

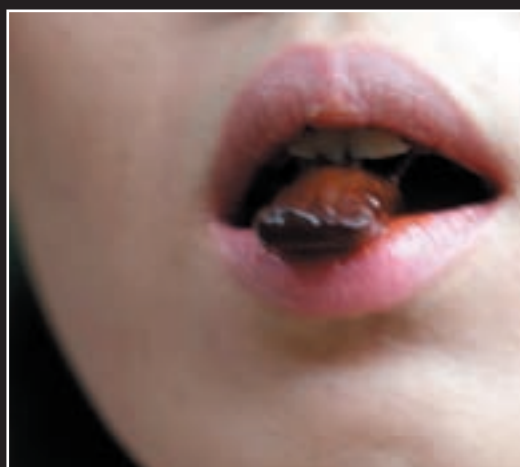


Onslaught of the Dream-seekers

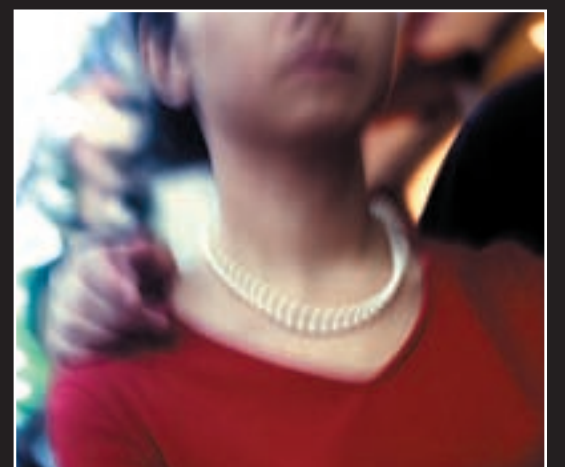
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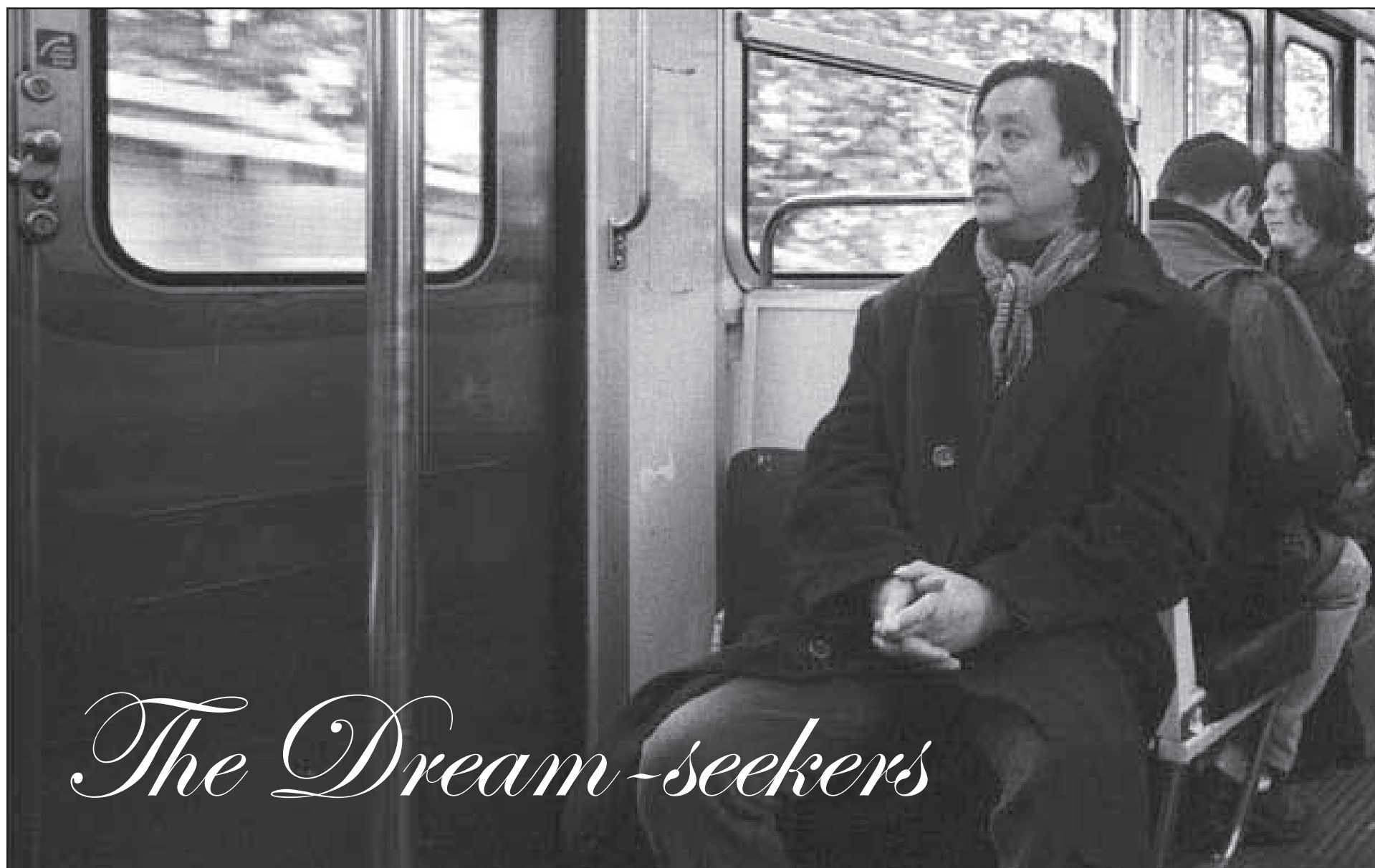
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The Dream-seekers

