

# Life above the sea

Outsider's eyes inside Shanghai







Subjective random city index:

High gloss pink sports car  
Dog fashion  
Yellow cows selling black-market tickets  
Amazing restaurants  
Fake brands: watch-bag-watch-bag?  
Don't drink from water tap!  
Lively street life at all seasons  
Practical inventiveness  
Sweet smell of tarmac  
Hard working people  
Cheap taxis  
Glitzy, shiny shopping malls  
Ever changing skyline  
Traffic jams  
Recyclers circling around on bikes  
High heels to work  
LV bags costing three monthly salaries  
Crafts are daily practice  
Wet markets with live seafood  
Copying is culture  
City versus countryside  
Goldfish  
High-end luxury brands  
Elevated highways between buildings  
Keep moving  
Spitting in public is OK  
City of villages  
Food is everything!  
Traffic lights are just decoration  
Shops rotating every day on one location  
Street food  
Babies are public magnets  
Life chicken, geese and pigeons  
Overloaded motorbikes  
Diamond pimped mobile phone  
Tea ceremony  
Hospital halls like national train stations  
Garbage  
Mobile dark kitchens steaming at night  
Great live jazz scene  
Street sales from bike vendors  
Majority wearing black  
No heater? Wear your coat at home  
Teddy bear vendor in the night  
Massive high-risers and self made shelters  
Improvised quick fix  
Order our menu, eat at the neighbours  
Messy public spaces  
Tao, Buddha, local believes mixture  
Red and gold  
Keep your goods sealed in plastic

Uniform with sneakers  
Many ways around many rules  
Coloured flashy facade lights  
Mobile phone fixation  
Online shopping  
Couriers wrapped in many layers  
15 RMB haircut  
Why wait in line? Jump the queue!  
Group activities  
Marriage pressure by parents  
Ask the boss  
Always the right time for business  
Plane trees  
Shoulder-checks walking the streets  
Twenty-four-seven economy  
Hardly any street violence  
Fireworks  
Homes without toilet and shower  
Money, money, money  
Fixing bikes on the street  
Family first  
Breath protection masks  
Free thin plastic shopping bags  
Keep face  
Bamboo scaffolding slippery when rain  
Fake eyelashes  
Zooming and dripping air-cons  
Pyjamas on street  
Constant construction  
Cheap labour  
Mostly men smoking  
Cosmetics ads everywhere  
Company hierarchy  
Hurry, hurry, rush forward!  
Historic buildings  
Oh, her amazing Asian eyes  
Singing birds competition  
Baby pants with open bottom  
Group-buy dinners  
No street shoes indoors  
Dumplings are hot  
High cheekbones  
Food is medicine  
Lovely foot massage  
Medicine is food  
Electric bikes  
KTV is no karaoke  
Straight black hair  
Burning money for death relatives  
Concrete trees  
Ongoing road works

Hairless beards  
Round dinner tables  
Lower sleeve protection covers  
Drink warm water!  
Music of pneumatic drills  
Slurping food  
No tipping in restaurants  
Powdered ladies skins  
Mouth is tool while eating  
Light pink plastic wrapping wire  
Crab season  
TCM for chronic treatments  
Tailor made clothes  
Early tai chi in the park  
Pumping night clubs  
Grandparents with babies  
Moon cakes  
Motorbikes riding on pavements  
Arranged dates  
Air dried meat on streets  
Widely spread metro network  
Spray painted worker ads on walls  
Mobile phone spam  
Typhoons change streets to rivers  
Girls holding hands  
Men carrying their lady's bag  
Limited use of perfume  
Flying kites  
Small dogs only  
Incense and fruit  
Calligraphy  
Shops selling just water  
Specialist in pork intestines  
Red packs  
Separate rooms in restaurants  
God of wealth  
Year of the snake  
Textile market  
Xmas is clubbing and shopping  
Private chauffeurs  
Home delivery  
In traffic only look forward  
Horse horse, tiger tiger  
Double happiness  
Sleeping in public  
Laundry on sticks like fishing rods  
Crickets as pets  
Maglev speed train  
Jade on a red line  
Yellow wine  
Meaning has different layers



Fermentation is a traditional way of preserving. Drying meat and fish outdoors is still common practice in autumn and winter for those who don't have a refrigerator. Often this meat is meant to be eaten during the Chinese New Year family dinner.





