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Stop animal abuse

The SPCA says the proposed animal police may not be what the city needs **p17**

Identity crisis

This young Hong Konger would rather that you do not call him Chinese **p19**

THE YOUNG REPORTER
magazine
JAN / FEB 2013



Asia's World City

And one of the dirtiest, too **p28**

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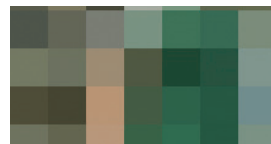
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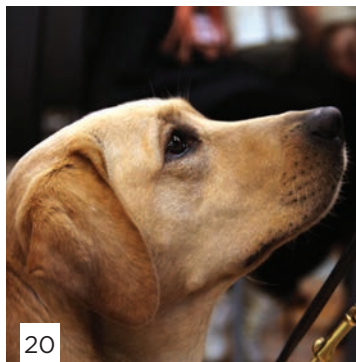
Venus Ho



The cover story of our previous issue offers insight into some issues of homosexuality in Hong Kong. Check out tyr.hk for the stories and more.



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F A C E B O O K

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One Moment



*Hong Kong, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, is one of the the worst air-polluted cities in Asia. Last year, air pollution accounted for more than 3,000 premature deaths and monetary loss of \$39 billion, according to a study released in January by researchers at the University of Hong Kong. Read our feature story to know more about the air you cannot live without. **p28***

Photo by Alan Wong



VACHERON CO

CAP



View

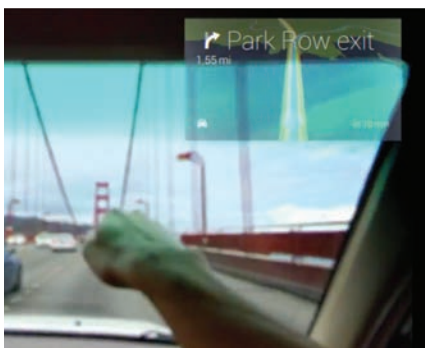
Watch out for wearable gadgets

Not too long ago, phones were dumb and would not tell you jokes even if you beg them. The tablet as we know it did not exist and mobile computing was largely unpopular. Today, it is all but surprising to see the likes of iPhone and iPad under the fingertips of dozens of people on just one car of the MTR.

However, for gadget makers, the need to fish your phone out of your pocket is simply too much of a hassle. (Think 1997, when people needed three different devices just to call someone, send an email, and photograph their Caffè Latte.) Their solutions are gadgets that you can wear.

Google's latest – and possibly its most ambitious – venture is an augmented reality display called Google Glass. In a video released in early February, the futuristic-looking device is shown performing tasks that, however anti-climatic it may sound, most modern smartphones are doing these days. The difference is Glass users would not have to move a finger, let alone a limp.

With the camera, GPS, and microphone on board, Google Glass can take voice commands from users to take photos, give visual turn-by-turn direction, and carry out Google searches.



The Mountain View-based company is not the only one that is marching towards wearable gadgets. Apple, Google's arch-rival in mobile computing, is reportedly developing a wristwatch computer with curved glass that can communicate with the company's iDevices. Engineering feats asides, it is

no small news that two of the biggest, most influential tech giants are showing similar outlooks on future gadgetry.

The rumoured iWatch and the Glass seem a step forward that enables us to get more information with less effort. The Glass, for one, would essentially liberate our hands. The advantage is akin to that of walking on two legs over crawling on all fours. With the Glass, users do not even have to stop walking if they want to look for directions to a restaurant. In fact, they would not even have to pull their hands out of their pockets!

However, some sceptics are quick to argue that asking people to put gadgets on their face is a miserably absurd idea that is doomed to fail.

Google understands that some people, not to mention technophobes, may not find wearing a computer on their face appealing. But a report by social-media analytics company Netbase, published last year in the Wall Street Journal, showed that 77 per cent of people on social networks were "excited" about the Glass, and only about 20 per cent were "skeptical" or thought it was "too much".

Google is well-aware of the style factor, something that Apple has triumphed in recent years, and it is reportedly teaming up with eyewear maker Warby Parker to work out a fashionable (Read: acceptable) look for the Glass, ideally without having to compromise on functionality. Naturally, the next generation of the Glass will also improve in size and longevity.

Another popular criticism is about how more accessible information technology does not improve the quality of living and, on the contrary, risks further downgrading interpersonal communication.

The long-running argument is usually supported by grim scenarios where, because of powerful new gadgets, nobody talks to each other at the dinner table or on the family couch. If the logic stands, however, the Hong Kong government should really



This is not a concept product. Google Glass has been tested by developers for well over a year now. It is expected to go on sale in 2014.

consider banning newspapers in Chinese restaurants to encourage news obsessed fathers to converse with their children. At the end of the day, it is the user that makes the call. People should not shift the blame to the tools when they fail to respect others' feelings.

Some of the fears for these gadgets are impulsive, the privacy concern, on the other hand, is real. If someone hacks into your computer, he may be able to get the video feed from your webcam and monitor all your activity before the screen. If your high-tech glasses are hacked, though, the hacker would be able to stalk you and see virtually everything you see, you can imagine the rest.

Such scenarios can be prevented with the considerable ease of a click or two and moderate digital literacy. Although just as there are people who whine about how Facebook took away their privacy, the service providers should go one step further to educate users in human language (trust me, most people do not read the 119-page end user legal agreement before they choose "I Agree"). Regulators should also always keep a vigilant eye on malicious activities on the cloud which can escalate into a threat to national security.

Although neither Google nor Apple was the first company to attempt to popularise wearable electronics, they are big players who have a proven record of pushing changes in the world of gadgets in a short amount of time. Apple, for one, has created a whole new category of product (tablet computers) and turned it into a demand of millions of people. Their effort may once again completely change the way we communicate with the rest of the world. The year is 2013.

by Alan Wong

City goings-on

We have just said bye to the somewhat universally celebrated Valentine's Day, as being hijacked by malls, bouquets and restaurants. But, as if owners of those didn't rip our wallets, just a month after the V-day, the increasingly popular White Day is just around the corner. For those who have no idea what White Day is, here is the brief:

The Japan-originated White Day, dated 14 March each year since 1978, is so called the "second Valentine's Day" in some Asian countries, including Hong Kong. In Japan, traditionally it is female who sends gifts to male on V-day, Feb 14, and a month later, on March 14, the reverse happens: men who received gifts are expected to return the favour. However, in

modern China and Hong Kong, it is believed to be the other way around, or simply exchanging gifts on both days.

Even though there are claims that the W-day is more like a commercial thing (not that V-day is uncommercial), rafts of couples in the city would still come together and express their love to each other on March 14, by treating their significant others pretty and hearty gifts. So, are we ready, again, to spend tons of money on the hyperinflated flowers and candlelight dinners? Why not go beyond buying stuff for some sweet surprises?

Our editor Heiin makes it easy for you with the following street talks about the apparently special days. **by Heiin Lai**

Valentine

MAN LAU, 30 ARTIST/BRIDE-TO-BE

What did u receive on Valentine's Day (Feb 14) this year?

Basically nothing. It's fine for me because both of us have been really busy with work and our wedding, which is scheduled in March. We simply didn't have time to plan for the day but we did say "Happy Valentine's Day" to each other – I think it's good and sweet enough.

What do you expect to give and receive on White Day (14 March) this year?

Well, mid-March would be even busier. Umm, I will try my best to grab a box of chocolate assortment if possible. I really have no idea what I'll receive from my fiancé. He doesn't seem to know much about W-day actually.

Is there any kinds of gift that you don't welcome on V- or W-day?

Oh yes! I think giving cups and photo stands is just so random and not hearty enough. Also on the list are cosmetics. They are something very personal which are based on receivers' tastes and attachments to certain brands. Some ladies, like I, don't make up often, so the sender should get to know the habit of the receiver before buying.

What is the most terrible V-day gift you have ever received?

I guess it's a bunch of flower I received in secondary school. I hated flowers so much at that time, thinking they are stupid so I secretly threw them away right away. This is ironic, as I actually love flowers a lot now!

What is the best gift you have ever had?

A "chocolate letter". It was a big piece of envelope-shaped milk chocolate and when I bit it, I discovered a real letter with warm love words in it surprisingly. This is impressively sweet!

Can you describe your ideal Valentine's date?

Everything goes in a simple way, like staying at home watching movies for an afternoon, then buying food and making a simple and happy dinner together – as long as my loved one is with me, nothing commercial is needed.





DOUBLE CHOI, 23
POLICEMAN

What do you expect to give and receive on White Day (March 14) this year?

I will tell her about the W-day to see if she wants to exchange something. If she does, I will buy her probably strawberry chocolates or a lollipop.

Is there any kinds of gift that you don't welcome on V- or W-day?

Well, I'd say, I'm fine with everything as long as it's from my valentine! Hopefully, she won't spend too much, though.

What is the most terrible Valentine's gift you have ever received?

I would say a box of chocolates. Well, not exactly "terrible" but it was kind of overly sweet with an "abnormal" texture. I did appreciate the effort of the sender though, just not the taste.

What is the best gift you have ever had?

The leather key bag I got on this V-day. It's very beautiful and useful that I can use and keep it for a long time. And it's quite special when you compare that with other popular handmade items like chocolates and sweets.

Can you describe your ideal Valentine's date?

If the weather is fine, I will take her to a nice beach for sunset or sunrise. If it rains, I will prefer staying at either her or my place, doing some craftworks or making desserts. I'll make the dinner either way, as she likes my cooking.



