

Improvisational Drift: New Directions in Ceramics

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UCCA Clay presents “Improvisational Drift: New Directions in Ceramics” from November 1, 2025, to March 1, 2026, a group exhibition featuring works by Masaomi Yasunaga, Geng Xue, Liu Xi, Asya Marakulina, Keita Matsunaga, USEFULLESS LAB × ROYOKO, Xiao Wei, Xu Zhiwei, and Yang Xinguang. Bringing together diverse practices that reimagine the expressive and conceptual possibilities of clay, the exhibition traces how contemporary artists navigate between tradition and experimentation. Each artist begins from a distinct point of departure, engaging in a continual negotiation between material properties, artisanal techniques, and individual sensibilities to reveal ceramic practices defined by openness, transformation, and renewed creative balance.

YIXING, China— From November 1, 2025, to March 1, 2026, UCCA Clay presents “Improvisational Drift: New Directions in Ceramics,” a group exhibition featuring works by ten artists: Masaomi Yasunaga, Geng Xue, Liu Xi, Asya Marakulina, Keita Matsunaga, USEFULLESS LAB × ROYOKO, Xiao Wei, Xu Zhiwei and Yang Xinguang. This exhibition explores the diverse trajectories of contemporary ceramic artists as they improvise and diverge from traditional techniques. Each artist begins from a distinct starting point on a “map” to engage in a dynamic negotiation between traditional craftsmanship, the unique characteristics of the material, and the logic behind their individual creative practices. Through this interplay of variables, they arrive at unique states of balance or reconciliation, ultimately revealing a vibrant new generation of ceramic practice. This exhibition is curated by UCCA Assistant Curator Zhang Yao.

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As a projection of the physical world onto a two-dimensional plane, the map is a highly abstracted visual form that distills the journeys of those who came before, delineating spatial relationships between places. It offers its users multiple viable routes, yet as explorers venture deeper, they may redraw its boundaries—both physical and conceptual—through lived experience. Ceramics, in this sense, resemble a vast and ever-evolving topographic survey. Over more than 20,000 years, the discipline has been shaped by a constellation of technical markers—moisture levels in clay, the control of kiln temperature, the precise balance of glaze ingredients—as if signposts laid down by

predecessors. To reach their destination, practitioners must navigate these established coordinates. However, there are some who, in moments of exploration and disorientation, stumble upon hidden forest paths, arriving at unexpected destinations through acts of creative deviation. This exhibition brings together ten artists of a new generation whose works trace divergent trajectories across the contemporary ceramic landscape. Some departed from a shared origin and later forged distinct paths; others, working within disparate creative frameworks, find sparks of resonance with each other.

Several participating artists turn their gaze toward the ceramic medium itself, dwelling in the textures of clay and fire and preserving the traces of process through research and natural simulation. Keita Matsunaga (b. 1986, Tajimi, Japan) employs natural lacquer to inscribe the surfaces of his work with textures reminiscent of tree rings and rippling water, constructing a sensuous dialogue between organic rhythm and human intervention. His works—titled with references to natural forms such as *Monuke*, *Trunk*, and *Puddle*—weave together visual and conceptual layers, where time's concentric cycles and water's ephemeral undulations converge. Yang Xinguang (b. 1980, Hunan province, China) extrapolates from locality as another way of tracing the ecological. In his work *Snow Peach Blossom* (2025), Yixing *zisha* clay is transformed into vessels for plant life, suggesting an ambivalent relationship between breath and containment while evoking the endless cycles of ecological renewal. By entangling, layering, and juxtaposing natural elements—such as plants and soil—with industrial materials, Yang repositions the organic as an active agent, one that infiltrates and subverts the narrative logic of modern development. Masaomi Yasunaga (b. 1982, Osaka prefecture, Japan) experiments with specially formulated glazes, treating the kiln as a “time machine in motion.” The collapse, flow, and pitting of the glaze under extreme heat become forensic evidence of a fire scene, as the artist seeks to strip away the vessel's subjective will and restore its primordial beauty. Xu Zhiwei (b. 1986, Anhui province, China) folds clay through a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, using refined lines and surfaces to evoke the imagery of landscape paintings. His works imbue ceramic with a sense of lightness and delicacy: the residual dust from meticulous carvings becomes mist in a mountain scene, while fine scratches and matte finishes serve as the markings of nature's quiet interplay between clay, fire, and glaze.

