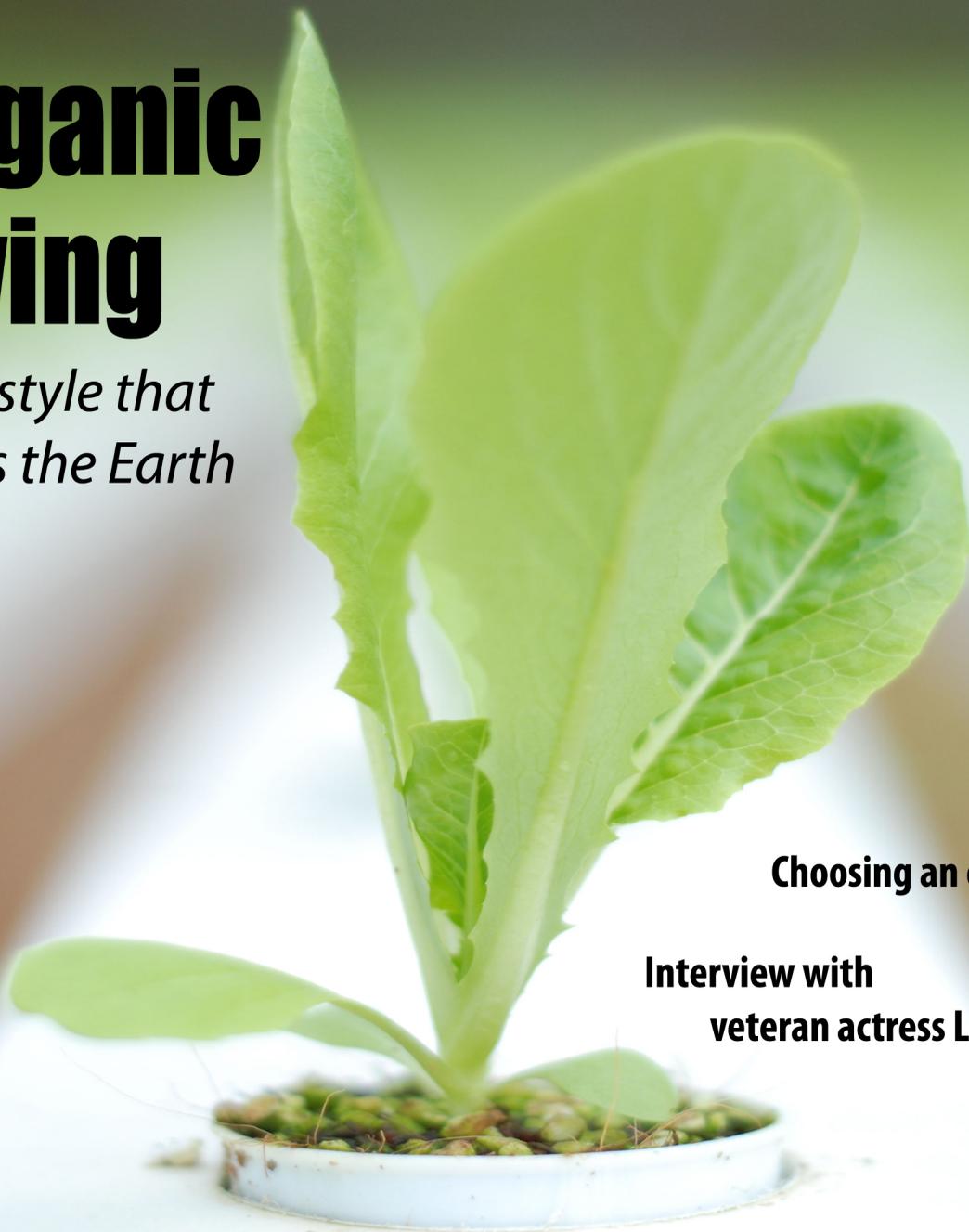


Organic Living

A lifestyle that saves the Earth



Choosing an exotic pet

**Interview with
veteran actress Lo Koon-lan**

TYR
The Young Reporter
-by HKBU journalism students since 1969-

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HKRep

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Organic living or more precisely organic food has been controversial. It costs a lot and is harder to find. But it seems people around keep saying you should be eating it. There have been scientific studies finding no nutritional difference between organic and conventional produce. But at least its production is believed to do more good to the environment by not using any artificial chemicals in the growing of plants and animals.

The climate is changing. Hong Kong has seen fewer typhoons and less rain in recent years due to the El Nino effect. Temperatures fluctuate in winters. There are ways to protect the environment and respond to climate change. One of which is to live organic. If you wish to do something for our planet, please turn to our cover story for how to eat organic, wear organic, wash organic...

As the winter break and Christmas approach, on behalf of TYR's Editorial Board, I would like to wish every TYR reader a merry Christmas and a happy new year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Alan Kwok".

Alan Kwok Kim-fung
Chief Editor

Loan is a bottleneck for graduates

Academic says the structure of tertiary education financial aids has been an obstacle for graduates to cope with their future

BY PEARLIE YIU

Many university graduates find hard to repay their student loans to the government and this means they have to reconsider their next steps.

The default rate of Non-means-tested Loan Scheme exceeded 15 per cent in the academic year 2008/09. There were about 13,000 graduates defaulting payment of the loan and the total amount involved reached 641 millions.

Mr Wong Cheuk-fai, in his final year of a two-year associate degree programme at Hong Kong Baptist University, has borrowed \$130,000 under NLS from the government during his study.

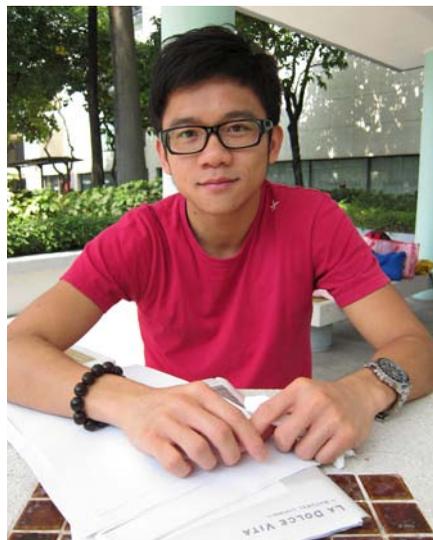
He tried hard not to borrow money from the government anymore.

"I want to buy a new flat before getting married," said Mr Wong. "But I feel hard to pay off the loan."

Mr Wong, who is from a family living in a public housing estate in Ngau Tau Kok, has to support his parents financially. He works as a part-time tutor for \$40 per hour.

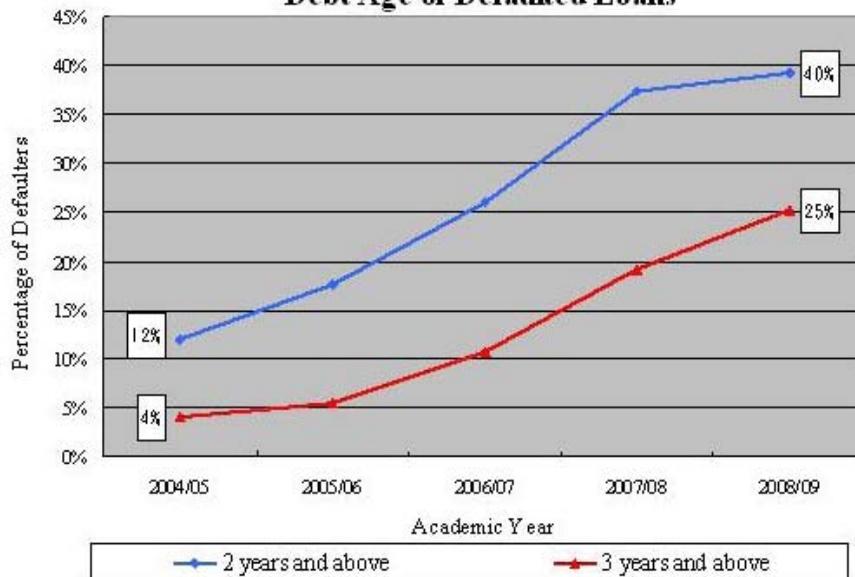
The annual tuition fee of his degree course is \$126,000. Altogether, he has to repay \$256,000 excluding the accrued interest after graduation.

NLS and Tertiary Student Financial Scheme are the two financial aids for undergraduates provided by the Student Financial Assistance Agency.



Mr Wong Cheuk-fai worries about paying off the university loan after graduation.

Debt Age of Defaulted Loans



Source: GovHK

There is a tendency that those who have defaulted would continue to default.

The NLS's interest rate is currently set at 2.984 per cent. It follows any changes of the average best lending rate among banks. The rate is charged once the loan is drawn down and until it is fully repaid within 40 quarters in ten years' time.

