

Shanghai Stories

There is the city and there are the people living in that city. Sometimes it's not obvious that the urban texture and its inhabitants are existing in different dimensions. In Chinese, there is an infinite gap between the two words "shangban" and "xiaban", meaning going to and finishing work. It means the lane houses, the smell of steaming baozi and youtiao, the dancing grandmas and the grandpas mastering Taichi, that only exist to you before 9 on your way to the office and after 5 on your way home. In the time between, you can look at the historic landscape from hundreds of meters up in a well-isolated skyscraper, and dream while being awake. This is when the difference is most visible: new and old, moving and still, local and alien, real and fictional. Liu Dao's new exhibition on the city of Shanghai plays on these contrasts and tries to achieve the impossible: to lead the audience back to the city they have been in all along.

Nothing is more Shanghaiese than walking in the middle of a crowded street early in the morning or late at night with your cartoon character inspired pajama on. † Nothing is more Chinese than going out for a morning walk to buy *shucai* or having *liangpi* and *roujiamo* for dinner somewhere in the street. "Duo shao qian? Haochi. Fuwu yuan! Zai lai yi fen! Xie xie." Yet, nothing is more of a mystery than my own city where I grew up. I still remember the days when I was a taxi driver, when bikes were stolen and not shared. Being a *shifu* gave me the privilege of understanding the city more than the city understands itself. My dating life was quite normal compared to the rest of the men of my age. Although I was married, there were two *ayis* that I was seeing on a weekly basis. They did not ask much of me in return, neither did I. We would meet. Talk only *yidiandian* before sex, I would leave something special on the coffee table and we would not know when our next date was going to be. My life was very *xingfu*, although some of my fellow cab drivers had five or six *ayis*, I didn't bother comparing myself to them. We would gather at the parking lot, exchange a few *chengyus* from time to time and move on to our daily *shiqing*. Then, one casual morning, while I was walking towards my favorite *shucai dian*, I noticed a *meinu* driving a 1965 silver Volvo † which I once saw in a British TV show. She is *limao*. She stops at the red light and here is my chance to cross the street. What a car!? Who is she? Where is she going? But the real *wenti* was whether or not she was the owner of that *niubi che*. How could she afford that car Roger Moore used to drive? It must be her husband's or a gift from some *youqianren*. *Tamade*... But what made me freeze in the middle of the street was that detailed, red *qipao* and of course her gorgeous silhouette while the vintage telescopic cigarette holder was touching her lips. She looked as noble as Audrey Hepburn and seemed so familiar to me. Once she glanced at my side, time stopped completely, and I finally recognized her! It was that *piaoliang* face of Zhou Xuan, the "golden voice" of another era. § She was an old love of mine I had long forgotten, but she still looked as stunning as she did that night when I heard her voice in a jazz cafe on the Bund. I still keep her in my fantasies...

Since then, I have driven thousands of miles around Shanghai and witnessed the city growing in every direction. I still drive around sometimes, but only for pleasure. People now take the metro. I don't like that place because of the surveillance cameras around. ** What for? There is not a single TV screen where I could at least look at myself. I bet those guys who work with it are even more bored than I am. Whatever. Instead, I put on my morning pajama and walk to the nearest square where I get to play mahjong with other *shuaigies* like me. †† It's a very competitive game. I like it because it reflects my nature, but I mostly enjoyed mahjong because it can be played anytime, anywhere as long as there is some money to bet on. Of course, the amount of money we used to gamble with would never exceed the budgets of all those construction companies around. To be honest, I quite love them solely because it is entertaining to guess which building they are going to *chai* next. †† Documenting it became my new obsession, especially the demolition cranes while they were in action. Of course, I have never tried to become an accomplished photographer, but this hobby has helped me to stop being involved in the highly addictive mahjong routine where I've lost almost all of my *renminbi*... Only then did I discover that I could deal with the ups and downs in life if there was some kind of a balance. §§ It's like walking on a rope with shirts hanging by the street. I needed something more concrete, so I started playing a balancing game on one of those temporarily erected construction walls. People would often stare at me as if I were a performance artist. Life was more than good back then. Then one day my *ayis* left me for some younger *shifu* who was driving a white Rolls Royce

and owned a French bulldog. *** But everything has to come to an end once. Life goes on. *Sui bian*.