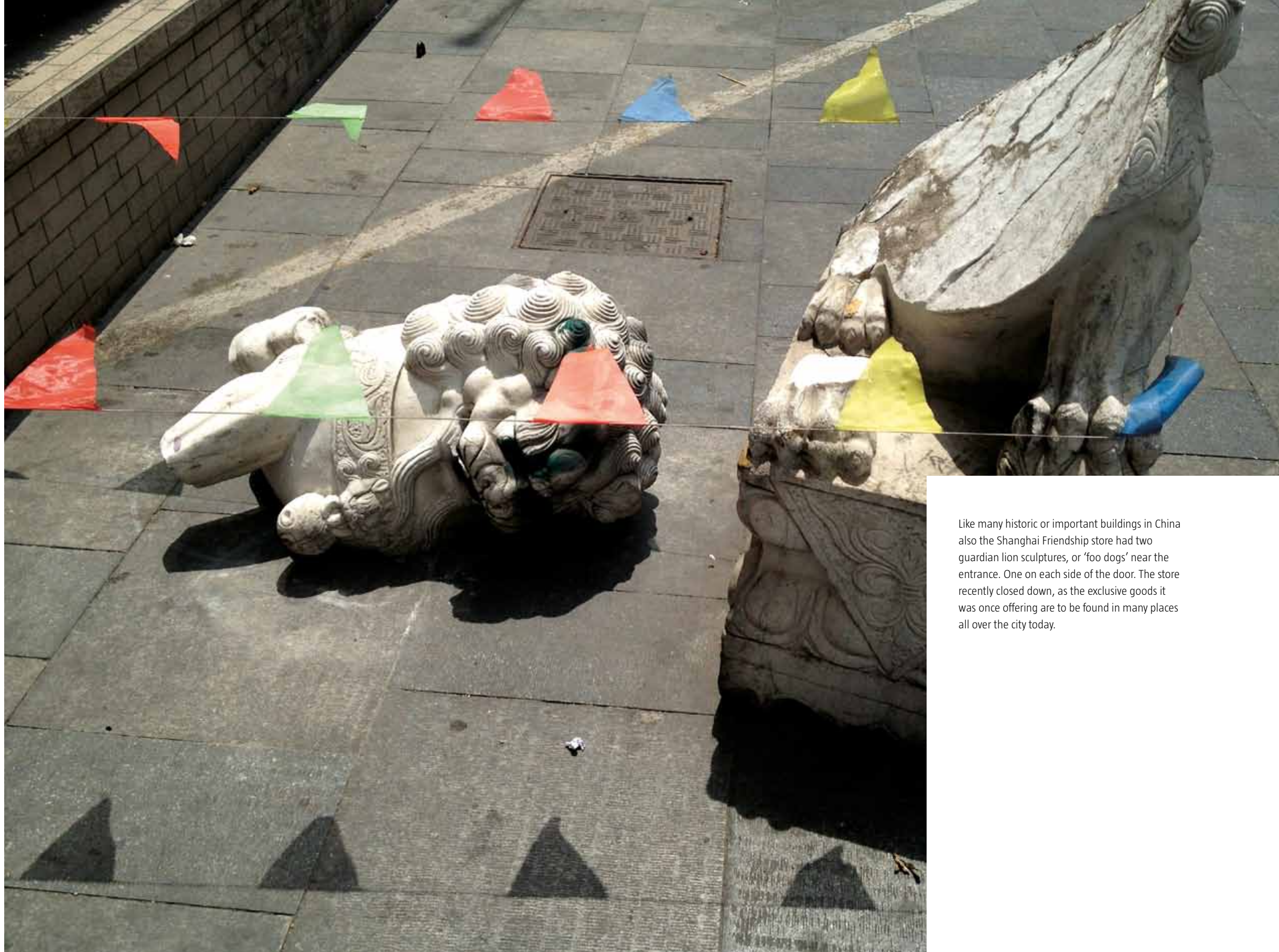






The first time I visited China in the late '90s the streets were mostly the domain of bicycles. Today cities like Shanghai are completely dominated by cars. To control the growth of new car owners, the local government is organising an occasional lucky draw to distribute the limited number of available licence plates. The price of a new licence alone equals the price of a small city car.





Like many historic or important buildings in China also the Shanghai Friendship store had two guardian lion sculptures, or 'foo dogs' near the entrance. One on each side of the door. The store recently closed down, as the exclusive goods it was once offering are to be found in many places all over the city today.





Today my electric bike is a taxi! I love the practical inventiveness of making a living. At the same time it is a necessity for many new citizens with often little or no education to survive in this mega city. Most mopeds are running on electricity as the local government is pushing for bikes to be less polluting, trying to improve the general air quality.







A haircut you can get every day of the year up until midnight, except in the weeks of Chinese New Year. Then most small shops are closed and massive groups of Chinese are making the yearly trip home to see the family. I pay only 15 RMB for a haircut. That is less than 2 Euros and double of what the locals pay.











Reusing and recycling is an integrated part of everyday life. Not because it is actively promoted, but out of necessity. The ones that make a living out of it circle around the city and specialise in for instance empty plastic bottles, paper and cardboard or broken electric appliances. Or in furniture. Around the corner from my work there is a man sitting on a staircase twice a week fixing broken umbrellas.