That means Mr Wong will have to repay at least \$6400 each quarter.

"Sometimes I dreamed of getting married and having three children as what Donald Tsang suggested. But will I be financially capable to do that?" said Mr Wong.

According to the SFAA, the median of university graduates' monthly repayment is around \$560 in the academic year 2008/09.

Compared to the average salary of university graduates around \$8,000 to \$10,000 per month (2010 statistics from the Joint Institution Job Information System), the monthly repayment seems not so much.

But it may mean a lot to those who want to save money for an apartment.

"After paying for those repayments and living expenses, there will be not much money left for those who plan to get married," said Dr Sam Yu Wai-kam, associate professor of the Department of Social Work at HKBU.

The down payment of a flat is 30 per

cent of the property price. That of a two-million-dollar flat is around \$600,000.

According to sales director Mr Derek Lai Wing-nok of Centraline Wealth Management Limited, if one saves \$5000 a month, it still takes seven to ten years to save enough for the down payment.

Mr Lai suggests the government should lower the interest rate of the student loan to ease graduates' burden.

"The graduates should start investment as well," he said.

Dr Yu suggested the government impose a graduate tax to replace the loan system to finance tertiary education.

"Once students graduate, they will have to pay for medical insurance, the Mandatory Provident Fund as well as repayment of government loan which are all bottlenecks for them," he said.

As a graduate tax raises money for universities, tertiary education can be free at the point of delivery. Although the tax is levied on graduates who are the immediate beneficiaries of higher education, it is progressive and those who have higher ability to pay will bear a higher tax rate, said Dr Yu.

"Graduate tax has been proposed in the UK and Hong Kong should follow suit," he said.

EDITED BY ELEVEN LIU



Take up the bowl and start a wholesome diet

Froyo is offering a better choice to chill Hong Kong's healthy dessert lovers

BY JACKIE YIN

Froyo has become a big hit in the city recently. Some wonder if the craze is another bubble.

"Frozen yogurt is a new product and a new concept, so it is risky. But now Hong Kong is ready for it," said Mr Dani Hazut, shop owner of Yogurtime.

The full name of froyo is frozen yogurt, a healthy dessert low in fat. Customers can add a wide range of toppings from fruit chunks and cereals to fudge.

Yogurtime provides customers with more than a hundred flavours of froyo.

Mr Hazut, the 30-year-old boss, has just opened the sixth branch in a Kowloon Bay shopping mall in October. Yet, Hong Kong is new to this trend.

"When I first came here two years ago for market research, there was no froyo shop. But I saw the potential," Mr Hazut said.

He paid \$600,000 for the startup cost – a fee cheaper than most other forms of franchises.

His shop sells a bowl of froyo for \$30. About a hundred cups are sold per day and the revenue is sufficient for the shop to breakeven.

The business is profitable compared to the fading trend of bubble tea, a Taiwanese-style milk tea with small tapioca balls which swept through the city before the rise of froyo.

The rapid development of the bubble tea business has reached its market limit, said Mr Dicky Pang Chun-tak, direc-

tor of Chatime Tea House.

His teahouse opened a year ago and is located at a street corner in Kowloon City, where another bubble teahouse stands by its side and a third one on the opposite side of the street.

"I doubt the future of froyo if its market will be saturated like bubble tea's," Mr Pang said. "Now more and more bubble teahouses can't hold on. The profit decreased by a half or at least by one-third."

To cover the daily expenses, Mr Pang's teahouse has to sell around 400 cups at \$13 for each per day.

"The one million dollars paid to the Taiwanese franchisee a year ago had not yet been recovered," he said.

Despite the decline of bubble tea sales, Mrs Jennifer Chan Choi Mung-jung, managing director of Frutti (Food) Enterprises Limited, has full confidence in froyo's future.

Mrs Chan's company is one of the top froyo traders in the US and offers franchises to enterprisers in Hong Kong, Macau and the mainland.

"Froyo is something that everyone in Hong Kong can afford," Mrs Chan said. "The yogurt is charged by weight so that people can have more choices."

Both Mrs Chan and Mr Hazut are dedicated to roll out new flavours. Mr Hazut created flavours like chewing gum and cheesecake while Mrs Chan specially developed pumpkin and corn

flavour to celebrate the Halloween.

Apart from the appealing colours and flavours, froyo is also a healthier alternative to ice cream as it is low in fat and calories.

"I prefer frozen yogurt. In particular, it's a healthy dessert and a healthy snack," said Ms Jenny Wu Ching-kuen, a registered nutritionist of the American Dietetics Association.

Planning to open 25 branches in the city, Mrs Chan is not satisfied with having Hong Kong as her last stop for the food fad.

"Tutti Frutti succeeded to open 250 stores in America within three-and-a-half years," Mrs Chan said. "China's population is 13 times that of the US, so it shouldn't be hard."

"About 30 per cent of China's population are well-educated and have the purchasing power. They're our target," Mrs Chan added.

Her company invested \$60 million in the mainland market and planned to open 300 branches within five years after its first launch in 2011.

EDITED BY STANLEY SUM

Just a click to shop the world

Online bidding agencies do a roaring business helping people buy foreign goods on the web

BY XAVIER NG

Having someone shop for you overseas has become a new business in the city due to some geographical limitations.

"I have been helping my customers to bid online for several years," said Mr Leo Man, owner of Osaka Station.

In recent years, some local stores provide a service of bidding goods from foreign countries and delivering them to customers. Some think there is a growing demand of the business.

Mr Man's shop, Osaka Station, sells Japanese gadgets and brand-name products like Hysterie Glamour, Head Porter and Bathing Ape to those who particularly love Japanese clothing.

"When customers see something they want to buy on the Internet, they can simply give us the web address. Then we will bid or order the goods for them," Mr Man said.

People in Hong Kong cannot bid Japanese goods online directly because sellers from Japan only ship goods within their country. But through agencies or companies like Osaka Station, people can get what they want easily.

These agencies or companies have mailboxes in Japan so they can collect orders, bid for customers and then send goods back to Hong Kong in bulk.

Not only those who want Japanese clothing need the service. People of other interests like to use it too because of the wide range of goods available.

"Old people buy antiques abroad through the agencies as well," Mr Man said.

Ms Fion Cheung, who collects Japanese toys, is also a regular customer of these agencies.

"Most of the toys I want to buy are not available in Hong Kong, especially for some limited editions," she said.

"Ordering through them is a lot cheaper," Ms Cheung said. "For example, a toy figure sold at \$900 in Hong Kong costs only half the price on Japan's auction sites. So the price is still lower even with a delivery fee."

Ms Bibianna Yip, a frequent client of bidding agencies, said the service was

very convenient.

"My friends call me 'worldwide purchaser' because I buy things online from many places like Taiwan and Korea," she said.

Ms Yip called this "browser-shopping" instead of "window-shopping". She shops online also because things are cheaper.

She added that she was too busy to go shopping so such new shopping pattern helped save lots of her time.

Apart from bidding and delivery, some agencies also provide a remittance service.

"When I shops on Taiwan's auction sites, some sellers ask for cash transfers to their Taiwan bank accounts," said Ms Chilli Chan, a student at the City University of Hong Kong.

"Therefore I need those agencies to help me transfer money to Taiwan."

Some may doubt the reliability of these service providers but Ms Chan has confidence in them.

"Their service charge is very low and I can judge their reliability by the evaluations of previous customers. So I can tell whether they are trustworthy."

According to Dr Leung Hon-chu,

principal lecturer at Hong Kong Baptist University's sociology department, such agencies have existed for some time.

With the Internet, they had become even more active, he said.

Dr Leung added that language barriers were eliminated, and the whole

"Friends call me 'worldwide purchaser' because I buy things online from Taiwan and Korea."

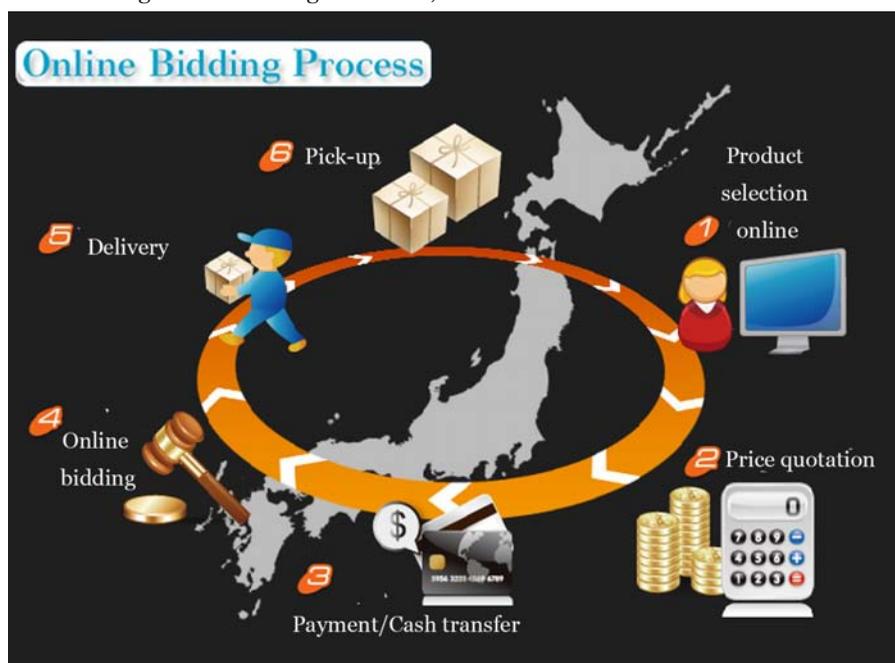
- Ms Bibianna Yip, a frequent online buyer

world got closer by sharing each other's culture.

