

**Concerns over  
sister-school scheme**  
Doubts over feasibility  
and political agenda **P10**

**Kim Jong-un in HK?**  
Meet the impersonator of  
DPRK supreme leader **P14**

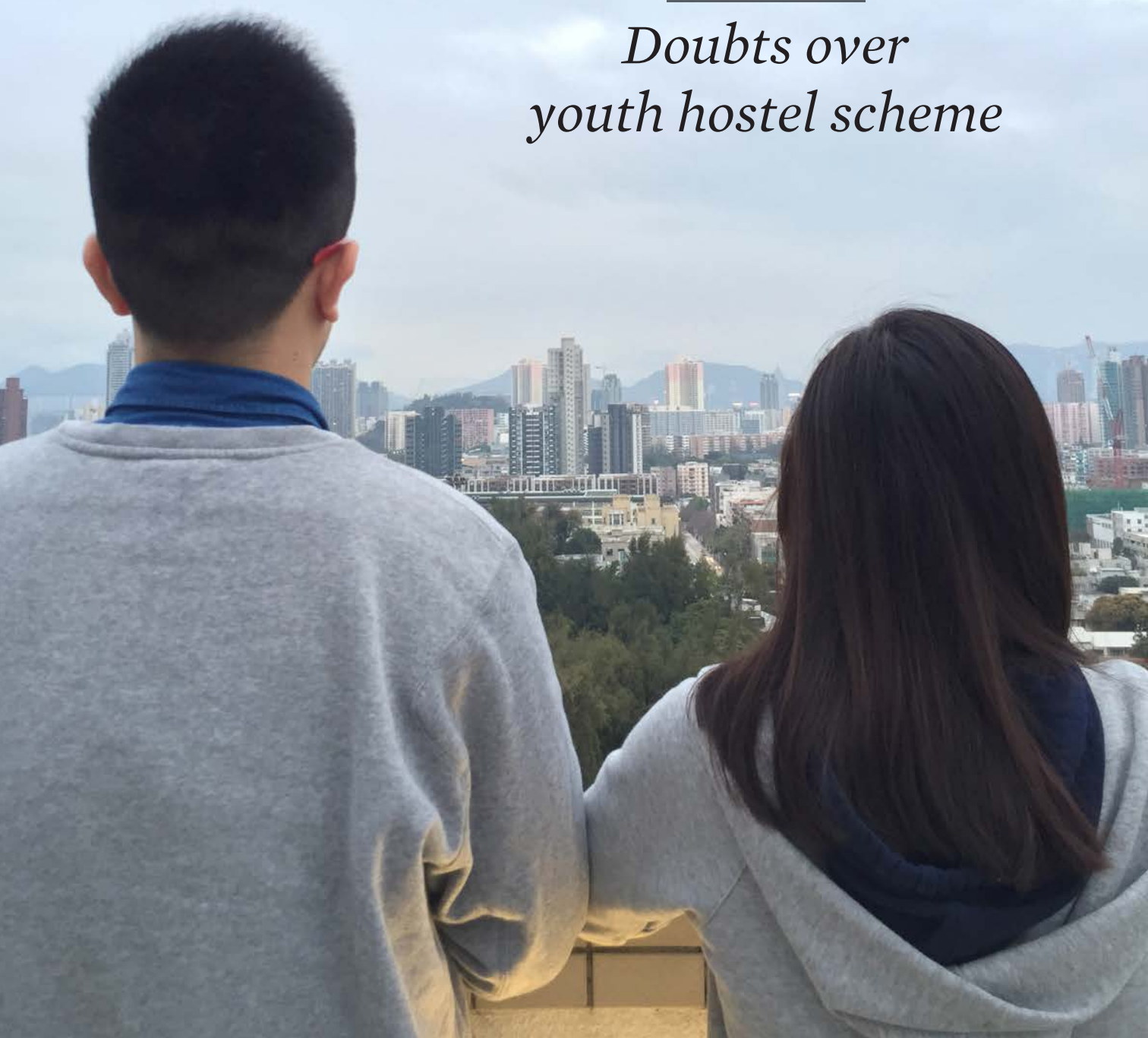
**Silver lining for the  
flower-plaque industry**  
Ancient trade struggles  
to blossom **P26**

# THE YOUNG REPORTER *magazine*

February 2015



## *Doubts over youth hostel scheme*



# In This Issue

FRONT

FEATURE

NEWS

## 4 One Moment

## 6 Owning a home remains a distant dream despite hostel scheme, say youths

How new Youth Hostel Scheme brings hope to people desiring for a home in Hong Kong