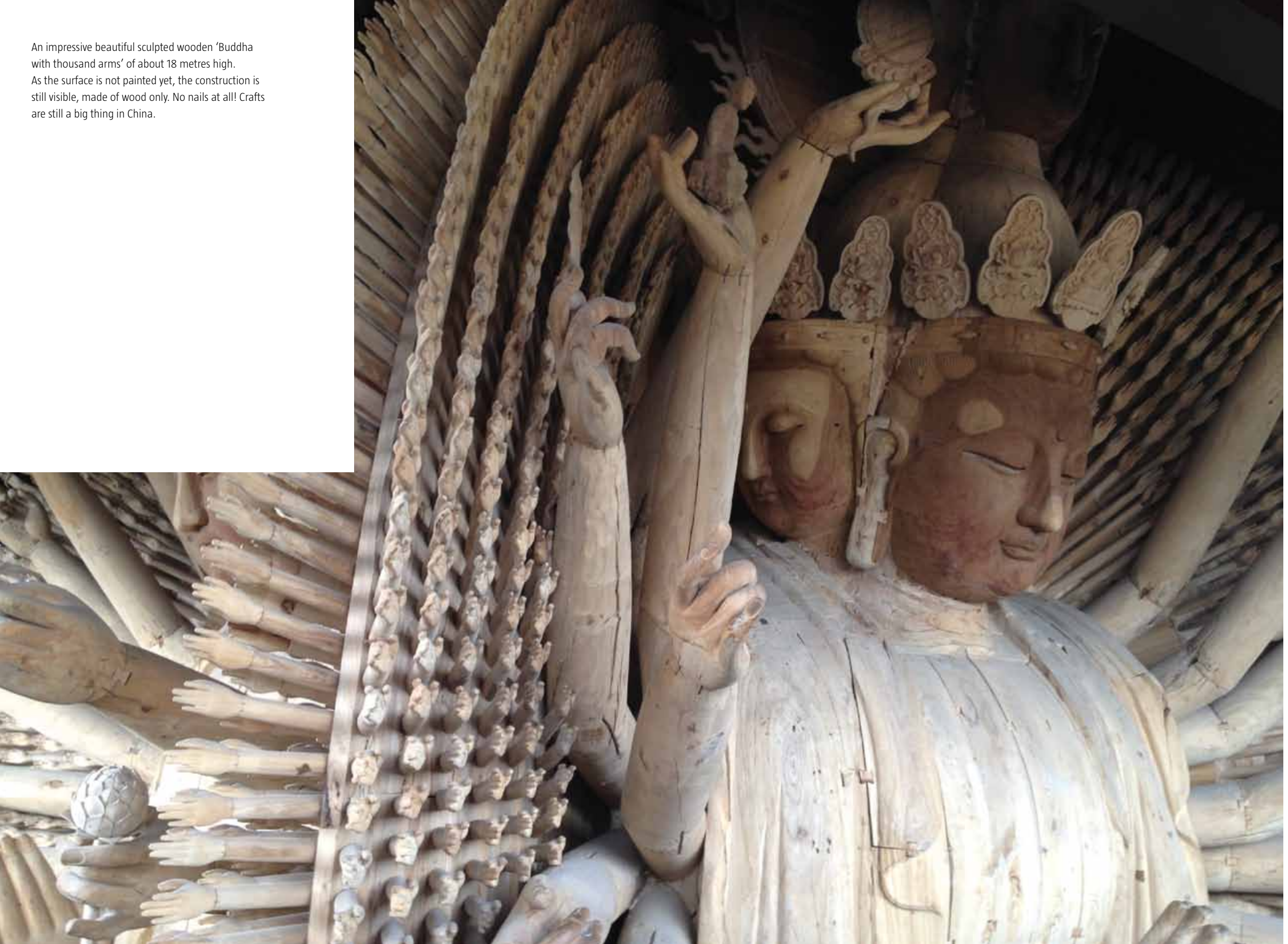


Pudong. In the early '90s this still was farmland with rice fields. Now it is the iconic skyline of Shanghai. Still rapidly developing. Buildings are tall and roads are wide. A large scale city fabric in which the best way to get around is by car only.





An impressive beautiful sculpted wooden 'Buddha with thousand arms' of about 18 metres high. As the surface is not painted yet, the construction is still visible, made of wood only. No nails at all! Crafts are still a big thing in China.









The Huangpu river separates Shanghai's old city Puxi from the new territories of Pudong. Everyday many huge cargo ships pass by. In the evenings accompanied by the tourist boats with rainbows of coloured flashlight that make them look like tropical fish.







The sound of construction is everywhere. The music of pneumatic drills and the sweet smell of tarmac on the elevated highways between high risers under construction. This city is never finished, never resting...