Shifting the gaze from the ceramic surface to its surrounding context, the medium becomes a sharp instrument for dissecting contemporary life—etching the erosion of identity, the

folds of power, and the stratigraphy of urban existence. Exploring the various configurations of slip casting and modern architectural forms, the works by Xiao Wei (b. 1994, Guangzhou) articulate the wearing down of individual existence in today's society. These forms also echo the dominance of instrumental rationality, where box-like structures and stratified identities rub up against one another; layers of colored slip are carved, fired, and polished, revealing the instability and fragmentation of selfhood. Liu Xi (b. 1986, Shandong province, China) adopts a self-healing approach to resist the rigid power structures that once constrained her, in attempt to chart her own path through the fissures of social structures. Interrogating strict hierarchical systems with her geometric cubes wrapped in fabric, standardized forms with sharp edges are softened and then stripped, leaving behind creases that speak to life's fluidity and the intuitive release of emotion—a tender yet resolute rebuttal to dogma. During her residency in Yixing, Asya Marakulina (b. 1988, Russia) focuses on the relationship between urban space and its inhabitants. Drawing from local slab-building techniques, she reconstructs vernacular Yixing architecture where public and domestic realms overlap. In *Yard* (2025) from her "City of Ceramics" series, she embeds the memory of Yixing's ancient ceramic culture into architectural details, re-firing *zisha* bricks commonly seen on local streets using a mix of native and different colored clay. These overlapping public and domestic spaces become transformed into miniature, portable slices of the strata; the city itself becomes a ceramic work in perpetual expansion.

Other artists in the exhibition treat existence and death as reciprocal forces—burning the endpoint back into where it started. In *Sea Creature Lantern* (2025), USEFULLESS LAB, in collaboration with ROYOKO, organically integrates *linglong* porcelain into industrial metal machination, transforming the material into a sentient, mutable entity akin to marine life. Porcelain coral sprouts from metallic rods, re-animating controlled mechanical forms, where death and rebirth alternate along a single scaffold. *Linglong* porcelain, once confined to vessels for everyday use, spills into new territory: for the first time, it gains movable "joints," becoming a hybrid mechanical organism—retractable, breathing, audible, and sentient. Geng Xue (b. 1983, Jilin province, China) breaks through the sensory limitations of ceramic with her large-scale video work *The Name of Gold (Video)* (2019). Constructing narrative landscapes from clay, she confronts existential anxiety and the search for meaning. Genderless clay figures symbolizing life itself are molded and then offered up to larger, unseen forces, repeatedly swept away in black and white footage. Retaining the raw texture of earth, Geng allows her clay avatars to speak on behalf of the life and existence of

those in real life, turning the cycle of being and extinction into a silent film on loop.

The exhibition's spatial design builds on the theme of the map. The space is partitioned into distinct zones by semi-transparent curtains that evoke geographic boundaries such as mountains and rivers, inviting viewers to walk through the exhibition freely, passing through the visual borders to chart their own course. This flexible layout injects new possibilities into the use of the gallery space, encouraging more ways to wander beyond the improvisational.