## 10 Concerns over sister-school scheme

Doubt over feasibility and political agenda of Sister School Scheme

## 12 New MTR station threatens old shops' survival

Fears over MTR West Island Line extension killing nearby small businesses

NEWS

## 14 Kim Jong-un in Hong Kong?

Meeting the impersonator of DPRK supreme leader

## 16 A Laughter Yoga Trainer

Former teacher gives up job to cheer people up by yoga

## 18 Brother Kim the "shoe-vator"

A local veteran shoemaker shares his story of lifelong contribution



## 22 Passing on the Craftsmanship

Young people urged to save fading handicraft industry

NEWS

## 24 A sleepless night at the fruit market

A night tour of Hong Kong's century-old fruit market

## 26 Silver lining for the flower-plaque industry

Flower-plaque industry struggles to blossom



## Letter from the Editor

**F**EBRUARY is the season of love. We start this issue by capturing the Hong Kong Observation Wheel's very first Valentine's Day. There are also stories about the Chief Executive's Policy Address, interesting people and almost forgotten industries.

Our cover story features the youth hostel scheme proposed by the Chief Executive, looking at whether the scheme would make owning a home a more attainable goal for the younger generation. Then, our politics feature digs into educators' concern over the government's proposal to encourage more local schools to team up with sister schools on the Mainland.

We also look into the fascinating life stories of people from different corners of society, including an impersonator of North Korea's leader. Last but not least, you will see photo essays on the Yau Ma Tei Fruit Market and the struggling flower plaque industry.

This month also marks the start of another year in the Chinese world. We wish you a happy and prosperous Year of the Goat (Or is it a Sheep? Ram?) Share your comment on our website or write to us!

**Carain Yeung**  
Editor

# THE YOUNG REPORTER magazine

Editor  
**Carain Yeung**

Deputy Editors  
**Alpha Chan**  
**Karen Lee**  
**Steven Wang**

Copy Editors  
**Joyce Wong**  
**Karen Leung**  
**Tsau Jin Cheng**

Web Editors  
**Aska Cheong**  
**Katrina Yau**

Art Directors  
**Shirley Chan**  
**Tiffany Ng**  
**Vicky Wan**

Public Relation Officer  
**Josie Wong**

Distribution Officer  
**Alice Wan**

Advisers  
**CK Lau**  
**Robin Ewing**

Design Adviser  
**Wade Chan**

Section Editors  
**Annie Lee**  
**James Zhang**  
**Lokie Wong**  
**Natalie Leung**  
**Nikki Wu**  
**Rainbow Li**  
**Stephen Leung**  
**Tiffany Lee**  
**Yupina Ng**

Reporters  
**Airis Lin**  
**Amie Cheng**  
**Anne Lau**  
**Catherine Chen**  
**Christy Leung**  
**Cora Chan**  
**Crystal Tse**  
**Harry Ng**  
**Hilary Wu**  
**Iverson Ng**  
**Jackson Ho**  
**Jane Cheung**  
**Jennie Tang**  
**Jo Lee**  
**Joanna Wong**  
**Joanne Lee**  
**Joey Hung**  
**Kumiko Lau**  
**Kyle Sun**  
**Mari Chow**  
**Nathaniel Suen**  
**Natasha Fernandes**  
**ShanShan Kao**  
**Thomas Chan**  
**Tina Cheung**  
**Tsui See Au Yeung**  
**Viola Zhou**  
**Yanis Chan**

Publisher  
**Alice Lee**

Printer  
**Department of Journalism**  
**School of Communication**  
**Hong Kong Baptist University**

Printer address  
**Dept of Journalism,**  
**HK Baptist University,**  
**Kowloon Tong, Kln**

The Young Reporter  
Volume 47 No. 5  
2015



Previous issue explores why government's one-off money assistance is not the best cure for local fishermen affected by trawling bans.

