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THE YOUNG REPORTER *magazine*

May 2016

Hong Kong 2047

A new constitution could
be the way out



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THE YOUNG REPORTER magazine

In this issue of The Young Reporter, our feature covers a subject that should concern everyone - the future of Hong Kong.

Beijing promised Hong Kong that there would be no change in the region for 50 years, promising to preserve the concept of "One Country Two Systems" until 2047.

However, events such as the 831 decision have raised doubts as to whether the promise will be kept among members of the public.

On 31 August 2014, the NPC Standing Committee decided on a framework for Hong Kong's 2017 Chief Executive election, which would allow people to vote for a chief executive from two to three candidates nominated by a group of 1,200 committee members.

The decision was not well-received by everybody and sparked

demonstrations, with The Umbrella Movement being the face of Hong Kong's cry for democracy.

With over 30 years to go before the 2047 deadline, our reporter talked to politicians and scholars alike, who say that constitutional reform could be the answer to Hong Kong's future, though it may be hard to gain momentum and begin without the help from a crisis in the mainland.

Also in this issue are stories about horticultural therapy, public art in Hong Kong and many more.

As the semester comes to an end, the print edition of The Young Reporter will halt until the beginning of the fall semester. We will continue our social media activity however, so there is no need to miss us!

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HONG KONG



2047

A new constitution could be the way out



Instead of attaching much attention to Beijing's responses, we shall defend ourselves actively and get fully prepared, said localist Alvin Cheng Kam-mun, also known as '4 Eyes Brother'

When Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, Beijing promised there would be no change for the territory for 50 years. The concept of "One Country Two Systems" will end in 2047. With just over 30 years to go, politicians and scholars are coming up with have different ideas for Hong Kong's future.

One of those is to write a new constitution.

Alvin Cheng Kam-mun of Civic Passion, also known as "4-eyed brother", has been an activist since the Umbrella Movement in 2014.

"If a de facto referendum on constitutional reform goes in ahead in 2018, the government will have to respond

to our voices," said the 28-year-old, "or else there would be another unprecedented protest."

Cheng was the youngest among the five members of the localist faction who intend to run in the the Legislative Council election in September. Their idea: a de facto referendum in the five geographical constituencies so that all citizens can help to come up with a new constitution.

"Constitutional reform can be down-to-earth. People would understand when we talk about amending unjust clauses such as Article 23 of the Basic Law," said the member from Civic Passion.

Article 23 stipulates that The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

"Constitutional reform is a step toward deciding Hong Kong's future, be it independence, continuation of 'One Country Two Systems' or reunification with the United Kingdom," he said.

Student activist, Joshua Wong Chi-fung, proposed a “Hong Kong Charter” in March. That is, draw up a blueprint for Hong Kong over the next ten years by collecting public opinions on the points of contention in the Basic Law. The goal is to call a referendum in 2030 based on the Hong Kong Charter.

“By writing a Hong Kong Charter and a constitution, we will effectively have the endorsement of the people. Our approach is different from the localists’ in that they only put details of constitution to online for netizens to edit, like a ‘wikipedia’ constitution creation system.” said Mr Wong.

Matthew Wong Yee-hang, an expert in Hong Kong politics at the University of Hong Kong, said that a Hong Kong Charter may be more acceptable to most people than drawing up a new constitution.

“Without mentioning the word ‘constitution’, it might not sound legally problematic. But bear in mind that Beijing would not be happy regardless of the label, as long as the underlying issue is problematic,” Mr Wong said.

He also mentioned Charter 08, a petition issued by hundreds of Chinese intellectuals in 2008, including Nobel Prize winner, Liu Xiaobo, to call for improvement in human rights and democratic freedom in China.

Dr Yvonne Chiu, an International relations expert at the University of Hong Kong, said the localist faction needs advice from the pan-democrats. They also need allies in future movements in the legislature.

She also suggested an independent group to act as a watchdog,

“We need a group to coordinate with other political parties, such as the

“Without mentioning the word ‘constitution’, it might not sound legally problematic. But bear in mind that Beijing would not be happy regardless of the label, as long as the underlying issue is problematic,”

Joshua Wong Chi-fung, Student activist





“Democracy in China will not be beneficial to Hong Kong’s democratic development. On the contrary, a crisis in China is the key,” said Benny Tai.

