

新生活的引领者

城市

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生活家

陈升·男人五十

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中国城市文艺复兴报道系列二

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大爷，老张，高哥与大胡子在大市内的小村庄

Grandpa, Old Zhang, Brother Gao and Big Beard in the little village within the big city

何颖雅 Elaine W. Ho

One of my neighbours is really fierce. During any season, you'll find him some afternoons coming out to linger on our *hutong* for a bit of fresh air, and even if it's only a few steps down from his apartment to the street outside, even if he only comes out for a few minutes, he has this particular way of dressing that looks simultaneously put-together and sloppy. It's something in his character perhaps, like the twinkle in his eye that looks both like the sweetest drop of genuine warmth and friendliness, and at other times flashes a mischievousness more akin to a rebellious middle school student. But my neighbour is over 70. He has served the People's Army in Korea and used to play in a band that toured all over China, but retirement and a bad leg mean that now his tours go no further than the few hundred meters of our *hutong*. I don't know if there's any dull sadness in this fact; his smiling reassures me that life is just fine.

On one particular summer afternoon as I was sweeping the storefront where I live, dear old Grandpa came out as he usually does, leaning against the wall and looking casually from side-to-side to observe the bustle of busy life outside. Today his outfit looked like a well worn ensemble for spending a day at the beach, something one would wear to go looking for seashells or something. Baggy front-pleated shorts reached to his knees, and a faded yellow t-shirt bore the washed too-many times look that might also be sported by hipsters in Berlin. No socks, but canvas boat shoes worn in that lazy way as slip-ons. I feel Grandpa looking at me and wave to him from across the street. I address him with the standard greeting of the *hutong* community: “吃饭了吗 Have you eaten yet?” He nods and we smile at one another; I continue with the housekeeping.

A minute or two later, there is a sort of repeated hissing sound behind me that I quickly realise is someone calling out for me. I turn back to the street, and Grandpa is still there, facing me. He's smiling as charming as ever. His hand rests on his shorts in a funny way, and slow movements of his fingers reveal that he is pulling the right leg of his baggy shorts up. Up and up and, *ummm...up*. Glancing every so often to the sides to make sure the street is clear, he continues this solo performance for me. I panic. And out of sheer dumbfoundedness, I do nothing but simply turn around and continue sweeping.

“Glorious China!” I am thinking.

This was not the kind of experience I expected when coming to Beijing. I've lived here for four years now, and stayed on this small *hutong* near *Gulou* for over two years. It wasn't that I was exactly expecting anything of the China experience in particular; in fact life here has

been the most opening up to pure chance and all the whims of the moment than I have had in any other place I have lived in the world. One cannot plan too much here. The situation is always changing. But that's perhaps what Chinese are good at. It's what they say of overseas Chinese in the United States, anyhow: "the ideal minority". Chinese are flexible, they adapt to any environment. And while the landscape back here on the mainland is changing constantly all around us—super-speed development, China's push as a major world player, *blah, blah, blah*—it's not so much that we've been able to remake ourselves as a certain steadfastness to things and a way of life that is deemed desirable.

I have another neighbour that lives in the same yard as me, and for the past eight years or so he has lived quietly in this *hutong*, perhaps as someone so melded into the environment as to be invisible. Everyone else in the neighbourhood calls him Big Beard, but I doubt they understand much more beyond that. He keeps mostly to himself, doesn't smoke, eat meat or drink alcohol, and speaks fluently in both Chinese and English. This puts him far outside of the typical *laobaixing* commoner type, and I observe Brother Gao talking to him completely incredulous, baffled and almost annoyed that he does not know how to enjoy one of life's most crucial pleasures: the offer of a cigarette. After Brother Gao's long oral treatise on how to enjoy life, they don't have much else to say to one another. Big Beard knows he's in the minority, and he just smiles helplessly. But he is as resolute about his way of life as Brother Gao, and their mutual adumance coexist in this yard in a way that is exemplary of a certain kind of assertiveness of the Chinese spirit. At the same time, these encounters are also a kind of juxtapositioning offered by the village-in-city scenario of Beijing *hutong* life. The communities within the mixed-family yard and the small neighbourhood subdivision are arteries that flow smoothly into the more modern infrastructures of the city: streets and avenues leads to ring roads, splitting off to service roads which lead to the underground parking lots of 24-hour convenience and mega shopping malls. Perhaps this is not so different from urban growth anywhere around the world, but here, these nodes and arteries lay on top of one another, intermingle and interact in a manner that make for an intense social diversity begging us to question the homogeneity of corporate globalisation.

