How shopping bags became the only outward sign of wealth in China's locked-down city

April 21, 2022

In Shanghai, China, where more than 25 million people have spent recent weeks in Covid lockdown, luxury shopping bags have become the hottest status symbols around, more popular than handbags, accessories, and other designer items themselves. Unable to renew their wardrobes since the end of March, the city's residents are showing off their wealth with shopping bags... which they hang on their front doors. It's a trend that continues to gain momentum, drawing mockery and criticism on social networks.
With Covid-19 cases on the rise, Shanghai residents are currently experiencing a strict lockdown. The closure of stores, combined with difficulties in obtaining food supplies, is weighing on the daily life of the population, which is gradually showing signs of resistance. And if shopping sprees in luxury boutiques may not be the top priority right now, some fashionistas have found a way to show off their status, their wealth, and their style in these uncertain times.

They are doing this by using the plastic or paper shopping bags in which luxury houses carefully pack the purchases made in stores. In other words, they are shopping bags featuring a certain high-profile name or logo, which obviously makes all the difference. In recent months, these bags have become the stars of social media, allowing users to show off their preferences in terms of brands and products -- even if one same shopping bag can accompany purchases ranging from a Hermes bag to a mere perfume.

But here, it's all about appearances -- sometimes misleading. This has led the inhabitants of Shanghai to use these shopping bags as a new outward sign of wealth, while waiting to get back out there with their favorite designer pieces. As a result, front doors to the city's apartments are now rarely seen without a Louis Vuitton, Prada or Chanel shopping bag hanging on their handle. But what's inside, you might ask? Covid-19 self-testing kits that health workers come to collect daily to limit contact cases, reports the luxury news site Jing Daily.

The trend has -- inevitably -- been shared by plenty of people on social networks like Weibo and Douyin, generating tens of thousands of likes, but also criticism and mockery from people in the rest of China. While some people just laughed at the situation, saying that the bags were more expensive than the doors they were hung on, others pointed to the (ostentatiously) materialistic nature of Shanghai's residents.

Despite its strict lockdown, China's economic capital has seen the first Covid-19-related deaths since the outbreak of the pandemic, and a new wave of infections.

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