-tak*-ed on the chopping boards and ladles clanked on the edges of woks. Bosses scurried everywhere, ordering waiters to do this and that. For a week, weddings, various ceremonies, and receptions that should have been held earlier had piled up, so now all the tables in the restaurants were reserved. Towards ten o'clock, the scent of cooking food emanating from the restaurants began to fill the sky. A gentle breeze took this scent everywhere.

The pigs became very fidgety. Since they had been starving for a few days, they just couldn't bear it anymore. First, the dappled pig retreated a few steps and then threw himself against the iron door which the oldest son of the old man had installed. The bolts of the door flew apart. At that very minute, as if premeditated, pigs throughout the city simultaneously burst out of their pens and rushed into the streets. People wearing their festive, dressy clothes first heard something rumbling. To the bewilderment of everyone, this was followed immediately by pigs flooding into the city from every direction.

People started wailing and fleeing. They stumbled over each other. Women ran back and forth looking for their lost children. Drivers froze, holding on to their steering wheels, not knowing what to do. Many people climbed on top of tall buildings and craned out of windows, looking down with fear. Pigs guessed where the scent was coming from and went straight to the restaurants and banquet halls.

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*A saleswoman swooned when she saw one fat, pure white pig take a bottle of thousand-yuan white liquor with the tips of its trotters.*

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When the pigs ran like bullets into the banquet halls, trays dropped from waiters' hands, clanging to the floor. Guests flew in all directions, screaming. Chefs stood holding knives and ladles. Disregarding everything else, pigs threw themselves at the food. Pots of boiling meat were overturned and bowls fell to the floor with a clang. For pigs, there was no need to eat the food on the table in order. [2] (#fn2) They mixed it all up and gulped it down. They pushed large pieces of meat with their snouts, pulling them around on the floor and carpets. A restaurant boss, trying to put a stop to the damage, came out of the kitchen with a long rolling pin, intending to punish the pigs. The dappled pig rammed him, sending him flying out a window.

Some pigs in hot-blooded excitement went out onto the streets and looted shelves of groceries and street stands. A kabob seller dropped his jaw in surprise when he saw a few pigs running toward his stand, taking the sizzling kabobs from the grill one by one, pulling the meat from the skewers in one smooth twist of the head. A saleswoman swooned when she saw one fat, pure white pig take a bottle of thousand-yuan white liquor with the tips of its trotters, and with one quick motion, open the bottle and chug it without pouring it in a glass.

A piglet, walking on top of something in the corner of a store, stopped when he heard a melodious sound coming up from his feet. He was stepping on a grand piano whose cover was raised because a customer was about to buy it. The pig had been eating leftover food from the table of a famous musician.

The pig didn't realize that he had developed a musical sensibility. Intrigued by the melodious sounds, he started running back and forth on the piano. A mixture of Mozart and Beethoven came out from under his trotters. The pig who drank the thousand-yuan alcohol couldn't control himself and started spinning like a whirlwind. [3] (#fn2) Other pigs that came upon the scene also started dancing, turning the whole shopping mall on its head.

There was one fat customer who seemed to live at one particular restaurant. While the pigs were destroying the lower floor of the restaurant, he was having fun with girls in a special room upstairs. When he heard the commotion, he came down the stairs. As he did, he met a pig bolting up the steps.

Unable to avoid an encounter, the customer ended up straddling the pig. This pig didn't know what was on top of him. Out of fear, he circled through the restaurant and started running outside. That fat customer, afraid of flying headfirst onto the ground, grabbed the neck of the pig very tightly. It seemed to onlookers on the street that there was a pig on top of another pig. Soon a rumor spread through the city that a pig was riding on another pig, circling through the streets, commanding the riot. Some people said this commander was originally a pig that had turned into a human after eating human food. Some other people said he was originally a human who had turned into a pig after eating pig food.

### 3.

City authorities immediately called for a conference in order to deal with this chaos. Because it was a holiday, it was quite difficult to gather the proper officials. Some of those who did come were inebriated, or had red eyes from lack of sleep. First the pig-raising families were ordered to identify their pigs and bring them home. It was very difficult to identify whose pig was whose in the chaos. Pig owners ran around the city making the chaos even worse.

