

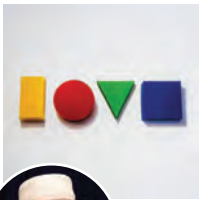
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THE YOUNG REPORTER *magazine*

MARCH 2012

Cover Since its inception in 2003, the individual visit scheme has drawn tens of millions of mainland tourists to the city and boosted the region's tourism. They are often associated with Hong Kong's economic prosperity but rarely popularity. *We look into some of the most conspicuous culprits.*

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In our previous issue,
we looked into the Asia's
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pollution. Check out tyr.hk
for the story and more.

Why they can't hold it any longer

ON any given day of the year, Kwai Tsing container port is a place where vessels, cranes, and workers bustled about around the clock.

That was until a couple weeks ago, when five hundred workers at the world's third-busiest port staged a sit-in, demanding a pay increase of 17 percent, whereas the port's operator, Hongkong International Terminals, said the contractors agreed to raise workers' salaries by 5 percent to \$21,000 a month.

Although many of them work in a dangerous environment and may smell like sea water, dockworkers are not the usual impecunious, exploited worker type. Their income – if the figure provided by the port operator is correct – is almost double the median monthly income of the city's working population (\$12,000). Indeed, they earn more monthly income than 70% of all workers in the city, according to the 2011 census report by the Census and Statistics Department.

Across industries, local workers' pay rises are expected to average 4.4% this year – just a little shy of the inflation forecast at 4.5% – according to a March survey by Employers' Federation of Hong Kong.

Dockworkers and union leaders are apparently infuriated by the many questionable practices of the port operator and contractors. But what underpins the unsettling labour unrest is the hardship workers face as the above-average earners in the city.

They are the often overlooked members of society that earn too much to qualify for government aids but too little to cope with the city's high property prices and rising living costs.

Earning nearly \$20,000 a month, they in most cases do not qualify for subsidised housing, which provides home for about half of the population. But private housing has been increasingly unaffordable in

recent years. House prices-to-income has reached a ratio of 13.4 last year, nearing the peak in 1997 before the burst of the housing bubble. Despite measures to cool the market, home prices have doubled in the past four years. Low mortgage rates, robust demand from mainland Chinese buyers and a lack of land supply are all but keeping Hong Kong the most expensive place on earth to buy a home.

Finding a place to live in the city that is neither a tiny subdivided flat nor a cage is hard enough, but because of strong Chinese yuan and rise in global prices, soaring food prices have become another major source of distress for the sandwich class.

Food accounts for the highest household expenditure after housing. Hong Kong relies heavily on import from mainland China, from flour to pork. Because of Hong Kong dollar's peg to the US currency, strong yuan against the greenback has placed the local currency in an inflationary squeeze. In local markets, prices of rice and beef, among many common foods, have more than doubled since 2007, a recent Labour Party survey has found. Global food prices apexed last August and, despite six consecutive months of decline, remain at high levels, according to the World Bank.

It is no wonder a recent index compiled by researchers at Shue Yan University showed that households with monthly income of \$15,000 to \$20,000 are among the groups that felt the most miserable.

In 2007, a 40-day strike of bar-benders ended with contractors offering pay increases to about \$21,000 a month. The all-too-familiar strike at the docks should remind the government of its ineptness in even keeping middle-earners off the streets. It is not that workers' paycheques are too small, it is rather that the apartments of the city come with price tags too big. *by Alan Wong*

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The Narrator



A beautiful mess

A journey into Jason Mraz's saddest tunes.

IT was a sultry, starless night in June and his 35th birthday, Jason Mraz hopped off a plane at the Hong Kong International Airport for his second concert in the city. In the next evening, he would be performing before more than 10,000 people in AsiaWorld-Expo and, a few days later, a few hundred lucky ones in an invitation-only gig.

In Hong Kong, the singer-songwriter is often known as the guy who sings “I’m Yours”, a song that had lingered on the charts and airwaves long enough to make history as the longest-running Billboard Hot 100 hit ever.

The first time he came, in March 2009, he performed before some 4,000 fans in Star Hall, a mid-sized multi purpose venue in Kowloon Bay. I was there, and I recorded a video with my point-and-shooter that would now pop up as one of the top results on YouTube if you search for “Jason Mraz in Hong Kong”.

When I saw him three years later, I brought a bigger, better camera, a sensible pick. In the side pocket of my bag, though, was a pen and a two-column, ruled notebook that I would hate to carry on any leisurely occasion, not least a Jason Mraz concert. But I had made no happier exception than that evening.

The idea of interviewing Mraz came to my mind a few days before the concert, when I realised my newfound identity as a reporter, albeit an intern. So I made a few Skype calls to Atlantic Records’s New York headquarters, got referred to his tour manager Amanda

Harrison (whom the singer said in his blog was his “Google Map”) and finally to Chris, a local representative from Warner Music.

When all was confirmed, I marked June 24 on my calendar, and posted on my Facebook, “Hey guys, I am meeting Jason Mraz this Sunday for a brief interview, what would you like to ask?” It turned out to be one of my most “liked” messages. There were encouraging congratulations in the comments amid friendly outrage that I scored face time with him. Anyway, there was no questions.

I woke up the other day a proud fanboy, eagerly looking forward to write about and maybe high-five his favourite singer. At work, I asked my editor whether she would want me to write a piece about the interview. Her response was lukewarm. “I think we had a profile piece already, when he first came a few years ago.”

But I went anyway. Why not?

“I feel strong, tremendous, grateful and optimistic as ever,” said the 35-year-old artist, his shirt unbuttoned down to mid-chest and sleeves rolled up, in a room that looks over the 10,000-seat indoor arena.

His hair has outgrown his fedora, spilling out from the sides. With the shaggy beard and moustache (thanks to his exploded trimmer in his hotel room in Korea), his look reminded some online commentators of, among many, a homeless man, Eddie Vedder (lead singer of Pearl Jam), and Jesus Christ. Unwary concertgoers might drop their jaws if they had not caught a glimpse above his neck in the past few months. His loyal disciples, however, would well notice his quiet evolution from the inside out.



“I can’t just go out on the stage to ask five thousand people to be sad with me for seven straight minutes.”