LILIA LAU, 18
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT

What did u receive on Valentine's Day (Feb 14) this year?

A cup of handmade strawberry panna cotta, plus an artistic photo ornament displaying photos of love memories made by my boyfriend.

What do u expect to give and receive on White Day (March 14) this year?

For the coming W-day, my plan is to make some white chocolates and a heart-shaped love card for my boyfriend.

Do you celebrate on both V- and W-day? How? Why?

Certainly! I love festivals! They give us chances to express our love and gratitude to our love ones which we would sometimes forget amid busy city lives. Usually my boyfriend will treat me a decent dinner in a nice restaurant on V-day, along with some surprises and a gift. I will also prepare a gift in return but it should be smaller than the one I will give on W, and it's another round for him.

Is there any kinds of gift that you don't welcome on V- or W-day?

Yes! Here is a big no to daily necessities, such as clocks and lamps, which I always receive on my birthday and at Christmas, even though giving people clocks is regarded as inauspicious. I would prefer useless but pretty ornaments – they can at least gratify me at the moment I unwrapped it.

What is the most terrible Valentine's gift you have ever received?

It could be a serious fight on V-day few years ago. He had a big row with me and didn't celebrate at all, leaving me alone crying at home. If you are really asking about a concrete one, I guess a short necklace with a crown pendant that I have never put on. I don't really like short necklace and I found that it's somehow difficult to match with my clothes.

What is the best gift you have ever had?

It must be the handmade hot chocolate pudding I received few years ago. It was overwhelmingly delicious and indulgent. Not only did the taste impress me, but also the effort the sender made, given that not many male friends of mine make desserts.

Can you describe your ideal Valentine's date?

I would like a full-Day date starting from a refreshing western breakfast, and then spending our time on theme parks or distant islands like Cheung Chau. We could then do something memorable, special and romantic like beach walking and lastly have a candlelight dinner, perhaps finishing with a Valentines' kiss?

BUSINESS

Storytelling commercials

Advertisers are churning out advertisements that tell stories. Or are they rather stories that advertise?



1. Old, sick, and weak, five old men live a miserable life.

2. They cannot take this life anymore. They want to chase their dreams – on motorcycles.

“WHY do people live?” an old man asks at the beginning of a short film, it proceeds to show five old men, in pursuit of their dreams, riding motorcycles around Taiwan despite their age and physical limitations.

You will have to figure out the answer to that question on your own. But Ta Chong Bank has found its answer to marketing its medical insurance plans. The three-minute film/advertisement, Dream Rangers, has gone viral online shortly after its launch, in 2011.

Short advertising films like that are popping up everywhere from popular video sharing site YouTube to social networking site Facebook. That is in part because of the increasing amount of time people spend online. In 2010, Hong Kong people spend on average 145 minutes

every day on the Internet, that is five minutes longer than on television, according to British market research firm Synovate.

As more companies are turning to online advertising, advertising agencies are coming up with ideas to attract the eyeballs of the online viewers – an audience that is notorious for its short attention span. Unlike TV watchers, web surfers may take the initiative to click a link to or even search for the often minutes-long and story-based advertising films, according to Mr Andy Wong, former creative director of a leading advertising agency and lecturer of the Department of Communication Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University.

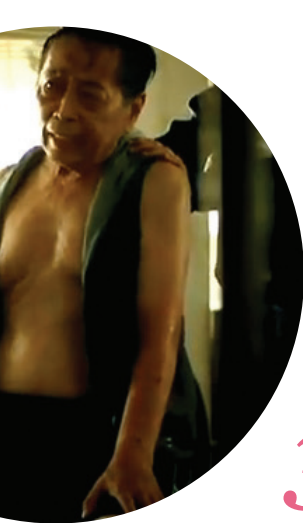
He explained that this feature of short advertising films illustrated a shift in the role of consumers, from a person

who passively received advertising content into one who actively looked for it.

The tricky part of online video advertising is to motivate people to click on the “play” button and keep them watching until the end. “People could stop watching the short films by a simple click, which is much easier than leaving the theatre when watching movies,” Mr Wong said.

Citing the example of “Dream Rangers”, he suggested that one of the best ways to hold viewers is for the films to ask a question at the beginning so people will stay to find out the answer.

Picking up on this advertisement trend, Chow Sang Sang, a Hong Kong-based jewellery retailer and manufacturer, has launched its first short-film advertising campaign named “Forever-



3. *They lift, they run and they practice to get into shape.*



Happy ending.

mark, Forever kiss”, in last November, to promote its Forever Kiss collection.

The short film, available on Yahoo! and YouTube, is separated into three episodes, each lasting about seven minutes. They depict a love story of a man and three women that revolves around the International Kissing Day. They drew over 55,000 hits in the first three weeks.

Ms Emily Li, brand general manager of Chow Sang Sang, believes the success of Chow Sang Sang’s advertising campaign was largely due to the fact that short advertising films, when compared to traditional television commercials, are able to “tell the story and concept of the designs more thoroughly”.

However, despite the advantages of online short advertising films over television commercials, Mr Wong, the Hong

Kong Baptist University lecturer, believes that traditional commercials still has a role to play.

“Consumers expect entertainment, not information, when watching these short films,” he said, adding that television commercials were better suited to provide information than short films.

Besides, Mr Wong said that short advertising films were also more costly to produce than television commercials.

Mr Benny Kung, whose company AnswerMark produced the Chow Sang Sang short film, said that it is more time-consuming for the production crew to shoot these short films.

“Timing is always difficult because the script is long,” he said.

He added that minutes-long advertising films took a lot of time to design

scenes that advertise without compromising the story of the film, which he believed was the key to making an appealing film.

Based on a true story, Dream Rangers have garnered more than six million views to date on YouKu, China’s biggest online video site, it has been forwarded more than two million times on RenRen, the mainland China equivalent of Facebook.

The commercial was selected for a special screening in London in early February by the Institute of Practitioners Effectiveness Awards. The group cited the film’s success of tripling the bank’s growth and its 134 times paid-back for every dollar spent. In retrospect, it appears that more than five men’s dreams have come true.

By **Eunice Leung**
Edited by **Joyce Cheung**

BUSINESS

Fly low-budget

Low-cost carriers are taking off in Hong Kong as Jetstar sets to base in the city

ABOARD a crowded plane towards his Singapore weekend getaway, Mr Christopher Tin is already dreaming about the various delicacies the Lion City has to offer. But back in reality, instead of enjoying a sumptuous plate of Hainanese chicken rice, all he has is a jar of cookies while making do with the tight legroom his seat has offered. His only form of enjoyment? The kiss of the seatback when the person in front of him reclines.

Mr Tin, a Chinese-American expatriate living in Hong Kong, is among an increasing number of people travelling on low-cost carriers in Asia. Instead of driving passengers away by cutting legroom, charging for

in-flight movies, desirable seats,

food and drink and every single piece of checked baggage, cheap tickets of no more than \$500 have proved to be very popular. By ditching traditional services, budget airlines have passed on huge cost-savings by offering low fares to passengers.

While global airline profits are expected to earn 60 per cent, of which its net income will grow to US\$6.7 billion and from US\$8.4 billion to US\$4.1 billion, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Asia-Pacific airlines are bucking the trend and expected to earn profits of US\$2.3 billion.

New low-cost carriers including Jetstar, Tiger Airways, and AirAsia have popped up one after another in cities like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok over the past decade. Two leading low-cost carriers AirAsia and Jetstar even managed to beat aviation giants Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines in brand reputation and trust in a survey by AC Nielsen and an industry magazine in 2012.

"The Asia Pacific market has strong growth potential," said Mr

Albert Tjoeng, the Singapore-based Assistant Director for Corporate Communications of IATA.

He said research results by IATA show 37 per cent of passengers around the globe would travel on routes to, from or within Asia Pacific in 2015. But most importantly, more than one fourth of the rising number would be generated by China and Hong Kong, being the aviation hub of the region, is expected to gain from this boom. He expects the 40 million passengers flying through the territory every year to double within the next decade.

Keeping costs down

In order to keep their prices competitive, low cost-carriers have always been dedicated to keeping operation costs at a minimum.

"Some airlines reduced costs by selling tickets online or via telephone to avoid travel agents commission fees," said Mr Kwok, the Spring Airlines salesman. "It is possible by skipping middleman agencies and reducing the number of employees."

In addition, some budget airlines fly



Spring Airlines

China's only low-cost carrier, started Shanghai-Hong Kong services in 2010. According to its website, the carrier offers round-trip tickets for no more than \$200, less than one third of the fares charged by Cathay Pacific.

"Our flights are at least 90 per cent full on most occasions," said Mr Alan Kwok, a salesman of Spring Airlines Hong Kong. The airline has launched seven more routes from Hong Kong to hubs across China over the last four years and plans to start new flights in the future.

Oasis Hong Kong

Hong Kong's first low-cost carrier. It went bankrupt in 2008 after only two years of operation. Its collapse was partly owing to the surge in fuel prices, which account for around half of its operation costs.

Jetstar Hong Kong

Soon to be launched as a locally-based low-cost carrier in 2012 by Australia's biggest airline Qantas. A joint venture between Qantas and China Eastern Airlines, Jetstar will become the second low-cost carrier based in greater China.