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD).”

Back in 2014, legislator Raymond Wong Yuk-man’s motion to call for the establishment of a constitutional amendments convention in order to amend the Basic Law, and work out a new constitution. The motion was voted down in the Legislative Council.

Benny Tai Yiu-ting, associate professor at the University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law said the results might be the same if localists proposed a similar motion in the legislature.

“I believe the pan-democrats will not support such an act at this point,

because they may not want to antagonise Beijing further.” he said.

“In case a candidate advocating such demands wins a seat in LegCo, surely it would gain more support in the future. It may end up becoming a big movement in the society. No one can stop that. That would be the choice of Hong Kong people.” Mr Tai said.

An article by Mr Tai published in March, suggested that there has to be a crisis in China before Hong Kong can have true democracy.

“If the Central government collapses, then Hong Kong people might have the opportunity to establish our own constitution. Otherwise it will be

quite difficult for Hong Kong people to start the process officially.”

Max Wong Wei-lun, an assistant professor at the University of Hong Kong, who formerly commented for Now TV, TVB and the Hong Kong Economic Times said that China’s responses toward Hong Kong’s affairs is an important factor in the city’s political environment.

“Youngsters with different views should propose their ideas, discuss and compromise. That is the way out,” said Mr. Wong..

“Deciding Hong Kong’s future should be a collaborative work. We can do it anytime if we are prepared. We can even start now,” said Wilson



“After all, it depends on what Hong Kong citizens want and the discussion among the young generation,” said media commentator Max Wong Wei-lun.

Li Chung-Chak, a secondary six student who has been active in social movement since 2010.

Having participated in the Umbrella Movement, Wilson said that Hong Kong people should not be disillusioned by the local government and Beijing.

“This is the reality. We shall find our own way out after 2047. Creating our own constitution is the first step toward self-determination,” said the 18-year-old student.

Basic Law Article 5 states that “the socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.”

“From a legal perspective, there is possibility to amend the Basic Law. The problem is how to get Beijing’s approval. It is a political problem rather than a legal problem,” Mr. Wong concluded.



*By Isabella Lo
Edited by Flavia Wong*

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BUSINESS

Bobsy Gaia: 25 years of Ecopreneurship in Hong Kong

The story of an entrepreneur and his eco-friendly businesses

Wearing a man bun and a long grey beard, Bobsy Gaia almost has the look of a Taoist priest from Chinese mythology.

The “ecopreneur” was born in Lebanon and has been pioneering socially responsible business in Hong Kong since 1992. He is the co-founder of several vegetarian restaurants, including “MANA! Fast Slow Food”.

Just like its owner, “MANA! Fast Slow Food” is vibrant yet relaxing. The furniture is made of recycled materials and the menu is on a chalk board. The restaurant regularly promotes eco friendly campaigns. For example, “World Water Day” was written in delightful colours on March 22 on the board to remind people to conserve water.

Mindful of the environment, Bobsy is on a mission to educate consumers to “eat like it matters”. His restaurant serves organic produce.

Bobsy became an “ecopreneur” when he started to promote social responsibility in business in 1989. He was a fashion designer at the time, but came up with the idea in a moment of despair.

“I was financially broke at that time in Bangkok. At the same time, many profound changes were happening in the world such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War,” said Bobsy, “there were also Nelson Mandela, mass protests over the destruction of the Amazon Rainforest and women fighting for equality. These movements showed the awakening of human power. It was speaking to me. I suddenly realized there was something bigger than me going on,” he said.

The awakening, Bobsy thought, was a “game change” in man’s perception of the world. That is similar to the realisation that the Earth is round and not flat. “The people in this humanitarian movement are amazingly creative in making changes,” he said. “The Umbrella Movement, for example, was a beautiful successful story that awakened Hong Kong’s culture,” he added.