E M A I L  
tyr1415@gmail.com  
F A C E B O O K  
t y r m a g  
W E B S I T E  
t y r . h k

**The Young Reporter**

**the-young-reporter**

**The Young Reporter**









# One Moment

*The Hong Kong Observation Wheel in Central welcomes its first Valentine's Day by attracting couples to record their moments of joy. The 60 metres tall big-O is expected to attract one million visitors in the first year of operation.*

By **The Young Reporter**  
Photo by **Vicky Wan**



COVER STORY

# Owning a *home* remains despite hostel schemes

Doubts over young people's ability to save up mortgage





# ains a distant *dream* ne, say youths

deposit for a flat during five-year tenancy at hostel





*The Tai Po project run by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups is located at Po Heung Street and will provide 306 rooms in total.*

**L**IKE many of his peers, Mr Jacky Yick Ka-ki, a 25-year-old engineer, has a modest dream of becoming a homeowner.

But with a monthly salary of just \$15,000, he is not optimistic that he will ever be able to save up enough money to do so as even a small flat costs several million dollars.

The youth hostels that Chief Executive Mr Leung Chun-ying proposed to build would seem to have opened up more choices for affordable housing for young people, said Mr Yick.

But as tenants could live in a hostel for only five years, he doubts if he would be able to save up enough to pay for the mortgage deposit for a flat during the period, he said.

In his view, the Youth Hostel Scheme is just a stopgap measure as merely a small part of the population can enjoy its benefits and it was not able to address the root cause of the housing problem, which is a serious undersupply of accommodation.

Aimed at helping working youth with a low income

to save for the deposit of their first flats, the Youth Hostel Scheme was announced by the Chief Executive in his policy address in January.

Under the scheme, four hostels providing 1,000 places will be built in Sheung Wan, Tai Po, Mong Kok and Jordan and run by non-governmental organisations on a self-financing basis.

A survey conducted by the Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre in 2012 found that young couples needed to save for 14.3 years to afford the deposit of their first flat.

The youth hostels are expected to relieve the housing pressure among those aged between 18 and 30 with a monthly income of between \$9,000 and \$15,000.

Currently, the city has a million young people aged between 20 and 29, accounting for 13.9 per cent of the total population.

Mr Kenneth Tong Yiu-keung, 29, is a representative of No Flat Slave, a youth organisation focused on the youth housing issue.

He said the government is not keen on addressing



**“The government should speed up the progress of building public rental housing or provide more hostel accommodation instead of limiting the tenancy period at the hostels.”**



**Mr Chan Siu-ming,  
a member of the Shadow  
Long Term Housing Strategy  
Steering Committee**

the high housing demand of the young people, citing the long queue for the public rental housing as a result of the inadequate supply of affordable accommodation.

The US-based consultancy Demographia has rated Hong Kong as having the world's most unaffordable housing, with its median home price at 17 times of its median pre-tax household income.

Mr Tong said the rent to be charged by the youth hostels, which would be around 60 per cent of the market price, is “unreasonable” and has failed to consider the affordability of working youth.

Young people normally have to spend almost half of their monthly income on rent, he said.

According to the findings of the 2014 annual survey conducted by the Housing Department, among 228,400 applicants on the waiting list for public housing, 60,400 were aged below 30.

“The supply of flats fails to meet the high (housing) demand of young people,” said Mr Chan Siu-ming, 28, an assistant to lawmaker Mr Fernando Cheung Chiu-hung,

who is a member of the Shadow Long Term Housing Strategy Steering Committee.

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Bureau said that young people will be allowed to queue for both public rental housing and youth hostels simultaneously.

However, they will have to forgo their applications for public rental housing once they are allocated a hostel unit, as “it is already subsidised by the government”.

Mr Chan said the restraint is unfair. “The government should speed up the progress of building public rental housing or provide more hostel accommodation instead of limiting the tenancy period at the hostels,” he said.

Mr Tsang Tak-sing, Secretary for Home Affairs, told RTHK in January that the hotels in Sheung Wan and Tai Po were expected to be completed in 2017 and the ones in Mong Kok and Jordan were still being planned.



## POLITICS

# Concerns over sister-school scheme

Locals schools will be given \$120,000 grants to establish partnership with mainland schools.

EDUCATORS have expressed concerns over a government proposal to encourage more local schools to team up with sister schools on the mainland, saying its objective is questionable and would put pressure on teachers and schools.

Chief Executive Mr Leung Chun-ying announced in his 2015 policy address that the government would provide an annual grant of \$120,000 to each local public sector school and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools that has a sister mainland school.

According to the Education Bureau, the grant will be used to fund exchanges in areas such as school management, lesson demonstration, lesson evaluation and idea conferencing with a view to enhancing experience sharing and teaching effectiveness.

The sister school scheme was launched in 2004. Since then, 420 local primary and secondary schools have established partnerships with schools in the mainland.

But this year is the first time the government has backed the scheme with a subsidy that aims to boost the partnership number to 600.

