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Japanese-English Translation: Katayama Hiroko—Fifty-dollar Coffee (June 1953)

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I'd just arrived for an overnight visit at the home of my friend H—, near Senzoku Pond, when, on my way in, I ran into her brother S—: one of a few surviving souls miraculously returned from an island in the southern seas. He was frail and convalescing then, periodically taking the waters at Itō and excursions to Tōkyō, and because I was sure he'd be in need of a hearty meal, I'd brought along fish, meat, and vegetables for supper. These were hard times, and as I too had managed to get through them by the graces of others, it was now my turn to return the favor.

A courageous lad and world traveler from youth, S— often entertained us with stories of his experiences abroad, but especially those of China as he'd spent several years living there. Recalling, for example, the rampant inflation of his days in Shanghai, he'd told us of stuffing his rucksack with worthless banknotes in order to cover restaurant tabs. A single cup of coffee, he'd said, had cost fifty bucks in those days, but I'd found this hard to believe as one could get a cup of coffee in Tōkyō then for little more than a penny. Swooning, I'd exclaimed,

Well, if a cup of coffee cost fifty bucks, then dinner at a restaurant must've run, what?, a thousand?! Imagine such inflation in Tōkyō!, I'd said. *We'd starve to death! But, then again, even dying must've run a person a pretty penny, no?,* I'd mused. At this, S— had reckoned that a funeral in Shanghai would set one back at least ten thousand dollars. But not to worry, he'd said, as the average citizen owned such a sizeable wardrobe that one had only to sell off articles of clothing in order to raise funds in times of need. If I were to sell one of my Ohshima *kimono* for, say, a thousand or so dollars in Japan, he'd suggested, then I'd be able to eke out a fairly comfortable living in China.

Sixty-seven years have passed since that conversation, but my Ohshima *kimono* is still worth nothing near a thousand dollars and, even now, a cup of coffee here costs only fifty cents, maybe a dollar. What enviable peace of mind I have knowing that I can survive on much less than ten thousand dollars! And, to this day, I've not heard reports of a single death in Shanghai due to inflation.