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New light sheds on paper-making industry **P24**

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A long trip of moral struggles over paying for stories about poverty **P28**

**THE YOUNG REPORTER**  
*magazine*

May 2015



LOVE  
HOTELS  
IN AN  
UNLIKELY  
SETTING

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## Letter from the Editor

Hong Kong tops the chart of the most expensive cities to live in for years. Rental and sales prices of domestic properties have become a number too big for youth and even working youth to consider. Living with the parents is not just a social norm but an economic strategy. Even with all the benefits, like cheap, or no, rent, home food, free laundry and of course family love, it has its shortcomings - lacking personal space.

For young couples, love hotels may be their go-to to unleash their young passionate love. But where are the spaces for those who simply wants to enjoy their own company away from the crowd? The rental index for domestic properties has risen from 80 in 2005 to 170 in April, 2015. Should young people compromise their

aspiration to a desired lifestyle for a space in a high-rise of a suburban area?

Taking a break from the ever-so-expensive reality, a nice tour around the world is not exclusive to billionaires. A perfect holiday may be a beach session at a Greek island on a warm but breezy summer day, there are though alternative ways to see the world that are more affordable and meaningful. Students are more encouraged to step out and see the world these days and discounts are available for almost everything if you have a valid student card. I am lucky enough to have visited more than ten countries in the previous year and I realise it is the memories you take away that stays. Not the key chains with national flag.

*Crystal Tse*  
Editor

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The Young Reporter  
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Printer  
**Department of Journalism**  
**School of Communication**  
**Hong Kong Baptist**  
**University**



Previous issue explores how and why Hong Kong's elderly abuse government-issued health care vouchers.

E M A I L  
[editors@tyr.hk](mailto:editors@tyr.hk)  
W E B S I T E  
[tyr.hk](http://tyr.hk)



Acce



SOME PEOPLE ARE TRANS. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE BI. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE BI. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE TRA. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE B. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE TRANS. GET OVER IT!

SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY. GET OVER IT!

Acceptance without exception

PEOPLE  
ARE GAY.  
GET  
OVER  
IT!



## One Moment

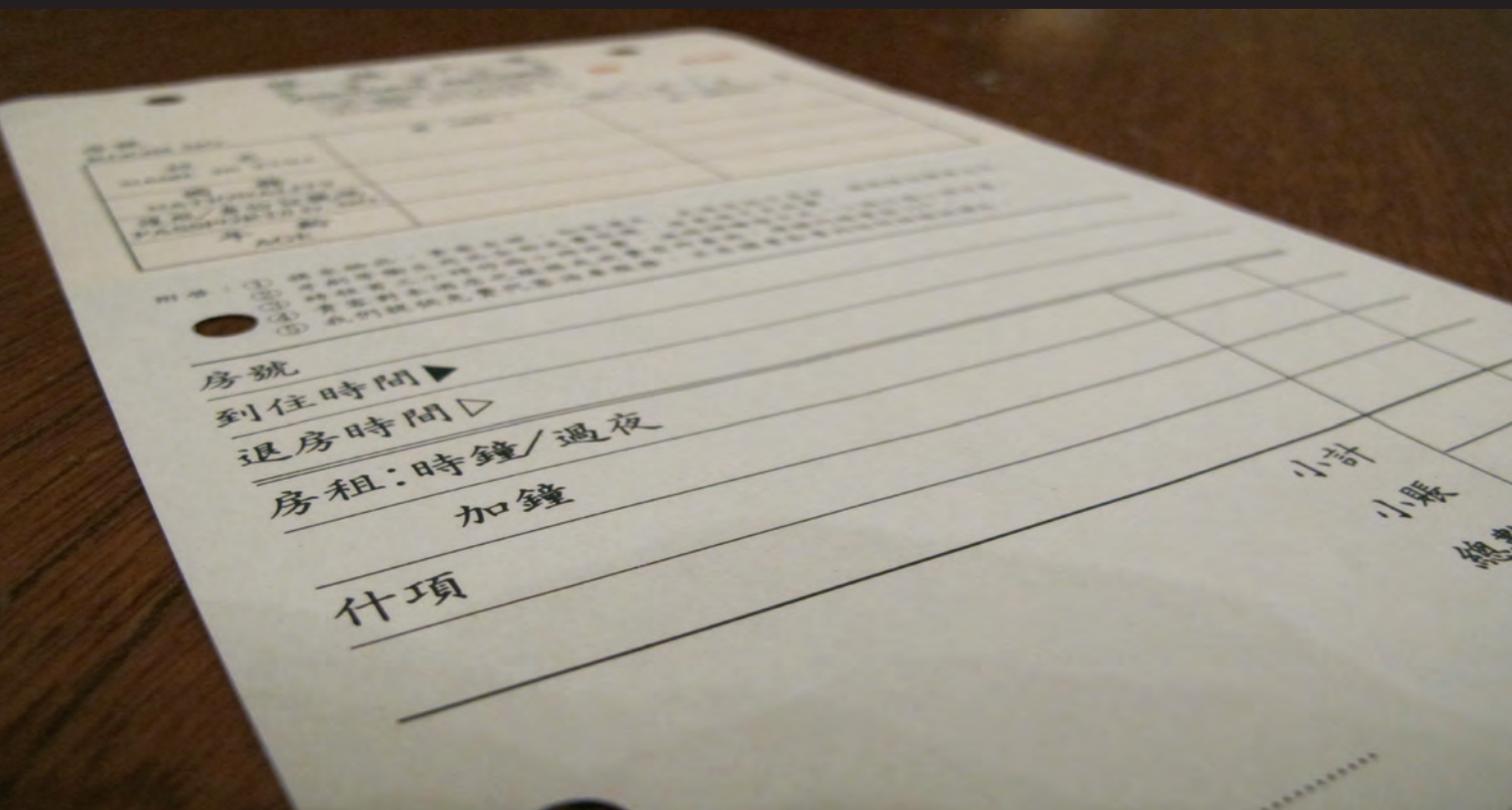
*Thousands marched to the streets of London for the annual Pride parade, starting from Baker Street to Whitehall. More than 250 groups showed up to stand for what they believe in.*

By **Sharon Shi**



## *Love hotels in an unlikely setting*

*Despite facing little competition, love hotels find it tough to survive in one of Hong Kong's most expensive districts.*



*Couples are obliged by law to provide their personal information upon using a room.*

With its quaint houses and prestigious schools on quiet, leafy streets, Kowloon Tong is without a doubt one of Hong Kong's most expensive districts.

Yet, it is also host to over ten love hotels: small-scaled establishments rented by couples for intimate sessions.

Unlike traditional hotels, love hotels allow customers to rent a room on an hourly basis.

One might expect fierce competition among the love hotels as they cluster around a small area near the Kowloon Tong MTR station.

“But there really isn’t much competition”, said Mr Campbell Leung, sales manager of one of the hotels. “It was even easier for us back when there were 30 to 40 motels in the area.”

He explains that he didn’t use to worry about losing customers to other motels because the

number of rooms was limited and demand used to exceed supply.

Love hotels, he says, did not need to advertise because people knew how to find them and many customers were very familiar with them.

During peak seasons such as Christmas or Valentine’s Day, his hotel was always fully occupied and walk-in customers had to wait, he says.

Although love hotels in Kowloon Tong do not face keen competition, they still have to constantly upgrade themselves to keep customers satisfied.