I still remember the pictures I took of the evolving Pudong skyline with a Polaroid camera. I love looking at Shanghai's changing faces and the people in it. ††† All those images pile up like a stop-motion animation film, with skyscrapers popping up like Tetris blocks in each frame. ††† Until a point when the scenery is not visible anymore. I found my favorite photo of a Chinese lady dressed in a white *qipao*, wearing a blue wig, trying to picture the Lujiazui towers, but she can't, because the scene is all too blurry. §§§ While I stare at the picture it seems that she is stuck in a time loop where she must repeat every second forever. Even though I felt sad for her, I happen to be the one who witnessed all these changes with my own eyes. **** But I always wonder, what's coming next? Late in the evening, as oftentimes, I find myself wandering around the shores of the *Waitan* where I spend time staring at the Pudong skyline. I wear my pajamas, but this time, all these flickering neon and LED lights †††† give me an awkwardly surreal sensation. If this very moment were to freeze in time, I would climb on the top of each skyscraper and stand on one leg balancing for as long as I could. †††† My imagination hits an end after a little raindrop falls on my head. I hear thundering echoes roaring louder than an engine of a Chevrolet packed with bank robbers escaping from a crime scene. §§§§ Suddenly, the rain starts pouring on my pajamas and I have no choice, but to hide at the Sze Hing Canteen across the street. ***** I start to run and pass by a crowd of people cheering in awe. I turn around and see something I would never expect to witness in Shanghai. The group is staring towards something through the rainfall. I look there, too, and get astonished by seeing a young lady, wearing a trench coat and flashing open all of her naked beauty right in front of me. ††††† She does it once, then twice. The rain intensifies, but the show is still on. Meanwhile, I continue running towards the restaurant and finally get inside. I approach the *laoban* and impulsively order a steaming hot bowl of *miantiao*. Then I sit down and, as usual, tell myself: "Life is like a bowl of noodles. Sometimes it's delicious, sometimes it gets boring, you can never be sure of its origin and you never know how long it will be." †††††

Dates: From May 11th to August 30th, 2018

Curation: Andrés Gál & Irmantas Bortnikas

Art Direction: Thomas Charvériat

Artistic Research: Tang Dashi 汤大师 & He Dashi 贺大师, Owen 欧文

Coordination: Yeung Sin Ching 杨倩菁

Venue: island6 Main, 50 Moganshan Road, building #6, 2/F, Shanghai

Artists: island6 art collective (Liu Dao 六岛)

Link: <http://island6.org/ShanghaiStories>



Scan and follow island6 Wechat account

† "Rummage Lords" (掘宝的爵)

‡ "Horsepower" (马力)

§ "The Song of Zhou Xuan" (周璇之歌)

** "The Stop I've Never Seen" (我从未见过的车站)

†† "Grin and Bear It" (逆来顺受)

‡‡ "Add Your Lazy Layer" (涂一层慵懒)

§§ "Wire Ballerina" (线上的芭蕾舞者)

*** "Silver Shadow" (银影)

††† "This Moment is Gone" (逝去时光)

‡‡‡ "The Up Down Blues" (大起大落的忧伤)

§§§ "Picture Perfect" (最佳摄影)

**** "Dilemma with the Seventh Version" (第七个版本的尴尬)

†††† "Luminous Magnum Opus Nihonshu" (发光的代表作)

‡‡‡‡ "Genius Loci" (场所精神)

§§§§ "Love On The Run" (爱情狂奔)

***** "Sze Hing Canteen" (泗兴食堂)

††††† "All These Zedigs" (这些新的人)

‡‡‡‡‡ "Walkin' in my third favorite Smell in all of Creation" (在世上我第三喜欢的气味中漫步)