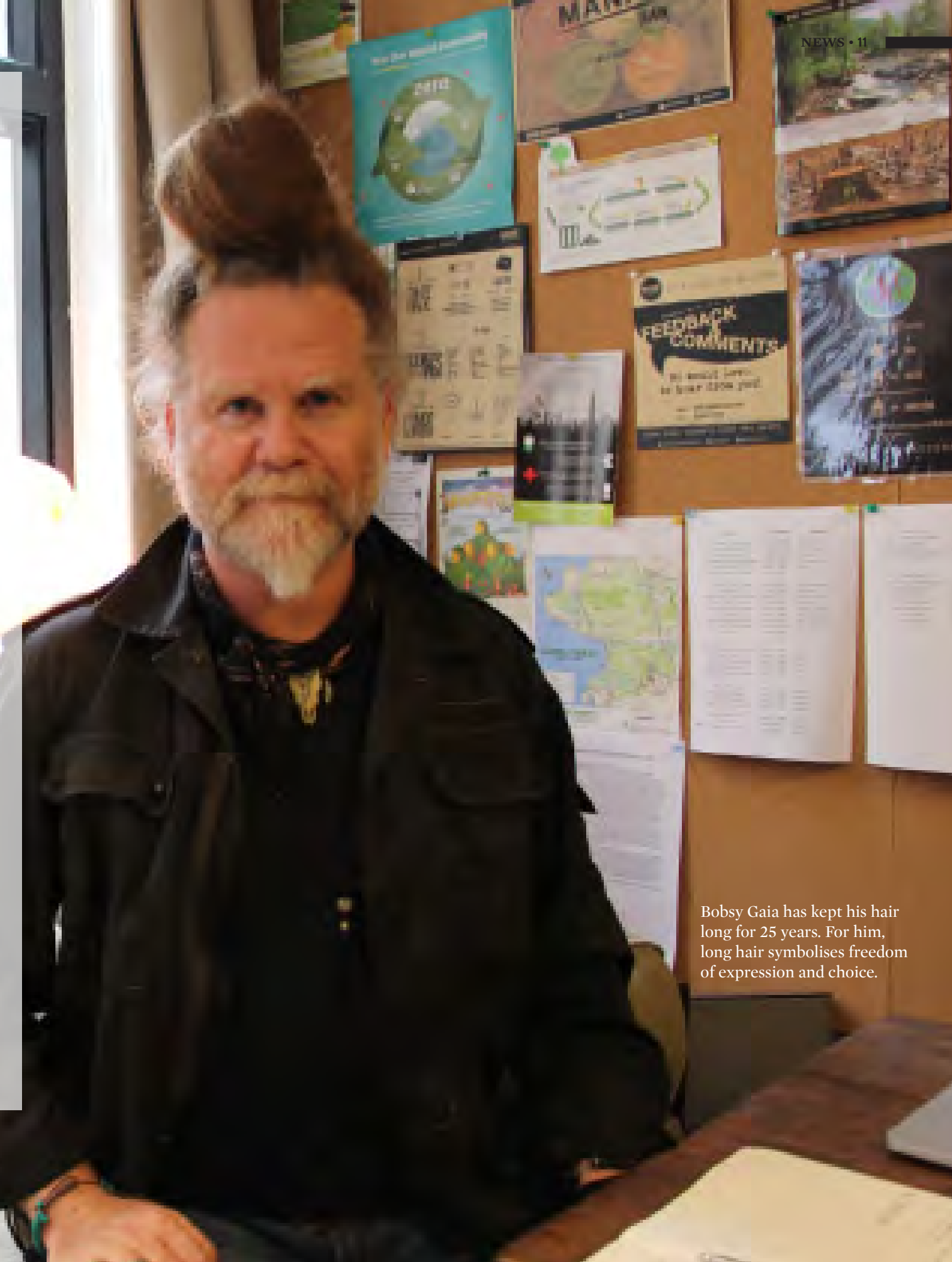
He believes such spiritual movement is universal. “Anything could happen to this energy. The movement does not have a name. There is no leader, no creed, no color, no religion, no manifesto, no any -ism and it takes place in people’s heart. That is why it is unstoppable,” he said.

Inspired by his belief, he started to pay extra attention to environmental issues in the news and even in song lyrics. His vision broadened.

After moving to Hong Kong, Bobsy started to manufacture “green fashion” fashion. That is, watches and clothes made out of recycled plastic. He founded “ABLE charity” in 1993 which helped to put a stop to reclamation around Lamma Island and instead, started to plant trees there. The aim was to raise public awareness of the environment. “We only have one planet and we have to look after it,” he said.