PARIS has been a draw for the Chinese since the early 20th century and even earlier. Two stalwarts of the Chinese Communist Party - Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai - spent their formative years in the City of Light.

Today's Chinese immigrants in Paris are by and large of a different breed. Many have fled rural parts of China, like Zhejiang, not knowing exactly what is in store for them in the new destinations. Most of their journeys were arranged by snakeheads, local gangsters who charge astronomical sums for a one-way passage.

Not all Chinese who end up here will achieve international stardom. Most, in fact, will labor for the rest of their lives, unknown to French society and unknown to the world. They will never get to see the Louvre or the Eiffel Tower, and their world, if they are lucky enough to be allowed to stay, would most likely be restricted to the small holes they call home, and the Chinese communities where they make a hard living.

Once in the "dream" cities, these immigrants often find themselves coming face-to-face with a totally different reality. The jobs and the easy money promised to them are nowhere to be found. The help that is supposed to come never surfaces. Soon, they miss the spouses and the children they have

left behind in China. And soon, their savings, if any at all are left, dwindle to a crisis level.

In a totally new and alien environment, without the necessary language skills and legal papers, these refugees are often forced to take menial jobs at below-market rate. Those looking for a fast break would most likely end up looking for the local snakeheads and become embroiled in lucrative but illegal businesses.

The immediate uphill task of making ends meet, the separation from loved ones, the endless visits to various agencies, the coldness of a new environment, are all enough to demoralise a person. Yet one thing characterizes these dream-seekers - they have no time for self-pity.

Perhaps the simple wisdom of Ah Rong best sums up their attitude, "Out here, you have to be mentally strong."

Here are their stories.