The meeting continued. A person who did animal research gave a long speech. To be honest, no one understood what he was talking about.

“The tragedy that took place today,” he said, “has put forward a lot of new problems for us.

Our clothing, tools, and transportation have become very modern. We are very selective in our food choices, but how much has our spiritual world progressed relative to these other developments? Since when did pig feed become similar to what we eat? Is our food starting to resemble pig feed? Or is pig feed being placed on our tables? If animals are not fed the food they are supposed to eat, their nature will change and this will cause chaos. What if human food begins to resemble that of animals? Ah, then, humans who have been derived from animals will return to their animal nature.”

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but we weren’t able to convince him.*

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A little after *pishan*, [4] (#fn2) the world fell silent of its own accord. After being satiated and having frolicked to their hearts content, the pigs grew tired and couldn’t carry their bellies. Some of the pigs that had eaten indiscriminately put their trotters down their throats to induce vomiting. Some others put their mouths against the cold tap, gargled, and said to each other, “It is no good to be too full.” They formed row after row and marched back to their pens throughout the city and, stretching out, rolled around on their backs. The pig that ran around carrying the fat customer was in bad shape; he collapsed with no life in his arms and legs. The fat customer had lost ten kilograms by the time he glided off the pig. When the pig was put on a stretcher and carried off by two other pigs, the fat man’s eyes filled with tears as though he were being separated from a close relative.

When the mayor arrived at the scene with other related officials there was not a single pig on the streets of the city. Pig manure and broken things were littered everywhere.

“Still good, at least the inspectors were here yesterday,” said someone standing next to the mayor.

“Oh, it was a festival for the pigs today,” said someone else standing behind...

#### 4.

All of our neighbors’ pigs, except that dappled pig, came back. Interestingly, the old man’s black sedan had also disappeared in the chaos. The old man’s oldest son said to everyone he met, “The sedan was driven away by that dappled pig. On that day, I saw him roaring away in my sedan with my own eyes.”

“Don’t be crazy. How can a pig drive a car?” we said, but we weren’t able to convince him.

## NOTES

1. “New money” is described by the popping sound it makes when someone holds it taut and snaps it with a finger in a test of authenticity.
2. In both Uyghur and Han cuisine there is a proper order in which food should be consumed.
3. In Uyghur epistemology, winds carry spirits.
4. Here, the writer uses the rural Uyghur tradition of organizing time according to the times of prayer (at dawn: *bamdad*, at noon: *pishan*, after noon: *asr*, at sunset: *sham*, at night: *eisha* or *hoftan*).

## G



**Mementimin Hoshur** has become one of the most prolific writers in the Uyghur language—a Turkic language closely related to modern Uzbek. Due to numerous Uyghur-language film adaptations of his writing in the relative freedom of Reform-era China, Hoshur’s work has become a touchstone in contemporary Uyghur popular culture. Although his 2003 epic *The Sand-Covered City* is regarded as his masterwork, he is most widely known for the vitality of his biting short stories of social satire. The above work of short fiction is one of the first works of Uyghur fiction translated into English.



**Mutellip Enwer** has, with Darren Byler, translated Uyghur short fiction in *Paper Republic*, and a volume of selected works by Uyghur folk painters in Kucha, Xinjiang. He is a PhD student in the English department at the University of Washington, Seattle, where his research focuses on teaching English as a second language and discourse analysis. Enwer graduated from Xinjiang University in 2007 with an MA in Chinese minority languages and literature.



**Darren Byler** has contributed essays to volumes on *[Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender](http://www.amazon.com/Transnational-Chinese-Cinema-Corporeality-Desire/dp/1626430101)* (<http://www.amazon.com/Transnational-Chinese-Cinema-Corporeality-Desire/dp/1626430101>) and *The Poetics of Travel*; he has also assisted in Uyghur-English translations (with Mutellip Enwer) in *Paper Republic*, *Selected Works of Kucha’s Farmer Painters*, and the Chinese-English translation of *Pictorial Xinjiang From Ancient to Modern Times* (with Li Dan). He is a PhD candidate in the department of anthropology at the University of Washington, Seattle, where he studies the aesthetics and political economy of urban life in contemporary Northwest China.