"Boundaries between nations get blurred due to globalisation even though some countries try to seal themselves up," he said.

"The Japanese try to keep a social boundary by confining trades within their country only," he said. "But the emergence of these middlemen has broken it."

"Different cultures in different places are spreading and influencing one another through the new shopping pattern."



Bidding agencies collect a service charge from \$30 to \$50 through online shopping.

EDITED BY CATHIE GUO



Domestic helpers in need are provided with meals and accomodation in the shelters.

Maids trapped by suits

Bethune House provides shelter to foreign domestic helpers with legal problems

BY THOMAS CHAN

At least 30 people are packed inside the house with one living room, two big bedrooms, a mini office and a kitchen which is supposed to accommodate only 20. This is a temporary shelter for dismissed foreign domestic helpers who could no longer stay with their employers.

Suhhrtini lives there. Dancing is a way for her to relax during her ongoing and lengthy lawsuit against her former employer. "Chatting and dancing with my friends here make my days easier since waiting for the unknown future is very painful," said the 40-year-old Indonesian domestic helper.

Bethune House, established in 1986 by the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, provides short-term accommodations, meals and social counselling to migrant workers in need.

Suhhrtini is one of them. She worked for a local family until October when things changed. "I wrongly pressed the button of the vacuum cleaner so it could not work properly. Sir saw it and threw the cleaner at me. My forearm was hurt," she said.

"That night, I ran away from my employer's home and reported my case to the police. And then, one of my friends took me here. Now, I have to wait for the police's investigation results," she said.

That was not the first time Suhhrtini

was beaten by her employer. She said she had been physically abused when she failed to carry out her former employer's orders.

"Sir slapped my face once I forgot to do or buy something he asked for. Every time after I was beaten, I was so afraid that I cried in my room," she said.

According to Ms Cynthia Ca Abdon-Tellez, director of Mission for Migrant Workers, women living in the shelter were once exposed to different types of abuses, from physical to verbal, such as exhausting working hours and underpayment of wages.

The organisation handles 80 to 100 cases every month and most of them are related to labour disputes.

"We get two to three physical and sexual abuse cases every three months," the director said. "But it's impossible to say exactly how many workers are abused each year, largely because they are exploited in private situations. Also, some of the workers just grit their teeth since they need their jobs to finance their own families," she added.

Elvire, 37 from the Philippines, lives in the shelter because her employer accused her of abusing his son. "Adrian, my employer's four-year-old son, told his dad that I slapped his face and hit his legs while I was escorting him to school," Elvire recalled.

"Sir didn't give me a chance to say a word and asked me to sign to terminate my contract. After a while, two policemen came to arrest me.

"I cried at that time. God knows I am innocent."

Apart from physical abuse, underpayment of wages is another issue that foreign domestic helpers are facing.

Ms Holly Carlos Allen, manager of Helpers for Domestic Helpers, which provides free paralegal services to domestic helpers, said around 95 per cent of Indonesians who sought advice from her organisation were underpaid.

Working abroad in hope of supporting her family, Sugoanti, 25, from Indonesia, got only \$50 monthly for the first five months in Hong Kong because large parts of her salaries went to the agency with which she signed up to repay a \$10,000 loan.

Despite policies in both the Philippines and Hong Kong to prohibit agencies from charging placement fees, they are not effective in protecting foreign domestic workers.

"Nearly 99 per cent of the agencies, both in the Philippines and Hong Kong, are over-charging domestic helpers. They often collude with loan companies so they can call that amount of money loans to evade regulations," said Ms Abdon-Tellez.

"In the Philippines, agencies usually charge domestic helpers 80,000 to 100,000 pesos, which are equal to five to seven months of their salaries in Hong Kong. If a contract terminates, maids will be asked by Hong Kong agencies to pay \$2,000 to \$10,000 for a new one."

Under immigration laws, the minimum monthly wage for all foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong is \$3,580, but they are usually underpaid, especially among Indonesian workers.

"The situation of Indonesian domestic helpers is even worse because their government actually allows agencies to collect their first seven months' salaries," Ms Abdon-Tellez added.

Ms Allen also said Indonesian workers might be exploited by contracts which they could not understand because they often did not know English.

Getting up at seven every morning and sleeping at ten every night, the life of domestic helpers here in the shelter appeared to be more humane.

However, Elvire is not happy. "I feel sorry for my family because I can't send them any money," she said.

EDITED BY VIVIAN CHUI

New plan to combat child obesity

EatSmart@school.hk aims to cap food intake in primary schools

BY GARY KWOK

The number of obese adults in Hong Kong has doubled over the last five years. About 40 per cent of adults are currently obese, compared to 20 per cent in 2005.

Mr Ness Li Kwun-chau, 21, is one of the victims of obesity.

"I once reached 225 pounds," the university student said. "I did not know any programme initiated by the government and could not afford a nutritionist."

Eventually, he took the initiative to slim down by eating less: "I ate one meal a day for three consecutive months to lose weight."

After dieting, his weight has gone



Source: www.edb.gov.hk

down to 176 pounds. The student managed to lose weight by himself, but perhaps his whole problem could have been avoided at the first place.

In order to prevent adult obesity, first steps should be taken at an early age, most experts agree. That is why the government has decided to act.

"We don't want the situation to worsen further. We have initiated plans to tackle it in primary schools," said Dr Regina Ching Cheuk-duen, assistant director at the Department of Health.

After the implementation of regular health assessments in 2004, a new scheme called *EatSmart@school.hk* was introduced last year.

Its objectives are to achieve energy balance, to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, and to limit intake of fats, free sugar and salt.

"We set up instructions of a healthy diet to schools and brief teachers about it. Then, they educate their pupils," explained Dr Ching.

So far, 171 out of 600 local primary schools have joined the programme.

Ms Yim Lai-sheung, teacher at Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School, is responsible for the implementation of the scheme. She said it had brought changes to the school.

"We started offering the kids more healthy food for lunch. There is at least

one portion of vegetables in each meal now," she said.

"Also, when we see they want to eat something unhealthy for snacks, such as chips, we take it away from them and give it to their parents."

Parents supported the plan at the school but children keep complaining.

"They think we are limiting their freedom of choice. They liked the old meals better, because there was more oil," Ms Yim said.

Apart from diet, regular sports activities have been strengthened as well.

"From this year, we start school by doing sports twice a week."

In spite of these steps, Ms Yim has unfortunately not observed any change in the health of the children so far.

St. Anthony's School is another institute that has joined the *Eat Smart* scheme. Ms Terry Lee, parent of one of the pupils, said it was a good move.

"I have been more aware of the importance of a balanced diet since my son was admitted to this school," she said.

"They give out leaflets about obesity and food, and teach my child about consequences of obesity. The teachers are willing to answer my enquiries about obesity. I am impressed."

Ms Lee's son Jason said in a telephone interview that he was happy with his current lunches.

"I think they are abundant and delicious. We have meat, rice, vegetables and fruits on a plate. Not only do they taste good, they look good too. I feel happy when I see my colourful lunchbox. It has increased my appetite," Jason said.

His mother believes it is good for schools to start controlling the diet of children at a very young age, so that they develop a healthy diet more easily.

When children have unhealthy snacks, we take them away and give them to their parents.

Ms Yim Lai-sheung, primary school teacher

"Presumably children consume more than a thousand meals throughout their six years in primary school. That makes a difference to their diet preferences," Ms Lee said.

In spite of the government's initiative to encourage healthier eating habits, more than 20 per cent of school children remain obese in Hong Kong.

"It takes a very long time for the idea to penetrate the society. We aim at younger generations now, hoping to create an impact also on people around them, so that by the time they grow up, the society will be improved," said Dr Ching.

EDITED BY LUCIE KAVANOVA



Will the new scheme finally stop growth of obesity among Hongkongers?

