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The Morning Street of Shanghai

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First began as a small fishing village, now a concrete forest, Shanghai can only hold on to a few things against the advancing war machine of time. When the sun rises, in the small alleys sandwiched by skyscrapers, merchants come with their aged, cackling, but colorfully decorated chariots and gather along the walls. The road is still made with bricks that resonate a soothing clicking sound when the wooden wheels of the chariots roll over them. Some cooks will set up their portable stoves, and the fragrance of *youtiao*—a type of fried dough sticks with a golden crust as crispy as well-baked French bread— and *doujiang*—soy milk. A few artists use maple syrup to draw images of the twelve *shengxiao*—twelve animals used by Chinese to associate a person's birth year, something like constellations. Craftsmen lay out their hand-made dolls wearing ancient emperors' robes and hats. The sellers are people in their 50's, 60's or even 70's, wearing nothing more than an old shirt that turns slightly pale after being washed too many times, yet they are all smiling. The customers are a reflection of the sellers—upward-curving mouths that smoothed the creases on their faces but over-bleached clothes beneath. One does not see men and women with black suits or pencil skirts around here, for they do not even realize the existence of the alleys. At the same time, the cooks, merchants, artists, and craftsmen do not worry about when time swallows them up, like how it has turned the dynasties into nothing but words in textbooks. They see here. They see now. Here, where the steam of the cooks' *doujiang* pots ascend up up up, even higher than the tip of the skyscrapers.

Zhihui Zou lives in Southern California. He has published a sports novel, and his work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in Short Fiction Break, Heavy Feather Review, Melbourne Culture Corner, and elsewhere. During weekends, he likes to play tennis with his friends.