| Article & photos by Tay Kay Chin

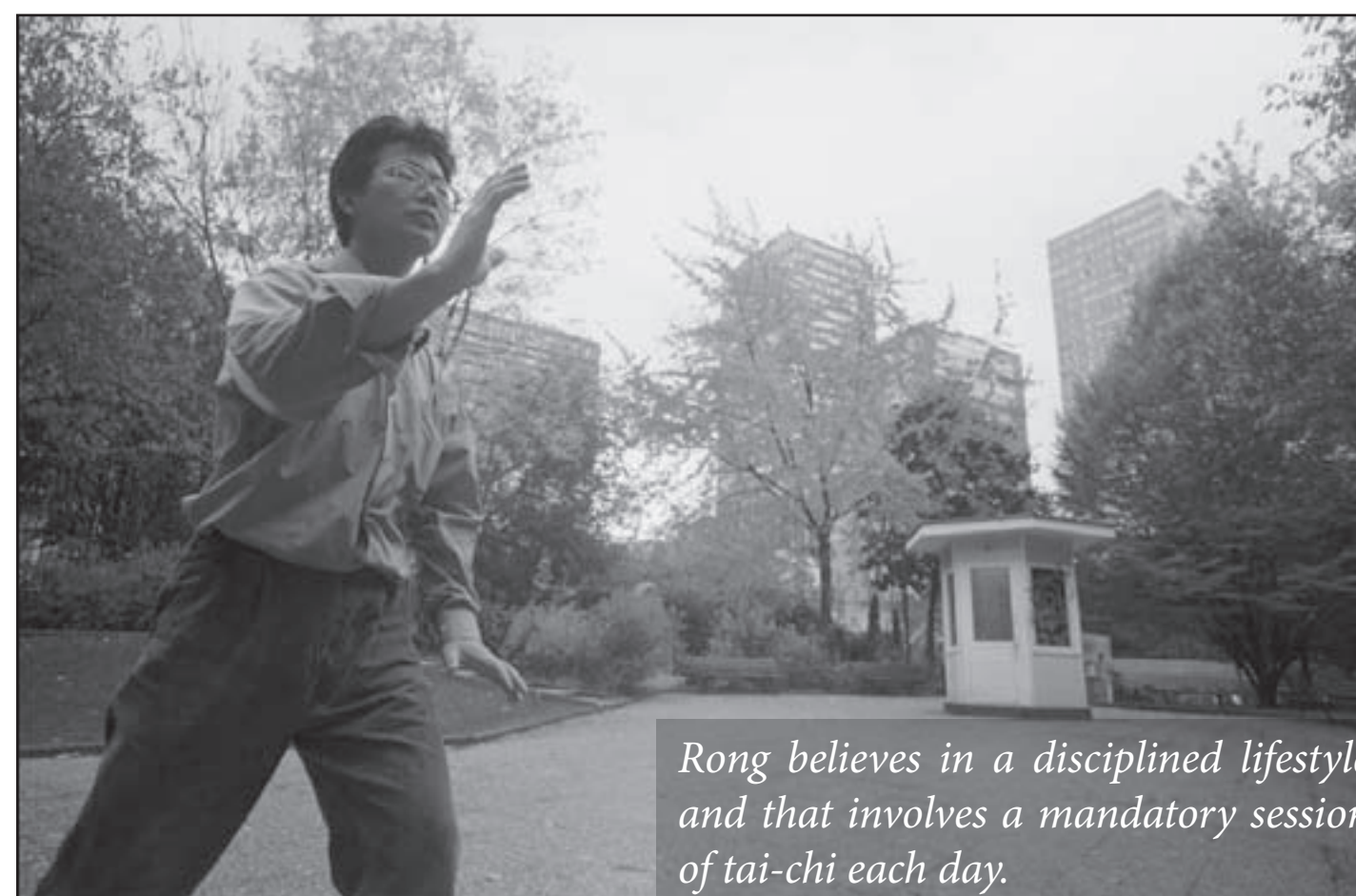
CHEN Tiensen, 33, arrived in Paris in mid-2000.

After paying the snakeheads more than US\$20,000, he left his wife and two young daughters to begin a long and arduous journey which took him through Hong Kong, Malaysia and Turkey.

Without any skills, Chen took a job pressing clothes in one of the underground factories that hire illegal immigrants.



Jobless, disgruntled and disillusioned, Chen, spends his money and time on horse racing.



Rong believes in a disciplined lifestyle and that involves a mandatory session of tai-chi each day.

LUAN Ah Rong, 37, has a simple philosophy about living - make the best of the worst situations.