The ecopreneur later started MANA! to provide an eco-friendly alternative to fast food. “Change the diet and change the world. MANA! is an option of changing in action,” he said. Their mantra is to minimize food waste and be organic-conscious. “We eat three to four times a day. The impact we make is unmatched,” he said.

*By Celia Lai, Crystal Tai
Edited by Charlotte Yang*



Bobsy Gaia has kept his hair long for 25 years. For him, long hair symbolises freedom of expression and choice.

BUSINESS

Eco-Vandalism Across Hong Kong

Biodiversity jeopardized by loopholes in the law



Various areas with high ecological values in Hong Kong have been suffering from degradation over the past decade. Some experts now call for saving those lands by including them into country parks.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Hong Kong, the major causes for degradation are illegal developments and fly-tipping.

The exhibition “Wall of Destruction: Eco-vandalism across Hong Kong” organised by eleven green groups in March, displayed cases of environmental destructions, especially the recent illegal mud dump in Tsim Bei Tsui.

“Hong Kong’s world-renowned rich biodiversity is being threatened by human activities. There is urgent need to protect them,” local environmental groups said.

Dr. Michael Lau, Assistant Director of Conservation for WWF Hong Kong, said the situation of the lands has gone worse in recent years.

“The first Eco-vandalism exhibition displayed 49 cases of environmental destruction between 2006 and 2010. However, the destruction in at least 11 locations has not been improved but even deteriorated, and 56 new locations have suffered in the following six years time,” Mr Lau said.

Green groups said such damage is due to loopholes in law enforcements and environmental protections.

Sha Lo Tung, known as the dragonfly paradise in Tai Po District, is suffering from severe environmental damage. Vegetation is cleared on a large scale and the wetland is drained.


Despite Sha Lo Tung being listed as one of the priority sites for enhanced conservation in the New Nature Conservation Policy by the Agriculture, Conservation and Fisheries Department (AFCD), it has never been included in a country park area. Instead, it is regarded as a country park enclave, most of which are private lots within village environs.

Spokesperson of AFCD said in the case of Sha Lo Tung, most of the land has been zoned as “conservation area” in the Outline Zoning Plans, which provides statutory protection to the site.

Dr. Lau said a major cause leading to Sha Lo Tung’s destruction is the loopholes in the Outline Zoning Plan, which make the Planning Department lack enforcement basis.

“Under the Plan, private owners are allowed to develop these ecologically-important areas for their own use,” Mr. Lau said. “Even for places like Tai Long Sai Wan, which is included in the “Coastal Protection Area”, or others listed in the “Conservation Area”, the Planning Department has weak control over them.”

Dr. Lee, associate director of the Department of Geography at the University of Hong Kong, said allowing a certain degree of development by private owners can be a plausible solution to reach an agreement.



“A complete ban of private use within country park areas is too rigid,” he said. “In the United Kingdom, private owners are given permissions to develop their land with limitations and guidelines in order to mitigate the burden on the environment.”

He said that the UK government’s action would not only benefit the environment but allow private owners to exercise their rights to develop.

“It requires both cooperation and permission,” he added. “But it can be effective in dealing with a party of resistance, the private landowners, when including these areas into the country park boundaries.”

The government is now looking into ways to involve the public on conservation. The first Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) will be subject to public consultation by April. Green groups are encouraging citizens to sign and leave their comments to the AFCD.

Dr. Lau said anyone who sees incidents of eco-vandalism should report to the authorities.

Trail Watch, an environmental organisation has developed a mobile app named TrailWatch. Users can join a real time monitoring network to report incidents and upload photos.

“Sometimes government actions take time,” Dr. Lau said. “TrailWatch often refers illegal development cases to green groups like us.”

By Daniel Ma
Edited by Lindsay Long

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ART AND CULTURE

An Ancient Art in a Modern City

Handmade Ukulele brings Hong Kong the happiest sound

Along the rugged track on Cheung Chau Island, next to all kinds of snacks and souvenirs, Ukuleles are also one of the attractions.

These little guitars' patterns and materials seemed to be different from the traditional ones.

Originally from Hawaii, this instrument has become popular among Hong Kong youths in recent years, due to the influence of romantic movies and soap operas.

Located on one of the busiest streets in Cheung Chau island, Benny Cheng's rock music school was decorated with colorful ukuleles.