Go for carbon free meals and travel

Are you willing to do a little more in your daily life just for saving our planet?

BY CECILIA CHAN & GINA NG

A forestation, renewable energy sources, hydrogen-powered vehicles – these technical terms sound as if saving the environment is a mission impossible for individuals.

In fact, a small change in our lifestyle can help save the earth from various environmental problems.

“Everyone cares about what they eat. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by replacing meat on our menu with vegetables is something everyone can do,” said Mr Patrick Ho Ho-yin, public engagement leader of WWF Hong Kong.

Dining choices affect not only people’s health, but can also lead to better health of our planet.

Just by simple acts such as having food produced locally and reducing consumption of meat, people can reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

“Red meat especially beef releases a kind of greenhouse gas called methane during the cattle’s food digestion. It has great impact on the environment,” said Greenpeace campaigner Mr Prentice Koo Wai-muk.

He said the mode of transportation for food also affected the amount of carbon emitted.

“The food mileage of the same food product produced in the same location may vary. For example, say, beef. It all depends on their grains, modes of transportation and energy inputs.”

Mr Koo said Hong Kong people were reluctant to change their lifestyle for the environment.

“Hong Kong people are very picky. Very often the meat they eat comes from places far away from the city. Why can’t they opt for local produce?” he said. “The

“Reducing greenhouse gases by replacing meat with vegetables is something everyone can do.”

- Patrick Ho Ho-yin, WWF Hong Kong

market also dominates people’s choice. Food manufacturers seldom promote green food.”

According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, livestock rearing accounts for 18 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions globally.

“Producing one kg of beef involves

emitting 36 kg of carbon dioxide, while growing the same amount of vegetables only releases four kg of carbon dioxide,” said Mr Ho from WWF.

Greenhouse gases are emitted along the entire supply chain of food. Such concept of assessing the environmental impact of food is called “food miles” or “carbon footprints.”

“Beef has one of the highest carbon footprints,” Mr Ho said.

He suggested people should assess the life cycle of different food, eat green and consume less meat.

“We don’t mean that everyone should be a vegetarian, but we do advocate people eating more vegetables by having at least two meat-free meals per week,” Mr Ho said.

He recommended having chicken and pork which involve fewer carbon emissions.

Besides eating green, sourcing locally produced food is another effective way to protect the Earth because more greenhouse gases are emitted when food is transported from elsewhere to Hong Kong. The longer the distance, the greater the emission.

“But there are some technical difficulties as Hong Kong is a small place and we don’t grow our own food. So we have to rely on imports,” said Mr Ho.

He said people might choose farm products that are grown or reared in places closer to Hong Kong, reducing food transportation involved.

“Eat seasonal” is also an important way to be eco-friendly.

“That’s very important because if you try to grow products that are not in season, a lot of energy and infrastructure have to be put in, say, a greenhouse, pesticides and antibiotics,” said Mr Ho.



About 30 primary and secondary schools take part in a “Low-carbon diet day”, with students having vegetarian lunches provided by caterers.



Food processing also incurs carbon.

“Packaging, distribution, transportation of grains, fertilizers or pesticides are all carbon activated,” said Mr Ho.

He added that a low-carbon way of cooking like steaming or quick-frying could also reduce the use of electricity and gas in the cooking process.

Mr Leung Chiu-yin, vice chairman of local green group Footprint, said Hong

Kong people were capable of reducing carbon emissions but there was still room for improvement.

“They got basic ideas of a low-carbon diet, but they lack the incentive to take action,” said Mr Leung.

He said the government should also play a role in encouraging people to reduce carbon emissions.

“Incentives are very important. In terms of low-carbon diet, the government should come up with measures to boost agriculture. There are now no markets for local produce,” said Mr Leung.

He suggested the government cooperate with the

mainland to create a platform for low-carbon diet.

According to WWF’s findings, every Hong Kong resident on average is responsible for 13.4 tons of carbon emissions a year.

On top of diet, more than half of the emissions are from air travel, which is heavily used by Hongkongers for business and holidays.

Data from the Civil Aviation Department show that the total number of passengers from January to September 2010 was around 37 million, which was 11.23 per cent higher than the same period last year.

Unlike other form of transport,



Raymond Lee

Flights account for more than half of the annual carbon emissions of Hongkongers.

planes release much more greenhouse gases and these emissions seriously damage the environment.

“They affect cloud formation and precipitation, damaging the environment 2.7 times more than other means of transport,” said Mr Ho from WWF.

He suggested the government should address the issue by introducing policies or guidelines to lower carbon emissions by long-haul flights.

“Hong Kong, as an international city, should not be lagging behind in combating global climate change,” he said.

Travellers should make an effort to reduce carbon emissions as well

“After all, ‘low carbon travel’ is not popular yet. It requires a change in travellers’ attitude. Using low-carbon modes of transport means they will have to spend more time on travelling,” said Mr Koo from Greenpeace.

Japan Airline Group is one of the airlines taking the initiative to reduce carbon emissions by using smaller but more fuel-efficient aircrafts, reducing aircraft weight and washing aircraft engines regularly.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Department has introduced a new set of express air routes in October 2009. The new air routes are expected to save up to a maximum of 210 km or 14 minutes of flight time, saving a huge amount of fuel and carbon emissions annually.

However, “low-carbon flights” has not been discussed yet in the new climate strategy and agenda of the Environmental Protection Department despite its

promotion of “low-carbon life”.

“There is no consensus yet in the international arena on how such a matter should be handled,” said Ms Eva Wong, senior information officer of the EPD.

Academics also said reducing carbon emissions needed cooperation of the entire world, not just the effort of one city.

“Hong Kong has a lot to reform, but reform is always difficult because there is always opposition from the groups that will lose out,” said assistant professor Xu Yuan of the Department of Geography and Resource Management at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

It depended on the willingness of every individual to take action to go carbon free in their daily life, he said.

Facts about low-carbon living

- 1 Every HK individual generates 13.4 tons of carbon emissions annually according to WWF.
- 2 Livestock rearing accounts for 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions according to FAO.
- 3 In producing of one kg of beef, 36 kg of carbon dioxide is emitted, while the amounts emitted in producing one kg of pork, chicken and vegetables are 6.35 kg, 4.57 kg and 4.0 kg respectively.

EDITED BY ALAN KWOK & SARAH LAI



HKUST provides students with overnight study areas where students can work or relax together.

College students crave a night pass

Universities close doors to students who work around the clock

BY HEIIN LAI

Apart from size and scale, what makes a college campus different from a high school's is perhaps the degree of academic freedom and knowledge interflow.

Most local universities are open to the public. Students can study or enjoy themselves by having extra-curricular activities on campus.

But some feel that the opening hours of their campuses are not long enough.

"We need an area to stay up all night for coursework, discussion on group projects, organising activities and chats," said Mr Andrew Chua Chun-ming, president of Communication Society at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Ms Carey Cheng Choi-wan, president of Creative Media Society at the City University of Hong Kong, said she and her classmates often had to work at school as the computers there were better equipped for assignments.

"But we need to leave at 11 pm every



HKBU students reserve rooms for overnight use as the campus closes at 11 pm.

night and come back at eight the next morning. This wastes our time, energy and money," she said.

Among the nine universities in the city, three of them - HKBU, CityU and Hong Kong Shue Yan University - do not open their campuses around the clock. HKBU and CityU close at 11 pm while Shue Yan closes even earlier at 9 pm. Though campus access of Hong Kong Polytechnic University remains available after midnight, all rooms are locked after 11 pm.

The other five universities open their campuses overnight and provide computer centres or study rooms for students who have to work around the clock. For example, students of the Chinese University of Hong Kong can gain access to these rooms any time by scanning their student identity cards.

Dr Albert Chau, dean of student affairs at the University of Hong Kong, said university students were expected to be able to manage their time and it was not necessary to look after them like primary school students.

"We trust our students, so we don't monitor them a lot," Dr Chau said.

He added that university students should learn to be capable and mature enough to allocate their time for assignments and take care of their own safety.

President of Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union Mr Fung Wai-wah supports the universities' provision of 24-hour study areas.

He said every student had different

working schedules and sleeping hours so such a setup was essential for a diverse range of students.

"Institutes should provide a platform for students to learn to be self-disciplined. It is also a way to establish mutual trust between institutes and students," Mr Fung said.

"Staying up for group projects and deadlines, and working together all night for student activity preparations are precious memories of college."

However, security is an issue. CityU's dean of students Mr Cheung Chor-yung and HKBU's assistant director of Estate Office Mr Raymond Li Chi-man both feel that it would be too dangerous to open study areas around the clock as the two universities were located in Kowloon Tong, a downtown area where strangers might easily get into their campuses.

Both universities provide an alternative for students - reserving rooms for overnight use if they need to.

But students are not happy about the complicated and time-consuming booking procedures.