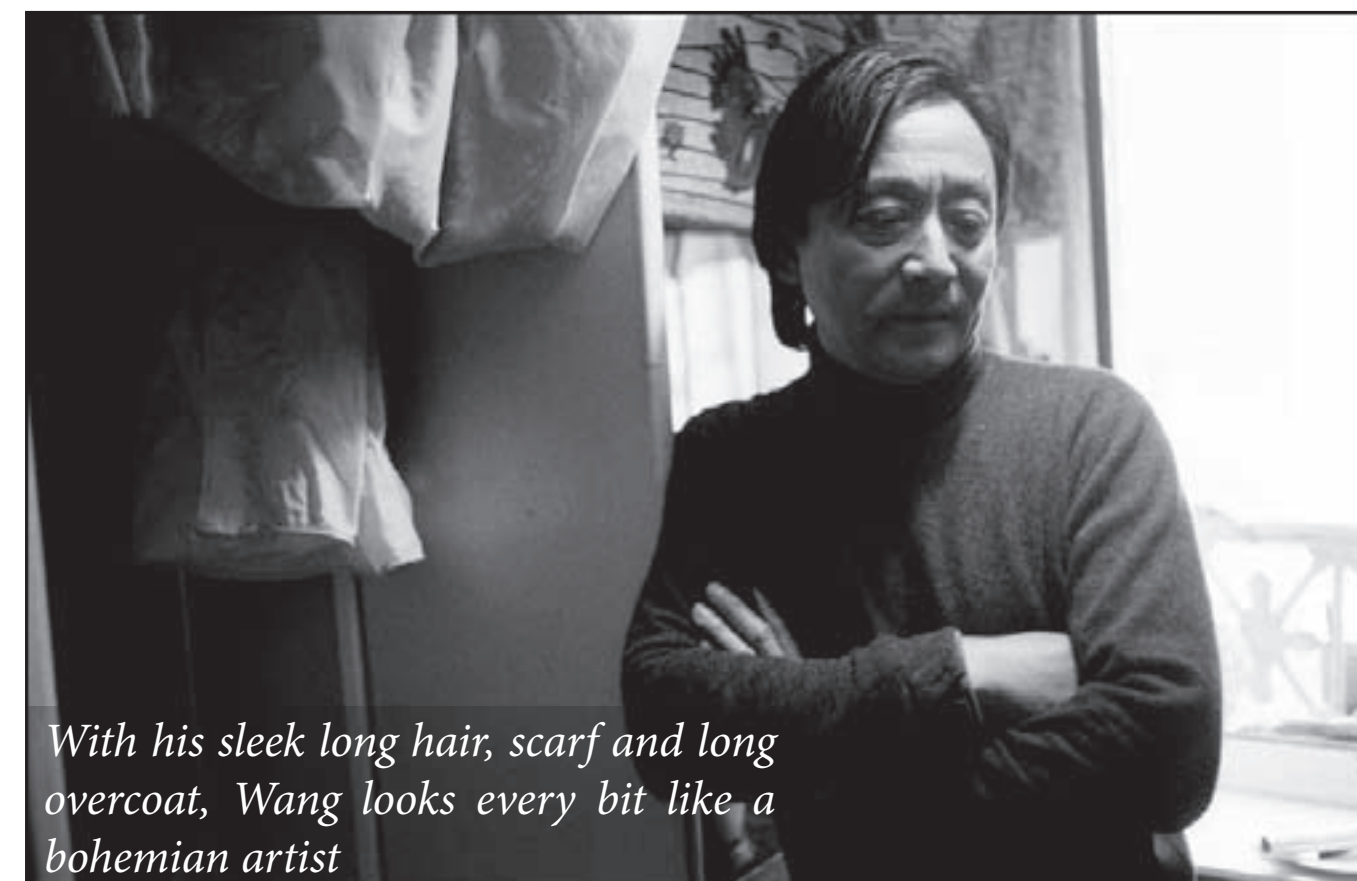
One of his first jobs in Paris was in renovation but he never got paid for his efforts.

He went on to sell drinks and souvenirs in tourist spots before settling on a more permanent job hawking fancy cigarette lighters in the 13th District Chinatown.

At 53, **Wang Mingde** is only slightly older than modern China.

If Wang gets to see any of Paris, it is because his job takes him. Equipped with a pager and a cellphone, he delivers food and restaurant supplies all over the city.

Otherwise, his typical day would consist mainly of visits to lawyers and different government agencies.



With his sleek long hair, scarf and long overcoat, Wang looks every bit like a bohemian artist

Written on the Walls



The list of missing persons still clutter up the walls.

“I believe there is a story about and behind every home destroyed: who lived there? What were they doing at the time of the disaster?”



WHEN the fatal tsunami hit Dec 26, 2004, I had just returned from the typhoon-devastated Philippines.

All things being equal, I would have jumped on the next flight out to Indonesia or Sri Lanka, where the damage was the worst. What stopped me from going was a persistent cough which I had caught earlier.

Instead, I stayed behind in Singapore and helped to coordinate relief efforts for a Singapore-based NGO, Mercy Relief. For three weeks, I worked arm-in-arm with 3000 other people to collect, sort and pack donations.

In May, I finally made my first trip to Meulaboh, Aceh, one of the worst hit areas.

It has been almost five months since the tsunami destroyed the communities that had taken Indonesians decades to build.

The media frenzy might have subsided, but certainly not the pain and the suffering. Every day, the locals woke up to the reality that life was no longer the same.

Many humanitarian and media groups that had descended on

the different affected communities in Asia had since departed, mostly due to the natural dwindling of interest in the markets they reported for. The high cost of operating from the field was another factor, so was the common excuse that there was nothing else to do anymore.