Nothing illustrates his transformation better than his latest and fourth studio album, *Love Is a Four Letter Word*, released four years after his previous and commercially most successful album *We Sing. We Dance. We Steal Things*. The name of the album, and the minimalist cover art, speak of his desire to untangle the idea of love in a world where relationships are chronically complicated, from between cunning politicians to guileless lovers. In “Be Honest”, a bossa nova-like acoustic melody, his message to his significant other is as straightforward as this line in the chorus: “I don’t ask for much, just be honest with me.”

New tracks like “The Freedom Song”, “Living in the Moment”, and “Everything is Sound” champion the embrace of the beauty of life and boast an euphoric vibe. Those new numbers have in part done away with lyrical complexity and turned to simplicity, a change widely viewed as treading a fine line between bliss and cheese.

Jason Mraz is a vegan, yogi, surfer and he likes playing shows barefoot. He supports Obama, gay marriage, and loves his avocado farm in San Diego. He sings with buskers and duets with fans, even though their unyielding love for the overplayed “Lucky” can be rather tiring. His radiant performances and jovial tunes may lead to the belief that he is always carefree. But the truth is when he takes off his hat and leaves the stage, he is prone to the miseries of life just like everyone else.

“I write a lot of material you’ve never heard that live inside my sadness. You’ll hear a song that lasts six to seven minutes of just beautiful sadness. But I can’t just go out on the stage to ask five thousand people to be sad with me for seven straight minutes,” he said, while moving his long-nailed right hand in the air (he plays guitar with his nails most of the time) and holding a glass of algae-green liquid with his manicured left.

His fervent followers would know he has in fact written some melancholic songs that are often obscured by his buoyant hits. For example, “A Beautiful Mess”, a conflicted ballad from his last album that many members on his fan forum hold dear, has a pitiful number of views on YouTube compared to “I’m Yours”, which is rarely mentioned at all.

“I try to do my best to balance it out to acknowledge there is melancholy, sadness that we all experience,” he said. “We also have to see the light and choose to rise above it to at least enjoy our day with gratitude to our family, to whoever it may be.”

“I Won’t Give Up”, the post-breakup song on *Love Is a Four Letter Word*, is his quintessential positive take on sadness.

“The song was about how I overcome the sadness. By singing it nightly, it becomes a mantra, a way to relive that triumph,” he said. “It also helps that a few thousand people in the room sing it with me.”

He added that he would eventually release “the saddest album in the world”.

“It will come out probably after I’m free of a record label.

MRAZ IS A VEGAN, YOGI,
SURFER AND HE LIKES
PLAYING SHOWS BAREFOOT.

The new Jason Mraz may have shunned sophistication, but his optimistic outlook is unmistakable in the lightweight jams in *Love Is a Four Letter Word*, even though he suffered a bitter break-up with his long-time fiancée Tristan Prettyman in the months preceding the release.



Because there probably won't be much commercial value about it."

He named his 2012 world tour *Tour is a Four Letter Word*. "Mraz", too, is a four-letter word, and that was how his father used to remind those who spelled his son's name wrong. Now that the singer-songwriter has won a few Grammy Awards and sold a couple million CDs worldwide, the misspelling of his last name, varying from "Maraz" to "Marraz", is probably less rampant.

It was not the case though when he started his career performing in Java Joe's, a San Diego coffee house, in 2000. He used to wear a trucker cap, not a fedora. He released his debut album with Elektra Records, *Waiting for My Rocket to Come*, in 2002 and achieved his first major commercial success with his next album *Mr. A-Z* (which spells out his surname), which peaked at number five on the Billboard 200 album chart.

His biggest success would be his third studio album, *We Sing. We Dance. We Steal Things.*, and more conspicuously the addictive tune "I'm Yours", which stuck in many listeners' head and has racked up more than a tenth of a billion views on YouTube alone. His fan base has grown from a handful of small-town bargoers to millions of people all over the world. More than ten millions of people have "liked" his Facebook page. His rocket has not just come, it has most definitely taken off.

In the sea of tour photos and fan messages, his official Facebook page had one thing that caught my attention. There was an announcement of a secret show that would take place two days after the tour concert, on June 26. Mraz-craving fans had to send an email to Warner Music to enter the ticket draw, and they would only receive details of the venue the day before the event.

When I brought it up, the room went quiet, some people frowned. The artist hesitated, looked up at a PR guy standing near me and said, "Am I allowed to talk about that?"

Much to my disappointment, he was not.

"Am I allowed to talk about that?"

"I'll be here," he winked and said, "live from Hong Kong."

I did not press on, and he did not give me an invitation to the secret gig. It was OK, I thought, because in just a few hours

I would be seeing him perform anyway.

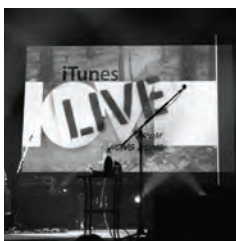
And so the concert went. The music was energetic and Mraz's singing flawless. The 10,000-strong audience went "banana", as he put it. The icing on the cake was a story he told mid-way into "You and I Both", a love song he wrote on Valentine's Day many years ago, of how two Coldplay concert tickets separated the singer and his then girlfriend. The therapeutic mantra "I Won't Give Up" concluded the night.

As I reluctantly grabbed my bag on my cold seat and dragged my tired feet to the exit, I realised I was just a ticket away from his secret show and, if I missed it, I would have to wait another three years to see him again.

I spent the next day checking my Gmail inbox hoping that I would win a ticket from the lucky draw. I tried to search online for clues for the venue and time, only to find people showing off their invitation email, which says, "Congratulations, luck is indeed a four letter word for you as you have won a pair of tickets to a special gig by Jason Mraz."

I failed to get a ticket, even though I was willing to pay for it. The show turned out to be an Apple iTunes event that invited only a few hundred lucky fans and music company executives. It was shorter than the tour concert, with special guests G.E.M. and Khalil Fong. The real gems of the night were an electrifying rendition of "Unfold", a groovy cover of Bill Whither's "Ain't No Sunshine" and a refreshing, unreleased song called "Halfway Around the World".