About the Artists

Masaomi Yasunaga

Masaomi Yasunaga (b. 1982, Osaka prefecture, Japan) lives and works in Iga-shi, Mie Prefecture, Japan. He has a master's degree in environmental design from Osaka Sangyo University. Recent solo exhibitions include: "Masaomi Yasunaga: 記憶の足跡, Traces of Memory" (ICA Miami, Miami, FL, 2025); "Masaomi Yasunaga" (Pierre Marie Giraud, Brussels, Belgium, 2024); "Empty Vessel" (Gallery 85.4, Tokyo, Japan, 2024); "Clouds in the Distance" (Lisson Gallery, London, UK, 2023); "Discoveries from picking up stones" (Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, USA, 2023); "In Holding Close" (Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts, Auburn, USA, 2023); "Looking Afar" (Lisson Gallery, New York, USA, 2022); "Masaomi Yasunaga" (Lisson Gallery, East Hampton, NY, USA, 2021). Selected group exhibitions include: "Unearthed" (Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, USA, 2025); "Objects for a Heavenly Cave" (Marta, Los Angeles, USA, 2024); "Enamel & Body / Ceramics" (Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo, Japan, 2023); "OBJECT & THINGS" (The Noyes House, Connecticut, USA, 2022); "Romantic Progress" (Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu, Japan, 2022); "Sterling Ruby and Masaomi Yasunaga" (Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2020).

Geng Xue

Geng Xue (b. 1983, Jilin province, China) graduated with a bachelor's degree from the sculpture department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2007 and earned a master's degree from the printmaking department of Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2014. She teaches in the sculpture department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She has been a participating artist in: the China Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, 2019; the 21st Sydney

Biennale, 2018; the Parallel Exhibition of the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017; and the Busan Biennale, 2014. Geng has been invited to participate in artist residency programs at the Gwangju Yijae Museum, South Korea; the Seto City Art Museum, Japan; the Fire Works Ceramic Studio, Cardiff, UK; the National Sculpture Factory, Ireland; as well as residencies in Berlin and Paris. She has also participated in inter-university exchange and visiting programs at West Virginia University, USA; and Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, Germany.

Her works in ceramics, sculpture, painting, and video are in the collections of institutions including the museum of Central Academy of Fine Arts, China; Henan Museum, China; Wuhan Art Museum, China; Zhuzhong Art Museum, China; M+ Museum / Uli Sigg Collection, Hong Kong, China; National Museum Wales, UK; Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, USA; Gwangju Museum of Art, South Korea; Seto City Art Museum, Japan; White Rabbit Gallery, Australia; Royal Delft, the Netherlands; Simon Fraser University Library, Canada; National Gallery of Victoria, Australia; and Powerhouse Museum, Australia. Her video works have been selected for exhibitions such as "A Hundred Years of Chinese Animation: Wanlai Ming Documentary Exhibition—Special Screening at the Chinese Independent Animation Film Forum," 11th IZDANJE 25FPS Film Festival "Here Out There," HAFF International Animation Film Festival, the Netherlands, and ANČA International Animation Film Festival, Slovakia.

Liu Xi

Liu Xi (b. 1986, Shandong province, China; lives and works in Jingdezhen and Spain) graduated from the sculpture department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She established her art practice in Jingdezhen. Selected recent solo exhibitions include: "Nourishment of Nature" (CoinCoin, Switzerland, 2024); "Blood, Body and Lace" (S12 Gallery, Bergen, 2021); "Stove" (Art+ Shanghai Gallery, Shanghai, 2019); and "Down to Dust" (Gaya Ceramic Art Space, Bali, 2018). Recent selected group exhibitions include: "Multi-Dimensional: Contemporary Chinese Studio Craft" (V&A Museum, UK, 2025); "All Design is Contemporary, If It's Alive. If It's Not Alive, What's the Point?" (Design Miami × Objective Gallery, Miami, 2024); "When I Play with a Cat, How Do I Know It's Not Playing with Me? Gyeonggi Biennale Theme Exhibition" (Gyeonggi Contemporary Ceramics Museum, South Korea, 2024); "Guangdong Nanhai Land Art Festival, Art in Qiaoshan, Zhaishengji Part 4" (He Huangzhao's Former Residence, Foshan, 2024); and "Runaway! Female Identity in

Contemporary Chinese Art" (Museum of Modern Art, Salzburg, 2023).