"They treat us as secondary school students," said Mr William Lu Wai-lam, president of HKBU Student Union.

He added that a 24-hour campus could also raise students' sense of belonging.

"At least my university, rather than a 24-hour McDonald's, would first pop up in my mind if I need a place to work overnight," he said.

EDITED BY MAGGIE TAM

Not your ordinary kitty and puppy

Reptiles and exotic species have become popular pets

BY JASMIN YIU

In the Bible, it is the animal that seduces Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge. In reality, it is a vicious predator that hunts down victims from dark corners with sharp teeth and venom. In many ways, snakes do not fit into popular notions about pets – heart-warming and communicative.

But Mr David Chiu, a 17-year-old schoolboy, is bold enough to take a snake out with his bare hands.

“There’s nothing to be scared of. It won’t harm you,” said Mr Chiu, with a python winding around his body and trying to hide from the light.

“People have to put aside their prejudice. Snakes are beautiful.”

The snake that Mr Chiu has close contact with is just one of the many exotic pets sold in The City Jungle, one of the reptiles shops in Tung Choi Street (aka Goldfish Street) in Mong Kok, which is a hub for pet markets in the city.

The area is like a mini-rainforest, where you can find giant spiders that is about the size of a man’s face, toxic tree-fogs and gecko from South America, to name but a few.

Mr Chiu is just one of many exotic pet lovers in the city, some of whom are prepared to spend thousands of dollars to buy the rarest breed.

There are about twenty turtles and several spiders in Mr Chiu’s home, but he does not keep snakes due to his family’s opposition. Instead, he comes to a reptile shop frequently to see his “friends”.

“He (David) comes almost every day,” said Hei, the shop owner who is in his thirties. “He started raising reptiles and other exotic pets since primary six. He



A snapping turtle opens its mouth for preys. Exotic-looking turtles can be sold at a very high price.



With his bare hand, Mr David Chiu grabs a python, a popular reptile pet for beginners.

began with raising moths.”

The shop owner himself is a pet lover as well. Apart from raising spiders, frogs and turtles, he also has a dog.

“Reptiles are so mysterious and colourful. They are easy to handle, unlike dogs which need more time,” said Hei. “For example, you just need to feed a snake with a mouse every week. Also it has a longer life of about 20 years.”

Depending on the species, the price of a pet varies.

“It can go from several hundreds to several millions for a turtle here,” said Hei. “Prices go up if the species is rare.”

But high prices do not stop people from buying them.

“It is fascinating looking at the snakes swirling around and there is a sense of achievement when you witness the birth of a new breed,” said an employee at the shop. “The whole picture is beautiful. Not only snakes, but also other reptiles.”

Mr Chiu thinks raising reptiles is different from having cats and dogs which are very communicative with human.

“For reptiles, you raise them only for appreciating their slow and delicate movement. You never want a snake to have much interaction with you,” he said.

But there may be a potential danger in raising reptiles that are venomous.

“Some of our reptiles are venomous but the venomous level is not high,” said Hei. “We ordered them through the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, and the department won’t let us sell species that would harm people’s life.”

In the shop, there are around a hundred species, which account for only a small proportion of the whole reptile family.

Other than regulations from the AFCD, shop owners also need to follow whether they are selling species on the list of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The treaty aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Keeping exotic and somehow dangerous pet is not a boys-only option.

Ms Elizabeth Yim Wing-yan, 19, had once kept a beetle and a toad. “Their biological and growing process is wonderful,” said Ms Yim

“And it is cheaper and easier to raise a beetle. You just need to give them some soil, sawdust and water,” she added.

EDITED BY THOMAS YAU

Organic living

To protect the environment and our health,
we have to change our lifestyle

BY JACK AUNG MIN KHIN, CLAIRE CHU, JUDITH KI & LITING YONG



ng

Ms Lilian Wu buys local organic produce from organic food stores such as Green Dots and the Kam Tin flea market, and cooks most of her meals at home.

The 28-year-old wants to save the environment by eating organic food.

“One man’s strength may be weak but is definitely not negligible,” she said.

Ms Wu started having organic meals earlier this year after meeting a vegetarian group in Europe. She then realised she could help save the environment by making a difference in her daily life.

“Organic food means protection for the environment as it generates less carbon, which in turn means less pollution. Chemicals are used only if they are unavoidable,” Ms Wu said.

By going organic, Ms Wu’s lifestyle cannot solve the climate change problem but is a first step. Green groups say raising people’s consciousness is the right way to tackle the problem.

Organic produce grows in farms that do not use artificial chemical fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides.

Organic farms try to maintain the ecological balance in the soil and consume less energy than conventional ones, says Professor Jonathan Wong Woon-chung, director of Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre. A way to do this is to cultivate crops at different times to conserve the soil’s “immune system” of soil and the environment.

“Organic farming tries to be akin to nature so that it maintains a balanced ecosystem. It is a sustainable way for agriculture,” said Prof Wong.

Hong Kong’s economic structure changed due to rapid urbanisation during the 1990s. The total value of agricultural output has become one of the lowest components of the city’s GDP.

“We have a large population in the city and there should be large pieces of land for growing food crops to feed the city’s population. But it isn’t the case,” said Prof Wong. “This leads to importation of food from the mainland. Food travels either by train or air, which consumes a lot of energy.”

Environmental protection groups are mobilising farmers to transform conventional farming to organic farming by providing them with relevant training. Such an improved way of farming helps tackle climate change.

“We should raise local organic production to save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” said Prof Wong.

But he added that it was difficult for

farmers to change because it was a complicated process. On top of technical difficulties, money is another problem for the transition.

“The government spends very little on organic research so the development is quite slow,” said Prof Wong. “This is because Hong Kong’s economy is not dependent on agriculture.”

Despite the lack of government support, Hong Kong Health Food Association said the organic food business in Hong Kong was growing.

The association conducted a survey in September 2008 and found that sales revenue from organic food reached \$10 million a year. It also found that about two million people consume organic produce on a regular basis.

Organic food supplier Homegrown Foods is going to expand their farms in Clear Water Bay next month. The company said the extension was a sign of growth in the organic business.

But organic restaurants such as Posso Pubblico and Life Café said due to

“We should raise local organic production to save energy and reduce greenhouse gases.”

- Prof Jonathan Wong, director of Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre

the lack of supply of organic produce in Hong Kong, it was impossible for them to be 100 per cent organic. But they tried to focus on clean and healthy food that would be good for the environment and have a smaller carbon footprint.

“Some so-called organic restaurants are just partly organic, and we should really be careful,” said Prof Wong.

Although there is no absolute definition of organic restaurants in Hong Kong, the whole process from purchasing, cooking, to serving of food should all be organic, according to Prof Wong.

“It is meaningless if they serve food in plastic bowls, for example, which are harmful to the environment.”

Another reason for Hong Kong people to opt for organic food is health.

“I have quite a healthy lifestyle doing lots of exercise and am quite aware of what I put into my mouth,” said Ms Wu, who is now persuading her friends to join her to adopt an organic diet.

“I am happy about my health now. I hardly feel tired as before. My shoulder pain also disappeared, thanks to a low level of lactic acid in my muscles as I have lots of vegetables in my diet.”





There are currently no regulations on organic beauty products in Hong Kong.

Natural beauty

Organic skincare products are in

Ms Christina Chan Lok-kwan is a 21-year-old undergraduate. She suffered from medical allergy last year that caused rashes all over her cheeks.

“As my skin became super delicate afterwards, I started using organic skincare products,” Ms Chan said.

She saw gradual improvements in her skin condition after four months and this has made her a firm believer in organic skincare products.

The organic concept has not only thrived in the catering industry but has also become a big hit in the beauty industry. The idea of “authentic natural beauty” that can be long-lasting without any harmful effect has become chic.

Ms Mi Chiang Om-ying, beauty consultant at Juice Beauty, said organic beauty products were healthier.

“With artificial chemicals, the effects of non-organic products on the skin can be instant,” Ms Chiang said. “But once you stop using them, your skin becomes dull and dry.”

Organic beauty products share the same requirements as organic food. Raw materials have to be grown without using chemicals such as artificial fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

Professor Jonathan Wong Woon-chung, director of Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre, said the manufacturing process had to be natural and organic, and certified as consistent with international standards.

The US Department of Agriculture is one of the world’s strictest official organic certifier. Its National Organic Program establishes a standard for the production and handling of organic products, ensuring ingredients are natural.

EcoCert is a self-governed control and certification body in Europe accredited by the USDA to issue licences to proven organic beauty products from over 80 countries.

Its standard shows products that reach 95 per cent without synthetic chemical ingredients are allowed to use the USDA Organic label for marketing. Those with 70 to 94.9 per cent are unlabelled and those below 70 per cent are neither considered passed nor labelled, as only certain ingredients are organic.