"People who come to Cheung Chau care more about the fish balls rather than the handmade ukuleles. Few would stop by and appreciate this art," said Mr Cheng, the music preceptor of G.V.S rock school.

In his point of view, Hong Kong people are too busy to slow down and pay attention to handmades in this fast-paced society.

"Those colorful ukuleles can more or less attract attention from the busy crowd," he added.

The ukulele handcraft art has a long history. It dates back to 1879 in Portugal and has since been gradually replaced by factory-made instruments, which are much

more efficient and perfectly polished.

"I can always buy a perfect ukulele in Hong Kong, but what I can't do is to make it by my hands and enjoy the process," said Evan Binkley, the founder of the brand Fish Ukulele.

The 42-year-old ukulele maker fills his house with unique ukuleles made from moon cake tin, papaya, bamboo and so on.

"The way I make ukuleles is completely different from other people. I have my own style and I want something different," said Mr Binkley.

"Different materials will create different tones and sounds, which makes it unique," he said, playing the one made from papaya that he picked up from garbage.

"The problem is that people cannot make money by doing that. A handmade ukulele costs much more money and time than one made by factory," he said.

Creative ukulele handcraft is also brought into Kiddy Heart Canteen in Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service by a group of social workers that organizes counselling service for poor children.

They picked ukulele as one of their activity tools to teach and interact with kids from low-income family that has art and music sense.

"Since the activity started in the month of Mid-Autumn Festival, I was thinking that there would be quite a lot of moon cake tins unwanted. And I found that they could be made into ukuleles," said Anny Chu, the team leader of Kiddy Heart Canteen.

The making process of an ukulele is not easy, said Ms Chu. They have to prepare the raw materials for the children and some parts are quite dangerous to be handled by children so they have to do that in advance.

"I hope we can provide a chance for children to explore new things that they had never tried before," she said.

In Hong Kong, there are some handmade workshops and exhibitions to promote handmade culture and to attract more attention on some dying arts, and handmade ukulele is one of them.

"I think you can continue to see a growth of creative things, because nowadays people are looking for reasons to own something. Therefore, creative handmade ukulele can give them that feeling," said Mr Binkley.

Playing with his handmade ukulele, Mr Binkley lost in the unique tone and sense of freedom that created by this unique instrument.

By Tracy Zhang
Edited by Julianna Wu

1. Evan Binkley, the founder of the brand Fish Ukulele.

2. A Ukulele made by Evan Binkley with pattern painted by his daughter.



3. Evan Binkley tunes a ukulele.

4. Benny Cheng who started G.V.S Rock School decorates his studio with colourful ukuleles.

ART & CULTURE

Art in the City

A set of sculptures recently sparked calls of panic

Does Hong Kong appreciate public art?

When the public art installation “Event Horizon Hong Kong”, first went on display on a rooftop in Central in November, 2015, people mistook the sculpture of a life-sized naked man as a suicide suspect and called the police in.

“I spotted it a long time ago. But to be honest, I don’t know why it has to be there,” said Ms Chu Tze-yan, who works nearby.

The controversial art project featured 31 fiberglass sculptures by artist, Antony Gormley. The figures stand on streets or rooftops across the city. “The idea was to underline the relationship between human and space,” says Mr Gormley.

“Public art allows free thinking and the community may not feel comfortable with sculptures like that at first,” said Antony J. Chan, the British Council’s Head of Art and Creative Industries, who organized of “Event Horizon Hong Kong”.

Mr Chan believes that the police calls that resulted from his artwork show a lack of understanding of public art.

But Hong Kong is no stranger to public art. In early 1999, the government launched a Public Art Scheme to boost creativity and to bring artistic elements to the public. Since then, more than 20 sets of public art pieces have been on

What is regarded by some as sophisticated public art, such as Mr Gormley’s naked men, is seldom appreciated. Instead, many seem to think that art should be decorative rather than artistic expression.

“I don’t see the need to understand those artwork thoroughly. It is fine as long as they make the place more beautiful and visually attractive,” said Travis Mackenzie, a tourist from Washington.

He and many tourists find pleasure in seeing the artwork, though some do not get the artist’s intended message.

To foster better understanding of Mr Gormley’s work, the British Council organized a series of outreach programmes, ranging from workshops to an online promotion campaign.