According to aviation experts, it is unlikely for Jetstar to meet with the same fate as Oasis. He said that unlike Oasis, which was a long-haul operator, Jetstar's routes are typically under five hours and is far less likely to be adversely affected by a sudden shrinkage to demand.

to obscure airports, which can be several hours away from the actual destination in order to lower landing fees, said Dr Fu Xiaowen, the Associate Professor in Logistics Studies at the Polytechnic University.

But despite various cost-cutting measures that may turn perspective customers away, Dr Fu believes that low-carriers such as Jetstar will survive as it is already a well-financed airline and has already operated throughout the Asia-Pacific for nearly a decade.

The future

According to Mr Rod Duclos, Assistant Professor at the University of Science and Technology, it may take years of marketing efforts for low-cost carriers to attract traffic to their websites and be considered by customers as the brand awareness of conventional airlines such as Cathay is way higher than its counterparts.

Ms Fiona Campbell, an English businesswoman who has taken Spring Airlines on many occasions, believed that the local population shows a distinct lack

of knowledge and understanding towards low-cost carriers.

"Europeans do travel a lot so flying on a budget airline is just like taking a coach," she said. "But it's completely different here."

Moreover, China's aviation industry is tightly regulated by the government and is currently dominated by three state-owned airlines, which may prove to be a stumbling block for airlines vying for a stake in the largely untapped market.

Aviation experts also points out that Hong Kong's skies may not be big enough to sustain the flocking-ins of low-cost carriers as both runways in the Hong Kong International Airport are already running at close to full capacity.

One possible solution to the capacity problem is to build terminals specifically for budget airlines, according to Dr Fu, the Polytechnic University professor. He cited the example of both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur which had opened Low Cost Carrier Terminals providing only basic facilities.

"No duty-free stores and no coffee while waiting for boarding," he said.

Edited by **Abigail Khoo**



POLITICS

The voters that cannot vote

Quite a number of voters were inadvertently stripped of their right to vote by officials trying to clean up the polling register

IN the last minute of the 2012 Legislative Council (LegCo) election, Ms Hui Yee-yin was not in the mood to join other like-minded neighbours to celebrate the anticipated victory of her favourite candidate. What concerned her most was not to vote right but the right to vote, since she was “deregistered” by the authority, thus barred from the election although she followed its registration instructions.

What further annoyed her that night was the chaotic scene at polling stations. She learnt that some other deregistered voters got their voting right back “after quarreling for a long time,” while her hours-long arguing with the officers has not been translated into a valid ballot. Living in a village house in Yuen Long, the voter of previous two LegCo elections said this was the first time in her life to be deregistered from the New Territories West constituency.

“Judging from the flawed registration procedures and the tumultuous election operation, I cannot be convinced under any circumstances that the government has respected the most fundamental political rights of Hong Kong people.” After speaking emphatically and emotionally, she needed to take a short break during the interview to remain calm.

Registration and Electoral Office (REO), which Ms Hui blamed for its misconduct, has sent inquiry letters in last April to 17 per cent of all electors, or about 296,000 whom the electoral officer considers should confirm their address recorded in the provisional register. If they want to vote, they have to reply before June 30, otherwise their names would be “struck off” from the final register.

As part of the verification measures implemented in January 2012, this was aimed to curb vote rigging, a technique



The mail from the REO, which contained a notification and a map provided by the Lands Department.

She was asked to confirm whether the red box printed on the map circled her home. She could not.

employed by some District Councilors in 2011 to place additional “iron votes” in their constituencies to secure their seats. Ironical cases such as voters with 11 surnames stating that they lived in a 400-square-foot warehouse in Mong Kok were unveiled later, which resulted in ICAC’s investigation towards dozens of suspects.

Among the list of 296,000 “suspected” electors, Ms Hui received the mail from the REO, which contained a notification and a map provided by the Lands Department. She was required to confirm whether the red box printed on the map pinpointed her home, but she said she simply could not since there was no landmark could be referred to, no alley was named, nor a MTR station could be found although her home was several minutes walk away from Yuen Long station.

The only Chinese word appeared on the map was “Kong Tau Tsuen,” name of the village where Ms Hui lived in. “The word is simply useless because every bit of the six-million-square-foot land can be called ‘Kong Tau Tsuen.’ I have no way to find where my home is, even though I have been living here for years,” she said.

She added that she immediately contacted the REO after she read the letter, but got nothing besides more confusion. “If you ring them up for ten times, asking for the staff there for the same issue, you will get eight or nine different responses.”

She can clearly recall one of the responses she got. “This junior officer who answered the phone just said, ‘Oh, don’t worry. It’s not a big deal. If you cannot pinpoint your home, you can simply use your previous address.’”

“I was totally shocked because of his response. I questioned him over his seemingly-fake assurance, but he guaranteed there would be no problem,” Ms Hui said.

Eventually Ms Hui lost her right to vote by following his promise, and could not reach the junior officer any more since she was told that he quitted the job.

Details of the phone call could not be verified by a second independent source. Self-contradiction appeared in subsequent letters sent to Ms Hui was the only evidence of REO’s mistake she could provide, where the authority set the deadline of updating address on July 11 previously but changed it to July 10 in the latest letter.

REO refused to comment on any individual deregistration case after repeating inquiries. Its publicity officer Mr Joseph Wong said any complaint from the voters would be followed up and dealt with privately, while he did not deny any resignation of his colleagues

in recent months.

According to the current legislation, the Electoral Affairs Commission Regulation Chapter 541A that concerns the geographical constituencies of Legislative Council election, says the Electoral and Registration Officer “must enter into the omissions list the name and principal residential address of any person to whom the REO has made an inquiry and asked for information but the required information was not received by the REO on or before the specified date.”

Mr Albert Chan Wai-yip, elected lawmaker whom Ms Hui planned to vote for, criticized the electoral system as “harsh” and “ridiculous.” “It is totally the government’s fault. How can it deregister so many eligible voters simply because they have not replied the letter? And how can it verify elector’s information in such a silly way?”

He said he questioned the government immediately after the 2012 election due to the “unprecedented discontent among the society,” but did not get any response until October 31, when Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Mr Raymond Tam Chi-yuen issued a written reply defending the REO’s exclusion of six per cent of eligible voters was in accordance with the relevant electoral legislation.

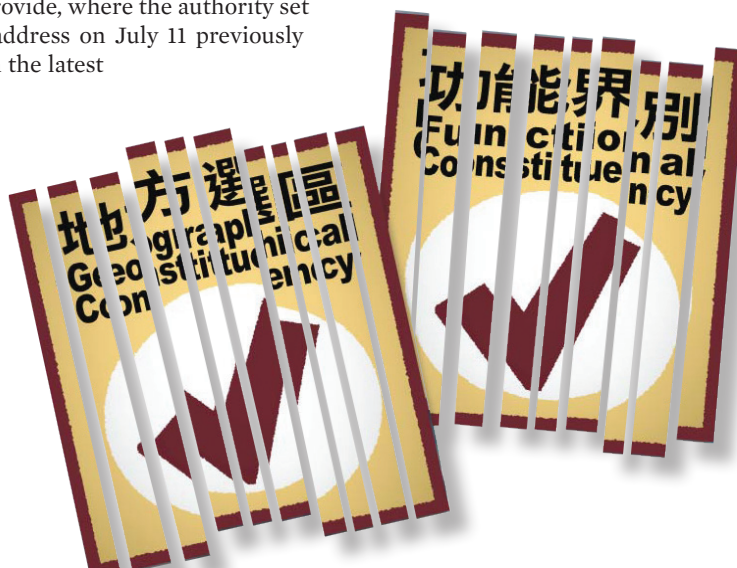
Commenting on Ms Hui’s case, Mr Chan Che-po, political science assistant professor of Lingnan University said the registration regulation might have restrained some people to vote, but the larger issue was that many deregistered voters were simply too “political apathetic” to cast their votes.

Although the voter turnout has increased to a record high of 1,838,722 in 2012, Mr Chan believed it we could only expect greater participation among the public after the implementation of universal suffrage in 2017. As he described, many people cannot see the value of their votes until they can directly elect their top leader.

But now, Ms Hui has indeed lost her voting right in this LegCo election. She felt confident to win a judicial review against the REO, but she did not apply for that due to its cost.

Instead, she lodged a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman, wishing that the election regulation can be improved in future.

“I haven’t done this (complaining to the ombudsman office) before,” she said. “I can imagine how difficult the process could be, but I am determined to take this tough journey.”



EDUCATION

Channel 101: Sex Education

NOW TV's controversial TV programme highlights the city's slow progress in sex education

FANCY seeing footage of naked people? How about close-up shots of sexual organs? While these images are usually confined to the boundaries of pornographic videos or biology textbooks, they can now also be seen, albeit controversially, in your living room.

The Sex Education Show, a television programme, was meant to be a groundbreaking attempt to explore sensitive issues such as sex, virginity and contraception. Since its premiere in November 2012 till its last episode in mid January, it had ignited public debate on sex education, of which one of the hosts and a lecturer at Hong Kong Baptist University's Department of Social Work, Mr Shiu Ka-chun, saw it as successful.

No sooner was it aired on Now TV's channel 100, the TV-operator's most popular channel, the programme was forced to move to Channel 101, which has fewer audiences, as it was swiftly denounced for being too radical and extreme.

"After the premiere of the programme, we received many complaints from parents," said Mr Shiu. "But it also means we have done something right."

He agreed to host the hotly-debated programme, which invited various experts to discuss sexual topic openly, because he believed that conventional methods of passing on sexual knowledge such as the sex education curriculum in schools, were inadequate.

