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## **Changsha: Photographs by Rian Dundon**

May 15, 2012 in [Books](#) by [The China Beat](#)

*Rian Dundon, whose photographs [have previously appeared](#) at China Beat, will soon be releasing a new book of photography on China, Changsha. Dundon's book will feature a forward written by friend of the blog Gail Hershatter and includes his photos of and essays on the Hunan province city of Changsha. For more information, and to pre-order a copy of the book, see [the book's website](#) (pre-sales of the book are part of a crowd-funding campaign raising funds for its first run with the publisher, *Emphas.is*). Below is a special teaser of Changsha material that Dundon has prepared for China Beat readers.*

### **KTV**

Off Yingpan Lu in the old city center is a small neighborhood karaoke club. 100 meters down the alley opposite the south entrance of No. 1 Hospital, it sits next to a noodle shop and across from a massage parlor. The sidewalk outside is cracked and littered with cigarette butts and slick with grease from the restaurant next door. Its windowless, white cement façade is punctured by a wide door with an arc of faux stained glass through which you can glimpse the glow of a TV and colored stage lights. The club's doorframe is draped in thick green sheets of plastic designed to keep the interior air-conditioning from escaping into the hot summer night. Through those heavy curtains is a long bar behind which sits an elderly woman smoking a soft pack of Baisha cigarettes. Bottles and glasses and piles of used ashtrays are stacked on the bar along with other objects: rags and poker cards and packs of cigs, half-chewed betel nut and keys and cell phones, packs of gum. Behind the bar is a refrigerator containing dozens of yellow 600 ML bottles of Harbin Beer. Their labels match those on the empty cardboard boxes strewn haphazardly to the side. In front of the bar is an arrangement of cushioned chairs and couches covered with cigarette-burned upholstery, all dark green like the plastic over the door. Spilled liquids slicken the tile floor and glass knee-high tables where swollen ashtrays slide back and forth, sometimes crashing onto the floor or clanging loudly against empty bottles and thick glass mugs of green tea. In the front of the room is a yellowed big screen TV where music videos play. Their faded images of 1980's Hong Kong pop stars sporting fashions and hairstyles long forgotten. Alex To is there singing to a woman he's met at a pool hall:

Baby don't go ~don't go~  
Don't go ~don't go~

How can I wake up tomorrow?  
I feel so sad  
I can't trust love anymore  
Baby don't go  
Don't go  
Our love will be hard to follow  
It breaks my heart  
If you don't love me no more

In the back of the room a woman is crumpled in a chair mouthing the Cantonese lyrics to a song she doesn't know. Next to her a man is alternating between vomiting into a waste bin and taking shots of beer with his brothers. On the screen a woman runs along a beach, crying and tripping over herself as she chases a scornful lover. ZY, who is pacing at the center of the room and twirling a microphone cord as he easily croons the familiar love song, walks to the monitor and motions as if to dry the desperate woman's tears before turning to face the packed room. With a wide smile and deep baritone chorus all the stresses of his week and year and life are extinguished into the crowd, absorbed by their loving faces and unconditional affirmation. Singing, more than any other vice, is his release. His comfort zone. Surrounded here by loved ones in a tiny bar on an old street where he grew up in a city he no longer recognizes, ZY is at the center of his world. King of the Old City, master of how things should have been.



Old friends at lunch, 2008



Backstage at the Night Cat gay bar and cabaret, 2007



Sleeping on the bus, 2011



Abandoned construction, 2010





KTV, 2006





Pool hall, 2011