“Public art allows free thinking and the community may not feel comfortable with sculptures like that at first,” said Mr Chan.

“These events are useful in promoting the values of public art,” said Mr Chan. “We hope to show people how to better appreciate public art.”

Mak Yee-man, a Hong Kong sculptor, agrees that the community needs to be educated on art appreciation. She created a sound installation called “The Symphony of Nature”, displayed at Trade and Industry Tower in San Po Kong.

It is a C-shaped piece of brass which vibrates with movement. The vibration can be heard by putting one’s ears near the brass shape. The idea is to get people to appreciate the sound in the environment which Ms Mak believes is so often ignored in a fast-paced society.

“My artwork and sound installation are difficult to understand because they are abstract, so usually people need more guidance to appreciate them” said Ms Mak.

There is a QR code linked to a soundtrack of vibration right next to the artwork. There are also promotional tours targeted at children.

Ms Joanne Wong, who works at Trade and Industry Tower said that she didn’t realize that she needed to hear the sound from the artwork in order to appreciate it.

“I wouldn’t understand it if I just pass by the sculpture, but as I always see it during my lunch break. I know it has something to do with nature from its appearance,” said Ms Wong.

Given the subtlety behind her work, Ms Mak thought the piece must first be visually attractive.

“I don’t expect people to understand my work at once. I hope it can make a visual impact on them first, and then leave them space to think, so that they



From left to right, Kevin, Roger Mak and Chu from Brainrental.

will come back and appreciate it again,” Ms Mak said.

Another artist, Roger Mak, echoes her opinion. He works with Brainrental, an art organisation that recently created sets of step painting at PMQ in Sheung Wan. The idea was to convey Hong Kong’s hospitality using symbols that represent “welcome”.

“It is normal that people have different interpretations of an artwork. It doesn’t matter if they cannot get our message clearly. It is more important to attract people first and leave a space for them to think,” Mr Mak said.

While detailed explanations in museums and art galleries may enable visitors to understand the artist’s message, when it comes to public art, it’s more a case of live with it, whether or not you get it.



*By Emily Cheung
Edited by Fred Lai*

PEOPLE

Connecting with Tattoos

The ink may be skin deep, but the accent is deeper.

Jayers Ko is not your typical tattoo artist.

“The ink may be skin-deep, but the accent is bone-deep,” she said. For her, tattoos are more than just decorations. It is an art of self-expression. She believes the message in a tattoo goes beyond space and time constraints to connect with people.

Ms Ko’s first tattoo was a little blue star on her left wrist. “What it is, graphically, doesn’t matter; but it’s the placement that matters a lot. It is somewhere obvious to me,” she said. It reminds her to move on from hard times.

“I needed something eternal to calm me down,” she said. The idea of getting a tattoo popped into her mind when she was 19. She was going through a tough time.

She had to take up the responsibility of taking care of her brother. Later, she was ditched by her boyfriend whom she was madly in love with at that time.

She went into a random tattoo shop in Thailand, picked a random picture and a random tattoo artist to edge the blue star on to her skin. That marked marking her start to a new life.

“My mum asked me if I was a prostitute when she saw the tattoo,” Ms Ko said. Her parents were against her becoming a tattoo artist.

But after getting her first tattoo, she studied psychology and searched for information about tattoos online. She tried but failed to get an apprenticeship.

With no background in art, Ms Ko started working on her portfolio by doing paintings on paper. She then sent an email to a traditional tattooist requesting an apprenticeship. “I guess it’s my passion that touched him,” she said.

“Apprenticeship is a lot of hard work for both the mentor and the apprentice,” she said. It is paramount to stay humble and respectful and pay attention to observe the mentor’s work, and ask questions only at appropriate time, so as not to interrupt the master and customers.

“Back then, I was only capable of making a straight line,” she said. She explained that tattooing is a job that affects another person for a lifetime, so she tattooed herself on the top of her foot before doing so on customers. “You are out there alone,” she said. The first time

she tattooed a customer, she paid extra attention not to make mistakes, she recalled.

She thinks about whether the tattoos suit the customers’ personalities by spending time to understand their stories. “Everybody has a story,” she says. Ms Ko believes it is her responsibility to visualize people’s stories through the tattoos she makes.