Liu Xi's works have been selected for international ceramic biennials, and she is the recipient of many awards. Liu also actively participates in international residencies, having conducted creative exchanges in Bali, Taiwan, Mexico, India, South Korea, and Norway. Her works are collected by institutions including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), White Rabbit Art Gallery, the Yingge Ceramics Museum, and the El Vendre City Hall.

Asya Marakulina

Asya Marakulina (b. 1988, Russia; lives and works in Vienna) graduated from St. Petersburg State University with a degree in Animation Film Design and is studying Sculpture and Spatial Strategies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Recent solo exhibitions include: "Chronicles of Revival" (Vienna Collectors Club, Vienna, Austria, 2025); "Uprooted" (The Smallest Gallery in Soho, London, UK, 2024); "The Pondest Pond" (KZ Gallery, virtual exhibition space, 2024); "Resting pieces" (Aquarium, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Vienna, Austria, 2024); "Sun" (Luda Gallery, Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2023); "Short day" (Saray Gallery, Anna Akhmatova Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2023), etc. Recent selected group exhibitions include: "Exhibition of the laureates of the Ceramic Brussels art prize" (Brussels, Belgium, 2025); "Welcome, Stranger, to this place" (Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo, Japan, 2021); "Thirty year olds" (Russian Museum · Marble Palace, Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2021); "2nd Triennial of Russian Contemporary Art" (GARAGE museum, Moscow, Russia, 2020); "The whole world was not accessible to my gaze" (Carillon Gallery, Fort-Worth, Texas, USA, 2019); "River name" (PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art, Perm, Russia, 2018), and more. Marakulina's works have been exhibited at Art Rotterdam, 2025; Ceramic Brussels, 2025; Tupik, 2022, 2023; and others. She has conducted residency creation in many places, including Yekaterinburg, Russia; Paris, France; Bern, Switzerland; Lanaken, Belgium; and Matera, Italy. Her works are collected by art institutions including the Russian State Museum, PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art, Credit Suisse Bank Collection, Sergey Kuriokhin Museum, New Collection Fund, GARAGE Museum Library.

Keita Matsunaga

Keita Matsunaga (b. 1986, Tajimi, Japan) lives and works in Gifu Prefecture, Japan. He graduated from Meijo University with a degree in architecture in 2010, completed training at

the Tajimi City Ceramics Design Laboratory in 2013, and continued his studies at the Kanazawa Utsatsuyama Crafts Workshop in 2016. Recent exhibitions include: "Unearthed" (Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, USA, 2025); "Accumulation Flow" (Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, USA, 2024); "Ito Keiji and the Artists Who Taught Him" (Rakusui-tei Museum of Art, Toyama, Japan, 2023); "Fragments of Homo Faber - The Future of People and Manufacturing" (Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum, Aichi, Japan, 2022), etc. Keita Matsunaga's works were selected for the 6th and 11th International Ceramics Exhibition Mino, Japan (Gifu Prefecture, Japan, 2014 and 2017). His works are part of the permanent collection of the Hyogo Museum of Ceramic Art. Matsunaga has also received the Grand Prize at the 2013 Takaoka Contemporary Craft Competition and the Encouragement Award at the 2014 ITAMI International Craft Exhibition.

USEFULLESS LAB

USEFULLESS LAB was founded in 2022 in Shanghai by Zhao Xiaoxiao. It is a research-based architecture and art design studio. Their practice encompasses architecture and interior design, art installations, interactive design, curatorial and exhibition design, furniture design, new media design and so on.