Mr Shiu said it was common for parents and teachers to dodge certain embarrassing aspects of sex such as circumcision, ejaculation and orgasm. In addition, the wide usage of pictures, soft toys and scientific terms in teaching had also made the topic difficult for children to fully understand what they were learning.

He also criticized that schools usually tackled sexual education from a moral standpoint, which further restricted the more "humane and realistic" approach on sex education.

According to a survey conducted by the Youth Crime Prevention Center of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, fallacies over sexual intercourse are widespread among teenagers. Among

Mr Shiu Ka-Chun is the host of the controversial programme on sex education.



273 youths interviewed in 2011, 35 per cent thought "ejaculating outside the vagina" was an effective contraception method, while another 12 per cent said washing their bodies after sex was also effective. But they are not.

Mr Tim Ho, a former teacher with 13 years of experience in teaching sex education blamed the government for not providing enough resources to schools. He said the government last issued a guideline on sex education 15 years ago and most of the content are now long past their expiry date. The Education Bureau had altogether issued two guidelines on sex education, the first one was in 1986, while the second one was in 1997.

However, Mr Chan Yiu-kit, executive of the Education Division of the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPA), said it was difficult for schools to use

the way how Now TV's Sex Education programme taught sex education.

"It takes time to talk about sex openly and positively in society and especially in school," said Mr Chan, who was also invited to the premiere of Sex Education. "We focus instead on explaining the human structure, rather than details of sexual intercourse."

Mr. Chan said the FPA did see the need to step up its efforts in promoting sex education in the territory and had been offering training seminars for teachers of all levels, which focused on the proper communication skills needed to educate children about sex.

"Schools are interested in these programmes and we receive applications from over 100 schools every year," said Mr Chan, adding that the government had also set up a website offering teaching materials such as case studies and animations, but admitted that it was far from sufficient.

Mr Ho, the former teacher, agreed that it was time for various parties to show their support in promoting sex education in schools.

He suggested that the government should allocate more money to revamp the sex education curriculum, while schools should set up a specific task group that was primarily responsible for teaching it.

By **Eunice Leung**
Edited by **Joyce Cheung**





Photo by Kathleen Wong

According to the Animal Work Scheme, the animal cruelty incidents dropped to 49 between January and November, a fall of 20 per cent from 61 at the same time last year.

SOCIETY

SPCA: animals need more than just dogcatchers

Animal rights group wants law-enforcement powers

EFFORT to set up designated “animal police” in the city to tackle animal cruelty would go for naught, says a spokesman for the Hong Kong branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

That position puts the organisation at odds with a coalition of other animal-welfare groups that began calling for an official animal protection squad after a photo of a bleeding stray cat in Sau Mau Ping racked up thousands of comments on Facebook last year.

Thousands of animal-rights activists marched to the Central Government Offices in January to urge the creation of animal cops to crack down on pet abuse.

Civic Party lawmaker Ms Claudia Mo Man-ching, who joined the January rally, said:

“The police arrested the five abusers immediately on the next day after receiving the report [of the Sau Mau Ping cat abuse incident]. It proves only the police is capable enough to protect animals from cruelty.”

Yet, the SPCA of Hong Kong sees animal cops as “unnecessary” since their staff performs a similar function.

Ms Rebecca Ngan, public relations and communication manager of the SPCA, said her group had 20 full-time members responsible for taking rescue calls and investigating reports of animal cruelty.

“The police are experienced in dealing with criminals, not animals,” she said. “They rely on us to provide them with professional knowledge and

veterinary reports on the animal victim in the event of a prosecution.”

Creating animal police to handle animal cruelty incidents would be a waste of time and money, Ms Ngan added, since 80 per cent of the allegations stemmed from pet owners’ carelessness, not intentional cruelty.

At present, the SPCA investigative team is working on an “Animal Watch Scheme”, introduced by the Police, with the

support of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

The scheme intends to fight animal cruelty through education, publicity, intelligence gathering and investigation. However, many animal activists were disappointed.

Ms Cheung Yuen-man of the Alliance for Hong Kong Animal Police deemed the scheme “fruitless” when she found that only 100 out of 994 animal abuse incidents between 2006 and 2012 resulted in legal proceedings.

“The three bodies [the SPCA, AFCD and FEHD] are powerless,” the spokesman for the coalition of 14 animal concern groups said. “It [the scheme] is ineffective and inefficient.”

The campaign on animal protection leaves a lot to be desired. According to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Ordinance, the SPCA of Hong Kong does not function as a prosecuting body. It has no right to access CCTV, to do house search and to arrest suspects.

The SPCA’s spokesman said the ordinance hampered the organisation’s efforts to help secure animal welfare.

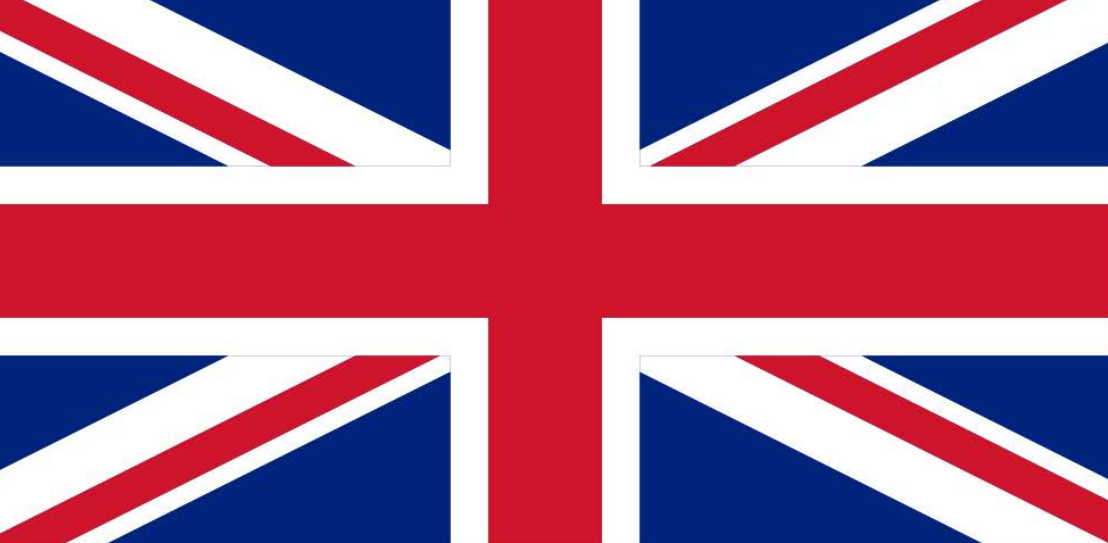
“Hong Kong is lagging behind with anti-cruelty legislation. Animal welfare has failed to keep pace with the city’s developments since the ordinance was implemented in 1935,” Ms Ngan said.

She wishes the government could revise the ordinance to authorise the SPCA with power to halt cruelty to animals.

The detection of animal cruelty has to be carried out with no delay because we can only have environmental evidence—since our “victims” cannot speak, she said.

The idea of “animal police” originated from an American reality television series “Animal Cops.” The award-winning episodes, premiered in 2002, filmed how volunteering animal police saved pets that faced abuses.

The series have since inspired the Dutch authorities to create, in 2011, a 500-member animal police squad that investigates animal abuse. Similar bodies have been set up in the United Kingdom and Sweden.



SOCIETY

War of identity

Growing social discontent is fueling Hong Kongers' battle against a Chinese identity

THERE is perhaps little doubt that a New Yorker is an American national and Londoner a British national. But when those who live in Hong Kong call themselves Hong Kongers, they may be implying that they are of a different “nationality” from Chinese.

Sixteen years after the British handover of Hong Kong to China, the Union Jack surged back to Hong Kong's political narrative as throngs of demonstrators waved the British Flag in anti-government marches.

One of them is Mr Danny Chan Chichun, 26, a computer technician and spokesman for the Facebook group “We are Hong Kongers, not Chinese”.

“For us, the word Chinese is a de-

rogatory term. You cannot describe me as Chinese in a political way,” he said, insisting Hong Kong's residents and mainland China's are of different ethnic groups.

Mr Chan said there was a vast gap between the two places owing to more than a century of separation after Hong Kong was ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. “We have totally different lifestyles, languages, cultures and even political environment,” he said.

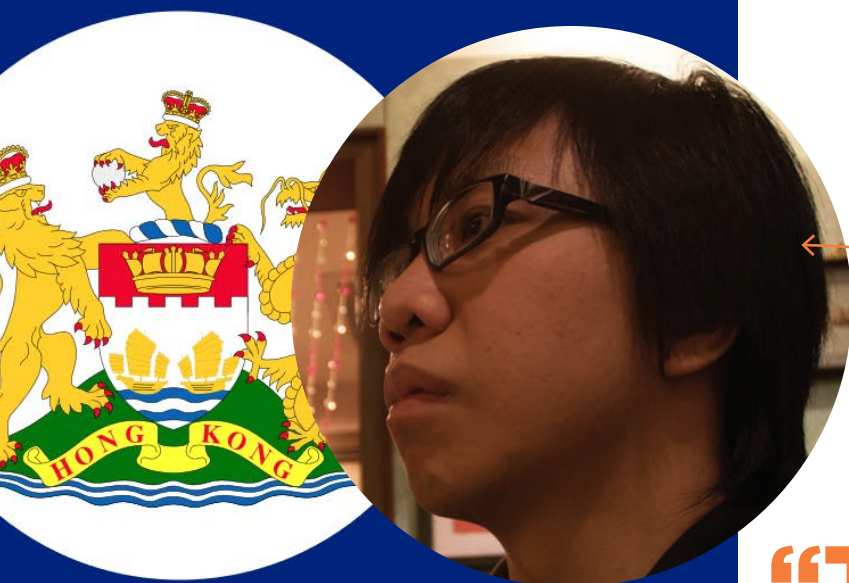
The idea of Hong Konger arguably emerged in the late 1970s, well before the handover, and has since undergone ebbs and flows as the political and economic atmosphere changed.