But Mr Leung Kee-cheong, principal of the Fresh Fisher Traders' School, said the scheme would put unprecedented pressure on teachers and schools.

According to his experience, teachers in charge of an exchange tour are required to take on a lot of responsibilities on top of their teaching duties, such as doing research on destinations, leading large groups of students abroad and writing post-visit reports.

Meanwhile, a shortage of teachers would negatively impact on students' learning process, as schools are not allowed to recruit supply teachers unless

**“Imagine if one class teacher has to be away to lead a school tour for five days, it will increase the burden of other teachers in our school.”**



**Mr Leung Kee-cheong, principal of the Fresh Fisher Traders' School**

teachers fall ill.

“Imagine if one class teacher has to be away to lead a school tour for five days, it will increase the burden of other teachers in our school,” said Mr Leung.

He believed the scheme could

help relieve pressure faced by teachers only if the government would allocate funds to increase the number of school secretaries.

With the potential burden brought by the scheme, Mr Leung sees no real needs to implement the sister-school scheme. “Forming sister-schools with mainland schools only serves the purpose of adding title and values to schools,” he said.

Mr Cheung Yui-fai, director of education research of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, said there is no existing rule to execute the sister-school scheme and schools can decide not to hold any activities with their sister-schools.

He said the school he works at hosted various short-term exchange tours to the Mainland during the term break last year. This provides greater flexibility to the school and would not affect the students' learning process compared to activities organised under the sister-school scheme, he said.

Separately, Mr Cheung said schools would outsource the whole scheme to other organisations if they do not have a strategic plan to implement it.

He is concerned that pro-mainland agencies may only take students to explore some aspects of China. “My concern is that those organisations may have a ‘hidden agenda’, instead of promoting the right educational message,” he added.

“There is no doubt that students should deepen their understanding of their country. Yet, how and whether the students form their Chinese identity are their personal choices. The government and schools have no rights to interfere,” he said.

By **Kumiko Lau**  
Edited by **Tiffany Lee**







## BUSINESS

# New MTR station threatens old shops' survival

Small businesses face financial hardship because of escalating rent and fewer customers as the newly constructed Sai Ying Pun MTR station is about to be completed.



The Four Seas, an imaging shop that has been operating since 1978, faces its closure this year. It is one of the last shops in this area still producing traditional ceramic photos.



Rental prices along the extended part of the Hong Kong Island Line have soared since the construction of new stations, says shop owners and property agents.



**M**R Wong Tak-on, a 59-year-old owner of a photo studio, bid farewell to a customer at the cashier.

The lady leaving the shop was still a baby in her mother's arms when Mr Wong took passport photos for her 25 years ago. Mr Wong had known her all her life and seen her grow to become a young woman.

This is likely to be her last visit to the 36-year-old photo studio, which closed down in January this year.

The rising rent and declining profit made it impossible to run the studio the old-fashioned way, said the Mr Wong.

Sai Ying Pun, the district where Mr Wong's studio was located, saw a drastic rise in rent in the past years, partly due to the extension of the MTR Island Line.

The plan to extend the Island Line to Kennedy Town was proposed in 2002, while construction began in 2009. The West Island line was put into service last year, but the opening of Sai Ying Pun station was postponed to March 2015.

The construction delay did not slow down the rent increase in Sai Ying Pun, said Mr Wong. "The rent has been soaring since 2009 when the construction work of the escalator for the new station started."

The sky-rocketing rent is caused by the development of a nearby residential estate, Island Crest, said Ms Cecilia Leung, a property agent in the neighbourhood. "It has attracted lots of well-paid expatriates to Sai Ying Pun and this has changed the entire local business environment."

Ms Leung said many rich people from Mainland China bought the apartments of Island Crest and leased them to westerners working in Hong Kong, whose accommodations are often paid by employers.

Bars and western restaurants had since sprung up and replaced those old small-scale businesses which failed to cater to the new market, she said.

The table tennis centre next to Ms Leung's office was "Ping Pong Gintoneria" which is decorated in the theme of table tennis.

Other property agents concur with Ms Leung. "How can you ask a pork retailer to pay a monthly rent of \$70,000?" one of them said.

Vice-chairman of the Central and Western District Council, Mr Chan Hok-fung told Time Out in an interview that it is inevitable that "people may complain about the high rent."

Mr Leong Kwok-kuen, the Acting Chief Executive of the MTR Corporation, refused to comment whether the railway extension would cause harm to the old shops along the new line.