Zhao Xiaoxiao

Zhao Xiaoxiao (b. 1995, Shaanxi, China) is an architect, designer, and researcher. She graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Cooper Union. She is the founder of USEFULLESS LAB and formerly worked at Rockwell Group in New York. Her recent exhibitions and projects include: "Long You Hu Riverside 8090 Youth Creation 2" (2024-2025); "Design Shanghai" (2025); a permanent outdoor installation commission for Beijing City Library (2023-2024); Shanghai Urban Space Art Season (2023); Wuhan Biennale (Qintai Art Museum, Wuhan, 2023); "World Weather Network" (UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in collaboration with Artangel, 2023); the 18th Venice Biennale (2023) and the inaugural Design Curatorial Program (Sea World Culture and Arts Center, Shenzhen, 2021). Zhao Xiaoxiao received the Harvard Radcliffe Fellowship for 2025-2026 and was selected as one of the "100 Chinese Women Artists Around the World" by Art News China in 2023.

ROYOKO

ROYOKO was founded in April 2018 in Jingdezhen and is the first daily-use porcelain brand

specializing in linglong porcelain. In June 2018, the brand held its first exhibition in Tokyo, Japan, and its works have been collected by institutions including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Xiao Wei

Xiao Wei (b. 1994, Guangzhou, China; lives and works in Guangzhou, China) graduated from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts with a master's degree in ceramic art design in 2018. His solo exhibition "Zhutudieyun: Xiao Wei's Works" was held in June 2025. He has been a participating artist in: the 14th National Art Exhibition, 2024; "A Journey of Porcelain: Jingdezhen International Ceramic Art Biennale," 2023; "Guangdong Contemporary Ceramics in the Perspective of the Greater Bay Area," 2022; the 11th Biennale of Contemporary Young Chinese Ceramic Artists, 2018; "A Thousand Mile Journey: Exhibition of Outstanding Works from Key Chinese Academy of Fine Arts," 2018; Milan Design Week, 2015; and the "Daqiwan Cheng," Lingnan Art Museum, 2014.

In 2023, Xiao Wei won the Newcomer Award of the "Beyond the Image: 2023 Shiwan Cup Youth Ceramic Art Grand Prix" and the Gold Award of the First "Youth · Design China" Youth Ceramic Art Creative Design Exhibition. His work *Shaping and Destruction in a Continuous Cycle* was collected by the museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts; won the second prize of the "3rd Guangdong Universities Ceramics Exhibition" in 2020; won the third prize of the "Shiwan Cup" Ceramic Sculpture (Utensil) Competition and the Outstanding Graduation Creation Award of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. In 2014, his work *High-Footed Dish* was added to the collection of Lingnan Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

Xu Zhiwei

Xu Zhiwei (b. 1986, Anhui, China) holds a master's degree in ceramic art design from the China Academy of Art and teaches at the ceramic art design department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Recent exhibitions include: the 13th National Art Exhibition, 2019; the 11th National Ceramic Design Innovation Competition, 2018; the 10th National Ceramic Design Innovation Competition, 2015; the 12th National Art Exhibition, 2014; the First China Contemporary Ceramic Art Exhibition, 2012; the Second Guangzhou Contemporary Ceramic Art Exhibition, 2012; the 9th National Ceramic Design Competition, 2010; the 12th Zhejiang Provincial Art Exhibition, which was awarded with an Excellence Award, 2009; and the 11th National Art Exhibition, 2009. His works are in the collections of institutions including

the Zhejiang Provincial Museum, the China Academy of Art, the University Town Art Museum of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, and the Dehua Ceramics Museum.

Xu Zhiwei won the Jingdezhen International Ceramics Biennale Newcomer Award twice in 2023 and 2021, was approved for the National Art Fund Young Creative Talent Project in 2022, and was selected for the Zhejiang Province Plastic Arts Talent Training "Xinfeng Plan" in 2020. His works were selected for the 13th National Art Exhibition and exhibited in Beijing in 2019. In 2018, he won the silver award in the 11th National Ceramics Design Innovation Competition.

Yang Xinguang

Yang Xinguang (b. 1980, Hunan, China; lives and works in Beijing) graduated from the sculpture department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2007. His works have been included in numerous major international exhibitions, including the 9th Shanghai Biennale and the inaugural Montevideo Biennale. His works have been exhibited extensively in renowned domestic and international art institutions including UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, China; National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rome, Italy; the National Gallery of Georgia; White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney, Australia; Loire Valley Contemporary Art Foundation Museum, France; the Singapore Art Museum; the Museum Lehmbruck, Germany; Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China; the Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, South Korea; and M+, Hong Kong, China.