When Mraz and his band thanked and said goodbye to the crowd, I waved to the stage ferociously and hoped he would spot me. How did I get in there? I guess my not giving up helped. Everything was sound. **by Alan Wong**



Dispatches

Letter from Myanmar

How does the Myanmar of 2013 look like? Our reporter spent eleven days travelling in the country during the Chinese New Year holidays.

YOU will feel Myanmar is a unique country the second you exit Yangon's airport. All men wear a longyi, a sarong-like garment that reaches to the ankles, and many of them have red-stained teeth, thanks to the betel nut they chew. Women have brown faces because they spread thanaka on their cheeks as sunscreen. Cars drive on the right with steering wheels on the right-hand side, after the administration suddenly in 1970 decided it has to be so for astrological reasons.

Myanmar, or Burma as it used to be officially called until 1989 and is still largely designated abroad, has remained more authentic than its South-East Asian neighbours. The country still faces many social and humanitarian challenges, but the quick-changing political context gives some hope for the future.

Parts of Myanmar remain inaccessible, as there are still ethnic wars in the West or North-East. In the South, the Karen ethnic minority has been in active conflict with the central government for over 60 years, making it the world's longest ongoing war. The population of Myanmar is composed of 135 distinct ethnic groups, and a code of silence surrounds those deep-rooted internal conflicts.

Children are commonly exploited for service in restaurants, cleaning in hotels, or doing agricultural works. Most of them are not even ten years old.

Treatment of litter is another huge problem, as there is no central collection system. Plastic bags and detritus of all kinds accumulate on the streets, shaping big heaps of waste in townships of suburban areas. This contributes to the propagation of diseases, and is exacerbated by very bad hygienic conditions in food conservation.

Seventy per cent of the 62 million population live in rural areas, and the primary sector represents 40 per cent of Myanmar's GDP. In the countryside people still use horse carts as the main means of transportation, and buffaloes to plough the fields. It takes two hours to crush four kilos of peanuts to obtain oil, with a cow actioning the crusher. Time seems to be suspended in Burma.

Electricity is mainly produced by noisy and polluting generating sets, which often do not work 24 hours. General power cuts occur many times a day. Telecommunications are also underdeveloped, as the government made it unaffordable on purpose for many years. Foreign cell phones do not work in any part of the country, and Internet connections are scarce and slow.

The United Nations Development Programme ranks Burma as the 149th state out of 187 for Humanitarian Development Index, and Transparency International, an anti-corruption watchdog,

appreciates the country as the fifth most corrupted in the world. Challenges are very high for the new government.

The political situation of Myanmar has tremendously evolved in the past two years. In streets of Yangon, portraits of Aung San Suu Kyi are everywhere and her books can be found on the shelves of any street bookseller. Two years ago she was still under house arrest and constrained to silence.

Thein Sein was elected as the new president of Myanmar and a semi-civilian government formed in April 2011, after almost fifty years of ruling by a tough military junta. Aung San Suu Kyi and some other political opponents were released, elections organised and several democratic measures undertaken, such as the abolishment of a 1988 ban on public gatherings of more than five people in late January.

The Myanmar of 2013 is under constant change. Its evolution in the next few years will be of global significance. Development issues remain nevertheless numerous for the newly-elected political leaders. The boost in tourism and foreign investments might present new risks for the newly-opened country. For all we know, this could be a glimmer of light for the people of Burma; it is up to the government to spot the frail links before they break. **by Thibault Bluy**



Photo by Thibault Bluy



The University of

Northumbria

This is to certify that

Heung Kong Yan

has been

over-educated, and will be

pretty employable

(Fast-Food Chains)



Registrar
31 March 2013

View

Not worthless, just worth less

THE university graduation season is approaching, together comes the time for hordes of senior students to scratch their head in search of a good job. A degree is no longer an absolute advantage or a sure ticket to employment. In fact, some will soon find out that the degree they are holding seems no more useful than the plot in a Michael Bay movie, ending up with jobs that do not require university education.

Saddled with unfortunate feelings, some people raise their eyebrows over what they call over-education. “If we will end up waiting tables, why bother squandering all the money (and time) on getting a degree?”

The higher education system has done us no wrong. The causes of the problem lie within us, the consumers of higher education.

No doubt that getting a degree is increasingly costly, but for most parents, if the goal is to set kids up for life, a degree still seems the best investment. University tuition has tripled in a decade, but the average salary of a fresh graduate has remained around \$10,000 a month throughout these years. Clearly the market has less and less mercy for fresh graduates, but the long-living proverb of “better education equals higher pay” has stood the test of time (of course you have to find a job in the first place). Although the difference has narrowed between the salary of degree holders and the average salary in the city, the income gap per person remains a considerably big \$45,000

per year (annual salary is \$191,000 for degree holders and the Hong Kong average is \$144,000). In other words, you can only choose between earning less and earning even less. A university graduate is bound to find a better job and make a lot more money than a non-graduate.

Some say we have too many graduates competing for too limited jobs, yet the reality is hardly so. No one can dispute that higher education is central to supplying the talent and innovations that are major drivers of productivity and job creation. Yes, job creation. More educated the society is, more opportunities there will be. A well-educated population has proved to be the foundation for a knowledge-based society, and our city has a long way to go. However, there are only about one million Hong Kong citizens either currently enrolled or have finished a degree-seeking programme offered in or outside the city, which makes only a seventh (less than 15 per cent) of the entire population, according to the Census and Statistics Department. To provide some context, the comparable figures for Canada, Japan, and for Korea are 51, 45 and 40, respectively.

Believe it or not, Hong Kong is less “educated” than you might think, and it is the government’s responsibility to provide more affordable access to higher education. Taking into account how much money you are likely to make after graduation, for many people the tuition fee is simply too high. University is still too expensive for the less privileged fam-

ilies. More grants, not loans, should be given to students who cannot cover their own education expenses, as more than a few graduates have been burdened with student-loan debt at a level that limits life decisions such as buying a house, getting married, and starting a family. Higher education should make life easier, not more difficult.