Mr Leung says that every few years, the hotels would be renovated to keep up with ever-changing customer trends.

The hotel that he works for is trying to change a simple and elegant décor, in stark contrast to previous designs that focused on vibrant colours and playfulness.

One of the main attractions of love hotels in the past was their fun equipment. For example, waterbeds or rotating round beds with electrical mattresses. “But those days are long gone,” says Ms Carmen Wong, the supervisor of another love hotel in the same area.

These beds were very hard to maintain, and the companies that manufactured them have gone out of business, she says.

When she became supervisor over 10 years ago, the motel that she worked for had already replaced all of their “fun” beds, says Ms Wong.

Outsiders might think that running a love hotel in Kowloon Tong is simple, but proprietors say business is tough.

In 2013, Romantic Hotel shut down after operating for 20 years because of high rent. The premises were then taken over by a bridal shop that reportedly pays \$400,000 in rent a month.

“Most love hotels in Kowloon Tong are built on privately owned land and it is the only way that they can survive in the area,” says Mr Leung. In addition, the owner of a love hotel often has several other more hotels under his wing.

Hiring staff is also challenging for hotel owners. Mr Leung says that most of the time they only hire women for daily operations, such as registration and cleaning, because female customers are more comfortable with seeing women on the premises.

But young women rarely work in these hotels for long, so owners can only hire middle-aged women.

“Young girls who work in this business have a tough time finding boyfriends, so they leave,” says Mr Leung.

By **Jonathan Chan**  
Edited by **Kumiko Lau**



*Love hotels usually install larger mirrors in rooms.*



A sign outside a love hotel says "leisure hotel, three hours at minimum, taxis are welcome."



Mr Monsoon Li commented that Hong Kong's cycle network is not comprehensive.

Cyclists in Hong Kong are not happy as they ride bikes on the choppy trails with cars and buses aside. And they are let down again after knowing the keenly-awaited cycle trails will not be completed in time.

Bike lovers have applauded the release of the New Territories Cycle Track Network extension plan in 2008, but the construction of the network, which provides a continuous east-west cycle track from Ma On Shan to Tsuen Wan, has been delayed.

Moreover, two sections of the track, Nam Sang Wai's and Sai Kung's, might never be completed, as green groups have expressed concerns about the environmental impacts of their construction.

## POLITICS

# Far from a bike-friendly city

Hong Kong should provide better infrastructure for people to enjoy cycling, bike lovers say.

It is a blow for cyclists like Mr Monsoon Li, a Yuen Long resident with more than eight years' cycling experience, who believes the Nam Sang Wai section should become part of the cycle track.

"Nam Sang Wai's rustic scenery attracts lots of photographers and cyclists every day," Mr Li said. "But there are many sections where cyclists have to dismount and walk, or they have to ride on the driveway. It is really dangerous for amateur riders."

The incomplete cycling network is not the cyclists' only complaint. Mr Li said many of his fellow bikers were disturbed by the unclear traffic rules for bicycles. For example, bikers were supposed to dismount at some intersections, but some elderly bikers not familiar with the traffic signs ended up being fined for breaching the law.

Mr Li blames the government's failure in long-term planning for the chaotic construction work today.

"The cycling network in Hong Kong is not comprehensive at all," he said. "However, it can hardly be changed now as mistakes have already been made in the planning process ten years ago."

Hong Kong does not have bike-friendly policies that exist in cities such as London, Paris and Taipei, where bikes are recognised as a daily transport mode, and cycling infrastructures are well-developed.

Different parties have been urging Hong Kong government to do the same.

Mr Lau Kwok-fan, Chairman of the Traffic and Transport Committee of the North District Council, said the Council was trying to convince the government to study the feasibility of making bicycle a mode of general transportation instead of merely serving recreational purposes.



**“...people living in the new towns do have to cycle every day from their home to the nearest MTR or bus station,”**

## **Mr Lau Kwok-fan**

**Chairman of the Traffic and Transport Committee of the North District Council**



“While it is true that citizens in the urban areas only ride their bikes on weekends as a form of recreation, people living in the new towns do have to cycle every day from their home to the nearest MTR or bus station,” Mr Lau said.

Mr Lau said cyclists in Sheung Shui and Fanling had complained inconvenience of that they had to stop every three minutes to cross the traffic lights.

Besides, some of the sections did not even have cycle paths, and cyclists had to ride on the carriageway together with cars, he said.

Secretary for Transport and Housing Professor Anthony Cheung Bing-leung said in 2012 that “road traffic in Hong Kong is so congested that it is difficult to spare spaces for developing tracks designated for cycling”.

The official position is shown by the slow progress in the Cycle Track Network construction. According to Mr Chu Wai-lun, a senior engineer at the Civil Engineering and Development Department, the work on the Yuen Long to Sheung Shui section is still waiting funding approval by the Legislative Council. Originally scheduled to commence this year, the project is likely to be postponed.

While cyclists like Mr Li find the delays unacceptable, North District Councilor Mr Lau said he understood the difficulties in carrying out this construction plan.

“At least some of the sections have been completed at this stage,” Mr Lau said. “If the government had consulted the environmental groups before launching the project, we would not even be able to enjoy these trails.”

*By* **Choco Chan**  
*Edited by* **Joanne Lee**



## SOCIETY

## Street food hawkers draw sympathy

Despite hygienic and food safety concerns, many want food peddlers to stay in the city.



*Hawker Control Officers can arrest those who are peddling without a license.*

To be a successful street food hawker in Hong Kong, you need to be good at cooking - and running. While peddling fish B&Balls and egg puffs, you have to watch out for Hawker Control Officers, who are responsible for keep the streets free of unlicensed hawkers. Those who don't run fast enough may be caught and fined.

Even knowing it is illegal to sell food without a licence, local hawkers are determined to carry on with this old business. While some see them as trouble-makers, others believe they are part of the Hong Kong culture and is worth preserving.

To rid the city of unhygienic street food, the government had stopped issuing new Itinerant hawker licences in the 1970s. In the 1990s, a \$30,000 ex gratia payment would be given to licensed hawkers if they were willing to give up the job.

This year, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department decided to crack down on the night market on Kweilin Street in Sham Shui Po, where food hawkers used to gather.

But many local residents have since expressed their sympathy to the hawkers that were forced to leave. In February, hundreds joined the "Supporting Hawker" campaign that called for the preservation of this traditional food culture.

Mr Yuen Chi-yan, who initiated "Supporting Hawker" after the Kweilin night market crackdown, said the government should reconsider the hawker problem from economic and social perspectives.

"Local street food culture would definitely attract tourists, just like those in Taiwan and Korea. It is part of our very unique way of life and is worth us preserving," Mr Yuen said.

In the 2015 budget address, Financial Secretary Mr John Tsang Chun-wah introducing to bring food trucks to Hong Kong, which triggering another round of debate over the issue.

Mr Yuen said he hoped the government would integrate local culture in the food truck plan and give hawkers a chance to continue their business.

However, some residents hate to see food hawkers around. Mr Wong Wing-nam, Chairperson of the Federation of Hong Kong Kowloon New Territories Hawker Associations, said hawkers brought lots of trouble to the community.

“If you live in the areas where the unlicensed cooked-food hawkers gathered, you would definitely object to their presence,” Mr Wong said. “They really lead to serious hygienic problems. They cook right on the back street of your home.”

He said as the hawkers took up space in the neighbourhood, they should bear certain social responsibilities.