While the help from foreigners is important, what's often not highlighted is that the locals' will to live on and their hard work, count even more in the reconstruction. If the debris and stench can be ignored, there is no doubt that anyone who has experienced the breeze and taken in the panoramas, can believe that a beautiful paradise once stood there.

I remember well the first time I was on Ground Zero. What struck me first was the scale - looking to my left and right, the destruction seemed endless.

I believe there is a story about and behind every home destroyed: who lived there? What were they doing at the time of the disaster?

I hope that with this project, I can continue to shine a light on a major catastrophe that is slowly losing its hold on the world's attention.



^^ "Pancang tsunami"
The victims express their frustration at the disaster.

<< "Tanah ini milik..."
This land belongs to me. An expression of determination to rebuild the rubble.

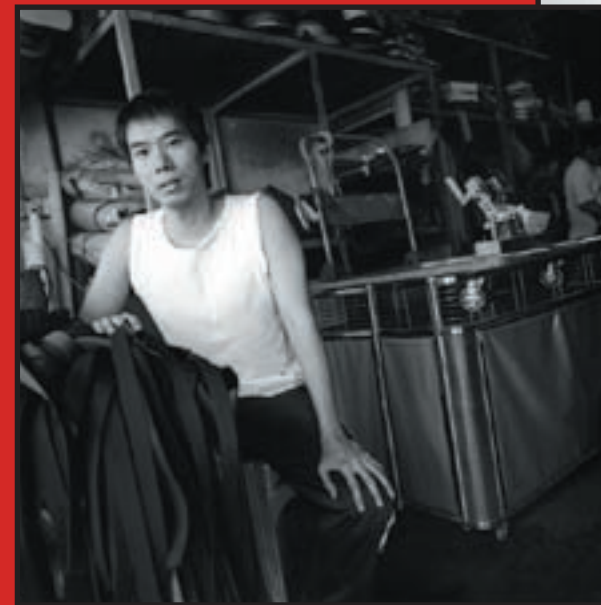
National Day Babies

*a personal project by Singaporean
photographer Tay Kay Chin.*

40 unique portraits of 40 Singaporeans born on August 9,
one from each year, starting from 1965.

The 40 Singaporeans are chosen from all walks of life. Their
portraits are accompanied by a short interview.

For the rest of the portraits log on to the official website at
www.august9.org



40 Years, 40 Babies, 1 Big Day

La Belle Vue

Isabelle Delcourt, originally from Paris, was a popular subject among her photographer friend until she decided to go behind the lens. Now, the mother of three, has turned her living room in Singapore into a working studio, where she specializes in people photography.

The professional shares 5 tips with budding photographers:

1. Study and pour over other photographers' works if only to know what has already been done so you can avoid trying something similar with your own work. Originality is never overrated.
2. Shoot for yourself. That's the only way you will ever improve as a photographer. If you always shoot according to someone else's brief, it's hard to find out what YOU really want to do.
3. Remind your clients; past, present and future, that you exist. There is no excuse for not doing this in the age of the World Wide Web.
4. An idea is a more valuable commodity than a photograph. Not enough young photographers THINK about what they are about to photograph before they actually photograph it. Yes you may be a visual person, but trying to materialize an idea visually is far more challenging than its actual execution.
5. Lastly, f-stops and shutter speeds are the key essentials for an image to be created chemically or electronically but knowing one's camera inside out will never win you a photographic award. Knowing what your camera CAN do doesn't equate doing anything with the camera. Go out, make pictures.

| Article & photos by Tay Kay Chin

Kwodrent – The Paris Collection



Singapore young designer Grace Tan's new series of limited edition clothes are once again

constructed out of rectangles.



Styling: Grace Tan
 Photography: Tay Kay Chin
 Model: Lavinia Tan
 Make-up by model
 Location: Old Ford Factory, courtesy of Singapore Land Authority