As for the job market, situations might improve if students are less business-oriented when choosing major. More than 40 per cent of current university students are business and management majors, and 32 per cent of the expecting students incline for a degree in those areas. On the other hand, compared to the B-school hype, only 19 per cent choose engineering and technology as their field of study, 14 per cent science, and 10 per cent arts and humanities. Yes, it is true that Hong Kong depends heavily on business, and it is also true that you have a bigger chance to make big money as a business executive, but can the city really digest that many business majors? I will not be surprised if these are the graduates who end up working in positions for which the university degree is not required.

But is waiting table necessarily worth less than sitting in an office? Maybe we need to stop judging the worth of things based on their cash-value. Maybe we have missed out on the whole point of higher education after all. Maybe someday we will see for ourselves.

by Coco Zheng

One Moment

Pyongyang's recent flurry of attack threats and missile tests has once again renewed fear about North Korea's ability to launch nuclear strikes on the United States and its allies. China, the autocracy's longtime backer and trading partner that accounted for 80 per cent of imports by 2011, is stepping up efforts to enforce U.N. sanctions. North Korea conducted its third nuclear test in mid-February, its third in seven years, according to state media.

Photo by Alan Wong

Taken in May 2011, in Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, North Korea



POLITICS

Upbeat numbers for mainland exchange

Study tours to motherland with full-blown subsidy schemes has been drawing students like magnet

To Beijing

IMAGINE taking a 7-day trip to Beijing, during which you can visit the Great Wall, the historic ruins of Yuanmingyuan Park, the Marco Polo Bridge and the National Museum; watch military shows in a People's Liberation Army garrison; and attend lectures at China's prestigious Tsinghua University; plus food, accommodation, insurance and two-way airfare. You may well think it's going to dig really deep into your pocket.

It's no wonder a price tag of \$2,200 would be a big draw to many students like Miss Kays Kwong Wing-ki, a participant of Tsinghua University National Education Programme for Future Leaders in 2001.

Miss Kwong, 20, said an affordable price was a major incentive for many applicants including herself to get enrolled and travel during the summer break. But she said it was the trip itself that motivated her to make contributions by becoming a member of the programme's organising committee for next year.

"Starting from today, we must love our country whole-heartedly and care for our country with tolerance instead of criticising it. China would be much stronger if everyone of our 1.3 billion population shares this attitude to make contribu-

tions," she said, as she found herself more patriotic after the exchange with professors at Tsinghua University.

Yet, skepticisms over the purposes of the subsidised study tours are heightened after the dispute over national education curriculum that resulted in tens of thousands of students protesting against the government last September.

A Facebook group has drawn more than 500 likes, with a name not only explicated its stance of anti-mainland study tours, but also asked a rhetoric question: "Are you willing to praise a Fascist regime?" in its description.

Miss Kwong responded by saying, "For those people who don't love their country because they don't know about it, they can choose not to participate. But there are always many more students who appreciate the opportunity."

While it remains debatable over the motives behind the study tours, it is undeniable that there is a substantial growth for Mainland study tours over the past years.

According to the commission's working group on youth national education, 142 tours were subsidised in the 2012/13 academic year, which 9,800 local students are benefited. It has been a great leap forward when compared to 4,600 students a decade ago.

The number of subsidised tours surged to its peak of 214 when the Bei-





jing Olympics was held in 2008. And the amount of subsidies from the Home Affairs Bureau had doubled from \$7 million in 2001 to \$15.6 million in 2010, when one third of participants headed to the Shanghai Expo.

Besides direct sponsorship from the government, such study tours are also assisted by Beijing. The programme to Tsinghua University, which Miss Kwong participated, is one of those that are “supported” by mainland’s Ministry of Education and its liaison office.

But the one called Hong Kong Uniformed Groups 10,000 Miles Friendship Tour, with a slogan of “Same Heart, Same Root” is what stands above the rest.

Jointly organised by 13 uniformed groups including Hong Kong Boys’ Brigade and Hong Kong Red Cross participants of the first tour visited the Great Hall of the People and were greeted by Mr Hu Jintao in August 2002, seven months before he became China’s top leader.

The prestige also extends to media coverage as the tour enjoys a separate section of the liaison office’s website. The tours has its flag presentation ceremony officiated by the office’s deputy director and activities highly publicised by mainland media including state broadcaster China Central Television.

Mr Matthew Wong Wai-man, Deputy Commandant of Hong Kong Adventure Corps who co-organised the trek, said the latest tour was funded by Youth Commission with \$1.1 million, almost double of its normal maximum sponsorship of \$600,000 for a single project.

One of mankind’s greatest constructions, The Great Wall is a must for study tours. (Provided by Hong Kong Adventure Corps)

According to the Lieutenant Colonel, there is a distinguishing characteristic about their tour. “We are uniformed groups, which means we have undertaken solid disciplinary training. On the other hand, we are not uniformed, because each of our 13 groups has its own culture.”

He added that the “cultural diversity” of the tour was also reflected in the destinations. The tours went beyond the hot spots such as Beijing and Shanghai, but also to the grassland in Inner Mongolia in 2002, the Three Gorges Dam spanning the Yangtze River in Hubei in 2005, the ancient city of Xi’an in 2006, the hometown of Mr Mao Zedong in Hunan and the rural counties in Guizhou in 2012.

But he said the fundamental reason for the immense fund was the programme’s large scale as they have more than 300 participants every year. Their sponsorship per participant is therefore still close to average rate of about \$3,000.

He added the increase in the government funding in the last few years was set off by the inflation rate in mainland.

When “brainwashing” accusations from the opponents were raised to Mr Wong, he commented in laughter, saying he thought Hong Kong students are too smart to be brainwashed. He said he could not even speak highly of the living standards in Beijing with the hazardous smog there.

Mr Wong added that Beijing’s role in the programme was simply to contact mainland departments to facilitate the visit, while the organiser’s autonomy of decision-making was not intervened.

By **Cheng Song**
Edited by **Ada Yeung**



BUSINESS

Escape the room

Hong Kongers successfully bringing virtual room escape games into reality



Freeing HK, calling itself "Hong Kong's First Real Room Escape Game", has quickly become a popular weekend getaway among busy Hong Kongers.

The Tsui family was locked up in an eerie dark room that mumbled ghostly soundtracks. There was no time for scary movies, the family was in a hurry to find the three items that would set them free, with whatever clues they could find.