Slippery when wet! Every compound or office building has one: a doorman. Standing in the cold and the heat. Keeping an eye on who goes in and out. Sometimes watching television in a little cabin, and often wearing an official hat and uniform like a policeman. What gives it away is that many of them wear sneakers.





Taxi drivers work long hours. But they are not the only ones that feel no hesitation to sleep in public. The first time I came across a public sleeper was when I stumbled over a construction worker that was sleeping on the pavement on a flat cardboard box during his lunch break.





Around the corner from my home is a shop that changes three times a day, every day. In the morning it is a pancake place for breakfast. Sweaters and casual fashion in the afternoon and at night a barbecue restaurant by again an other owner, with visitors eating and drinking on low plastic furniture.



These transportation bikes are everywhere. Used by street vendors in textiles or vegetables. Or to deliver the big plastic water bottles to homes and offices, as tap water is not safe to drink. At night these bikes are often used for so called 'dark kitchens'; mobile kitchens that cook food at high fire at the corner of the street.







Glitzy shopping malls pop up everywhere in the city. They sell mostly the high end Western luxury brands. The most popular one is Louis Vuitton. The brown leather ladies bags with the pattern of the LV monogram and flowers is a true status icon on the Shanghai street. It is not uncommon that young ladies save up to three monthly salaries or more to be able to buy one. And if you can't afford the real thing it there are always copied look-a-likes that go for a lot less.





Typhoons. They shake up the city a few times a year with extreme windy conditions and endless rain. Sometimes the rain lasts for three days non-stop, flooding the streets. Best to buy enough food and stay indoors till it's over.



Red symbolises good fortune, joy and happiness. It is connected with fire. The colour is found everywhere during Chinese New Year and other holidays and family gatherings. A red envelope is a monetary gift which is given on special occasions. The red colour of the packet symbolises good luck.







It is quite amazing how even tall buildings get covered in scaffolding made of just bamboo, kept together with wire. The workers building these temporary constructions are fearless. They build and climb at extreme heights without any protection. Some say they can because they have a Kung Fu background. The only disadvantage of using bamboo is that it gets slippery on rainy days.







These hand drawn circles are often found on the streets and in public spaces. In the middle a yellow powder; the ashes of joss paper or ghost paper. These fake money bills have been burned in favour of ancestors, for them to spent in 'the other world'. Each circle represents one person. A traditional Taoist / Buddhist ritual.







For those who can afford it fancy cars are very popular. Maserati, Bentley, Lamborghini and what not. Or a pimped, pink, glossy Porsche for the ladies that love a toy car.









Plane trees define the character of the former French Concession. They nicely blend together with the historical lane houses. Most interesting is the way trees are looked after throughout the city. Some of them end up like a special hybrid, something between a tree and a sculpture.











Keep it sealed! It goes for many newly bought products and objects. Not sure if the owners generally don't care or if they like to keep there goods protected. Used bikes, doors, chairs, computers and more are all kept in plastic.







Local workers and craftsmen advertise their services and skills by placing small hand written signs on the streets, or quickly spray a message on a wall. Quickly, because public cameras are everywhere. The local government fights this commercial graffiti by regularly painting over these messages in matching background colours.





Laundry drying outside on sticks like fishing rods.  
It is a very common sight in the Shanghai streets.  
They usually are placed on a frame that hangs  
from the windows of homes and apartments up  
to six or seven floors high.







Shanghai has an vast and modern metro network that extends to every core urban and suburban district. As of 2014, there are 14 metro lines, 329 stations and 538 km of tracks in operation, making it the longest network in the world. It set a record of daily ridership of more than 7.5 million travellers on 22 october 2010, the last week of the World Expo.







People Square. Every sunday parents are gathering to look out for a good match for their child, a future husband or wife. Self made notes stating mostly age, length, education and income of their single son or daughter. For youngsters the pressure is high to get married with the right partner before they turn 30.





Generally dogs only come in small sizes. More often than not they are dressed up in dog-fashion before they hit the streets. Especially in winter. They wear coats, trousers, branded sports wear and even dog-sneakers.





The Shanghai hairy crab is a medium-sized crab that is named for its furry claws. It is native to the Chinese coastal estuaries and a local autumn delicacy. The females are to be eaten in September because then the eggs are at their best. The males are most tasty in October. Crab meat is believed to have a 'cooling' effect on the body. Food is medicine and medicine is food.





The beauty of living in an other culture is that ordinary everyday things become special and surprising. Coming from the Netherlands I moved to Shanghai. Freely translated Shanghai means 'Above the sea'. These pictures were never taken with the idea in mind that they might end up in a publication. They were a personal visual record. Intuitively shooting from the hip, capturing moments of great contrast and enormous differences while walking through Shanghai. Mapping out the tracks and traces of this dazzling, massive city through the eyes of a curious outsider. A big oriental cocktail. Not always sweet, but never boring. Give me more!

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