Legislator Mr Kenneth Chan Ka-lok, who represents Hong Kong Island, has expressed his concerns over old stores' survival in the neighbourhood. Mr Chan said that the rapidly rising rents had been affecting the local business environment. "Big developers and chain stores might move in because they could afford higher rents," he added.

"Land owners would rather leave the stores empty now than renting at low prices to tenants," said Mr Wong, the photo studio owner. He misses the days when there were book shops, goldfish stalls, stationery shops and amusement arcades around his studio.

Mr Wong said his shop was then popular among students, who would visit his shop at Western Street during lunch breaks or after school. "My store is like a mini-supermarket.

You could find many things like cameras, music records, autographs, mobile phone SIM cards, and we provided printing and faxing service."

Today, it is hard to imagine that this antiquated store was once the trendiest place in the district for students to hang out.





## PEOPLE

# Kim Jong-un in Hong Kong?

Not everyone has the chance to visit North Korea, let alone meeting the country's supreme leader. But some people suspect they see him here

If you think you have met North Korean leader Kim Jong-un occasionally in Hong Kong, don't panic. You have only met his look-a-like, Kim Jong "Um", a character created by Howard.

Since 2013, Howard, who prefers not to reveal his name, started impersonating the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In fact, when Howard first saw Kim Jong-un with his father, Kim Jong-il, years ago on television, he already noticed that he looks very much like Kim Jong-un. But it was not until his friends also pointed out this likeness did he start impersonating Kim.

"If lots of people recognize me as Kim," he said, "it means that I could become an impersonator and make money."

He and his friends created a Facebook page called "Kim Jong 'Um'-Kim Jong Un Look alike/Impersonator" and started posting pictures of him with Kim's signature haircut and black button up suit.

Although Howard looks like Kim, it still takes him four hours to turn himself into Kim by changing his hairstyle and modifying the shape of his eyebrows.

Other than changing his appearance, Howard has also learn to imitate Kim Jong-un's tone by watching all the speeches the real leader has delivered.

But despite having done that, Howard said he knew nothing about Kim's personality. "Actually, I think no one knows for sure," Howard said.

**"I still do not know how to speak Korean," says Howard**

"Perhaps he is a puppet of the real governors behind the scene. Who knows?"

Another obstacle for Howard is speaking Korean. Usually, he only needs to walk around and wave to people silently. But he feels horrible when he is asked to recite Korean lines.

"I still do not know how to speak Korean," he said.

Still, Howard's plan works well as expected. Kim Jong "Um" received an invitation from an Israeli burger company to be the main character of the company's advertisements.

His impersonation is a success especially outside East Asia, where foreigners find it difficult to distinguish him from Kim. There are always westerners criticising him with harsh words on his Facebook page when he has to explain a lot.

Although the real DPRK leader may not be impressed by his impersonation,



Howard is not worried that the North Korean government might do any harm to him. "If I were assassinated as a Hong Kong citizen in Hong Kong, it would be big news and that would irritate China," he said.

Howard said he impersonates Kim not only for money but also for fun. During his trip to Brazil last summer, he was regarded as the real leader by a ticket reseller, who took photos with him and offered him a free ticket to a World Cup game.

During the Umbrella Movement in October, for the first time Howard dressed up as Kim not for a job. He showed his support for the movement by smiling at the protesters and holding an umbrella with his Kim Jong "Um" look.

Now, Howard is in America to seek further opportunities. "Hopefully, I can sneak into this year's Oscar ceremony. Let us see the reactions," he laughed.

By **Kyle Sun**  
Edited by **Alice Wan**



Photo courtesy of Howard



## PEOPLE

# *I am here to make you laugh*

Former teacher gives up school career to go into the serious business of cheering people up

**“Some of my friends say they laugh much more simply by being with me. I’m their laughing therapy.”**

**Ms Natalie Lui, a laughter yoga trainer**



SHE is not a clown but her job is to make people laugh. To be exact, she trains people to laugh. Ms Natalie Lui, a laughter yoga trainer, holds her class at the Tseung Kwan O Women’s Club every Thursday afternoon by bringing to her students one hour of laughter that includes smiles, giggles and lots of guffaws.

The class begins with Ms Lui clapping her hands and opening her mouth widely to make the sound “Ho Ho Ha Ha Ha” as her students - the oldest one is in her 70s - follow.

She then ask her students to imagine themselves eating a buffet, picking up gold at a golden beach and being in a Miss Hong Kong parade. Everyone laughs like a young child.

