

Airing out: the beauty and significance of Shanghai's colorful laundry lines

Emma Leaning

Knickers: Not just knickers, bras, underpants, duvets and denims. In Shanghai, a colorful charm blows in the breeze. Some people see washing lines as mundane, a nuisance or an inconsequential relic of the past. But there's a case for airing laundry in public. What do our neighbors' knickers teach us about connection and diversity?

We all live in flux, no matter where we are. The unfamiliar becomes familiar, we fall in and out of love, and the once confusing turns out to be cherished. This dance between light and shadow, joy and sadness, tradition and change give life depth and meaning. So many things puzzled me about China when I first arrived.

But having lived here for years, immersing myself in the culture and being with its people has brought new perspectives. What's annoying or strange as an outsider can be a source of intrigue when we really want to understand something. And through adaptability, we gain insight into the values and practices that make a community.

The slurping of noodles used to put me off my food. Noise in parks spoiled my walks, and hanging laundry seemed messy. All that's changed. The smacking of lips is a ritual appreciation for culinary delights. The once-annoyingly loud parks are a choir of human connection, and Shanghai's laundry lines symbolize a city unafraid to reveal its true colors.

There's a balance, though. Because being ourselves all of the time is something we should spare anyone we claim

to care about. We draw a line between personal expression and those around us. The same line applies to preserving the soul of a constantly evolving city.

Like us, the composition of a place takes care and consideration. Renovation projects bring obvious benefits, but in pursuing progress, we mustn't overlook the bits that make a place special.

Shanghai's streets have become a hot topic for discussion. People feel nostalgic about disappearing lanes that were a treasure trove of hidden gems. Equally, as residents seek better living conditions, there's a demand for development.

The challenge lies in finding a balance that preserves the essence of neighborhoods while addressing the needs and aspirations of those who call them home.

While I don't air my laundry outside, I enjoy glimpsing into my neighbors' lives. The fluttering lines above our streets create connection. They remind us that we are not alone but rather part of the shared cloth of everyday life.

As we embrace the idiosyncrasies of other cultures, we open ourselves to new world views. We realize that our initial discomfort was less a barrier and more an invitation to broaden our minds. In the process, we develop an appreciation for diversity. From the cacophony in the parks to the symphony of slurping, China proves that life is too short to let initial annoyances or ignorance overshadow the beauty beneath.

Real connection and growth exist outside our comfort zones; we must seek them out. Like biting into a Sichuan pepper — initially, it stings,



Airing laundry is a reminder that perspectives are shaped by experiences. — Hu Jun

but as we savor the flavors, we discover the delicious heat that makes us human.

Airing laundry is a reminder that perspectives are shaped by experiences. The T-shirts and Y-fronts that cover Shanghai's skyline are metaphors for the power of acceptance, a reminder that the things we

find difficult to appreciate or comprehend can hold beauty and wisdom.

We are more alike than we thought when we strip away the external layers that separate us. We all know uncertainty vulnerability, and the desire to be understood. Our laundry, in all shapes

and sizes, reminds us that we share the same fundamental hopes, dreams and needs.

So next time you see a pair of pants hanging on a line or catch a glimpse of your own, remember that beneath it all, we are in this together, thread by thread and one leg at a time.