Food safety is another big concern. Unlicensed hawkers are not obliged to provide information on the ingredients they use, and the food they sell is not subject to under government scrutiny.

Mr Wong said it was hard to hold the culprits responsible or to claim compensation if anyone got sick after having

street food bought from hawkers.

“Being a hawker is not just about making money, but also about social responsibility,” Mr Wong said. “How can the unlicensed hawkers peddle with an easy conscience if the problems remained unsolved?”

Mr Wong said the dilemma could be solved by opening more cooked-food centres and relocating hawkers there.

His suggestion was similar to the proposal by the Secretary of Food and Health. Dr Mr Ko Wing-man, after the Kweilin night market protest. Mr Ko said the government would discuss with the district councils to choose proper sites for cooked-food night markets.

Mr Yuen said he welcomed the proposal and hoped the government would continue listening to the voice of Hongkongers.

Secondary school student Mr Henry Hui said street food hawkers had become a part of Hongkongers’ collective memories and their source of self-identification, and it would be a great loss if they were not allowed a place in the city.

“It would be best if the government could strike a balance between maintaining hygiene and preserving the hawker’s culture,” said Mr Hui. “They deserve more room to live on.”

By **Kary Hsu**  
Edited by **Mari Chow**



**“Being a hawker is not just about making money, but also about social responsibility,”**

**Ms Wong Wing-nam,  
Chairperson of the Federation of  
Hong Kong Kowloon New Territories  
Hawker Associations**



*Long-term diners and servers of the Ginkgo House Western Cuisine restaurant build a strong bond.*

## SOCIETY

# Enjoy retirement through work

Getting retirees back into the job market may ease Hong Kong's ageing problem, but not all employers are ready to hire them.

The clock strikes ten when a tired Mr Chan Fuk-cyun calls it a day at the restaurant where he works as a part-time waiter. He works a four-hour shift every week only, which is nothing compared with most of Hong Kong workers who labour 50 to 60 hours a week. But Mr Chan is 73 years old.

A manager of a high-end steakhouse before retirement, Mr Chan now works at Ginkgo House Western Cuisine, a restaurant chain committed to providing employment opportunities for the elderly.

"By working here I can fulfil myself as a valuable individual," said Mr Chan. "It also solves my financial problem since I do not have an income after retirement."

Many other employees at Ginkgo House are above 60 years old. The restaurant is one of a small number of businesses willing to employ retirees. They are willing to work for reasons ranging from economic hardship to maintaining a sense of dignity through gainful employment. The oldest worker is 79.

According to the Census and Statistic Department, almost one in every three Hong Kong residents will be aged above 65 by year 2041, increasing rapidly from one in every seven, in 2011. The elderly dependency ratio over these 30 years will triple itself from 188 to 549.

As mentioned in the Budget 2015, a heavier burden will be imposed on the work force as population ages. Reliance on the working population surges and sustainability of the existing social protection schemes has been questioned again, while a universal pension scheme remains unsettled.

With an expected surge in demand on public expenses, Financial Secretary Mr John Tsang Chun-wah rolled out the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged to tackle problems stemming from the ageing population. But many retirees have no confidence in governmental aid and would rather seek new jobs themselves.

“We receive a hundred applications from retired people every month,” said Mr Roger Tam Siu-wah, a social worker who is promoting the Ginkgo House programme. “The Budget’s \$50 billion allotted to helping the elderly in need sounded like a huge amount. Be that as it may, it cannot benefit each individual.”

Neither is the job market prepared to offer ample work opportunities for the elderly. Few employers are willing accommodate aged employees’ health problems and poorer work performances.

Mr Tam says the restaurant doesn’t earn much, because they have to hire more people to adapt to the flexibility of retirees’ timetables. He add the restaurant has to close early because they do not want



*An elder waiter prepares the menu for customers in Ginkgo House.*

the elders to go home too late, for security and health reasons.

“Not all companies can make changes for their elder employees,” said Mr Keith Wong Tsz-wai, Chief Officer of Policy Research and Advocacy from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. “But the good thing is now the government welcomes old people back in the work force, so they are more encouraged to try new jobs.”

Ms Winnie Cheung Chun-lin, 61, said she could not find a job after retirement. Employers, especially those from private enterprises were not willing to pay the due amount of insurance for retirees, in spite of their skills and responsibility.

Still, some of the retired have managed to get new jobs they like. Mr Fung Ka-man, 61, found a job working as a part-time taxi driver upon his retirement from a bank two years ago.

“My timetable is flexible now. I have more time to spend with my children and my wife,” said Mr Fung. “Although the income is not stable, it does not matter. The older I get, the more I realise that money does not mean everything.”

**“By working here I can fulfil myself as a valuable individual ...it also solves my financial problem since I do not have an income after retirement,”**

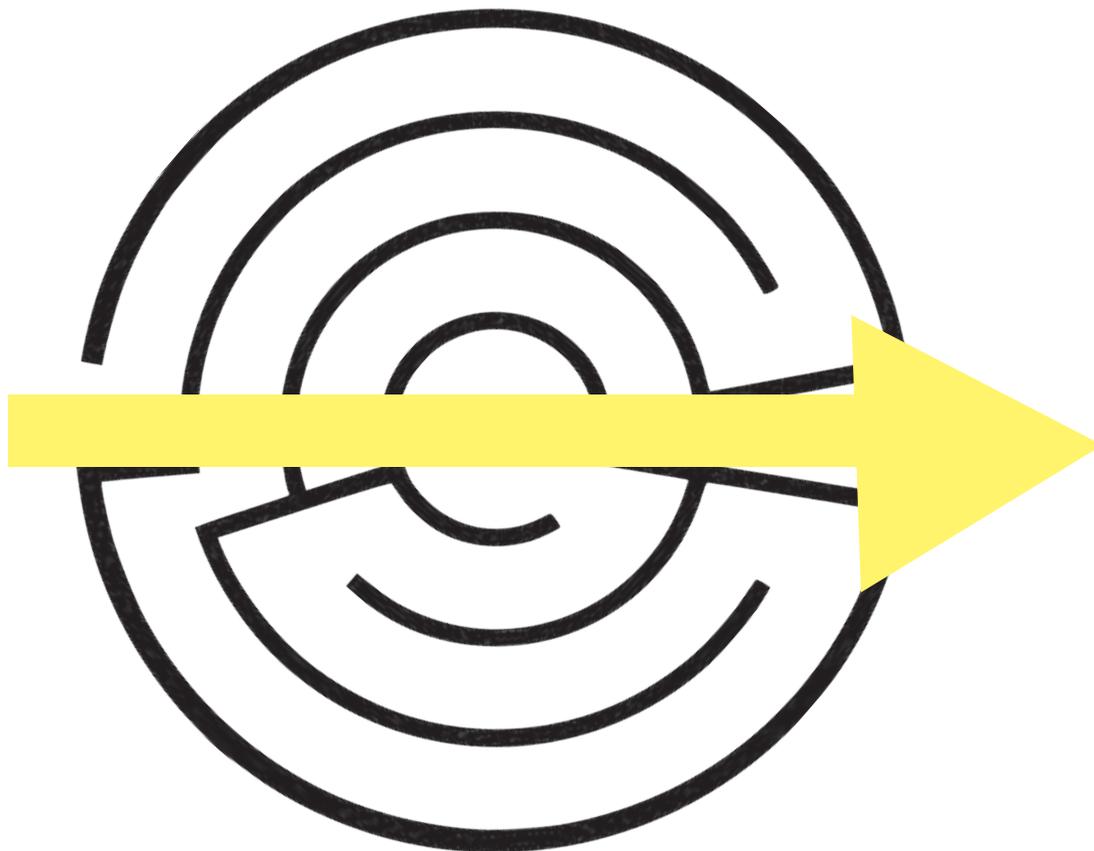
**Mr Chan Fuk-cyun, 73**  
**Part-time waiter of Ginkgo House Western Cuisine**

By **Anna Tang**  
 Edited by **Nathaniel Suen**

## SOCIETY

# A shortcut to University

Well-off students gain an edge in admission to local universities by taking exams overseas.