And soon – in 45 minutes – the game was over. The family had failed to escape. But it was not the end of the world. In fact, the family seemed rather happy.

The participants were playing a real-life room escape game at Freeing HK, a local attraction that took inspiration from similar online games and turned it into a tangible entertainment in Sai Yeung Choi Street, Mong Kok. Players are blindfolded, handcuffed and have to find clues to get out of a locked room.

Since its inception last November, Freeing HK attracts an average of 1,500 players per month. The owners, Mr Raymond Sze Wai-hang and Mr Instant Wan Sze-tang, are planning to launch two news centres in Causeway Bay and Tsim Sha Tsui as they see demand soar.

Staging their first "room escape game" shop in a shabby building in Mongkok, the two said the district represented Hong Kong people's daily life, and throughout the game, they hoped the maze-like game could offer an escape to local people from their hectic and depressed lives.

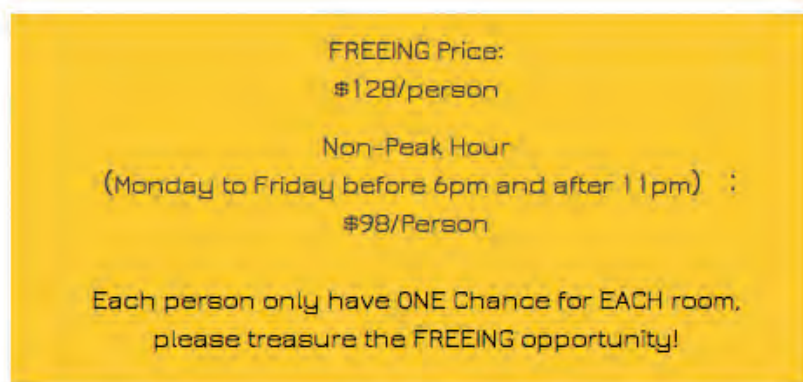
"Hong Kongers are living a dull and colourless life," Mr Sze said. "You can see people rushing in crowded areas like



In a promotional video, participants are shown searching for clues to unlock the door.



Chairman of Freeing HK Mr Instant Wan Sze-tang and CEO Mr Raymond Sze Wai-hang



Mongkok. Freeing HK is hoping to free their spirits in this concrete jungle.”

Mr Sze added by organising these games, he hoped the locals could see things in different angles, and most importantly, to work as a team.

“There are hindrance every day and it is essential to have a logical mind to solve them,” he said. “This is what we want to teach our players.”

The new type of game was now spreading like wildfire, but both Mr Sze and Mr Wan said they did little promotion on the street. Participants often learned of the game from their friends and social media.

Although the clues will be revealed after the game and returning players may

play in the same room as before, the game still attracts 20 to 30 per cent of returning customers.

Though as successful as it may seem, Freeing HK has until recently been losing money.

They explained that finding a suitable location was particularly difficult. But Freeing HK has more to tackle with.

“We have quite a number of technical problems. For example, it took us a lot of time to set up a comprehensive infrared laser system. The deterioration of the setting is also faster than we have thought,” said Mr Sze.

Another problem they face is training the staff, of which a high level of attentiveness is required in setting up the

challenges.

“If they put an item in the wrong place, the whole game will be jeopardised,” Mr Sze said. To further develop their assistants, the company has come up with a detailed checklist and a system to train the staff to become specialists holding and resetting the games.

Despite gaining popularity, the raising rent in the territory is also deterring the two owners from expanding the business.

They were also planning to float shares in Taiwan and Macau to raise money and look for new talents.

“There are always more opportunities than obstacles,” said Mr Sze.

HEALTH

Bittersweet pill to swallow

New technology shines a light on colorectal diseases diagnosis



The camera in this capsule can take 35 frames per second.

IT may only take you the effort of swallowing a pill to stay away from colonial cancer. No more corded tube to travel through your bowels. As simple as that.

PillCam, otherwise known as non-invasive capsule endoscopy, is a swallowable capsule that takes images of the gastrointestinal tract as it travels through it and discharges itself naturally. The capsule can record 35 frames per second when traveling quickly or four frames per second when moving slowly.

Dr Justin Wu Che-yuen, director of S.H. Ho Centre of Digestive Health at Prince of Wales Hospital, said that PillCam is highly suitable for those over 50 who show no symptoms of colorectal cancer but are concerned about the risk of complications from the invasive colonoscopy. The procedure is widely-used in detecting colon cancers, the second leading cause of cancer deaths in 2009.

Patients going through colonoscopy are required to take in a laxative solution beforehand to cleanse their colons and will be put under sedation to prevent any discomfort from the half-an-hour procedure, which involves an insertion of a thin and flexible tube with a miniature camera on the end into the patients' bodies. In fact, PillCam has already been proved to be more life-saving, as the test only uses a wireless sensor belt to pick up signal sent from the capsule.

Some patients only discovered the polyps, a precancerous lump of tissue, in their bowels after PillCam test, despite receiving negative result from colonoscopy. Mr Wong Yam-hang, 75, discovered two polyps in his large bowel while Mr Lam Hing-yam, 64, found out eight polyps in his bowels, thanks to PillCam. The former experienced consistent abdominal pain despite nothing was found abnormal in colonoscopy.

The inaccuracy of colonoscopy diagnosis was caused by the limit of the colonoscope itself, which can only be pushed till the caecum, where the small and large intestines meet, and thus may fail to detect any abnormal growths hidden in the folds and coils of the bowels.

Although PillCam is widely used for diagnosing colon cancer in many parts of Europe and the Americas, it is only starting to gain traction as an alternative to colonoscopy in advanced

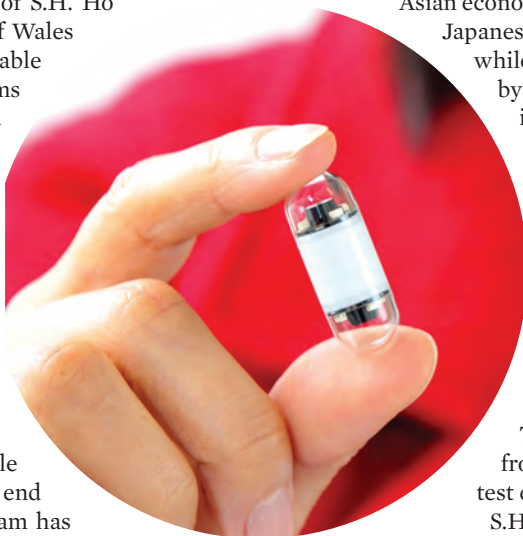
Asian economies, such as Hong Kong and Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Health approved it in 2007 while its marketing clearance was granted by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2001 and by the European Union in 2006.