Having been a laughter yoga trainer for three years, Ms Lui has made hundreds of people laugh. She is also the founder of Yogamate, a social enterprise with a mission to spread health and happiness in Hong Kong.

In her yoga classes, Ms Lui describes some happy scenes and asks the participants to laugh in an exaggerated way. She said those fake laughs can induce real positive emotions.

“Depression is infectious,” Ms Lui said. “And laughter can protect you like a mask. Laughing leads you to see things from new perspectives and helps you find the solution.”

Ms Lui is certainly protected by that mask.

When she finishes her sentences

with a series of “Ha Ha”, she says to others, “Why so serious? You should laugh more.” When she was waiting for trains, she smiled to the glass, she said.

“Some of my friends say they laugh much more simply by being with me,” Ms Lui said. “I’m their laughing therapy.”

But Ms Lui is not born to be optimistic. When she was teaching economics in a secondary school four years ago, she always got sick and depressed because of the stress.

“The administrative work brought a lot of pressure,” she said. “When I was trying to look like what people expected a teacher to be, I was not being my true self.”

After suffering from poor health, Ms Lui quit her job and became a social worker in a parent-support organization. To do her job well, she learned yoga by herself. But soon she found Youtube videos were not enough, she decided to seek professional training in India.

“Instead of keeping looking for new jobs without knowing what I was really doing, I thought I needed a break to think about what I want,” Ms Lui said. “I found that yoga was something I could enjoy and help others at the same time.”

After Ms Lui came back to Hong Kong in 2011, she left her job again and established Yogamate to teach laughter yoga with several other trainers.

Ms Lui said although her family and friends found her new career strange, she was determined to explore what she likes. And her experience has inspired

people around her to pursue the kind of life they want.

“Many people think it’s dangerous to give up what you already have,” she said. “When they see how I went through the change, they get the courage to make a try.”

Now Ms Lui describes herself as someone who sells laughter. Her company now has over 20 trainers. This year, she will train another 60 to 70 people to be laughter yoga teachers.

She said seeing her students laugh gave her great satisfaction. She has met people who came to the lesson to have their only laughing time on the day. She also knew a cancer patient who had not laughed for three months before doing laughter yoga.

“Everyone wants others to be happy and I never see anyone who finishes a laughter yoga session without laughing,” she said. “Having the ability to share laughter is really a blessing.”

Ms Lui said her new motivation is to have people who have done laughter yoga spread happiness in different parts of the city.

“Hong Kong is such a busy place that people here forget they can laugh. But if we help them press the button, they will get back the ability again, she concluded.

By **Viola Zhou**  
Edited by **Stephen Leung**



*Ms Lui warms up with her students before doing laughter yoga and leads them to imagine happy scenes like eating a buffet.*



# 紳士鞋

PEOPLE

## Giving back to society with shoes

Passionate shoemaker serves his family and society with his sophisticated skill.

**A**DORE them (or not). Buy them. Wear them. Wear them out. Yank them into the bin without second thought and it all begins again. This is how most people treat their shoes nowadays. But if Mr Lee Tak-him's life, so far, has to be wrapped up in one word, it has to be "shoes".

Mr Lee, commonly known as "Brother Kim", has been making and mending shoes for more than 40 years. He is the second-generation co-owner of the family business, Shanghai Gentlemen Shoes Co., which is also a government-recognised Community Caring Shop.

The closer you get to his shop, the clearer the sounds of sewing machine and hammer. This rhythmic melody makes a great contrast with the hustle and bustle of the busy Mong Kok, where the shop is located in.

This little workshop supported generations of the Lees and Brother Kim has been working there since he was a teenager. Decades of training perfected his skills and enabled him to give back to society.

With a close friend's connection, he started cooperating with a community centre. The centre delivers worn-out shoes (usually owned by elderly people) to his shop about once in two weeks and he takes his time to repair them, without charging a single cent.

"Most of the time, old people are just reluctant to throw old shoes away because the shoes hold special meanings and they have a strong connection with them," he said, "but it is a pain for me to see them in discomfort wearing worn-out shoes, so I made up my mind to fix it for them." His kindness gained him

recognition and he was awarded the Good Deeds certificate by the Commission on Poverty in 2014.

Brother Kim's skill also allows him to find his niche in life by creating tailor-made shoes for the disabled or customers with distorted feet, who often have a hard time looking for shoes that fit. He is particularly satisfied when the benefited express how they could be in trouble without him, he said.

"My shoes are all done on request. I feel like I can help them, and this is very meaningful," he added.