During the exam season, form six students in Hong Kong have a hard time studying past papers and doing exercises. But some of their fellow students may find it much easier to get into their dream schools.

A growing number of senior secondary students transfer to overseas high schools so they can get into universities in Hong Kong without taking the local entrance exam, Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Examination. Mr Ryan Yan, a business student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, is among the privileged. He went to study in the United Kingdom after finishing his fifth year in a secondary school in Hong Kong.

“I am afraid of failing Chinese Language in the HKDSE exam,” Mr Yan said.

HKDSE replaced A-levels as the university entrance exam in 2012. Under the new system, all form six secondary school students sit the same exam, which

makes the competition more fierce. In 2014, 73,000 students took HKDSE to vie for 15,000 government-funded first-year degree places in Hong Kong.

If Mr Yan wanted to enroll at a university by taking HKDSE, he would have to set a score of at least 3 in Chinese Language.

But he opt to study in the United Kingdom and take the A-Level exam, even though it meant one more year in secondary school.

After taking the exam in the U.K., students can try for a British university or apply for a Hong Kong one through the non-JUPAS channel, same as international students.

Not everyone can afford such an alternative. Many who stay in Hong Kong find it frustrating that their chances to get admitted are undermined.

“It is very unfair to local HKDSE students,” said Mr Ivan Sze, a first year law student at the University of Hong Kong. “I have many friends who went to study in secondary school overseas and were admitted to some subjects which had not been offered in Hong Kong.”

One of the reasons is that local universities would offer returning overseas students a place with lower admission requirements, as they are believed to be more competent than locals.

For example, in order to major in economics and finance at HKU, applicants who take the A-Levels in the U.K. need to have at least two As and one B, while local graduates taking HKDSE must obtain two 5\* grades. But according to Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, A in A-Level is equivalent to only 5 in HKDSE.

Moreover, the A-Level curriculum is also easier than that of HKDSE. Mr Yan, who had studied in both curriculums, said GCSE A-Level is simpler because students need more extensive but less in-depth knowledge.

Mr Li Ching-chi, a secondary school teacher in Hong Kong, said too many government-funded degree places were allocated to students returning from overseas. He called for a more fair and transparent admission system, in which the public can check the scores of every student admitted.

Ms Yip Mei-sheung, mother of a university student, agrees it is unfair to qualified students in local schools, but she understands why some parents send their children abroad.

“Every parent would provide the best studying environment for their children if they can afford the cost,” Ms Yip said.

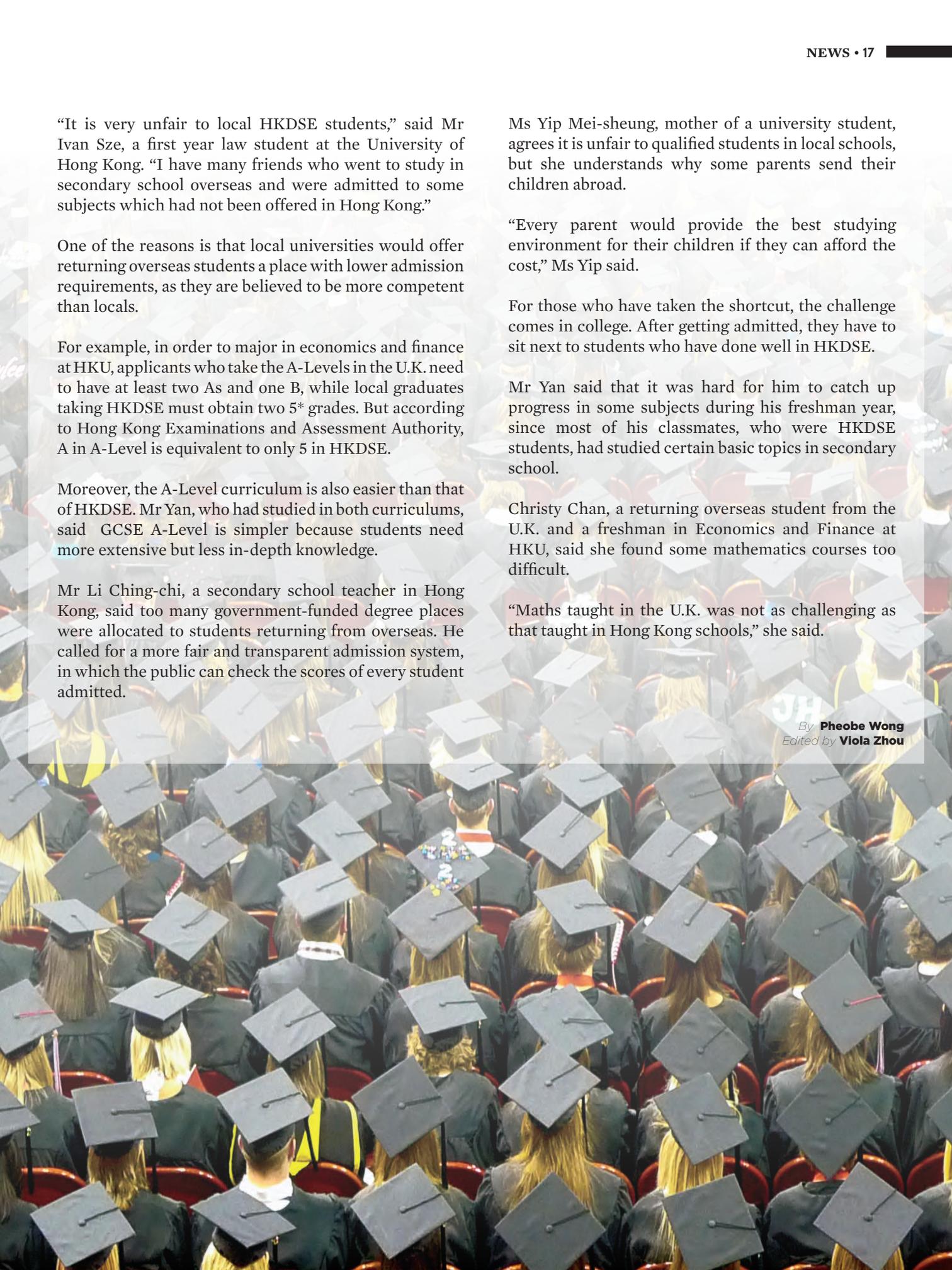
For those who have taken the shortcut, the challenge comes in college. After getting admitted, they have to sit next to students who have done well in HKDSE.

Mr Yan said that it was hard for him to catch up progress in some subjects during his freshman year, since most of his classmates, who were HKDSE students, had studied certain basic topics in secondary school.

