

Summer Heat Inspires an Award-winning Story

To most, being stuck in a dorm room with a broken air-conditioner on a humid summer afternoon would seem extremely unfortunate. However, Shao Dong, a PhD candidate from the School of Chinese, turned this experience into a thought-provoking short story. His piece, *A Young Man and his Refrigerator* 《冰箱與少年》, was awarded First Place out of nearly 600 international contestants in the 9th Lin Yutang Literary Awards 林語堂文學獎, one of the most prestigious annual Chinese literary prizes established in 2007 in memory of Nobel-winning writer Lin Yutang.



Creativity lies in the ability to seek inspiration from the most mundane matters. Shao Dong was lamenting that the air-conditioner in his dorm could not offer him any relief from the sweltering heat, when he began to wonder how millions of people in China whose only source of coolness were their refrigerators could survive. This train of thought prompted him to write a tale about Taotao, a young immigrant working in Shenzhen, aspiring to save money for a house in his hometown, a story typical for Chinese youth nowadays.

While the plot seems simple, there is more to it than meets the eye. Literature has long been hailed as a reflection of society, and Shao believes his piece aptly depicts the current times and the mentality of youth. Taotao's struggles chronicle the adversity youth face when trying to achieve upward social mobility. More importantly, his lust for a refrigerator symbolizes people becoming slaves to materialism and consumerism. As they lose themselves in their worldly pursuits, they are unwittingly leading a deprived and empty existence.

Originally from Changzhou, Shao has a profound understanding of deep-rooted social issues in China, yet his insights have been further enriched by his five years at HKU. Studying in a university with diverse values enlightened him to problems he had overlooked in the past. He compares living in Hong Kong to staring into a mirror, which reflects many absurdities in modern life and Mainland China. He has also benefited tremendously from the Writer-in-Residence Scheme organized by the School of Chinese through having literary exchanges with famed authors and winning the University Literature Award. Pursuing literature is an uphill battle in Hong Kong, and he remarks that instead of becoming a best-selling author (暢銷書作者), he only hopes to fulfill his passion as a struggling author (滯銷書作者). This prestigious recognition serves as another stepping stone towards his path to realizing his dreams.

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