Selected recent solo exhibitions include: "Nature and Man" (Changsha Art Museum, Changsha); "Spring Breeze" (Beijing Commune, Beijing, 2023); "Botanical Monument - Yang Xinguang Solo Exhibition" (OCAT, Shanghai, 2021); "Above the Soil" (Beijing Commune, Beijing, 2019); "Glass Intestine" (Shanghai Museum of Glass, Shanghai, 2016). Selected group exhibitions include: "Common Ground: UCCA 15th Anniversary Patrons Collection Exhibition" (UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2022); "Multiple Landscapes: Long Museum 10th Anniversary Special Exhibition" (Long Museum, Shanghai, 2022); "China Contemporary Art Annual Exhibition 2018" (Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing, 2018); "After Nature: UCCA Dune Opening Exhibition" (UCCA Dune, Beidaihe, 2018).

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Associates, as well as Lead Partner Aranya, Lead Art Book Partner DIOR, Lead Imaging Partner vivo, Presenting Partner Bloomberg, and Supporting Partners AIA, Barco, Dulux, Genelec, SKP Beijing, and Stey.

Public Programs

On the opening day of the exhibition, curator Zhang Yao will lead a guided tour to introduce how contemporary artists have expanded the expressive possibilities of ceramics beyond their traditional role as “vessels.” Through their practices, ceramics move fluidly between craft traditions and contemporary contexts—shifting, diverging, and continually generating new conceptual and aesthetic forms.

That same day, UCCA will host a conversation featuring participating artists Liu Xi, Keita Matsunaga, Yang Xinguang and Masaomi Yasunaga. Drawing on their diverse cultural backgrounds and approaches to ceramic-making, the artists will discuss how their practices engage with and reinterpret ceramic traditions today.

During the exhibition period, a material-focused workshop will be led by participating artist Xu Zhiwei, whose practice centers on celadon and its techniques. The workshop will delve into the phenomenon of craquelure in celadon glaze—once regarded as a technical flaw in the ceramic surface, later evolved into a distinct aesthetic feature that gave rise to patterns such as “golden threads and iron wires,” “hundred-broken shards,” and “ice crackle.” In contemporary artistic practice, these crackled patterns are reactivated as a medium connecting history and the present, craftsmanship, and concept.

About UCCA

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China’s premier museum of modern and contemporary art. Committed to the belief that art can deepen lives and transcend boundaries, UCCA presents a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives across four architecturally and programmatically distinct locations. Owned by a group of committed patrons, it is funded by donations, sponsorship, ticketing, and proceeds from the commercial activities of UCCA Lab. UCCA has presented more than 200 exhibitions and welcomed more than ten million visitors since its founding in Beijing in 2007 as the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art.

About UCCA Clay

UCCA Clay is a museum situated at the intersection of ceramics and contemporary art. Located in Yixing, Jiangsu province—China’s “City of Ceramics”—it anchors the city’s reimagined Creative and Cultural Ceramic Avenue district. Designed by Kengo Kuma and Associates, the 2,400-square-meter building is the Japanese architect’s first built work to employ clay as a primary material. Featuring a remarkable façade made of hand-fired terracotta tiles, the building showcases Yixing’s renowned purple clay (*zisha*) that began to be used in pottery during the Song Dynasty. UCCA Clay’s program takes inspiration from the region’s unique cultural heritage, drawing together Yixing’s thousand-year ceramic history with UCCA’s global artistic vision. The museum’s exhibitions center contemporary work in the medium of ceramics by Chinese and international artists, while also offering further context and facilitating exchange and dialogue with the wider world. Opened in 2024, it is the first contemporary art institution in Yixing.

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