As one of Asia's leading medical hubs, Hong Kong is a regional pace-setter in performing colon capsule endoscopy, with major private and public hospitals across the city, such as Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital, Queen Mary Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital, offering comprehensive PillCam services to the public.

The cost of a colonoscopy alone ranges from \$5,000 to \$8,000, while a PillCam test can cost \$16,000.

S.H. Ho Centre for Digestive Health, under the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the first local public hospitals to introduce capsule endoscopy services, rolled out its colon capsule endoscopy service in September last year. The centre also offers training programs to local health professionals.

Having said that, colonoscopy remains the gold standard for preventing colorectal cancer largely due to its capability to instantly remove both polyps and lesions found in any section of the large intestine, something capsule endoscopy is not yet able to achieve.



PEOPLE

Shooting for life

Women's rights video producer hopes to make a difference through her works

HAVE you ever thought that there is something more to life than simply working and sleeping? Have you ever had that feeling that you needed to do something meaningful rather than completing that thankless stack of paperwork on your desk? While most of us would probably have thought of leaving everything behind before, very few of us have actually managed to do so.

But Ms Yuen Han-yan did just that.

A documentary filmmaker by trade, Ms Yuen who used to film for Radio Television Hong Kong, now runs "Half the Sky Public Education", a non-profit organisation she founded in 2011, which promotes women's rights in China.

"I once thought that gender inequality had ceased to exist in China since there were so many stories about successful female entrepreneurs," she said. "But that changed after I came to see for myself that many women from the countryside were actually still struggling to make ends meet."

Touched by the plight of her fellow countrywomen, Ms Yuen took the brave decision to leave her life in Hong Kong behind and started educating mainland women on various women's rights issues such as domestic violence, sexual discrimination and labour exploitation.

But unlike other human rights groups which achieve these goals with a more hands-on approach such as conducting workshops and seminars, "Half the Sky" does it work mainly through the digital realm.

Putting her past experiences in film-making into good use, Ms Yuen shoots various promotional videos for her organisation and shares them on popular social networking websites such as Weibo.

Her most recent work was a video campaign called "Find the Saggiest Migrant Worker". It is a compilation of female migrant workers in China showcasing their talents such as singing, dancing and even tailoring.

"It makes me very happy to see the viewing numbers increase," she said.



"And I also gained a lot of pleasure by experimenting on the different ways to shoot these promotional videos."

While the nature of her current works might seem no different to her previous occupation, Ms Yuen revealed that simply knowing how she is playing a part in a just cause creates a sense of fulfillment that she could never get from shooting documentaries.

"I wanted to use my work to push people into action!" Ms Yuen said. "But documentaries just weren't that effective."

Contrary to common perceptions that documentaries usually serve an educational purpose for the general public, she believes that it is perhaps more accurate to call it "preaching to the preached".

"Documentaries are not really suitable for the masses," Ms Yuen explained. "They are for the intellectuals, for people who already know what is happening and for people who already care."

In comparison, short video clips,

which usually only take viewers one to two minutes of their time, are a lot more viewer-friendly for the average Joe.

She added that while documentaries do have its own educational purpose, it is only for a small minority.

"What I am hoping to do is something that can affect the majority of the people," Ms Yuen said.

Despite the satisfaction of her work so far, she admits that a lack of time coupled with financial constraints have proved to be quite the obstacle in

life. Since starting "Half the Sky", Ms Yue has had to juggle between her charity work and being a freelance documentary filmmaker.

"There are times when I would love to concentrate solely on Half the Sky, but I can't because I have to work," she said. "I have to pay the rent as well."

"Then again, I'm very happy with what I'm doing, so there really isn't any reason for me to give up."

By **Ruby Leung**
Edited by **Helen Yu**



Inconvenient consequences

Ten years after the Individual Visit Scheme was introduced, our city's tourism and retailing sectors continue to prosper from the millions of mainland visitors the policy has lured across the border. While the policy is undoubtedly a huge commercial success; it has brought about a number of social problems. We take a look at some of the most nagging issues.



Parallel traders

JEWELRIES, cosmetics and high-end fashion clothing, these are the items people usually associate with shopping arcades in places such as Central or Causeway Bay. But, contrary to common perceptions, these shops can now also be found in Sheung Shui, a residential area in the outskirts of Hong Kong, just one train station away from the mainland city of Shenzhen.

Since the Individual Visit Scheme was introduced in 2003, shops catering to the needs of mainland visitors have filled up the shopping arcades near the Shueng Shui MTR station, forcing many local businesses to either move to a less crowded area or close down altogether.

The scheme, which allows residents from 49 mainland cities to visit Hong Kong individually, was introduced 10 years ago and was billed as the rescue plan for Hong Kong's flagging tourism sector which had just been badly hit by the deadly SARS outbreak.

Ten years on, mainland tourists in Hong Kong have shot up from 6.8 million to 34.9 million, a surge of 411 per cent.

Despite the scheme's success in attracting more mainland tourists to Hong Kong, it has, however, also attracted par-

allel traders into our boundaries, people who imports non-counterfeit products from another country without the permission from the intellectual property owner.

And it is they who have particularly irked Sheung Shui residents due to the inconvenience they are causing.

"The streets are now much more crowded with these parallel traders carrying and packing up their stuff," said North District Councillor Ms Or Sin-yi. "The price of daily goods has also soared because of their presence."

In 2009, Shenzhen residents were allowed multiple entries into Hong Kong under a one-year visa, resulting in a sharp rise of travelers who enter in-and-out of Hong Kong several times a day.