Christy Chan, a returning overseas student from the U.K. and a freshman in Economics and Finance at HKU, said she found some mathematics courses too difficult.

“Maths taught in the U.K. was not as challenging as that taught in Hong Kong schools,” she said.

By **Pheobe Wong**  
Edited by **Viola Zhou**





*Ling Sir spends much of his time in the hills.*

**M**r Ling has always been an avid hiker. He was responsible for catching “mountain thieves” as a policeman and has been searching for missing hikers since he retired.

In September 2005, a policeman Mr Ting Li-wah was reported missing in Sai Kung Country Park and a 10-day search mounted by the authorities failed to find him.

As a retired senior police inspector and a former colleague of Mr Ting, Mr Ling Kin-kwong stepped in and continued the search with a group of explorers and policemen.

While the volunteers still failed to locate Mr Ting, Mr Ling realised the importance of forming a search team to

find lost hikers and took a leading role in forming the Countryside Volunteer Searching Team in 2007.

Today, members of the CVST include former and current policemen, members of the Civil Aid Service, and people from many other walks of life. Over the past eight years, they successfully located several missing hikers.

“We are hunters. We ‘hunt’ people,” he said with a laugh.

CVST usually starts looking for a missing person after the authorities have given up the search. That perhaps explains why the group has only been able to find dead bodies as the so-called “golden period” for finding a

missing person alive has lapsed.

“Even if the lost hikers were not alive when we found them, it was still an achievement for us and a relief to their family members,” said Mr Ling.

In a search for a lost Japanese tourist in 2007, CVST cooperated with the Japanese’s colleagues who hiked together with the lost tourist and invited him to demonstrate the scenario again in Hong Kong.

This experience was critical to CVST because it clarified that the original route provided by the colleagues was wrong.

Besides working at CVST, Mr Ling is also an author of more than ten

## PEOPLE

# Not only a policeman but also a hunter

Two years' fruitless search for a missing colleague has prompted a retired senior police inspector to found the Countryside Volunteer Searching Team.

books. "Story of Rural Area Searching" includes five cases under investigation was published in 2008 in order to raise the public awareness on the danger of hiking.

Those books also helped to get the attention of readers who might know more about the cases and the searching team or even join CVST by contacting Mr Ling.

Mr Ling is now working on another book about the history of Hong Kong police during the past 170 years. One objective of the book is to prevent social corruption in the public by reminding young police officers to reject and unmask bribery.

Mr Ling has been an active hiker and martial arts practitioner since he was

a secondary student. The two pastimes provided Mr. Ling the qualities to become a policeman, a career he held for 28 years before his retirement in 2005.

But, he only begins to realise the importance of his health after becoming disabled for three months when broken glass cut his left foot.

"I realised then that people could not take their health for granted," said Mr Ling. "I swore I would not neglect my health anymore."

"Police work had brought out the best in me, and I got the chance to help people using my professional skills and attitude," said Mr Ling.

But he was ready to leave the police

force as he was satisfied with his CVST work, which shared the same working nature.

"Even after retirement, I worked as a bodyguard, a teenagers' mentor, and an adviser for security guards. All these jobs have helped me accumulate knowledge and experience," he said.

Mrs Ling, Mr Ling's wife, says her husband is a person who speaks little but did a lot.

"He enjoys his achievements but still keeps learning after retirement. He is a man with great wisdom who often appears slow-witted," Mrs Ling says.

## ARTS&amp;CULTURE

# Music is a language that can speak to one and all

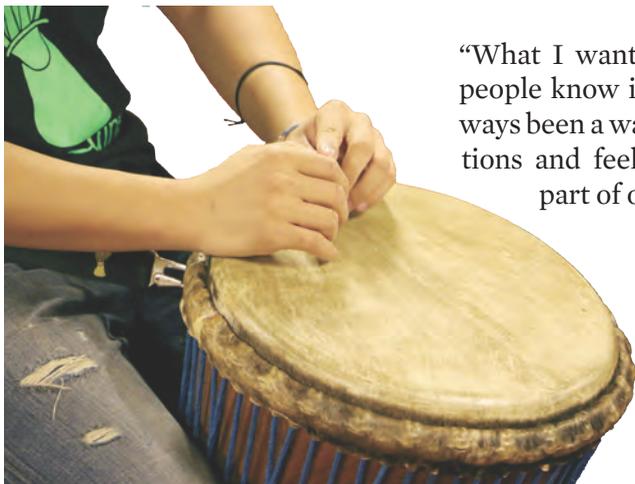
The sound of djembe speaks to local musicians.

The music studio fills with smiling kids and their singing of “Dun Ni Ya Ma, Dun Ni Ya Ma, Yeah!”, which means happy.

Western African countries like Mali, Guinea, and Senegal, are far from Hong Kong. But actually, that is not the case, since many people here practise African music by playing djembe, a drum-like instrument.

In Hong Kong, a group of adults and children explore this, by learning the musical instrument that brings people together in the Western African culture.

Djembe is a percussion instrument. Player hits it to make sound either with their hands or drumsticks. Different pitches and volumes can



be generated by adjusting the ropes on it.

Mr James Kwan Man-leung is the director and founder of Tam Tam Mandingue Hong Kong (TTMHK), a music studio that promotes and provides djembe courses.

He is a passionate lover and lifelong learner of Western African music. He also teaches courses in his studio and other schools.

He says TTMHK is not there to make money from parents or kids.

The founder thinks that when it comes to art, especially in Hong Kong where the society does not easily accept a new culture or ideology, one cannot think too far or too wide.

“What I want to express and let people know is that music has always been a way to exchange emotions and feelings. It has been a part of our lives.”



*A little kid is amazed how he has used the drumsticks to play djembe so skillfully.*

In Western African music, djembe and sound have an important role. They share happy messages, such as marriage and birth, with people in different villages.

“The relationship between rhythm and human behaviours is very close,” says Mr Kwan.

He also thinks that the development of rhythm of Western African music is the furthest and the best in history. The message or culture that the music has passed on to generations is about sharing happiness, exchanging human behaviour and most importantly, about cooperation.

“Chinese music does not have a single functional role like Western Africa music. To me, Chinese music was more of a performing role. A lot of famous instrumentalists play solo on a certain instrument, but there are very few or almost no famous ensemble played by Chinese,” Mr Kwan says.



One of the instructors, Anita has been teaching children playing djembe for over ten years.



Children enjoy their lessons with their friends and instructors.

There are four elements in Western African music and TTMHK offers different courses. Djembe involves using the hands for drumming. Dunun involves using sticks, plus African folk song and body movements.

According to Mr Kwan, Western African culture has preserved a lot of originality and natural sounds of life such that people would be more relaxed when playing music.

“You can feel that you are connected with the djembe when you are playing it.”

He also thinks that the music fosters a tighter connection between people.

Mr Kwan used to be a music student playing trombone and some other instruments with a group of friends. He got to know the master drummer Mr Mamady Keita in his lessons in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. He is an icon in teaching and passing Western African music, and has travelled worldwide to teach and share this culture with people.

He knew Mr Keita would stay in the United States for a few days at that time so he immediately flew there and asked if he could follow Mr Keita and learn djembe. “Why not?” Mr Keita said “yes” immediately.

The natural and freestyle personalities and discrimination lack of racial are evident in playing djembe and Western African Music. And that is what inspired Mr Kwan to share such a message to more people including our next generation.



“Music, life and education- these are the three inseparable things in life,” says Mr Kwan.