The number of Hong Kong people who identify themselves as Hong

Kongers hit a new high last year, according to a poll last June by the University of Hong Kong. Of the 1,001 people surveyed, around 46 per cent considered themselves “Hong Kong Citizen”, whereas only about a quarter of respondents called themselves “Chinese Hong Kong Citizen”, a slightly more popular choice than “Chinese Citizen”.

Some Beijing officials and pro-establishment newspapers panned Mr Chan and his associates for instigating independence for Hong Kong. Mr. Chan denied right away and saw their punitive comments as a joke.

“What I have been doing for a long time is to complain to the Chinese and Hong Kong governments about their tyr-



“The flag represented Hong Kong before 1997 and our nationality.”

anny and dictatorship. The flag means nothing to Hong Kong independence,” he said.

On the other hand, Mr Lew Mong-hung, a delegate to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, said he was “100 per cent Chinese”.

Born in Guangdong province, he fled to Hong Kong 40 years ago soon after the Cultural Revolution broke out.

“We are no doubt Chinese. You can disagree with what the government does but cannot deny your identity as a Chinese. This is completely unethical,” he said.

Dr. Benson Wong Wai-kwok, assistant professor at the Department of

Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University, sees the rise of a Hong Kong identity as a way of denouncing the Chinese and Hong Kong governments.

In his view, some Hong Kong people still reminisce about their way of life during the colonial rule. Meanwhile, people are dispirited by mounting social problems after the handover and incensed by Beijing’s interference in local affairs.

“What they want is to get what Hong Kong people are supposed to have: universal suffrage, press freedom, economic growth,” Dr Wong said. “They no longer remain silent on all these issues.”



The British colonial flags were used to demonstrate the local identity of Hong Kong in recent protests.

By **Lawrence Mak**
Edited by **Clarie Lee**

SOCIETY

Our long-ago friends

Guide dogs are resuming their helping roles in the city

GUIDED by his best friend, Deanna, 60-year-old Mr Tsang Kin-ping cautiously feels his way through an MTR station. Instead of explicitly telling the visually-impaired Mr Tsang to cross the gap between the train and the platform, the furry companion takes the lead to step across it.

Mr Tsang is startled by Deanna's move, but regarded himself lucky as he is only one of the three people in Hong Kong that can enjoy guide dog service in the territory in recent years.

With light brown fur, Deanna is a Labrador Retriever that does not appear as tender as her name suggests. Passengers often keep sturdy Deanna at arms' length since she always looks serious and, for some, even aggressive. The unfriendly distance has troubled Mr Tsang and other guide dog users.

"They [local citizens] don't have basic knowledge about guide dogs, or how to serve guide dogs properly, and that bothers guide dog users," says Mr Tsang, the vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Guide Dog Association (HKGDA), the first non-profit institution providing guide dog services in town.

Another example would be the refusal of entering restaurants or other public places because of the existence of the dog. Ms Inti Fu Tai-fun, another

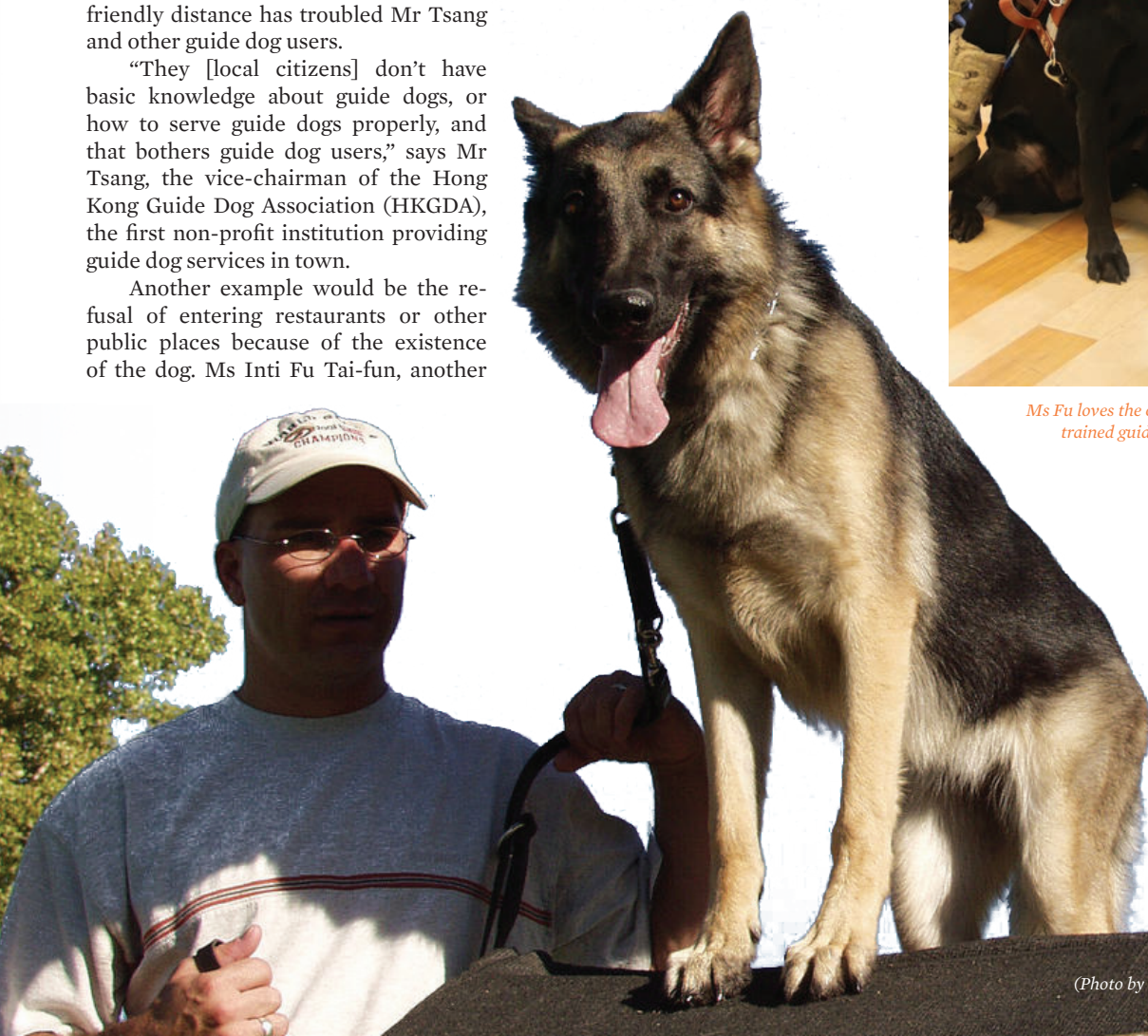
guide dog user in Hong Kong, was rudely refused by a head waitress to enjoy her meal in a restaurant with her dog Nana.

"It's true that pets are not allowed to enter restaurants, but guide dog is an exception," Ms Fu says, basing her argument on the Food Hygiene Code by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department that says a dog which serves as a guide for a blind person should be allowed into food premises. She even called the police to solve the matter, but soon left because of the long waiting time.

But the situation of guide dogs was not always upsetting. Everything was very positive when Ms Fu and Mr Tsang went to United States of America last summer to collect their guide dogs and had a one-month pairing training ses-



Ms Fu loves the colour of her US-trained guide dog Nana.



A German Shepard training to be a guide dog.

(Photo by Magic The Eye Dog/Flickr)

Logo of Guide Dogs, a guide dog service provider in the UK



sion to break the ice. And in early January, one of the local dining groups, Super Star Group, starts to welcome guide dogs and their users to enjoy their meals in the group's restaurants.

"The re-introduction of guide dogs to Hong Kong after 38 years of absence have re-granted visually impaired people the right of making choices," Mr Tsang says.

Thirty eight years ago, in 1975, two guide dogs were introduced to Hong Kong. Due to the lack of facilities and knowledge to look after the dogs, the two guide dogs died because of sickness and traffic accident, according to HKGDA. Since then, the guide dog service was scrapped.

The re-introduction has relit the hope of visual impaired people - they can now choose between using a cane and a guide dog. But since guide dogs have been absent in society for four decades, Mr Tsang is worried about society's lack of acceptance and knowledge.

Speaking from his experience, he and Deanna are denied admission or discouraged to enter public premises, where free entry of guide dogs is actually protected by the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, for numerous times.

Similar to Ms Fu, an MTR staff member stopped Mr Tsang on the platform, and asked him to wear a sign labelled as a visually impaired person if he claimed Deanna is a guide dog rather than a pet. And in another occasion, Mr Tsang had to wait for the collective decisions of five-star hotels in the city on whether to accept his buffet reservations if he requested to bring his guide dog in.

The crux of the problem, Mr Tsang thinks, is the lack of education and train-

ing among staff members from all levels of the business hierarchy, both senior management and the frontline.