Similar schemes include Bundesverband deutscher Industrie-und Handelsunternehmen (BDIH) and NaTrue from Germany, Cosmebio from France, Soil Association from the UK and Australian Certified Organic from Australia.

However, for those who do not understand the definition of “organic” and how the systems work, their safety and rights might be at risk.

The lack of proper surveillance for organic beauty products in Hong Kong might become a chance for businesses to use the term “organic” for marketing purposes, even if they sell products with low quality or even no organic ingredients at all.

Smart Slim Beauty Centre is a small-scale beauty centre in Tai Wai. They offer a facial treatment called “Organic Natural Botanical” that claims to reduce skin sensitivity and redness.

As printed on the leaflet, “organic xanthophyll” and “organic botanical jelly” are the two assigned remedies, but certified logos or even the word “organic” are not found on the packages.

“In fact, they’re just natural, but not organic,” said beauty consultant Ms Mandy Lau at the centre. Without elaboration, she then went on to promote how natural products can be as effective and safe in combating skin problems.

A year ago, the Cosmetic & Perfumery Association of Hong Kong addressed the importance of regulating organic beauty products, and contacted the HKORC for forming a certification system for these products in Hong Kong.

However Prof Wong believes it is not the right time to do so yet, due to the lack of resources and researchers.

He said the limited information about the market and the complex production process of beauty products were some other hindrance.

“Besides, most brands that offer organic products are from foreign countries with certifications. It is not that urgent for us to have one yet,” he said.

But prices of different organic products may range from several hundreds to several thousands. There are some affordable alternatives.

Ms Michelle Phan is a Vietnamese professional makeup artist with over a million subscribers on YouTube. She is well-known for her numerous makeup and DIY skincare tutorial videos.

She demonstrated her homemade organic skincare treatment including the rice water toner, egg mask, tomato scrub and sugar olive oil scrub.

These are made up of accessible and affordable organic food, and above all, they are safe to use.

“Anything besides organic could contain pesticides that can be harmful to the skin,” Ms Phan said in her tutorial.



Organic baby wear ranges from hats, blouses and shoes to toys with a limited choice of colours and designs available.

Baby wear goes organic

More parents are opting for organic baby clothing made of fabrics that contain no toxic chemicals

Baby clothes always look cute through shop windows. Mothers can never resist popping into the stores just to take a look at the latest baby fashion.

And some opt for safer materials rather than trendy designs, explaining why organic baby clothing is making a hit in the city. Ms Mak Hoi-shan, 33, is a new mother who is careful about what she puts on her baby.

"I normally wash new clothes before dressing my child, because you know, the bacteria on clothes can harm their skin," she said. "Buying organic clothes for babies is also a way to better protect their skin."

Cotton fabric is used frequently in making organic clothes. Cotton clothing labelled as "organic" means the cotton used is free of pesticides. Instead, organic farmers use natural predators and intercropping to control pests, and use special machinery to control weeds.

In conventional cotton farming, toxic pesticides and synthetic fertilisers are used. Cotton occupies 2.5 per cent of farmlands in the world, and takes up 25 per cent of pesticides and ten per cent of fertilisers of global consumption.

Pesticides are designed to damage the biological systems of insects that are similar in other animals and humans. They can be hazardous to human health.

Aldicarb, the second-best-selling insecticide used for cotton growing, can kill a person if one drop is absorbed through the skin. Statistics show that in the 1990s, almost half of the cotton

workers in the world had symptoms that were related to pesticide exposure.

"Because cotton is inedible, farmers seldom worry about the toxic chemicals and add even more to the soil," said Prof Jonathan Wong Woon-chung, director of Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre.

To provide an alternative to contaminated clothing by pesticides, Ms Joyce Ip Yuen-chi, started her organic baby wear store, "Organic Baby", three years ago.

"Babies are a key factor for bringing organic clothing into daily life", Ms Ip said. "If you had a baby who crawls across everywhere and chews whatever he reaches, you would worry about the toxic chemicals around."

But organic baby wear buyers are restricted to middle-class and educated mums who are aware of the organic concept, says Ms Rainbow Yuen Wai-ping, marketing director of global organic baby wear company Natures Purest.

"The rich even buy a full-set: beddings, blankets, toys and outfits for all occasions," said Ms Yuen.

The design of most organic baby clothes are plain and not very colourful.

"Till now, mums do not find it hard to accept the scarce choice of colours, knowing the benefits of organic cotton to their kids," said Ms Yuen.

But Ms Ip worries that with fewer designs available, it is difficult to develop a bigger market for organic baby wear.

"I would love to see organic clothing becoming the main trend, but it is hardly possible," said Ms Ip. "The designs that can be solely made of organic cotton are very limited."

"In the fashion industry, big brands dominate by fancy designs that inevitably involve toxic paints and dyes. Consumers cannot figure them out."

A dilemma arises as rising demand for organic baby wear means the clothes have to be more fashionable. But to remain chemical-free, organic clothing must come with fewer varieties of designs and colours.

Faced with the situation, Ms Ip upholds her mission to sell non-toxic clothes.

"Colours are surely less attractive due to the limited selection of natural dyes made of soil, water and plants. But the most important thing is to remain toxic-free and chemical-free," said Ms Ip.



Organic toys use a limited selection of natural dyes made of soil, water and plants

Be careful when you wash

Washing with organic detergents may not be eco-friendly at all



Environmentalists suggest making improvised cleansers from vinegar, baking soda and camelia powder instead of using chemical detergents.

The ongoing crave for organic products does not stop at food, skincare and clothing.

Individuals aware of the potential threat from harmful chemicals are even going “organic” with their household detergents and cleansers.

Associate Professor Michael Lam Hon-wah at City University’s Department of Biology and Chemistry said chemicals in cleansers might cause biological damages to both human and wildlife.

“Household cleaners contain chemicals that interfere with our endocrine system which regulates hormonal balance,” said Prof Lam. “Moreover, phosphates in traditional detergents also induce excessive algae growths that jeopardize life cycles of rivers and lakes.”

Solutions to these latent chemical threats are organic cleaning products which are biodegradable and do not contaminate air and water, minimizing risk to human and the environment.

A wide variety of them are readily available from chain grocery stores.

However, not all of these products are able to deliver what they promise. Some may even do more harm than good, when compared to “inorganic” ones.

“Advertising keeps telling us how anti-bacterial or professional-strengthened those cleaners are until we believe cleaning is impossible without them,” said Ms May Cheng Mei-chun, sustainable living officer of Hong Kong Kadoorie Farm and

Botanic Garden.

“In fact, we are exposing ourselves to a variety of undisclosed chemical ingredients that could be dangerous to us.”

Some detergents with “organic” claims are not necessarily the real deal.

“By saying something is organic does not mean it is environmentally friendly,” said Ms Helen Leung Min-hang, spokesperson of Living Green Project, a non-profit voluntary green group.

“That is because of chemical detergent manufacturers’ practices of word-play in labeling their products.”

She added that unlike food and healthcare products, there were no regulations on organic claims for detergents.

So manufacturers could take advantage of that void, and put “green” or “organic” tags to boost the sales of their products.

“Consumers should watch for this duplicitous use of words on detergents, as they might be nothing more than hype. Instead, look for terms like ‘solvent free’ or ‘plant-based’ rather than ‘eco-friendly’ only,” said Ms Leung.

She also suggested that households make their own cleansers with materials such as vinegar, baking soda and camelia powder, which are cheap but effective and environmentally friendly.

“Vinegar and baking soda work like a charm. Just \$5 each and it can save you from all those cleaning products that cost more than \$40,” said Ms Fanny Kwok Shu-fu, a 37-year-old housewife who had long been suffering from chemical allergy before switching to homemade detergents four years ago.

“No more dry and itchy hands. I get bigger storage space without dozens of bottles of unnecessary cleaning products stocked in the house,” she added.

Some in the organic business believes it is more important for individuals to pick up organic principles in life rather than just shopping.

“The pace of life in Hong Kong is so fast that we have little time to slow down and expand our conscience to the health of Earth,” said Ms Ada Lui Wai-kuen, founder of Sisa Essence selling handmade soap with natural ingredients.

“Organic should not be just a label, it should be your attitude towards life.”