After all these years, Brother Kim certainly still has a passion for his career but he is sentimental to how people's attitude towards shoes has changed, how "things are not the same anymore".

"The demand of leather shoes obviously declined compare with that in the 60s," he said, "People back then would wear them both to work and to casual dates. Sneakers and slip-ons seemed to have replaced leather shoes nowadays."

Regardless of how much society has changed, Brother Kim's pursuit of elegant yet comfortable footwear remains as he believes that a pair of sophisticated shoes guarantees the well-being of an individual, or in his words, "your sturdy groundwork".

Although good shoes are pricey, he praises them as artworks and assures that they are worth it. He does not like to see young ladies wearing badly manufactured brand-name high-heels just for "good looks".

"A pair of well-made leather shoes refreshes you and builds a professional image, while it also protects your feet from po-



修補皮鞋  
手袋

& BAGS

手工縫制





**“There is still a very long way before I retire. I will carry on until the moment comes and I shall stop.”**

**Mr Lee Tak-him, a shoemaker**







tential harm, such as feet strains from rapid movements,” Brother Kim said, “your legs and feet support your body every day. How can you take this risk when it comes to shoes and health?”

His belief is not the only reason he stays in this sunset industry. Getting him attached to this business are precious memory growing up surrounded by shoes and his care for the family.

“To produce a pair of shoes, you have to make its vamp first then its sole. Since my father was only specialised in making the latter, we decided that my brother would learn from him and I would follow another master to practice vamp-making,” he said. “But the journey of apprenticeship was tough because I had no salary and opportunities of putting my hands on shoes were limited.”

Brother Kim’s hard work paid off and he recalled how relieving it was to know his father would not have to beg people to finish off the products again.

The family business did not gain Brother Kim a big fortune and he never really hoped for that. “Expansion” is almost out of the question as young people are reluctantly to join the craftsmanship. He said some young people in their twenties requested to learn from him but they never made it till the end.

Brother Kim thinks this is understandable because young people are concerned with their livelihood and their future, as the market has low demand and shops usually pay apprentices very little.

Speaking of the future of his shop, he said, “There is still a very long way before I retire. I will carry on until the moment comes and I shall stop.” He said when he could no longer make ends meet, he would rent his place to those who have other ambitions in this prosperous city.

By **Jo Lee**  
Edited by **Carain Yeung**

**Write to us.**

***We will publish your letters in the  
magazine and on our website.***

***tyr1415@gmail.com***

***The Young Reporter  
run by HKBU journalism students since 1969***



## ARTS&amp;CULTURE

# Passing on the Craftsmanship

Handicraft is losing its fame in the age of machinery, yet two young craftspeople are trying to preserve the industry

**S**ECOND by second, stitch by stitch, craftsmen put their hearts into crafting unique products. Every detail of the products is highly appreciated in the eyes of artists and consumers.

However, machines and factories were replaced this time-consuming production line with its high-speed mass productions.

The art of crafting struggles to find a balance between art and financing. With little assistance from the government, many craftsmen left the market to feed their families.

In time of turbulence and change, two young handicraft artists devote their time to save the industry by passing on the skills through workshops.

Ms Carola Lau, a 24-year-old leather craftswoman, dedicates herself to her handicraft business, Carola

Handmade, which started in 2012.

Soon after her training with an experienced Australian leather craftsman in 2014, Ms Lau began to spend all her time on crafting for sales and leather craft workshops until now.

“I really like handicrafts because they are handmade with a genuine intention that cannot be replaced by products of mass production,” said Ms Lau.

The idea of conducting workshops was from a girl who asked Ms Lau to teach her leathercraft after seeing pictures of the leatherwork of Ms Lau’s.

“Art may be something far away to most people,” said Ms Kate Kam, another young handicraftsman, “but handicraft could be a stepping stone for them to arouse their interest in art because it’s personal and fun.”

The 26-year-old painter, Ms Kam, is the owner of a pop art studio, Popduction, which was set up in 2012. In order to draw people

closer to art, Ms Kam holds painting workshops in her studio to promote handicraft art besides selling her own art pieces.

With stencil and paint, Ms Kam transforms photos into unique pop art paintings. With workshops and promotions, Ms Kam wishes more people could be exposed to the art of handicraft.

Handicraft workshops are in demand in the market in recent years because people want to create their unique and personal products and it has become a trend.

However, the handicraft industry is in hidden danger because people might turn away from the culture once the trend is over. Both craftsmen are worried that the industry would fall again when the people lose their passion in spending time on crafting.