In 2012, these multiple-entry visitors account for 20 out of the 35 million mainland tourists and among them, many are involved in parallel trading activities such as buying tax-free baby milk formulas in pharmacies and selling them across the border at higher prices.

In an attempt to rectify the situation, the government started limiting each visitor or resident leaving Hong Kong to be able to carry only up to 2 cans of baby



el S

Parallel traders have become a common sight on East Rail trains, which connect the city centre to Lo Wu border.



milk formulas.

In addition, the luggage limit for those travelling on the East Rail Line to Shenzhen has also been lowered from 32 kg to 23 kg, making it more difficult for parallel traders to bring more goods out of Hong Kong in a single trip.

But even though such policies have been launched specifically to counter parallel traders, Mr Lau Kwok-fan, also a North district councillor, believes that the parallel trading cannot be fully eradicated as the profits of parallel-trading is simply too tempting.

Legislator Mr Albert Chan Wai-yip once revealed in a legislative council meeting that parallel traders are profiting close to \$600 million a month from baby milk formulas alone.

Even though parallel traders have caused plenty of social problems to Sheung Shui residents, Mr Leung Kin-shing, co-organizer of the North District Parallel Imports Concern Group, believed that it might cause more harm than good if Hong Kong is rid of them and the Individual Visit Scheme entirely.

“Our economy will most probably face another meltdown if all the mainland visitors stop coming to Hong Kong,”

“No one said no to the scheme when it first came out ... until the numbers went bonkers!”

—Ms Claudia Mo Man-ching, lawmaker

said Mr Leung.

Mr Leung believes that the Individual Visit Scheme is not to be solely blame for the social problems. Instead, he lays the blame on Hong Kong’s over-reliance of the retail and tourism sectors and said that unless the city is able to reinvent itself, doubts over the scheme will continue to be raised.

Legislator Ms Claudia Mo Man-ching echoed Mr Leung’s view that Hong Kong’s tourism sector has become too reliant on mainland tourists.

“No one said no to the scheme when it first came out,” said Ms Mo. “That was until the numbers went bonkers!”

The “numbers” she was referring to was a statistic from the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau which revealed that mainland tourists account for nearly 70 per cent of total arrivals in 2011.

“As more and more mainland tourists are visiting Hong Kong, we are also seeing a worrying decline in Western tourists,” Ms Mo said, warning that it could be harmful to the city’s development.

“We are not as multi-cultural as we used to be,” she said. “Something has to be done.”

Shopp

a staggering amount of

SHEUNG Shui is not the only district to have been “conquered” by mainland visitors as more and more tourists and parallel traders are visiting Tuen Mun as their new favourite shopping spot.

Since the opening of the Shenzhen Bay checkpoint in July 2007, more and more mainland visitors, especially those who live close to the checkpoint, find Tuen Mun more accessible than Sheung Shui, as it takes only 20 minutes for them to get to Tuen Mun by bus routes B3 and B3X.

According to Mr Edward Kan Ka-ho, a customer service manager who has been working at Tuen Mun Town Plaza for over a year, eight out of ten customers who shop at the major malls in Tuen Mun are mainland visitors.

That number is in stark contrast to the situation only about a year ago, when only about two out of every 10 customers were mainland tourists, he said.

Mr Kan pointed out that even though parallel traders only amount to two out of every ten mainland visitors in Tuen Mun, it has the potential to grow further as the number of parallel traders has increased by 20 per cent since last year.

Similar to Sheung Shui, the increase in the number of mainland visitors has not only helped enhanced the revenue of businesses; it has also intensified the tension between local residents and the visitors.

More local residents have filed complaints over the “uncivilised behaviours” of mainland visitors since 2012, said Ms Marie Chan, a customer service officer at Tuen Mun Town Plaza.

According to her, many of the complaints include spitting, littering, shouting and queue jumping and mostly concerns mainland shoppers at PrizeMart, a store known for selling household products at relatively reasonable prices.

During the pre-Chinese New Year period, numerous complaints were received over groups of mainland visitors, whose numbers were large enough to form queues that stretched across several floors, for their inappropriate behaviours and poor attitudes, said Ms Chan.

Most local residents complained that the mainland visi-



tors had obstructed the store’s surrounding areas, including fire escape routes, as most mainland shoppers were eager to unpack the products right after buying them.

Ms Chan said local clients were not only dissatisfied with the chaos caused by their mainland counterparts, but were also unhappy they could no longer shop around freely without disturbance.

Minor physical clashes between locals and mainland visitors also occurred during those “out-of-control” periods.

Ms Ma Yu-shum, a saleslady who has been working at Wing Wah Cake Shop at Tuen Mun Plaza for over a year, has witnessed several times local residents being hit by bulky trolleys pushed by mainland buyers.

“Physical clashes could easily turn into fights,” said Ms Ma.

To tackle the situation, the mall has been strengthening security at different spots, so as to offer help to both local and mainland buyers as much as possible, according to the plaza manager Mr Edward Kan.

Apart from buyers, Mr Kan said a small number of stores had also occasionally complained about the disturbance caused by mainland visitors.

But according to Mr Kan, their complains are few and far between compared with local shoppers as they were, after all, the beneficiaries of the current situation.

Mr Henry Tam Long-yiu, a salesman who works at TSL Jewellery in the same plaza, agrees that mainland clients have been the main source of revenue in the past few years.

According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, more than three-quarters of mainland visitors travelling under the Individual Visit Scheme took repeated trips to Hong Kong and they averagely exhibited a high level of daily spending of up to \$2,200 per person, on popular items such as cosmetics, jewelries and clothing.

“There would be hardly any business without the presence of mainland customers these days,” said Mr Tam, adding that over 60 per cent of his customers are from the mainland.

He said that mainland buyers have definitely done more good than harm when it came to boosting profits.

ers

in your residential
neighbourhood, too

and some

Illegal Workers

ACCORDING to the Immigration Department, more than 4,000 mainland visitors entering Hong Kong through the Individual Visit Scheme were arrested for working illegally in the city last year.

Many of the arrested were working as domestic helpers, prostitutes and construction workers. Apart from having their entry permits revoked, some were even imprisoned – first seen in the sentence of an illegal mainland domestic helper last June.