DIY cleaning formulas (by Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden)

Tile Cleanser	Vinegar (1/2 cup) + Water (4.5L)
Wooden Floor Cleanser	Vinegar (2 cups) + Water (4.5L)
Wooden Polishing Agent	Olive Oil + Vinegar (Proportion: 3 : 1)
Carpet Cleanser	Soda Powder (Evenly on carpet for half day, then vacuum.)
Carpet Deodorant	Soak in vinegar overnight then rinse with water.
Stainless Steel Utensils	Squid Bone; Soda Powder + Vinegar (Proportion: 3 : 1)
Basin Cleanser	Soda Powder + Vinegar (Proportion: 3 : 1)
Range Hood Cleanser	Soda Powder + Vinegar (Proportion: 3 : 1)
Pipe Drainer	Soda Powder + Vinegar (Proportion: 2 : 1)
Toilet Bowl Cleanser	Vinegar (1/2 cup) + water (4.5L)

EDITED BY ANDY AU YEUNG, BRIAN LAW, LAURA LUO & JOHN XIAN

Wordless expressions

HK's first mime artist acts out his dream

BY SADIE LO

He looks like any other middle-aged men on the street dressed casually in sportswear and sneakers. With no make-up on, he is more than willing to talk about himself.

But when he comes onto stage, he becomes completely speechless, because the professional mime artist knows his performance speaks louder than words.

"Mime helps me understand more about life; it records human gestures and feelings. By observation, you realise everything around you and will dig out more interesting stuff."

Mr Wong Kwok-chung, 47, is a mime artist for over 20 years, and is on stage two to three times a year.

Interest for this silent art form germinated in Mr Wong's mind since he first saw a street performance when he was a primary school student. He then decided to join courses taught by foreign mime masters overseas.

But admission fee was a barrier. In order to pay for his way, Mr Wong worked as a street sweeper for two years.

"The advantage of being a street sweeper was that I did the job only in the

"I might have given up on being a mime artist if there was no way out."

- Wong Kwok-chung, a local mime artist

morning and I could spend time on practicing mime in the afternoon," he said. "I wanted to earn for the learning fees and do what I like at the same time."

At that time, mime was an interest rather than a career to him.

"I might have given up on being a mime artist if there was no way out."

But soon the artist found the industry profitable. Recalling 20 years ago, Mr Wong said the economy of Hong Kong benefited mime artists.

"Working hours were not long compared to the money earned," he said.

From then on, he switched to become a full-time professional mime artist. Yet those days were in the past.

He now teaches at schools and operates a glass studio to make ends meet.

The glass-studio-cum-mime-practice-room costs him \$300,000 a year.

"In the past, I earned five times more than now. It would be better if the rent was lower so that I could focus on the art but not making money," he said.

There are only three to four full-time mime artists in Hong Kong now. Mr Wong believes that the government is not the only one to blame for the slow development of mime in Hong Kong, as people should take an initiative to learn it. Mr Lee Yin-gui, chairman of Fringe Mime and Movement Laboratory, shared Mr Wong's view.

"Most people in Hong Kong know nothing about mime. They always think that mime is about pretending to pull a rope or touch a wall but there are actually different types of mime," said the chairman.

Another regular viewer of mime performances, Ms Cheung So-so, agrees that not many people besides

her are interested in mime.

"I think mime is an art for only a small number of people," said Ms Cheung, who has been watching mimes for 14 years.

"Hong Kong people love comedies and things that let them relax but mimes are mostly about self-mocking and tragic characters," she said.

As the first professional mime artist in Hong Kong, Mr Wong Kwok-chung never gives up and always upholds his motto: "Art is a brand name which is worthy of people's attention".

He plans to give free performances of joyful mime and cross-overs with glass art to sustain his lifelong interest.



Mr Wong Kwok-chung is one of three to four full-time professional mime artists in Hong Kong. He has more than 20 years of experience.

EDITED BY CANDICE WONG



Ms Lo Koon-lan (left) acts Lulu Kim, one of the "Four Crazy Kings" at the Flower Palace Nightclub in drama *I Have a Date with Spring* by Hong Kong Repertory Theatre in 1992.

Drama is her husband

Veteran actress Lo Koon-lan never spares herself in the pursuit of her lifelong acting career

BY SIMON YUEN

The soft-spoken lady with metal-rimmed glasses and scholarly demeanour is a regular at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts.

On different occasions she plays specific characters – sometimes a perfect wife, sometimes a loving mother. In reality, Ms Lo Koon-lan is a strict teacher, an expert in contemporary performing arts and a woman “married to drama.”

“Drama is my husband,” Ms Lo said. “I can’t live without it.”

Becoming an actress was not her plan when she was a secondary school student. “I wanted to be a teacher to influence students on thoughts,” she said.

Majoring in history at the Hong Kong Baptist College, Ms Lo also studied history and geography at the Northcote College of Education.

After graduation, Ms Lo became a secondary school teacher and a part-time actress at the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre for two years. At that time, she was frustrated by her students’ indifferent and premature attitude.

Then she decided to give up teaching and be a full-time actress when the HKRep started recruiting full-time staff.

“I promised myself I will go back to school a year later.”

After completing her one-year contract with HKRep, Ms Lo found her love and devotion to stage performance and stayed at the HKRep for 15 years. She de-

scribes it as a “live show”.

“It is a thrilling experience, and you must concentrate,” she said. “It doesn’t like filming in which you can always have a second chance and retake.”

In 1988, she took up her first film acting as a guest actress in the award-winning film *Chicken and Duck Talk*, directed by Clifton Ko.

Later in 1995, Ms Lo won the Best Supporting Actress award in the 14th Annual Hong Kong Film Awards for another Clifton Ko’s production, *I Have a Date with Spring*.

To her, acting in television series is far less appealing than performing on stage.

“When receiving invitations from TV stations or film companies, I usually accepted them as it was an easy way to make money. I needed money to continue my study.”

For an acting career, completing secondary education should be enough as perceived by many. But Ms Lo had a greater ambition.

“I knew I needed to improve myself and go back to school again. Otherwise I could not make any breakthrough in performing. I felt I didn’t have any new ideas about drama and should learn more. I didn’t want to be mediocre.”

Ms Lo made up her mind and went to Britain to further her studies in 1998. She graduated with a Master’s degree in East and West Theatre Study at Middlesex University in London.

“As an actor, you have to exercise

what you have learnt and experienced. Having profound knowledge in culture, music and literature helps a lot in acting but it doesn’t mean you must have high education levels,” she said.

“The crux is you must keep learning.”

Ms Lo later studied Drama and Movement Therapy at the Sesame Institute in London and Theatre Study at the HKU SPACE as well.

She becomes a senior lecturer of acting at HKAPA in September 2007.

“She is a conscientious teacher. We’re influenced by her great passion for drama,” said Mr Sam Choy Chak-man, a HKAPA’s graduate.

Among the many performances of Ms Lo, *Seagull* is her favourite drama.

“I acted in it at an early stage of my career. Some actors and directors inspired me a lot,” she said.

“I particularly love *Amadeus*, *Desire Under the Elms* by Eugene O’Neill and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello. They allow me to try different characters of different personalities. It is a way to learn and explore.”

Movie lover Mr Hui Ka-ho, 21, is a fan of Ms Lo: “My favourite film of her is *Summer Snow*, a 1995 local production. Being an actress is difficult in Hong Kong. Her performance undoubtedly speaks volume for her competence.”

As a Christian, Ms Lo thanks God for giving her power and faith.

“I don’t want to stop pursuing knowledge and wisdom, and I am still exploring my potential. Who knows what and where I will be in the future?”



Ms Lo acts in drama *Thunderstorm* with her teacher King Sir, Mr Chung King-fai.

EDITED BY VERA CHEN

End of random surprise

Capsule toys are no longer drawn

BY GARY KWOK

By inserting a five-dollar coin into the machine and twisting its button, a semi-transparent plastic ball carrying a surprise roll out.

Inside can be a little Pokémon toy, a mini Sailormoon figure or a model plane with tiny components. You will never know what you can get from the twist you made.

I could never wait until classes were finished and always rushed to a capsule toy machine after school with my classmates when I was in primary school.

Then I gathered my Stitch collection by drawing a capsule toy every day. Capsule toys had made up a large part of joy in my childhood.

But my Stitch collection is no longer exclusive and can easily be found in Gamby. There are even Stitch figures that I failed to add to my series for sale.

Gamby, a shop selling pre-packed capsule toys, was established in 2007. It has opened five branches in the city. Instead of traditional capsule toy machines, Gamby takes out the toys from the plastic balls and sells them directly, at a higher price.

For example, a toy costing five dollars to draw from a capsule toy machine is sold for six dollars in Gamby. Yet fanatics can save money for drawing repeatedly to get their targets.

All sorts of capsule toys can be found here in Gamby such as NDSL pens, Pokémon, Gundam, Hello Kitty and Disney figures... You name it, they have it.

Shopkeeper Ms Connie Chong said they bought these toys from the same suppliers as capsule toy machine companies do at a lower price because they need not plastic balls and the machines.

Looking at the toys in the shop, my childhood memory popped up in mind. Buying these wholesale capsule toys is a lot easier and more convenient. But I am sure something is missing.



Instead of drawing them one by one from a machine, capsule toys are packed and sold wholesale.

