

They straddle 2 worlds

As if the real world isn't a tough enough place to make a living in, these women's jobs have an unearthly quality. LUI YU MING enters their realm.



← She plans ghost tours

She screams at cockroaches and mice. Her friends call her timid. Yet, when night falls, customer relations officer Chua Hwee Li, 23, goes out looking for ghosts with fellow Asia Paranormal Investigators (API).

Armed with scientific gadgets like temperature sensors and trifold meters, she and the other investigators try to prove the existence of spirits. "Our investigations are based on research, history and science. If there's a ghost, the temperature of the air will dip," she explains. "And trifold meters can detect movement in the air."

Most of the time, their ghost sightings turn out to be flatly explainable. Once, they were sent a photo with an "extra" hanging around in the background of a group photo at Marina Bay MRT station. After an on-site inspection, they realised that the "girl" came from the reflection off a bah kwa (roasted pork jerky) advertisement poster.

Other times, the results are "inconclusive" at best – dips in temperatures that can be explained by cold air seeping in through cracks, for example. But Hwee Li remains convinced that there are spirits out there and that the investigators will be able to prove their presence eventually.

After all, she has seen a few, she says. Her first encounter was at 15, in her old home in Tampines. One night, she saw two women – one young and one old, with a baby on the granny's lap.

Frightened, she fled the room and told her mum who told her "there's no such things as ghosts!". But their superstitious maid later took her aside to tell her she has seen the ghostly trio before. Hwee Li can't think of any rational explanation for her "sighting".

Since then, she has been intrigued by them. She surfs the Internet for reports and counts *The Amityville Horror* as one of her all-time favourite movies. Does it sound like a self-fulfilling prophecy, where she thinks she can see ghosts, so she does? But Hwee Li insists she isn't very imaginative ("I'm not even creative – I can't draw or write") so it isn't all in her mind. She claims: "I see ghosts only when I'm down on my luck." What do they look like? "Like humans but very pale."

This passion to see the dead has caused her a few run-ins with the living. During her early days of ghost hunting, she quarrelled with her parents, who disapproved of her hobby. "They are superstitious and were afraid I would bring an evil spirit home," she recalls. She also broke up with her then boyfriend, who hated that she spent more time with her ghost-hunting buddies than him.

These days, out of respect to her parents, who have a Japanese shrine in their home, Hwee Li makes sure she says a prayer before she enters the door and showers immediately. The Chinese believe that you should clean yourself to get rid of negative energies.

Besides investigations, she's API's event planner for its fortnightly ghost tours. "People are surprised when they find out this is my interest. They sometimes say '*Chi bao mei shi zuo!*' (Mandarin to imply she has nothing better to do)," she says, laughing.

Lest you think getting spooked out is the only thing she does in her free time, she's quick to point out that she also makes time for her new boyfriend. "We watch movies," she offers. What kind? Horror, of course.