Although Ms Ko has been gaining media attention, she does not want to be called an artist because she thinks she is not good enough. She thought that fame can be a bad influence. “I just want to be better in what I do,” she said.

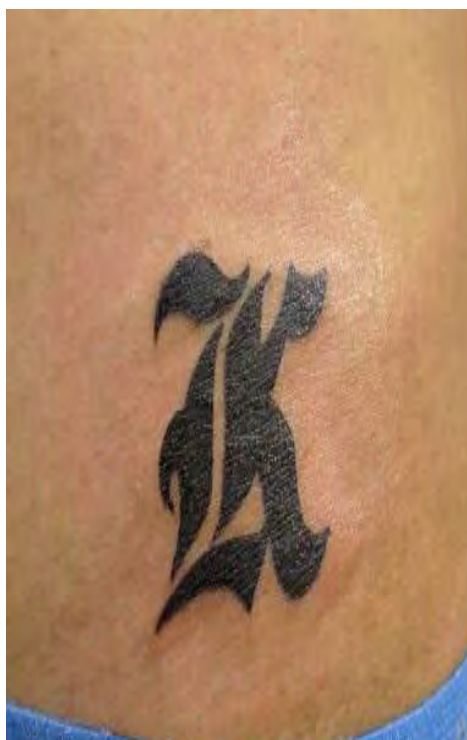
After seven years of hard work in her tattoo shop, her mum was eventually convinced and started to support her work, but she still does not accept Ms Ko for having more tattoos on her body.

“As the Chinese saying goes, your body belongs to your parents,” Ms Ko says. She tries to cover most of her tattoos out of respect for her mum. But she also tattooed her dad last year.

“I feel really blessed and grateful for what I’ve been through because all these experiences help to shape me to what I am today.”



Jayers Ko was invited to participate in the Amsterdam International Tattoo Convention 2015, an Expo with well-known tattoo artists



HEALTH & SCIENCE

Stretched to the limits

Shortage of nurses at public hospitals puts pressure on patient care



Public hospitals in Hong Kong serve 90 percent of all the patients in the territory, yet employs only 40 percent of doctors according to Hospital Authority figures. Medical staff were pushed to their limits during a recent outbreak of influenza.

Miss X, a registered nurse working in the orthopedics department of a public hospital, says medical staff feel like they are ‘fighting a war with no weapons’.

“As nurses, we want to provide a good care for the patients,” she says, “but

the hospital is not giving us enough support, especially when it comes to manpower.”

The nurse says there are only six nurses per shift taking care of more than 50 patients. Sometimes it is down to four or five nurses if someone falls ill.

“We are lucky if the patients are all in stable conditions, otherwise we would be under a lot of psychological pressure if anything happens all of a sudden,” she said.

The Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff addressed an open letter to Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying in March. They said medical staff is overworked.

The nurse-to-patient ratio, they said, was 1:12, far exceeding the international standard of 1:6.

“No matter which department it is, there are more patients during the influenza season,” says the nurse. “When one department is in need,

others departments need to give a helping hand. There is a ripple effect.”

She says Lunar New Year is the only time when they get some relief because it is taboo for Chinese people to go to hospital during the holiday.

“Experienced staff quit their jobs in public hospitals and work at private hospitals because they can earn more and the workload is less. This will lead to a shortage of experienced staff in the public sector,” she warns.

However, Miss X admits that staff at private hospitals have a heavier workload than before because patients who can afford it tend to go there when public hospitals are overcrowded.

“Working as a nurse is full of pressure,” says Miss Y, a registered nurse working in a pediatric intensive care unit (PICU). She believes the pressure for medical staff comes from the nature of the work.

“I’ve been a registered nurse for five years and I’m still very nervous at work because babies are always fickle minded and you have to be prepared all the time.”

Miss Y says when she first started working at the PICU, the pressure came from a lack of experience. But that changed., “As many member of staff left, apart from handling my duty, I also need to take care of the new nurses.”