"It is the service providers' responsibility, not the passenger's responsibility to explain everything," he says, when it comes to the elaboration of the guide dog service. "They can't expect guide dog users to explain every single time in the following years."

According to Mr Tsang, HKGDA is providing education and training to staff members from various businesses. They are also striving for guide dogs' entry to hospitals, where all live animals are currently prohibited.

Any efforts made to improve guide dog services will not only benefit the three user-dog pairs, but also potential guide dog users. Mr Eddie Lee Kar-tar, a HKGDA guide dog mobility instructor, who is responsible for matching a suitable guide dog with a user and training the pair to coordinate, says as 10 more guide dogs puppies will arrive in the city around spring.

The puppies will then receive trainings from foster families, and receive knowledge on how to interact with human beings and behave appropriately on various social occasion. However, HKGDA has already foreseen some obstacles that puppy raisers will face when train-

ing puppies in public premises.

For example, although the free entry of legally recognised visually impaired people accompanied by qualified guide dogs is protected by the current legislation, guide dog puppies and their raisers have no legal grounds in Hong Kong, according to Mr Lee.

"If a restaurant refuses a guide dog puppy to be trained in it, it is not an offense," he adds. However, he points out that it would be "disastrous" as the puppies fail to be trained in real-life public settings.

Therefore, HKGDA is calling for the government to introduce new legislation to protect the free entry of guide dog puppies into public premises, and in the long run, to grant the same legal status of puppies with qualified guide dogs.

"However, passing a new legislation does take a long time," says Mr Lee, hoping that all obstacles will be solved in near future.

At present stage, the group is planning to have 30 more guide dogs serving in the territory in five years. And to further develop the service, they are recruiting people who are interested in developing guide dog service in Hong Kong and hoping to construct an Assistance Dogs Centre that would serve as a training ground and veterinary clinic.

By **Vanessa Piao**
Edited by **Sophia Fu**

HEALTH

Water birth yet to gain acceptance

Already popular in the West, when will water birth be a legit alternative to painful traditional delivery methods for expecting moms in Hong Kong?

CHILDBIRTH is always associated with excruciating pain, constant screaming and lots of pushing. While water birth has gained popularity in the West a gentle alternative for labouring, it is yet to have its day in Hong Kong.

Water birth, a childbirth that occurs in water, is expected to cause the expecting mother less pain by offering perineal support, which decreases the risk of tearing and reduces the use of episiotomy.

"I recently gave birth to a son in a birthing pool. I had a profoundly positive experience." Said Stephanie Chung, 32 and a mother of two.

"When I had my first child through regular labor, it was quite difficult, because I had such a weak body and it got worst as I was trying to recover after giving birth," said Chung, adding that she had only heard positive feedbacks about water birth.

Chung found out about water birth from one of her friends in Canada, who has benefited from water birth. Chung remained skeptical of this procedure until she consulted the doctor. She decided to give it a try.

It is said that the warm water provides a calming influence and a relaxing atmosphere to the mother in labor.

"In the process of water birth, my skin was less likely to tear because the water softened and stretched my skin. The water was body temperature so that it was not as hot as a bath. As my body heated up during labor, the water was very refreshing," added Chung.

While water birth is nothing new in many countries, Hong Kong seems to be a step behind, in terms of public acceptance and proper facility.

"Water birth is a relatively recent development in the Western world and has become very popular overseas. yet here in Hong Kong, people know so little about it," said Mr. Cheung Kwok-leung, an obstetrician who has been in the gynecology field for more than 15 years.

He confirmed that laboring in water can help the mother to fully realize her primordial power to take control of labor pain and optimize the birth experience.

Although laboring in water seems to be a better delivery method for pregnant women, hospitals in Hong Kong have not been equipped with proper facilities for safe water birth.

Although laboring in water seems to be a better delivery method for pregnant women, hospitals in Hong Kong have not been equipped with proper facilities for safe water birth.

Candy Li See-wai, an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) nurse at the Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital - Tai Po Hos-

they are not certified to do such things," Said Cheung.

In deed, there is no birthing center or home birth allowed under the system in Hong Kong for water birth, the only exception is to hire a doula, who can bring a birthing pool to help during the process of labor.

Chung added that because of the scarcity of support for water birth in Hong Kong, it was difficult to find a midwife who would agree to what she had planned for her labor, as it is not an en-

"I had a profoundly positive experience."

-MS STEPHANIE CHUNG, MOTHER OF TWO

pital said, "As giving birth in water is not yet endorsed or supported in hospitals in Hong Kong, the lack of sanitization of the equipment being used make the process risky for mothers and their new born."

Another concern that Chung had before deciding to try out water birth was not being able to have an epidural or to be drugged for the delivery.

"Midwives or doula are not allowed to give out drugs to the woman in labor as

dorsed process for expecting mothers.

"Unfortunately, water birth is very unpopular here, hospitals do not usually authorize or recommend it at all." Said Doctor Cheung.

"But I know for a fact that if an expecting mother is willing to compromise, the Matilda International Hospital allows women to spend some of their labor time in a hot warm bath and just get out for when the baby is ready to be delivered."

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ENVIRONMENT

Friendly flies

The insects' babies may bring new hope for the city's food waste problem

CLINGING to smelly scraps and chewing them may sound disgusting, but this is how a few thousands of Black Soldier Fly Larvae (BSFL) compost up to 10 kilograms of food waste every day in Aubree, Hong Kong's pilot bioconversion site in Fanling.

"That is similar to eating up 20 dead fish within 24 hours," said owner Mr Cheng Yin-kai, who has spent about two years working on bioconversion of food waste. The process uses agents like the

larvae to convert organic materials into usable products or energy sources.

Although small in size, the worm form of adult Black Soldier Flies may solve one of the biggest problems Hong Kong is facing. The latest government figures shows that approximately 3,600 tonnes of food waste are produced each day. That is 40 per cent of the solid waste going into municipal landfills. Since the city is expected to run out of landfill space by 2018, there is an urgent call for

new ways to reduce waste.

"What makes Black Soldier Fly larvae special is that they will eat almost any food," said Mr Cheng. "No matter how salty or oily [the scrap is], the brown larvae eat them all. They even eat bones."

Apart from waste consumption, the larvae are also a nutritious and cheap fish food. "The worms can turn the amount of protein in food scraps from about 10% to 40%," Mr Cheng said. He added that the fish in his pond stayed healthy after being

Black Soldier Fly Larvae eagerly gobble up all sorts of food scraps.

3,600



fed the larvae, and it was cheaper.

While there seems to be many advantages, Mr Wong Woon-chung, professor of Biology at Hong Kong Baptist University, thinks it is not a good idea to mass reproduce the fliers for large-scale bioconversion.

“Bioconversion technology is difficult to operate on a large scale because of the uncertainty of the biological growth of the insects,” he said, citing the findings from a composting pilot programme that

took place between 2009 and 2010 in Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden. He explained if a disease broke out among the insects, the operation would have to stop.

“These technologies should only be operated on a small scale and they alone cannot solve the food waste problem in Hong Kong,” Mr Wong said. “Besides, odour and the containment of the flies are also issues of concern, especially when we cannot control the factors that

influence the growth of the flies.”

But Mr Cheng of Aubree does not seem to worry much. He said the smell of ammonia was unavoidable in the larvae’s consumption, but it could be relieved through ventilation. “At least it smells better than leaving the waste untouched,” he said. “The bioconversion programme takes time to develop,” he added, “but I strongly believe that it will succeed.”

By **Andrew Wan**
Edited by **Jackie Yin**



100 tonnes of food waste
produced each day

40 per cent
portion of the
garbage ending
up in municipal
landfills that is
from food waste

ENVIRONMENT

Small change, big differences

Can Hong Kong go smart with new energy saving technology?

YOU may not have heard of the “Smart Grid” project, but some Hong Kong citizens are now experiencing an “environmental revolution” brought by the plan as they can know their electricity consumption.

The “Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) Pilot Scheme”, organized by The CLP Power Hong Kong Limited (CLP), is the first “Smart Grid” project of the company that aims to allow people make better decisions on electricity consumption and in turn achieve a greener lifestyle. The 18-month long trial starts from the beginning of this year, and more than 5,000 residents from private and public housings and a thousand small to medium-sized enterprises are participating in the project.

To inform citizens about the amount of energy they have used, a small measuring meter is installed in their houses and provide users information on energy usage and tips to lower energy consumptions. An alert signal will also be sent to the participants if their energy usage has reached a high level. If citizens want to find out more, they can read them through web portal or download a “CLP Hong Kong App” to their smartphones.

And to better educate and promote

the advantages of this new technology to citizens, the power company has also set up the first Smart Grid Experience Centre in Hong Kong in 2011.

The “Smart Grid” technology was first mentioned by the president of the United States of American, Mr Barack Obama. The goal of using this technology was to reduce electricity bills in different households, as users are differentially charged for electricity consumption during peak hours and off-peak hours of demand in America, and as a result to reduce greenhouse gas emission. Since its introduction in 2009, several countries and regions, including Hong Kong, welcome the plan and have started their own research on the project.

Appealing as the new meter may sound and though the goal of the pilot scheme is different from that of the American project, some wonder if the installation of such gadget with Smart Grid technology will lead to health problems.

Dr Mah Ngar-yin, a Smart Grid researcher, finds that the smart meter could emit radiation that cause sleeping and emotional problems. But, so far there is no scientific proof that can confirm Dr Mah’s finding.

She even points out that some for-

eign citizens dislike Smart Grid because of the inaccuracy of the meter charges and related privacy issue.