With a common goal of popularising art, both Ms Lau and Ms Kam wish the government could put more effort in supporting the falling handicraft industry.



Every detail is critical in the eyes of Ms Lau while she uses a puncher to make holes for leather stitching.

Ms Lau believes that cultural cultivation has to start early because children possess much more creativity and imagination. “I hope I could pass on the spirit and passion of handicrafts to the next generation,” said Ms Lau. Her suggestion is to organise handicraft workshops in schools for children to build up their interest in crafting.

Besides school promotion, Ms Lau added producing and distributing free art-related magazines is another way to raise cultural awareness on art and provide art-related information to the public.

On the other hand, Ms Kam said that handicraft industry was facing a huge obstacle of lacking space for development.

Even though the Artspace in Wong Chuk Hang, a creative space provided by Hong Kong Arts Development Council, is available to the artists at affordable rents, Ms Kam wishes there will be more places for large number of artists for conducting handicraft workshops.

In Hong Kong, it is difficult to tell whether handicraft industry could stay in the market because of its time-consuming nature. However, with promotion by the government, passion of the craftsmen and support by the people, there is still hope for the industry, the craftwomen said.



*Ms Kam's customers stand with their paintings after the workshops with pride.*







# 張記果欄

PHOTO ESSAY

## A sleepless night at the fruit market

AS most shops have closed for the night, a shabby and old market at the corner of Reclamation Street and Waterloo Road in Kowloon springs to life with the awakening scent of fruits.

The Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market, commonly known as Gwo Laan, has been serving as the city's major distribution point for imported fresh fruits since 1913.

The market starts its day at around 2am, when wholesalers would move and unload carts piled with fruits at the market. "Mind your steps," says a busy trader bluntly as he pushes a carload of pineapples across the intersection.

Efficiency is what matters. On average, about 70,000 boxes of fruits are sold every night, according to the Kowloon Fruit and Vegetable Merchants Association.

Most people in the industry are middle-aged men, who have to monitor the fruits that will be sold and distributed overnight to wet markets and fruit stalls throughout the city. Keeping a dog as a security guard is common.

"Watch out. It (the dog) is even crazier than I am," said a trader as he stops his dog from attacking this photographer.

By **Amie Cheng**  
Edited by **Alpha Chan**







PHOTO ESSAY

## Silver lining for the flower-plaque industry

At the end of an alley in the Yuen Long old market, a craftsman dips a big brush into a can of neon orange paint and starts to stroke on a white cardboard. Though the wooden doorplate next to the antiquated iron gates says it is a flower shop, the place is stacked with racks of papers and scaffoldings rather than flowers.

Lee Yim Kee Flower Shop is one of the remaining workshops in Hong Kong producing handmade giant flower plaques, or “Fa Paai”.

Topped with a peacock, large calligraphy of celebrating messages, glittering papers and red edgings, the dazzling display which could go up to 10-metres tall can be an important tool for making announcements besides celebrating shop openings and traditional Chinese festivals.

Although Fa Paai is listed as one of the 480 intangible cultural heritage items of Hong Kong in June 2014, it is at the edge of existence as rising costs, lack of successors and changing building structures leave little space for the craft to survive.

Ms Lee Tsui-lan is the second-generation helmsman of the shop started by her father, Mr Lee Yim, six decades ago when there was great demands for flower boards for village feasts in

the New Territories.

As technology advanced, Ms Lee has digitised the production process, notably in the production of Chinese characters. “Everything is made with computer nowadays. It is really convenient, but for sure the printed characters are less lively as hand-written ones,” she said.

The business has gone down in recent years and the shop is struggling to make ends meet by relying on regular customers.

Ms Lee feels it a pity but said she would not be surprised if the craft eventually dies out. “It is a natural process especially when very few young people are willing to join the industry,” she said.

Mr James Li Ka-wai, however, believes that he could still make a fortune in the industry by working hard. The 22-year-old is going to take over Lee Yim Kee Flower Shop after a two-year apprenticeship.

Mr Li said the monotonous nature of the craft keeps young people from staying. “I wouldn’t be devoted to this industry if I didn’t have the ownership. And now I find the production challenging, profitable and I get to preserve a tradition, so why not?” he said.

By **Yanis Chan**  
Edited by **Vicky Wan**









E M A I L

*tyr1415@gmail.com*

F A C E B O O K

*t y r m a g*

W E B S I T E

*t y r . h k*