Even a place like the (ironically named) "Village" in 三里屯 *Sanlitun* is not simply another shiny stack of international brands excreted from the global commodity machine. I love that there are always migrant workers lingering about, enthralled by the synchronised fountain on the square and gawking at the glamour of big city life. Their presence is crucial to the city's development and a marker unique to the Chinese urban condition. And while a Beijinger will probably hate me for saying this, these migrants actually have something in common with the old locals amidst the social spectrum that represents China today. While the migrant worker may live in a temporary structure alongside a massive construction site and the old Beijinger has been living in his 25 m² one-story dwelling for decades, these two characters represent something slow and steady in this city that should not be overlooked. The migrant

workers spotted all throughout the ring roads and in between (shoveling away on dusty roads, sleeping on rusty vehicles, squatting over a tin serving of today's meal) represent another place, implanted onto the very geographies that make up the map of our dear capital. They are here and not here, anonymous faces collectively unforgettable, ghosts lost in the system of tireless progress. But just next door to the lots where some of these migrant workers sleep while they renovate the property which they've just demolished, our big-bellied old Beijingers represent another time within the history of Beijing. Their way of life may seem outdated compared to the “小资 *little yuppies*” hanging around *Gulou*, but, as Old Zhang tells me, “I've lived in this *hutong* for over thirty years now. And in thirty years' time, I'll still be living here. Even if everything around turns to high rises and office buildings, we'll still be here, and we'll still be living like this.” Grandpa's story is not so dissimilar. Surely he's been shocking the ladies for ages, and at 70, he's still going strong.

These juxtapositions between the polished and dirty, traditional and contemporary, and outsider and local make up the vitality and vibrancy of this city, as well as the inspiration for my continued research and practice as an artist. I'd like to know how all the little motions of everyday life add up to the complex network of relations, routes and routines that define contemporary life, and I have yet to see a better art intervention than the daily sport of the *hutong* residents who adamantly place stones and bricks into the middle of the street in order to slow down the cars who try to zoom through the *hutongs*. Albeit a small effort, such actions represent the way of an individual taking charge and responsibility of their community, actively taking part and even governing, on a micro-scale, the world around them (“*Are you sick, fucking driving in the hutong so fast?! Mentally ill!*”). While these little pockets may be mere villages embedded within the metropolis of urban Beijing, the relation back and forth between the two make up the life of China and the key to understanding it relative to the rest of the world.

It is not certain this last stronghold of those like Old Zhang will really survive in thirty years' time. Both the old Beijingers and the outsiders dream of large high-rise flats with central heating. The post-80s and post-90s generations also have other plans. And yes, the socio-economic landscape has changed everything, and us, over the last few decades. But the tracings of these mini-narratives bear all the potentiality of what we, amidst everyday life, can do, or can choose to do, with every moment.

The projects and interventions of HomeShop where I live and work are a question of these creative possibilities to be found in daily life. The actions of me and HomeShop collaborators are a way of engaging others in the community, whether as art, service or merely spending time together. The openness or ambiguity of these outcomes are a result of an approach that traces movements over time as processes, of context specificity as a network of simultaneous and intertwined singularities rather than static or captured motions. Our

materials and ideas are born out of the city in all its relations, the ordinary and the extraordinary. A field recording becomes a way of mapping the space of the *hutong*, an open-air screening becomes the platform for a public discussion on the Olympic Games and government control over the city, and a party becomes the site of a Mexican birthday ritual celebrated over an eight-metre long barbecue grill made by Beijing-based Swiss artist Matthieu Pilloud. Both organised salon-style discussions and casual encounters are included in the process of recording and making. Whether or not we label this as “Art” or “Life”, their core is a consciousness as the forward and back replay of information exchange and communication.