Many parents in Hong Kong would let their children learn western musical instruments, such as piano and violin. However, there are exceptions, not because how the course itself would give them a certificate of proof, but for a wider perspective: the improvement and the enjoyment of your own musical sense.

Serena Ng Wai-yu, who turns five this year, has been learning djembe in this studio for a year. Serena’s father, Mr Roy Ng Sin-ming, is also a student of TTMHK.

Mr and Mrs Ng found out that Serena liked playing percussions, such as drums. So they decided to send her to learn djembe.

Serena’s love and passion towards djembe has spread to her father. As a result, Mr Ng enrolled in adult djembe courses a year ago. He said that he wanted to train himself in the musical field.

“What Serena and I like about djembe and Western African music is that it is very natural and more free-style whereas Western classical music in a way is more serious and nervous.”

According to studies of the relationship between the brain and music, there is an important correlation between fast tempo and positive emotions.

For instance, when people listen to music with a fast tempo, they tend to feel happier. This is because human brain would access the rhythm of a piece of music and create certain emotions.

Similarly, listening to music with a fast tempo jogging and dancing, while help to boost the human brain. The same applies to djembe and Western African music.

“I feel Serena has stronger feelings towards rhythm after having lessons here,” Mr Ng says, “playing djembe makes her feel happier.”

No matter what kind of music children play, parents just want them to have fun and enjoy themselves throughout the process.

Regardless of whether Western African music is mainstream or not in Hong Kong, music brings people altogether and that perhaps is the greatest love of all.

By **Sharon Tang**  
Edited by **Thomas Chan**

*Hitting the last note, kid drummers put their drumsticks way high up with their instructors.*



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## ARTS AND CULTURE

## Vitality under the fire paper effigies crafts

Burning offerings to the deceased slash the industry, but some craftsmen create paper effigies that carry only healthy snacks and drinks.

Some people choose to “deliver” goods through burning paper offerings to communicate with the dead. With current domination of the mass manufactured paper offerings from mainland factories in the market, some younger craftsmen struggle to sustain the tradition by bringing new sparkles to the craft-making industry.

Burning joss paper into ashes is a traditional Chinese custom in which people believe that the dead can receive the oblations in the underworld and use them in their afterlife. However, the tradition now faces the risk of vanishing.

“Hopeless. I feel there is no room for inheritance,” said a traditional paper offerings craftswoman, who has been working at the industry for over 50 years.

People didn’t appreciate the paper artwork as they did in the old days. Some

even deemed the ritual as superstitious, which, according to the craftswomen, was based on the Confucian concept of “carefully attending the funeral rites of parents and following them when gone with due sacrifices”.

The room for the industry to survive was limited due to people’s increasing environmental concern and diverse religious beliefs, she said. They now rely mainly on the sales of paper offerings in Ching Ming Festival and Chung Yeung Festival to generate revenue.

Albeit the downhill for the industry, some people show their preference to buy the mass produced paper offerings from mainland factories which are comparably cheaper than the local ones.

“Those cannot be called art,” Mr Ho Shek-kin, owner of a traditional paper offerings store located in Nam

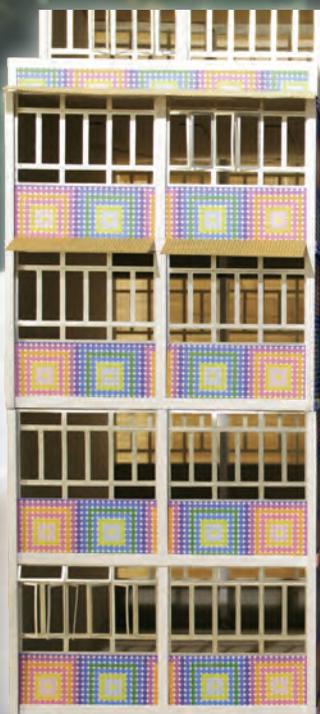
Shan Estate said. “They are only print products.”

Mr Ho added that less people were engaging in this traditional art. Nevertheless, two young people are willing to dedicate themselves to the production of modern paper offerings, wishing to bring some fresh slashes to the industry.

Mr Au Yeung Ping-chi, who succeeds his father’s business in Bo Wah Effigies located in Sham Shui Po, has already spent almost twenty years in paper offering industry.

He makes paper offerings of trendy products like high heels, camera and smartphone.

“To me, paper offerings is not only my career but more importantly an extension of art, and my interest,” he said.



# ading of traditional smanship

needs a light to some makers machines  
rinks.

Unless the effigies are from customized orders, people would simply fire them the effigies without any scrutinizing them. In hope of preserving the traditional culture, Mr Au Yeung started his own workshop to demonstrate the techniques of making paper offerings.

After acquiring the skill, people don't make paper craft merely for their descendants, but also for decorations. "There is a student creating a confectionery box for Chinese New Year," he added.

"I have faith that the industry can survive in the future," Mr Au Yeung said.

Another paper art craftswoman, Ms Amanda Cheng, who is the founder of the Soul House Design Studio, also makes customized paper offerings.

She established her brand in merging paper offerings with modern paper art to better imitate the modern housing style when making housing effigies.

"What fundamental of my effigies is realism," Ms Cheng said.

Making paper gadgets is not special among different customers' requests, and their circumspection can always touches her.

She once received a request from a pet owner, who ordered a life-like miniature office chair to mourn the loss of his dog. The office chair represented a special connection between them. When the dog was alive, it always leaned on the office chair.

Another customized order was a pair of shoes designed to fit the ancestor's feet with fractured toes. Sincerely

wishing to send a pair of comfortable shoes for the father in afterlife, Ms Cheng's client repeatedly reminded her to pay attention to the adjustments on the size and shape of the shoes. The client even made a template to check if the adjustment was accurate on the delivery day.

"Burning process is meant to satisfy descendants' wish, or as a compensation," she added.

Ms Cheng hopes that her art craft can bridge the slight gap in the industry but she worries about the prospect of paper offerings industry.

"Hong Kong people are materialistic. People usually judge the value of a good by its raw materials," she added.

Ms Cheng has made an assumption: If there were a flower made with gold and a flower made with paper, people would most probably think that the paper one had a lower value and neglect the effort made behind the paper art.

"Hong Kong people stress a lot on efficiency. Handicrafts take time, so they are more expensive. Hence, it is hard for art industry to develop in Hong Kong. Worst of all, the Hong Kong government does not focus on cultural conservation," she said.

In Taiwan, the rental cost is low, which favors craftsmen to rent a large studio for production. Whilst according to the craftswoman, the high property price in Hong Kong makes them difficult to afford a studio, not even spare an area to place the products at home.

Ms Cheng concluded that there were still many limitations on the art development in Hong Kong.

# FACT or

HEALTH&BEAUTY

## *Non-toxic nail polishes for*

Water soluble nail polish claimed to be toxic free and however parents still concern its safety issue.

The love of beauty is not exclusive to women. Some companies invented the water soluble nail polish as the non-toxic alternative, excluded the various chemicals which threatens the health of pregnant women and children. However, are nail polishes really safe to apply on children's hands?

Unlike the traditional nail polish, the water soluble one does not contain toxic ingredients which harm users' health, such as toluene, a solvent that helps nail polish go on smoothly but is neurotoxic; formaldehyde, a cancer-causing preservative; and dibutyl phthalate (DBP), a chemical that keeps nail polish flexible but is known to interfere with reproductive hormones. The water-based nail polish can be taken off simply by using water or the nail polish remover that contained alcohol.