Yet, Dr Josie Close, a practising architect and an Smart-Grid-advocate, disagrees with Dr Mah’s view on health and privacy for there is no solid evidence to





Example of a smart meter, in use in Europe, that can reduce load, disconnect-reconnect remotely, and interface with gas and water meters

“The biggest motivation for foreign users to use Smart Grid is that they know the various power charges in different usage hours, so they can alter their consumption habit...”

MR IP CHI-MAN, CHIEF SECRETARY OF GREEN FUTURE, AN ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

caused a few thousand premature death and a loss of HK\$39 billion last year, according to the University of Hong Kong.

“It is well aware that the Hong Kong community is extremely discontent with poor air quality, while the electricity expense is getting more expensive,” Dr Close says. “Actions must be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help consumers through detailed metering to understand their pattern of consumption and thus control their own electricity use.”

However, she does not believe the CLP’s pilot programme could facilitate the development of Smart Grid technology as there are only two electricity suppliers, CLP and The Hong Kong Electric Company in the city. They provide electricity without price variation during peak hours or off-peak hours of demand, a situation that contradicts the initial goals of the project which aims to reduce electricity bills.

She says the monopoly of electricity suppliers is the barrier to launch Smart Grid in Hong Kong.

“[There is] no opportunity [for users] to change to another electricity supplier, to reduce our bills through differential tariffs, nor an easier way to generate electricity from renewable energy sources,”

Dr Close says.

Her concern is reiterated by Mr Ip Chi-man, the chief secretary of an environmental organization, Green Future, who is aware of price inflexibility that might hinder the full implementation of Smart Grid technology in the territory.

“The biggest motivation for foreign users to use Smart Grid is that they know the various power charges in different usage hours, so they can alter their consumption habit according to the price,” Mr Ip says. “However, the current market structure (controlled by two power companies) in Hong Kong does not allow us to do so.”

He adds that a market structure reform is needed if Hong Kong is to launch Smart Grid and the government should take initiative in promoting the technology.

“Even if the local market structure cannot be altered within a short period of time, the government can set up laws to “force” the two suppliers enforce Smart Grid,” he says.

Though there are challenges ahead, he thinks Hong Kong is on the right track in creating a greener environment.

“There is a long way to go, but it is definitely the right way,” Mr Ip says.

By **Andrew Wan**
Edited by **Kris Lui**

prove their doubts on the technology, and she adds the possibility of leaking one’s private information is higher through on-line purchase.

Instead, Dr Close emphasizes the compelling need for Hong Kong to implement Smart Grid technology as the city has serious air pollution, of which it has

Harder to breathe

*By Brian Yap,
Ruby Leung,
Venus Ho*

W

ALKING through the thick blanket of translucent smog that enveloped the jam-packed thoroughfares of Sham Shui Po, Ms Wong Siu-bing was suddenly seized by an uncontrolled spate of heart palpitations.

Perspiring profusely while desperately gasping for breath, she soon gathered her wits when the panting subsided and trudged on.

She is one of the tens of thousands of chronic asthma patients in Hong Kong, a pollution-stricken metropolis where respiratory diseases are one of the top leading causes of death, according to statistics from the Centre for Health Protection.

Having been diagnosed with asthma,

she was subjected to multiple daily doses of inhaled steroids, while constantly experiencing sleepless nights marked by acute heart perspirations.

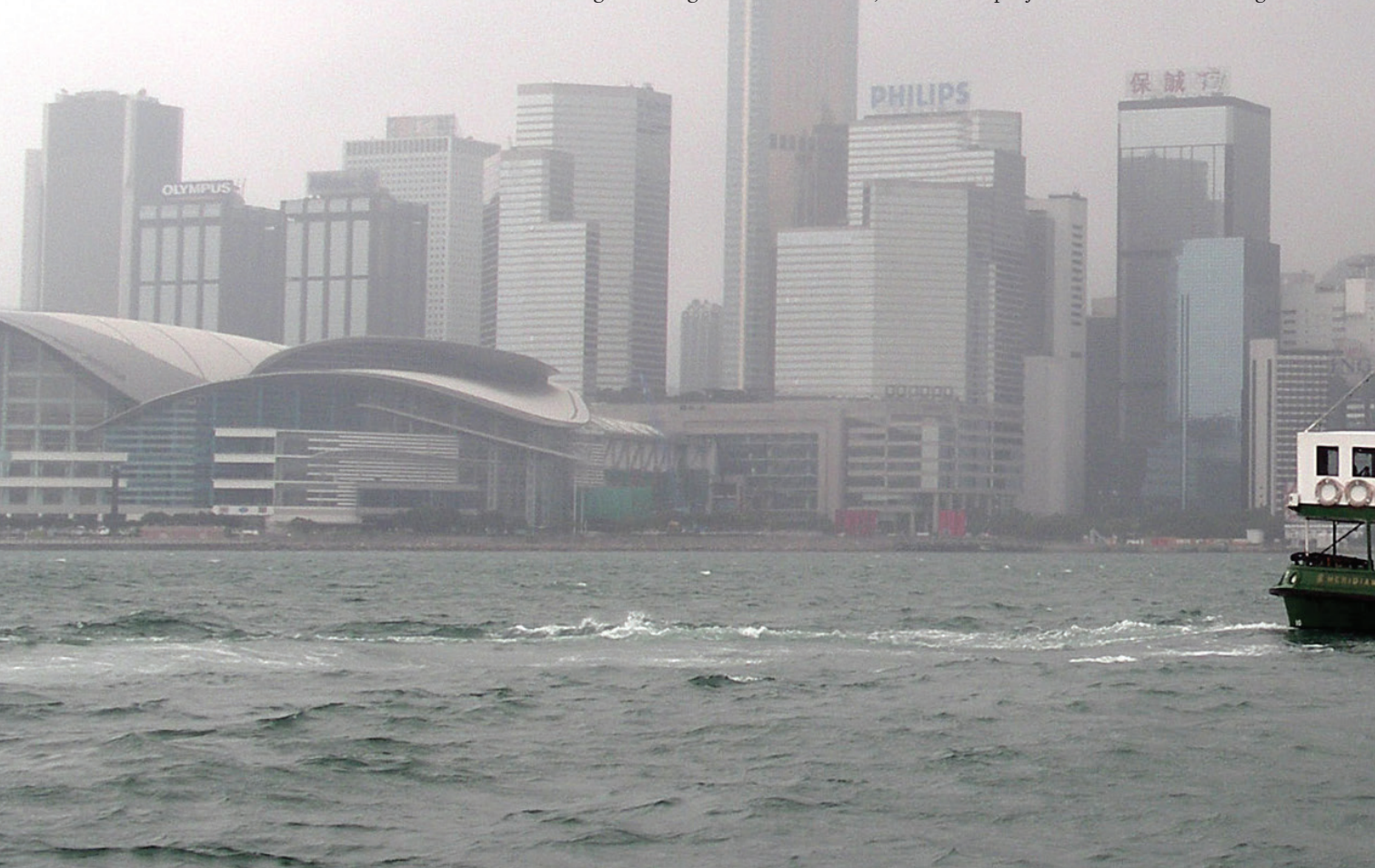
It does not help that her home is an 80-square-foot cubicle in a tenement building in Sham Shui Po, one of Hong Kong's most densely populated districts. It has only one window, which only opens onto horribly polluted roads.

Although Ms Wong's health has since improved having received subsidised medical treatment, the debilitating effects of asthma – most notably fatigue and lethargy – left her reeling from significant depression.

You leave me breathless

Clean Air Network, a local non-governmental organisation that campaigns against and educates the public about the city's air pollution, conducted a clean air search project on Sham Shui Po District between last October and January this year.

The project involved establishing 12



roadside air monitoring stations in six designated locations across Sham Shui Po. It found that the levels of fine suspended particulates, or PM2.5, recorded in all monitoring locations exceeded the World Health Organization's recommended standards by an average of 82 per cent.

PM2.5 are extremely fine particles measuring 2.5 micrometres or smaller in diameter. They have been proven to be more harmful than the larger PM10 particles as they can penetrate deeper into the lungs and thus obstruct oxygen absorption.

The project also found that the levels of PM2.5 particulates recorded in most of the monitoring locations are, on average, 65 per cent higher than simultaneous pollution readings collected at monitoring stations set up by the Environmental Protection Department.

But despite the discrepancy in PM2.5 readings collected by the CAN and the EPD in their respective monitoring stations (the CAN says the EPD's sta-

tions were set up too high above ground level), all the figures pointed to the fact that roadside pollution in Hong Kong has reached alarming levels.

Diesel On

The main culprit for Hong Kong's roadside pollution lies with the fleet of old diesel vehicles spewing black toxic fumes, which contain a deadly mix of respirable suspended particulates and nitrogen oxides, as they roam the city's roads surrounded by high-rise buildings.

In his book titled "Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development in China," Dr. Paul G. Harris, chair professor of Global and Environmental Studies at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, cites statistical data obtained from the EPD and Civic Exchange.

The research figures show that diesel commercial vehicles account for 88 per cent of respirable suspended particulates and nitrogen oxides emissions, while diesel buses make up about 40 per cent of all roadside pollution. The lat-

ter is supported by data collected from CAN's monitoring stations close to bus and/or minibus stops, which reveal that the concentrations of PM2.5 particulates are 40 per cent higher than the WHO recommended level compared to 33 per cent recorded at other stations.