Like the example of greeting Grandpa or the other neighbours daily with a “吃饭了吗 Have you eaten yet?”, “回来了 You’re back!” or “又出去啊 Going out again?”, the oral recognition of the obvious is a means toward something else, a way of acknowledging the other as an assertion of the present moment. All of these relations are context specific, and our behaviours within them a combination of routine, spontaneity and feeling for the other. To take notice of these things is an attempt at new organisations of thought from visual and lived experience, and a further attempt to share them.



北京的第二场雪后的家作坊。

大爷，老张，高哥与大胡子在大市内的小村庄

文 | 何颖雅 翻译 | 西维

我有个邻居非常“猛”。无论哪个季节，只要在我们的胡同里待着就能看见他在“遛弯儿”透气。哪怕他只是从家里到外面的街上走几步、哪怕他只出来晃几分钟，他那“固定”着装看上去总是既整洁又邋遢——这也许是他性格的缘故吧。他一眨一眨的眼睛经常传递着一种真诚的温暖和友好，但有时候，他的眼神又让人觉得他是个爱搞恶作剧的叛逆中学生。但我的邻居已经60多岁了。他曾经作为志愿军到朝鲜打过仗，还曾经参加过某个乐队在全国的巡演。然而，离休和一条坏腿意味着他从此只能在我们胡同的几百米范围内活动。我不清楚，这其中有没有什么难言的感伤情愫，但他的微笑总是让我肯定，活着就好。

有一个夏天的午后，我正在我家门前打扫，亲爱的老大爷又出来

了。和平时一样，他靠在墙上，不经意地左右张望着外面忙碌的生活节奏。今天，他的一身行头看上去很旧很舒服了，打扮得像是要去海边一样——恐怕只有那些要去沙滩捡贝壳什么的人才会穿成那样。他穿着鼓鼓的、折边向上的及膝短裤，上身穿一件洗了很多次颜色掉得差不多的黄色T恤，有那么点柏林街头潮人穿衣服的意思。他光脚穿了双帆布船鞋，像穿拖鞋一样懒散地踢踏着。我觉得大爷在看我，于是从街对面冲他招招手，并用胡同里标准的问好方式跟他打了个招呼：“您吃了吗？”他点点头，我们彼此笑笑，我便继续打扫门廊。

一两分钟之后，我听见身后有一种嘶嘶声，立马意识到是有人在喊我。我回过头，看见老大爷还在那，他正对着我，脸上带着一如既往的

迷人笑容。他的双手很滑稽地抓住自己的裤腿，手指头缓慢地移动，看上去是在不停地把右边的裤腿往上拽——往上，再往上。他不停地左顾右盼确保街上没什么人，同时对着我继续他的表演。我有些害怕，而且纯粹惊呆了，只好转身继续扫我的地。

“神奇的中国！”我想。

来北京之前，我从来没想过会遇到这种事情。但北京也不特别——每个地方都有它的特“色”。现在我已经在这里住了4年，在鼓楼附近的小经厂胡同里也住了两年多。倒不是说，我对中国有某种特殊的期待；事实上，在这里，我的生活总是不得不对各种机遇开放，这种状态比我生活过的世界上任何地方都强烈。在这儿你没法计划太多，因为情况总有变化。

我的另外一个邻居也住这大杂院里，过去的8年多以来他一直静静地住在这个胡同里，仿佛因为已经完全融入到环境里而容易被遗忘。大家都爱管他叫“大胡子”，但我怀疑除此之外人们还不知这名字背后的更多故事。大部分时间他都一个人待着，不抽烟、不吃肉也不喝酒，但他能讲流利的中文和英语。这令他和那些普通的“老百姓”非常不同。有一次，我仔细观察高哥跟他的对话，高哥脸上露出怀疑、困惑甚至被冒犯的表情，他不能理解大胡子为什么连人生最大的快乐——抽烟——都不去体会。等高哥结束了他如何享受生活的长篇大论之后，俩人没啥可说的了。大胡子呢，也知道自己是异数，只能无奈地笑笑。但他和高哥都对自己的生活方式那么毅然决然，他们的固执在这个院子里共存仿佛正是中国人骨子里的某种“倔”的表现。与此同时，这些有趣的碰撞恰恰反映了北京胡同生活的城乡特质，其背后是北京所特有的“并置”现象。北京大杂院和小社区里的这些群体，就像是缓缓流向城市现代结构的一条条动脉：大街通往环路，再岔开为通向24小时便利店和大型购物商场的条条辅路。也许这跟世界上任何其他城市的现代化没什么两样，但是在北京，这些动脉和关节相互交错作用、彼此渗透，以一种紧迫的语调要求我们对集体全球化所带来的同质性化发出疑问。

