

BBQ Meat Shops

by Ya Xin Lu

I wasn't here in 1970
when a hundred golden-brown ducks lined the windows of this street
and a thousand voices flew raucously
char siu rou!
niu rou ga li!
bai zhuo gai lan!
and little footsteps pattered on the concrete
begging *mama* for just one treat
while big laughs bounced off watery glass
onto salty air and sweet grass

I wasn't here in 1975
when the white men came knocking on the door
rows of *kao ya* thrown on the floor
voices dead
air sour
bullshit about cooking temperature spewed for hours
because buttered steak raw is bourgeois
but *char siu* pork tended fully is deadly

I wasn't here in 1976
when my people rose
a whole association to oppose the people who took our laughter when they left
voices turned redder than red
marching up Parliament Hill ahead

I am here in 2022
when a few golden-brown ducks line the windows of this streets
and a dozen voices walk peacefully
try all they please
they cannot take away this salty breeze