Gamby always get flooded with customers, mostly office workers. I see a big contrast between Gamby and Vivi Shop, a capsule toy machine place opened in 2003, where is much less crowded.

Perhaps Gamby defeats Vivi Shop by helping people to save time.

"Office workers are busy. Thus they are more willing to pay for what they want," Ms Chong said.

The pace of life in the city is ever speeding up. Efficiency always comes first. Even for leisure stuff like toys, people are unwilling to sacrifice their time. They would rather pay a lump sum to get capsule toys in packs. Time is everything to most Hong Kong people.

I remember how my schoolmates gathered joyfully in front of the capsule toy machines and made repeated attempts to draw the toys they wanted.

I could see the anticipations in their

eyes and on their faces every time they opened the just-rolled-out plastic ball.

When we finally drew the one we longed for, we felt so contented and would treasure it a lot. But now people are buying capsule toys directly and painlessly. I wonder if they really treasure them as much as how we did.

Prioritising efficiency on top of everything could make progress and improvement of a society. But at the same time, we are losing many pleasant memories. At least, one can never enjoy the unease and excitement from drawing a surprise from a capsule top machine by buying the packed editions.

I reluctantly put down the figure I have been looking for to make a complete collection, walked out of Gamby and spent my last five-dollar coin on a capsule toy machine nearby.

EDITED BY SARAH LAI

I buy organic for karma

How eating becomes an act of love

BY SIMON CHAU

Why are you buying organic? Ask any shopper in local health shop, and you will get something like “it is safer”, “it tastes better”, or “it is more nutritious”.

I have totally different motives. While there is nothing wrong in benefiting the “me” mentioned in those answers, I have my eyes on a bigger picture.

Organic movement dawns in this community

When my colleagues and I simply-mindedly set up Produce Green in 1988, the first organic farm in Hong Kong, we were criticized for being utopian and for growing premium food for the superrich while ignoring grassroots suffering.

Twenty years down the road, organic produces are waiting for us in most districts despite a limited choice. Now the concern is rather whether the organic claims are trustworthy and if they are value for money.

Fear makes us buy green insurance

Hong Kong consumers are on the whole (79% of the respondents selected in markets and shops) ready to pay up to 25% more for authentic organic food-stuff, according to a recent survey report on organic marketing.

And most of them have little idea what “organic” really means in the first place. It is obvious that the primary and often sole reason is safeguarding oneself and the young at home.

The slow but certain climb of organic sales comes happily with a sense of show-off consumerism, and restaurants are waking up to the halo effect and market opportunities of organic dishes.

Break out from our narrow and self-centered vision

The consumers are fancied by the media coverage concerning the health benefits and trendiness of going organic, and dream to go with it. However, there is an absence of altruism, or self-centeredness couple with narrow vision.

Yes, there is not much choice in the local homegrown market as far as organic foods go. My family is running on a tight budget, as I retired from full

time work five years ago. Despite this, we remain a little lavish in insisting on organic provisions on the dining table, because I am convinced that this is simply the right thing to do.

Let there be love: Eat with compassion

To support the organic movement is to practice loving:

Loving our body: We have the full responsibility to keep our health. Organic food provides us with all the necessary vitamins, minerals and in particular the trace elements. It does not poison our body with deadly chemicals, radiation and genetically modified organisms. It is therefore the only suitable choice for our meals.

Loving all creatures and the environment: To produce food for ourselves, humanity is murdering trillions upon trillions of living organisms every day. This is a serious sin. The prevailing non-organic way of farming further destroys the habitat of many animals and plants. Organic farming minimizes such destruction and offers compassion.

Loving our children: We did not inherit this land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children. In other words, we all have the sacred duty to preserve the earth so that our future

generations can survive with all the air, water, and food that are needed, and a good environment. The only way to ensure this is to farm organically.

Loving our sisters and brothers: All communities on this planet are inter-related. By depriving their means of survival with our “modern” way of farming leading to soil erosion and the toxification of the elements, we are intensifying somebody’s suffering with every non-organic product we buy. Our organic choice is invariably a blessing to some souls afar.

Loving the Creator: All creatures come from the same original Source. Every act of anti-natural destruction is one of sacrilege and madness. Organic farming is based on a sense of ultimate respect, and recognition of karma.

If there is a future, it must be Green

The organic revolution is more than one about techniques, marketing and gastronomic enjoyment. It is a revival of the time-honored concept of “body and the earth are one”.

It reminds ourselves that we are what we eat, and it pays, literally and metaphorically, to eat more healthily in physical, ecological and spiritual terms. This is the real “Green Revolution”. I care.



Dr. Simon Chau, former head of Translation Programme at HKBU and former chairperson of Hong Kong Vegetarian Society, co-founded Produce Green Farm in 1989 and Island Club Organic Farm in 2010.

Sunshine is waiting for you

BY CATHIE GUO

“What is organic” and “how to live organic” could be the most confused questions when people talking about “organic”, but it cannot be much simpler as it all relates to our way of living.

Try to imagine a life like this:

9 am, time to work again. Make a cup of coffee, sneeze from the cold central air-conditioning, and start the whole busy day lying in an office chair.

3 pm, after lunch, there is warm sunshine outside the building, but not a beam of sunlight coming through the window shade.

6 pm, time to back home but you cannot leave. The sky is getting dark and lights are on for the endless OT (Overtime) culture.

It might be hard to stay away from such a high-pace lifestyle in a city like Hong Kong. But when you start to think about “organic”, you start to think about an easier, simpler and more comfortable lifestyle compared with the one you are suffering from.

In recent years, the organic market is expanding in many areas. From the most common organic fruits, vegetables and organic farms, to beauty products, baby supplies and even cleaning supplies. Organic concept is gradually be-

coming a trend in Hong Kong. But what does organic mean? The United States Department of Agriculture has provided some evaluation criteria.

USDA shows products that reach 95 per cent without synthetic chemicals inside are allowed to use the USDA Organic label for marketing. Those with 70 to 94.9 per cent pass the system but unlabelled. And those below 70 per cent neither pass nor labelled as only certain ingredients are organic.

However, living organic is not all about these figures, it is not about the food you eat, the clothes you wear, or the beauty products you put on your face.

Middle-class and educated mums buy a full-set of beddings, blankets, outfits and toys for their babies, pay high salary hiring nannies to take care of their babies, and buy them iPads to play with their friends. But how often would they bring their babies to experience the nature?

Office ladies put different kinds of organic food in their mouths to keep fit, and put different organic beauty products on their skin. But how often would they visit the suburbs instead of shopping malls during weekends?

The nature has been far away from

our life for a long time. Even with hundreds of “organic products” around in our homes and offices, the world seems not to be an organic one.

Some may argue either organic products are too expensive or there is not a certification system to ensure their safety, but you can still enjoy an original life with the nature: a blue sky, green grassland, and being alone.

Vietnamese American Michelle Phan has introduced a kind of organic life to us. With about a million fans worldwide, her economic DIY tutorials allows you to have fun with rice water toner, egg mask, tomato scrub and sugar olive oil scrub to beautify yourselves. All can be done in a small kitchen.

Bicycles and outdoor cafes are not far away in the New Territories and Outer Islands. Forget the high cost or the safety matters of the products. It is much more important to enjoy a family time with the nature.

Ms Ada Lui Wai-kuen, founder of Sisa Essence that sells natural handmade soap said: “Organic should not be just a label. It should be your attitude towards life.”

Please remember, sunlight and fresh air are always waiting for you.

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Shop G4, G/F Grand City Plaza, 1-17 Sai Kok Road, Tsuen Wan

Hong Kong Reader

7/F, 68 Sai Yeung Choi Street South, Mongkok

TC2

G/F, 106 Portland Street, Mongkok

People's Recreation Community

1/F, 18 Russell Street, Causeway Bay

Culture Shock

Shop B2, G/F, Mei Sun Building, 4-20 Kau Hui Chik Street, Tai Po



There are five skate parks in the city:

1. Mei Foo Skate Park
2. Morrison Hill Road Playground
3. Chai Wan Skate Park
4. Morse Park
5. Tung Chung Skate Park





Extreme toss

Extreme sports players master their tricks on and off the streets as more skate parks are built

Young people who seek adrenaline rushes and challenges find extreme sports aka X-games a good way to show off their talents. The high level of inherent danger never deters enthusiasts who enjoy pushing their limits.

Inline skating, freestyle BMX and skateboarding are the most popular X-games in Hong Kong. Players drift around, jump, and turn high in the air. They enjoy a sense of self-fulfilment while burning their energy.

The government has stepped up efforts to provide better venues for X-games. Tung Chung Skate Park is newly built in June. And two new BMX parks are under construction in Diamond Hill and Fanling.

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY HELEN WU
EDITED BY MINERVA CHENG



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