哪怕是三里屯Village（名字很讽刺，居然叫“村庄”）这样的地方，它也不仅仅是全球化商品机器孕育的又一个堆砌名牌的闪亮盒子。我喜欢那里，不是因为能在那儿买到来自世界各地的东西，因为那总有农民工在晃悠，他们被地上的音乐喷泉吸引，同时为大城市的浮光异彩感到惊讶。他们的出现对这个城市的发展是那么的重要，而且是中国城市发展中最独特的一面。也许我这么说会激怒某些北京人，但这些“外地人”身上的一些特质跟社会光谱上的一部分本地人是相似的——而他们共同代表了今天中国的各个社会阶层。农民工们也许都住在建筑工地边上的临时大棚，而老北京人则几十年地住在他那25平米的平房里，但这两类人都代表了个城市发展中缓慢而稳定的一面，这一面不应该被人忽略。住在临时板房里的农民工，和住在他们装修工地隔壁的平房里的老北京，一个来自城市的外部，一个来自城市的过去，却同时在这个空间和时间的交错点里，一起诉说着关于北京的故事。跟成天在鼓楼晃荡的小资青年们比起来，他们的生活方式也许过时了，但正如街坊老张跟我说的，“我在这胡同里住了30多年了。30年后，我还要在这儿住。等周围全变成高楼大厦的时候，我们也还在这儿住。”老大爷的故事并不陌生——我相信这么多年来他已经吓唬过不少女生，但他都60岁了，却还那么有精气神。

光鲜与肮脏、传统与现代以及外地与本地混生的同时存在，让这个城市充满生机与活力。它们还为我做的艺术带来了源源不断的创作灵感。我试图去发现，日常生活中的这些一点一滴如何聚集成复杂的人际关系网络，又如何构成现代生活的条条框框？我从来没见过比这更好玩的行为艺术：胡同居民们会每天“孜孜不倦”地把石头、砖块搬到路中间以试图阻挡来来往往的车辆。大爷大妈们常常冲过往的汽车喊道，“有病啊你？妈的在胡同里开那么快！！神经病！”这些行为哪怕不足为道，但反映了作为个体的他们，如何努力地参与、管理着这块他们周围的小地方，并对其负责。虽然这些小胡同，仅仅就像嵌在北京大都市里面的



村庄，但这些“村庄”和大都市间的微妙联系，组成了中国生活真实一面。只有理解这种联系，我们才能真正理解中国是如何跟世界发生联系的。

像老张这些人表示自愿留守的想法，我不确定是不是真能持续30年。胡同中的老北京人和外地人似乎都向往着住楼房，最好还有中央供暖。80后和90后们则有着他们自己的打算。的确，过去的几十年以来，社会经济条件改变了一切，包括我们；然而，分享胡同居民们的这些琐碎小事情的时候，我们总能看到更多的可能性。对我而言，老大爷那神奇的“打招呼方式”或者一句简单的“吃了没？”、“回来了？”，都比“你好”来得有创意，而这些细节都给了我们视觉、思维上的新体验——并且，未来，我们还可以再分享它们。

不是么？那些很琐碎的事情也能激发我们去思考，我们的日常生活还能包括什么。🇨🇳

何颖雅：居住在北京的艺术家和设计师，“家作坊”创始人。“家作坊”是一间位于鼓楼东大街小经厂胡同的店面，成立于2007年，基于此来研究北京城市独特的空间和交流方式并组织社区艺术项目。“家作坊”以及各种介入生活的活动，都是为了挖掘日常生活中创意一面所作的尝试。 <http://www.douban.com/people/HomeShop/>