Even though the government has

stepped up its efforts to tackle the issue, Mr Chow Luen-qui, chairperson of the Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union, said some construction companies are still hiring mainland visitors as workers.

“Compared to local workers, those from the mainland are cheaper,” he said. “I have heard of many cases where mainland visitors were hired for renovation jobs.”

Under current regulations, construction workers in the territory are required to register with the Construction Indus-

*“Real tourists
do not travel
in and out of
Hong Kong
every day”*

– Mr James Tien Pei-chun,
Liberal Party honorary chairman



In numbers

34.9 million
Number of mainland visitors entering Hong Kong through the Individual Visit Scheme last year

20 million
Number of mainland visitors entering Hong Kong through the multiple-entry permit under the scheme, many of which were believed to be involved with parallel trading and working illegally

\$600 million/month
Profit gained by parallel traders through baby milk formulas alone, according to legislator Mr Albert Chan Wai-yip

\$2,000
Cost of a counterfeit Hong Kong construction worker registration card, according to Mr Chow Luen-qui, chairperson of the Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union

try Council.

However, Mr Chow said that many mainland visitors are able to obtain a counterfeit registration card for only around \$2,000 in the mainland.

To make matters worse, he added that illegal mainland workers are not only confined to low-skilled labour such as construction workers and domestic helpers, but also in the more qualification-oriented information technology industry.

Mr Wong Siu-ting, a computer programmer for a local company, said it is quite common for companies to hire en-

gineering and computing graduates from the mainland for part-time work even though many of them are entering Hong Kong as visitors.

"The academic level of mainland graduates are pretty much the same as our local graduates," said Mr Wong. "Their difference lies in their pay as it is a lot cheaper for companies to hire mainland graduates instead."

Mr James Tien Pei-chun, former chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, said that many of these illegal mainland workers, who entered Hong Kong through the Individual Visit

Scheme, were from low-income families, which might explain why they would resort to working illegally.

He also questioned the rationale behind the aforementioned 2009 revision of the Individual Visit Scheme, which enabled Shenzhen residents to enter Hong Kong multiple times a day, saying that most of them were actually parallel traders and illegal workers.

"Real tourists do not travel in and out of Hong Kong every day," Mr Tien said. "Unlike normal visitors, they (parallel traders and illegal workers) do not contribute to the economy."

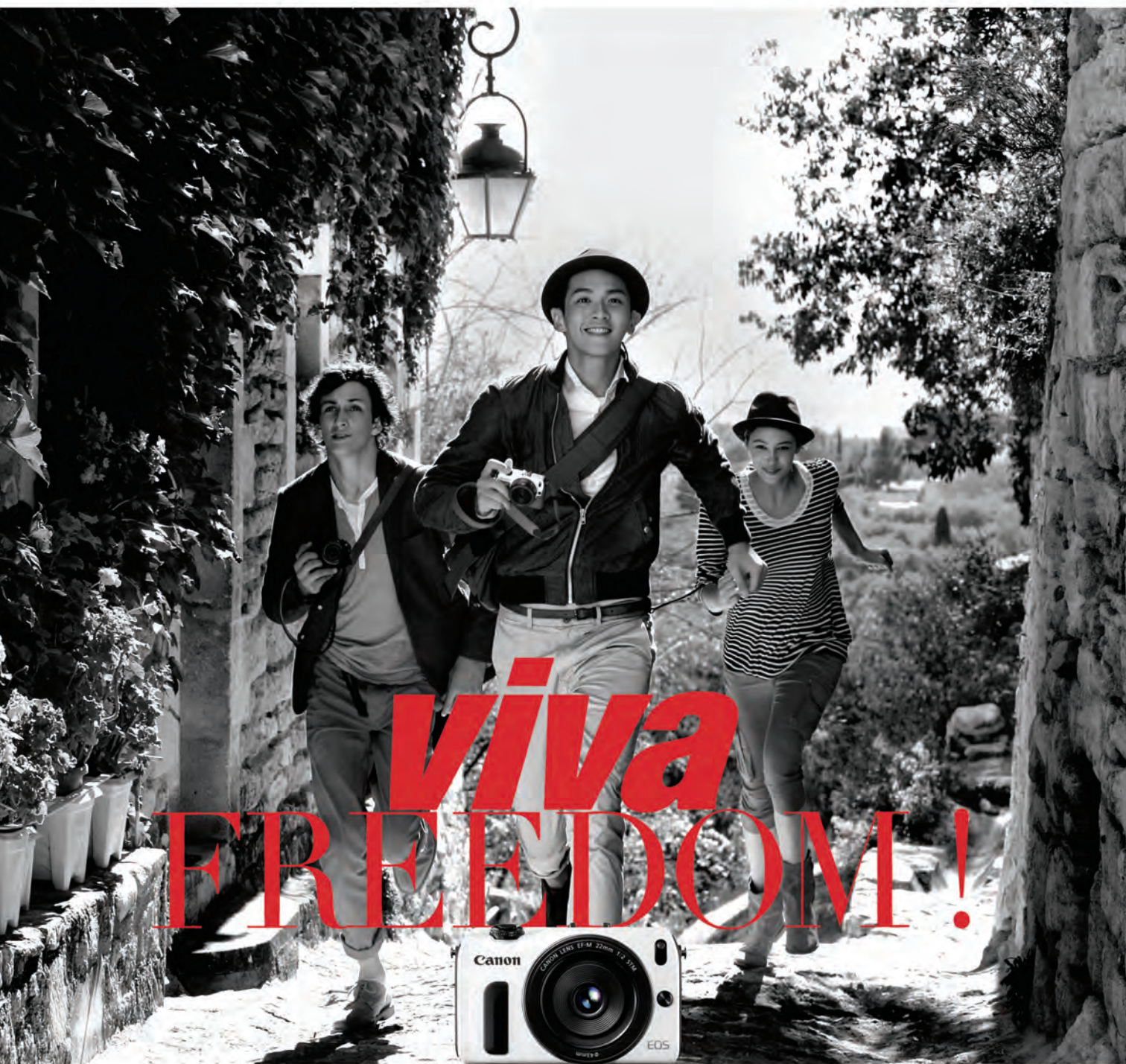
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