Mrs May Kam Mei-wan, 42, welcomes the odourless water soluble nail polish as she believes that this alternative is safe to use under scrutiny by the government.

"I will consider buying this, because I can enjoy the fun [of nail polishing] with my daughter together," said she, "And if it does not need nail polish remover [to remove], we can paint [our nails] over the weekend and take it off on school days."

The water soluble nail polish is becoming popular and welcomed by the parents

nowadays. "Petit Tiara" is the nail polish brand that sells in 759 Store, one of the largest chain stores in Hong Kong with a total of 247 stores. It is convenient for parents to choose the nail polish for their children.

The shop manager of 759 Skyland in Tai Po says that the washable nail polish is currently a more popular choice among parents as a substitution of the traditional one, claiming that the polish is almost odourless and can be rinsed off with soap and water easily.

She also mentioned the sales of these nail polishes have slightly increased as



# FRAUD

or children:

l a good option for children,



children were on the Easter holiday and could paint their nails freely.

However, it is still questionable for the safety of these nail polishes as we should consider whether the ingredients are really toxic-free and totally safe for children's use and the potential threat to children's health under the prolonged exposure to the polishes.

Dr. Chan Kin-yip, specialist in dermatology, points out that applying nail polish may harm children's fragile nails while weakening and making them more likely to be hurt or break off. Also,

irritation and itchiness would be caused to people whose skin is allergic to wet nail polish.

He said that water soluble nail polish would be a healthier option as it does not need to use chemicals like acetone to remove, which is less harmful to children. However, he warns parents to avoid children swallowing the nail polish carelessly, especially those who like sucking their fingers.

Mrs Tracy Fong Wai-man, who has two children, aged two and five years old, showed her concern of applying nail polish on children.

"The fact is that all cosmetics are not good for children," said Mrs Fong. "I don't think I will allow my children to put these on their fingers. They are still young, what if they suck their thumbs and take in all that chemicals? As a parent, I think I have the responsibility to carefully choose what is the best for them."

Indeed, water soluble nail polish provides an alternative to children, but parents should do some researches about the ingredients of nail polish and understand the potential threat of these polishes before turning nail art into a family activity.

By **Hilder Lo**  
Edited by **Jennie Tang**



INTERNATIONAL

# *Slum tourism : Moral struggles over paying for stories about poverty*

112 Days, 15 Cities, 12 Countries.





*Slum tourism is mainly operated by companies aiming to make profits rather than improving the living condition of the poor. Critics say it is harmful to the locals who participate, and it affects tourists who joined these tours.*

#### **Route:**

- 01. Embark: San Diego, CA, US**
- 02. Hilo, Hawaii, US**
- 03. Yokohama, Japan**
- 04. Kobe, Japan**
- 05. Shanghai, China**
- 06. Hong Kong, China**
- 07. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**
- 08. Singapore**
- 09. Rangoon, Myanmar**
- 10. Cochin, India**
- 11. Port Louis, Mauritius**
- 12. Cape Town, South Africa**
- 13. Walvis Bay, Namibia**
- 14. Casablanca, Morocco**
- 15. Debark: Southampton, UK**



Poverty is about a lack of money and material possessions, living in unbearable conditions, possibly starving to death, vulnerability to diseases and forced labour. I thought I knew what poverty is.

Seeing and experiencing it in real life, though, made me question my previous understanding of the word.

I spent 112 days visiting different countries through a programme named Semester At Sea. It combines academic cultural comparative studies on the ship with the experiences in different ports. We often participated in slum tourism which offered tourists a chance to experience poverty through interaction with slum residents. The experience haunted the students on board including myself, leaving us with an unsolved question in mind.

Coming home from the Semester At Sea has left me a lot of memories that are depressing and difficult to talk about.

In Cape Town, South Africa, I joined a home-stay programme in a township at the periphery of the city where different ethnic groups used to live in separate areas during Apartheid. Between the policy of racial segregation from 1948 to 1994, by the whites maintained their minority rule over the dominant black population.

The house in which I stayed was well-furnished, newly-painted, and decorated with modern silk curtains. Just looking at its interior, I would not have noticed the differences between a township and a house in South Africa.

The host, Ms Nokuzola Cobodo, has remained in the township because of post-Apartheid poverty. She taught cooking classes for a living until she started the home-stay business 10 years ago, receiving guests from around the world, including the US, Europe and Australia.

The treatment for the coloured population has improved since, though many of them still live in grim condition and do not have equal access to public resources.

Ms Coboda was keen to share the unjust experience she faced during Apartheid, for example, the unfairness in education and employment opportunity. Ms Coboda's stories, as well as those of many other local residents in the slum, gave us a clear picture of what happened in the past. However, it also made me uncomfortable.

We were there to learn about lives of the locals and we are doing so by digging into their pain. Worst of all is that they earn a living by repeatedly telling others about their painful past.

Although Ms Cobodo, was open about sharing her stories, yet my fellow students from my programme who stayed with different hosts said that it was extremely difficult for their hosts to discuss the past. Some residents refused to discuss that part of their lives and treated the home-stay business as merely an authentic cultural experience for tourists. Nevertheless, the aftermath of Apartheid interests tourists the most and they often get first hand information from slum residents who are possibly uncomfortable with the topic.

Besides, the home stays may not reflect the reality entirely. From my observations, township is in relatively good condition compared with other houses we saw on our way to the hosts.

But I struggle morally when it comes to paying poor people to teach us about poverty. Even though a friend of mine who was on the ship with me had worse experiences in Cambodia. Apart from slum residents, it also affects tourists who find themselves paying to be entertained by real people who live a hard life.

Emily Baade, an American university student majoring in Physics, went on a boat tour to a floating village in Cambodia as part of the programme. It was not a luxury boat ride. The floating village was on dirty water filled with trash. Villagers drunk and brushed their teeth with this water and lived there.

A middle-aged man was driving the boat and a young boy who looked like he was probably nine years old was helping out. Emily and her peers were very excited to have the lovely little boy's company during the ride at the very beginning.

Emily guessed that the boy has probably been working on the boat for quite some time as he was familiar with the routine. He was a good company who made Emily relaxed and she thought he was extremely cute when he offered to give everyone

back massages. But at the end of the trip, the young boy yelled "dollar, dollar," which was out of her expectation.

"That made me sick. My brother is 13, and my sister is 12. For someone that age to do that, to be worried about making money, it made me sick," she said.

Another little girl with a big snake around her neck was on another boat. She was trying to move it around and showing it off to the tourists approaching the boat. She was also yelling "dollar, dollar!"

Emily said it was a "slap in her face" when she realised that child labour was so close.

She had not given any money to child beggars in the past since she believed that giving them money would support child labour and that will make it sustain.

But this time, at the end of the boat ride, she could not contain herself and decided that she would tip this boy.

Once they saw her opening her purse, children from other boats rushed to her giving her their biggest smiles.

*A girl asks for money from tourists by showing a snake around her neck in Cambodia.*



“He was like trying to make friends with me but he was not looking at me, he was looking at my purse. Because he has learnt, as a nine-year-old child, that if you smile and play that at tourists, they would give you money.”

“He wasn’t smiling because he was happy, or he wanted to see me and talk to this random American girl,” she added, “he was acting. Just the idea that you know how to play for money.”