Indeed, Hong Kong is trailing far behind many other developed cities in Western Europe and Asia, namely Singapore, in terms of air quality management. The 36,800 pre-Euro and Euro I diesel commercial vehicles still running on the city's roads attest to the laxity and obsolescence of its air quality regulatory system.

According to the WHO Air pollution ranking, Hong Kong's air quality is twice as worse than that of Singapore. Domestically, the picture looks even grimmer for Hong Kong as it is the second worst city (after Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang) in China for nitrogen dioxide, which comes primarily from vehicle exhaust.

The European emissions standards for light and heavy duty commercial



Photo by Magalie L'Abbé/Flickr

vehicles, which are enforced in all EU member states and widely used as a global benchmark for vehicle exhaust emissions around the world, are applied under a system of classification based on the fuel efficiency of the vehicle, with Euro I being the least efficient and Euro V the most efficient.

According to the EPD, the 117,000 diesel commercial vehicles licensed in Hong Kong in 2009 comprised 23,800 pre-Euro (purchased prior to the introduction of emissions standards in 1992); 15,100 Euro I; 28,000 Euro II; 31,000 Euro III; 20,000 Euro IV, and only 150 Euro V.

While pre-Euro vehicles account for only 20 per cent of road traffic in Hong Kong, they generate 34 times more respirable suspended particulates and 2.6 times more nitrogen oxides than Euro IV ones. Additionally, a Euro III vehicle emits five times more RSPs (PM10) than and 1.4 times as much nitrogen oxides as a Euro IV.

Combined, Pre-Euro, Euro I and Euro II account for 57 per cent of the total number of diesel vehicles on the road, producing 73 per cent of total roadside respirable suspended particulates

(PM10) and 34 per cent of total roadside nitrogen oxides.

The dingy pearl of the Orient

Despite the fact that more than 50 per cent of Hong Kong's air pollution comes from the roadside, oceangoing vessels and factories from the Pearl River Delta have their equal share of the blame.

Hong Kong is arguably one of Asia's most vibrant shipping hubs, and yet large oceangoing vessels sailing past or berthed at the city's cruise terminals produce more respirable suspended particulates, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide than power plants.

Mr Patrick Fung, campaign manager of Clean Air Network, pointed out that the Hong Kong government had long been reluctant to commit themselves to long-term emissions standards, and had never aimed to reach beyond the interim pollution targets.

Incoming remedy

The growing pervasiveness and severity of Hong Kong's pollution have finally prompted the government to come up with more stringent, sweeping measures to clean up the air, with Chief Ex-

ecutive Mr Leung Chun-ying proposing that a \$10-billion subsidy scheme be set up to replace more than 80,000 pre-Euro and Euro I to III diesel vehicles on the city's roads.

In addition to the proposed subsidy scheme to phase out heavily polluting diesel vehicles, Mr Leung has suggested bringing in more radical measures to curb air pollution from shipping by stalling on-shore power supply facilities, so as to encourage oceangoing vessels to switch to electric power while berthing.

Aim low

That said, the city's Air Pollution Index, which measures the air pollution levels in Hong Kong, is "outdated" as its values fail to reflect the seriousness of existing pollution, not to mention informing the general public how dreadful the air it is they are inhaling during normal days.

The API is based on the Air Quality Objectives introduced by World Health Organization in 1987. It converts air pollution data from several types of pollutants, namely sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide, into a value ranging from 0 to 500.

Clear Day?

January

On the calendar, **Green colour** represents a clear day and **red colour** a polluted day. Produced by The Hadley Environmental Index by the School of Public Health, The University of Hong Kong, the calendar records days when the city's air quality violates the World Health Organization short-term Air Quality Guidelines.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



People cover their nose and mouth in an attempt to avoid inhaling roadside air pollution.

Recent findings, published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, show that people touching their mouth or nose is a primary way that germs spread from contaminated surfaces to people's faces and from sick people to often-touched surfaces.

The forecasting system is adopted to alert the public, especially susceptible groups like those with heart or respiratory illnesses to elude the onset of serious air pollution episodes. Nevertheless, it has not been updated since it was adopted 25 years ago.

Adding to the list is the existing mechanism that measures only PM10, the relatively large particles, excluding the finer PM2.5, which poses the greatest health risk because it can lodge deeply into the lungs.

"The government wants measures that are easily (usually already) achieved. Naturally, its key stakeholders, namely business interests, also like this. The public suffers, of course," said Dr. Harris at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Environmental experts believe a binding agreement with the Guangdong authorities aimed at tackling pollution from the sea and from factories across the border is surely possible in the long term, are afraid it is merely a "red herring".

"The government could acquire this right now," said Dr. Harris. "Again, it is its vested interests, warped perceptions of the importance of transshipment for the econ-

omy, and an enormous discounting of human health that stops the government from doing it. Essentially blaming Guangdong or the delta traffic issue is a way for the government to divert attention. It's shameful!"

The "fragrant harbour"

The worsening air quality has raised concern that Hong Kong, home to thousands of expatriates, is no longer desirable place to live. A survey done by office space provider Regus, of some 200 international and local companies, suggests that three out of four companies said the city's poor air quality made it harder for them to attract and retain overseas employees.

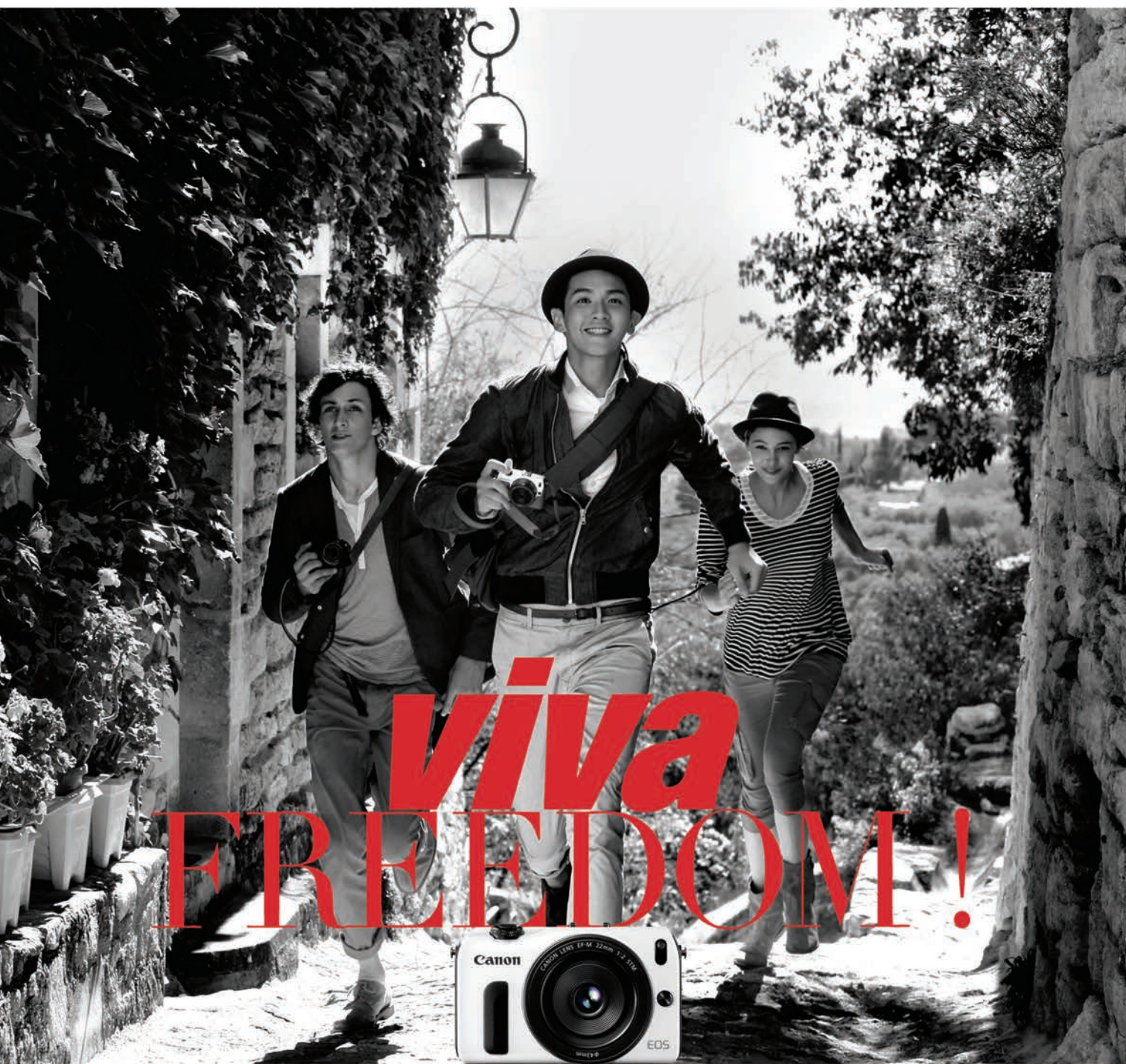
Another survey, done by the American Chamber of Commerce, has found that almost half of its members knew of professionals who left the city because of the escalating pollution.

"Right after my child was born, my husband and I had no choice but to move out of this city which we've always been in love with," Mrs Kate Anderson said, citing her concern for her child's health. She still calls Hong Kong her "all-time favourite".

In January, not a single day met WHO's requirement for clear day, meaning the levels of NO₂, PM10, SO₂, O₃ and PM2.5 were too high.

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