

Proving movie stars are just ordinary people



EASY MINDS TALK

This column invites influential people from around the world to share their stories focused on emotions, well-being and the sense of fulfillment and happiness. This includes their views on different methods, such as the healing power of art, to relieve the stress and anxiety felt by many in our fast-moving modern world.

They are psychotherapists, art therapists, artists, authors and other experts on mindfulness, self-growth and other aspects of life.

Topics include but are not limited to arts and creativity, worthiness, self-compassion, self-care and parenting.

Let's explore ways of keeping our inner calm together with an easy mind in life. The column is presented in multimedia forms.



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Lynn Liu

"Ordinary" is how Liu Heung Shing, founder of the Shanghai Center of Photography, described the photographic project he initiated with Chinese actress Zhou Xun. Titled "Good Vibrations," it features photos by nine renowned Chinese actors and directors who turn their lens to important people in their lives.

"The most important thing in my view is how ordinary this project is, how ordinary images can touch people, communicate something... Sometimes, not every image has to be very dramatic," Liu said during a Zoom interview. "I feel this is going to be something very different."

So what's the vibration to explore?

"We're always influenced by friends and people we respect. They also inspire us to do the things we do," he continued, adding that the power of images can "take us back to our daily life, (to) the people who bring you up, who you love, who influence you."

A selection of some 90 photos is now on display at SCoP.

The answers have been abridged due to limited space. Please check out the podcast for a more detailed version.

Q: What prompted you into the project?

A: I've known Zhou Xun for a very long time, but we'd never really worked on anything together or anything like that.

During a dinner with Zhou, I thought it was odd that she would bring up out of nowhere that she felt all the movies and television and commercial activities she had engaged in in the past make her feel like she's under cinema lights all the time. She has this urge to reconnect... and, not in her exact words, to chill and decompress, and know what life is really like.

I kinda picked up on this and said maybe you ought to use your camera to photograph people who influence you and inspire you. And she felt immediately connected with this idea.

We... went back and forth for almost a year before we actually ended up with nine people.

I've always felt, when I was overseas, that Taiwan or Hong Kong entertainment world has an oversized influence on the mainland, with gossip and movie stars and all this stuff... which I am not

always comfortable with.

So this project, in my view, gives me an opportunity to photograph them in the way they want. And this is an opportunity for me to say, "well, these movie stars are just like you and me, in that they've photographed life, they value their friends, their parents." The project enables me to remove this veneer of stars. This form of me and through the exhibition, connecting with the audience, brings something subliminal to the viewers.

And I have heard, a week after the opening, something quite positive.

Q: What are the good vibrations here?

A: Good vibrations mean what these people have with the people they photograph, between them they have this vibration. For example, one of the photos that Zhou really likes — beside her childhood friends who don't see her as a star... just as their primary school mate. And she approached them the same way — is the photograph (she) grew up watching. "It's always my dad washing the dishes," (she said.) I was blown away by something so trivial. This is the heart of daily life.

By laying out those kinds of photographs together, they show how I see them, how they see their friends and how their friends respond to them.

Here are nine people, by accident, who cut across different age groups. For example, Jiang Wen showed up with his wife Zhou Yun. Just a few days ago, they were working with me on what to wear. I even Googled some clothes for them. And then to my surprise, they both showed up plain. She's completely without makeup, wearing a normal cotton dress. He's in a T-shirt and jeans. I looked at them, they looked at me, and I said, "Well, good enough for me. Let's go."

Q: What did you see unfolding from their inner world through their cameras and their photographs?

A: I think in front of me sometimes, they felt a little bit shy.

Like Dou Jingtong, she preferred to have less of me photographing images in the exhibition of her developing a roll of color negative film right in front of my camera... I even reminded her I used to do that every day, over the toilet in



Behind the Scenes in Quzhou as Zhou Xun is photographed by Liu Heung Shing as she sings for her school friends. — Zhang Ziyuan



Portrait of Zhou Xun in the countryside of her hometown Quzhou, as she prepared to photograph her childhood friends. — Liu Heung Shing

the war zone, in the hotel. And I said "you better warm it up to 37.8 degrees (Celsius), that's for color negatives." She much preferred to show the pictures she took. In Dou's portion of the exhibition, you see more of her works.

For film director Bi Gan, you saw one picture. Because he was a young film director, when he made films he had very small budgets. So his mother always appeared in his films as a free extra. He'd like to photograph his mother's shadow, because he believes the shadow of his mother is much more enduring than an actual photograph. That turned out to be a brilliant frame, big size, black and white. And then I photographed him while I turned around with the camera, and his mother's shadow is behind him.

At the end, I think some very

spontaneous photographs came out... I feel there's a range of unposed, undisguised images of movie stars living a life just like you and me.

Q: How much do you think one's photographs can speak for one's mind, emotions or personality?

A: I don't think a person can be judged by one photograph. In fact, my portraits of China are very deliberate. China is a big story, a very complex story. Over 50 years, you can stagger those photographs, one on top of the other. You take a view with me, and then go together and say, "well, this is the China I have come to know."

I think sometimes a definitive portrait can say a lot about someone. That being said, in my range of works, I always believe if you can show China and show any other country, show people of different walks of life, you will have a very revealing portrait of a nation or a society. And that's what I've been trying to do, and seems like I'm still doing 50 years later.

I think the story is much more compelling. I take the approach that I sit back, let what's out there come to me, or I come to them. And then you put together a very revealing portrait. That's why I feel that in the people, what they look like, their eyes, facial movements and body language from the late 1970s to 2021, you see the transformation of China.

Q: Technology has made photography accessible to the public. How do we steer people