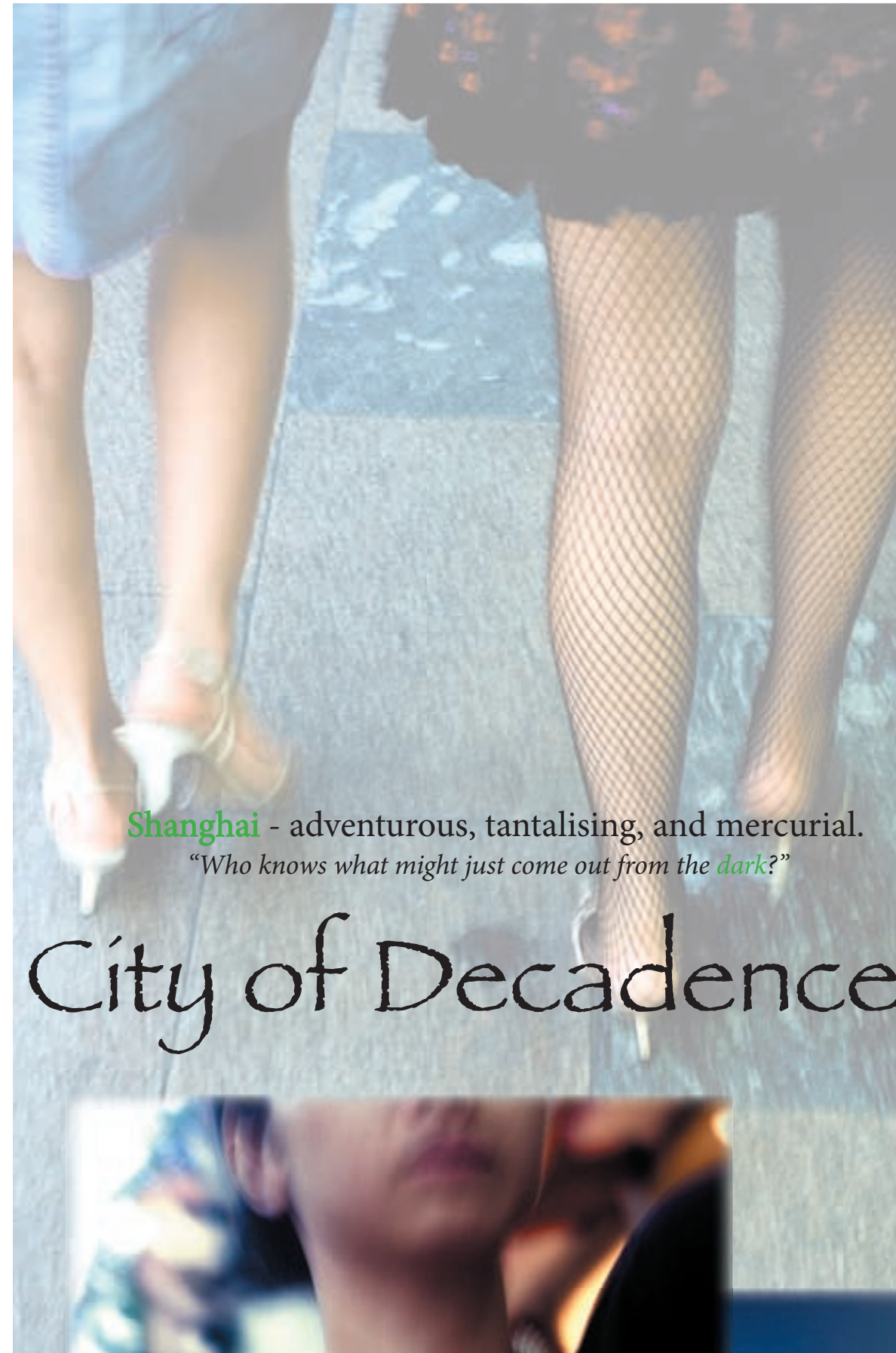


City of Lights

Paris - Exquisite. Elegance. Splendour.
"Where *dreams* are said to come true."



| Photos by Tay Kay Chin



Shanghai - adventurous, tantalising, and mercurial.
"Who knows what might just come out from the *dark*?"

City of Decadence



| Photos by Benedict Taylor

City
Snapshots

Paris & Shanghai

Every issue, we bring you new places and new sights.

If there are places you would like to see, write in to travel@tok.org

after

tôk

from the *tôk Team*:

After much work, we've managed to pull together the first issue of *tôk*, and it's been a great joy producing this paper for you.

We have more good things to come, so do look out for us next month.

In the meantime, if there are any suggestions or improvements that you would like to see, do drop us an email at contact@tok.org

If you would like to be part of the exciting *tôk Team*, send us an email at the above address for more details.

We look forward to bringing you issue 2 soon.

Have a great month ahead!

*We hope that you've
enjoyed this issue.*

tôk Team

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