Mr Bob Ma from the University of Pennsylvania pointed out that slum tours are controversial since most are run by companies that aim to make a profit instead of improving the lives in the slums. Locals who participate suffer the humiliation of putting their lives on show for tourists, especially for Westerners. Hence, slum tours have been widely criticised for being exploitative.

Even so, Mr Ma does not see slum tourism becoming less popular anytime soon because they satisfy tourists needs.

He said that tourists often seek experiences that sets apart from their daily routines. Therefore a more radical experience, like visiting a slum, is preferred over mass produces tourism aimed at satisfying the standard demands for fun and relaxation.

However, experts’ views differ. Professor Gordon Mathews, an anthropologist from the University of Hong Kong, author of *Ghetto at the Center of the World: Chungking Mansion*, thinks that slum tourism is not unethical if the money goes back to the slums and residents benefit.

He thinks that it is hard to generalize the impact on the slum residents and the tourists, since it depends on the nature of the slum tours and who gets the money. “There are different kinds of slum tours. Those organized by NGOs tryto get money to make the slum better by providing electricity and school, so those run by individuals just hope to make profits for themselves,” he said.

In addition to having a source of income for slum dwellers, Professor Norman Backhaus from the University of Zurich, believes that tourists can also benefit from knowing the difficulties of slum dweller’s lives.

“It is a fine line between benefit and exploitation since it is difficult for the slum dwellers themselves to organise tours because they tend not to have access to tourists and hence need middlemen to make the contact,” he added.

The fact that sympathy in generates business has a negative impact on those involved, especially the children.

For example in Bagan, Myanmar, is an untouched city with more than 3000 pagodas. The Buddhist temples were built during the 11th and 12th centuries. When i was there, a few children approached us with collections of postcards under the hot sun in their bare feet on the burning floors of the pagodas.

I sent home postcards at every port country I visited so I asked him about the price to see if i could pick up a few for my friends and family. Since he said I would have to buy a full collection, I ignored the child.



Little boys selling postcards in their bare feet in 40°C in Myanmar.

A little while later, the little boy came to us again and said we could swap in other collections and that he could reduce the price for us.

Seeing a kid doing business in such hot weather, making all the effort to make, what we would consider a small amount of money, I realised that we could not simply walk away as if nothing had happened.

My two other friends and I bought three collections and carried on sight-seeing.

We did not know how long he had been doing this as he could speak some fragmented English. However, we were there on a weekday afternoon. Shouldn't a kid that age be at school having classes with his buddies?

He followed us and took out another collection of postcards that looked like drawing by kids of monks in Myanmar in front of different backgrounds.

“Did you draw this on your own?” we asked him.

“Yes, I earn money to pay for school,” he said. The drawings were inexpensive so my friends and I each bought another collection.

We did not know how much he needed to be able to attend school everyday. I did not feel better nor did I feel like “I helped this kid” or “I made some changes”. After all, poverty cannot be resolved by just small individual acts. Whether or not I have purchased these postcard from this little boy from Myanmar, I would go on and feeling bad.

As a journalism student, I told myself that I was joining this programme as more than a participant. By writing about my experiences and people's misfortune, I can make a change by forcing the more fortunate group, us, to reflect more on our lives.

Travelling in developing countries is not always pleasant. There were times when I felt guilty that I was born in Hong Kong because I could have been born in any of these countries. Yet this was an experience that I would not regret, as it was definitely more rewarding and meaningful than going to an affluent country, chill out and gain nothing.

By **Ceci Au Yeung**  
Edited by **Crystal Tse**

*Ordinary houses in Bagan, Myanmar*



## PHOTO ESSAY

# A utopia in ruins

Remnants of a forgotten Catholic community stands on a remote island in Sai Kung, but eco-tourism sheds new light on the fading legend.

**H**ong Kong is notorious for its density. Being the fifth most densely populated city in the world, there are nearly 7,000 people to every square kilometer of land. But this is not the case on an island to the East of the territory.

Yim Tin Tsai Island has been abandoned for decades and lost its last permanent inhabitants in the 1990s. The Hakka village with a Catholic culture now lies in ruins.

Thick bushes hide the remnants of collapsed buildings, while piles of abandoned ship wood remind visitors of the island's once-prosperous fishing industry. Although the walls have caved in and given way to masses of reed, an iron cross is still stands on to the bricks as a solid symbol of the village's Catholic tradition.

Villagers repaired St. Joseph Chapel in 2013 and decided to introduce tourism to the island, opening up this lonely landscape.

Fifteen minutes by boat from Sai Kung, the spot is opened to visitors only during weekends. About 40 residents who have already moved out travel back on a weekly basis. They reconstruct the salt fields or sell traditional Hakka food, like Cha Kwo (steamed buns) and sweet bean curd, to encourage tourism and cater to visitors' needs.

According to the business owners, the number of visitors fluctuates between 200 and 300 every weekend. Tourism here is still developing.

"Although we encourage tourism, people insist on an 'eco-friendly' development. That means no waste, no pollution, and everyone should take care of the island and behave themselves," said Mr Au Gi-fu, a Taiwanese resident on the island. But other than slogans promoting the concept, the policy has yet to be enforced to restrict travellers' behaviour.

Au, now 75 years old, gave up his career as a chemical engineer in the 1980s and has adopted a "Simple Living" style ever since.

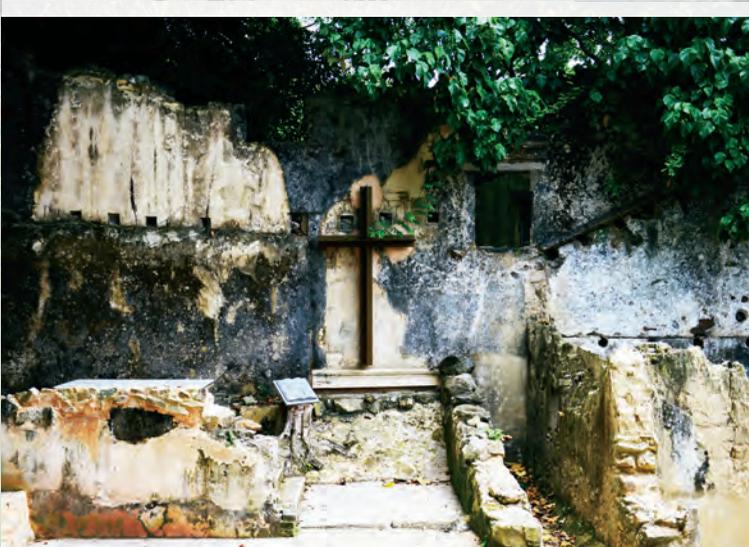
He set up "Simple Living House", a bare wall lodge, two years ago. Bricks stoves were installed to make cooking possible using fire wood. There is no electricity there.

On his trips around the island, Au picks up pieces of waste paper and keeps them until he arrives at a waste-filled wood shed next to the house. The slogan here: "Trash does not end up on the ground".

Mr Au reveals that he is just one of many people who insist on green living practice at Yim Tin Tsai.

Yim Tin Tsai once stood out because of its long history and rich culture. But it is not abandoned anymore. Ecological development has come to the fore and the island may shine again in the near future.

By **Fred Lai**  
 Edited by **Jo Lee**



E M A I L

*editors@tyr.hk*

F A C E B O O K

*The Young Reporter*

W E B S I T E

*tyr.hk*