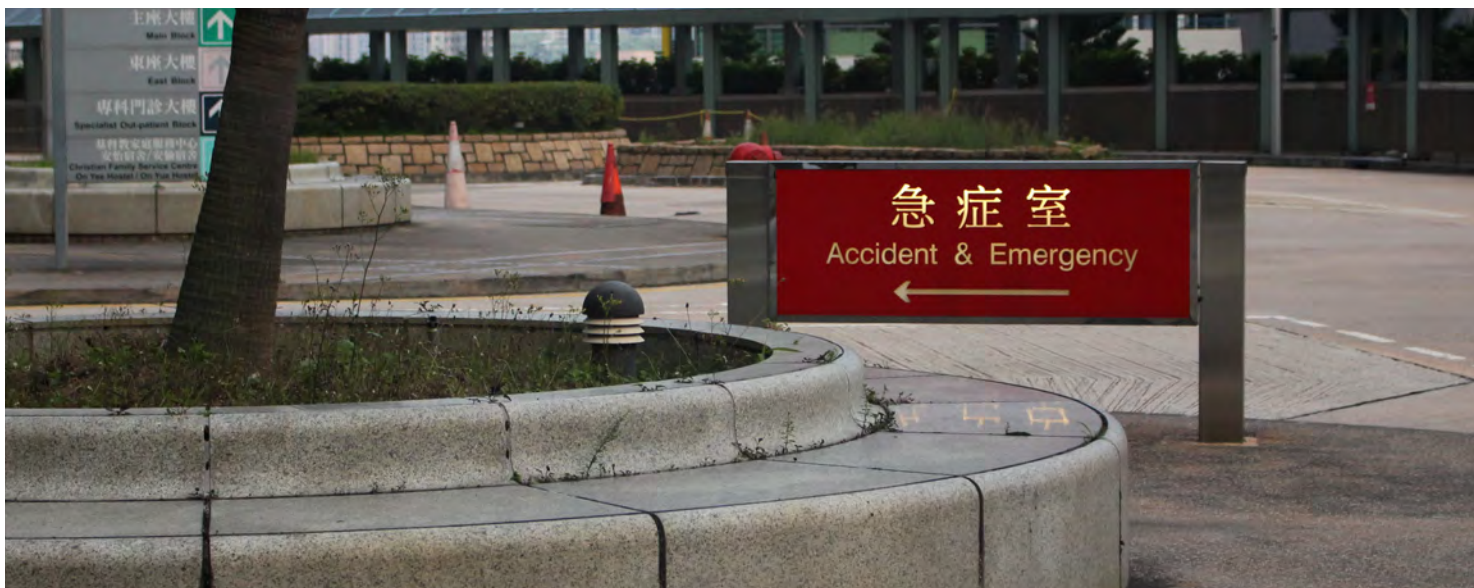
Miss Y is disappointed with the latest government Budget Plan. She expected the government to increase the expenditure on medical care but instead they are cutting it.

Chan Wai-tat, member of the North District Council, says the government is only putting resources on major infrastructure projects like the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, instead of something that improves people’s livelihood.

He says it is common for medical staff to work 18 hour shifts in emergency rooms. They are exhausted and are under a lot of pressure, but they have no choice.



“There are around 15,000 medical doctors in Hong Kong, only one-third of them are working in the public sector serving 90 percent of the citizens,” said Miss Y.



"Under the hospital clusters system in New Territories East, it is negatively affecting the quality of medical care service," he says. "For example, if someone living in Sheung Shui has to see a gynecologist, the only option is to go to the Prince of Wales Hospital in Shatin."

The newly elected district councillor says he will propose to the North District Council that the government should increase Private-Public hospital partnership.

"There aren't any private hospitals in North District, the closest one is in Shatin," he says. "Therefore, even patients living in North District who can afford private hospitals, still prefer North District Hospital out of convenience."

Chan believes that's the main cause of overcrowding in public hospitals, especially in North District, and it will lower the quality of medical service.

"If the government can increase medical expenditure, that would be the best solution for now," he says.

A spokesperson for the Hospital Authority responded that they have met the representatives from Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association

and Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff on 29th March regarding the work pressure on frontline medical staff.

"During the meeting, the Hospital Authority pledged to monitor the use of manpower and medical ser-

vices during influenza season," HA responded, "we will maintain close communication with front-line medical staff and take further contingency measures to cope with the situation."



"If the government can increase medical expenditure, that would be the best solution for now,"

Chan Wai-tat
Member of the North District Council

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Edited by Alvin Kor*

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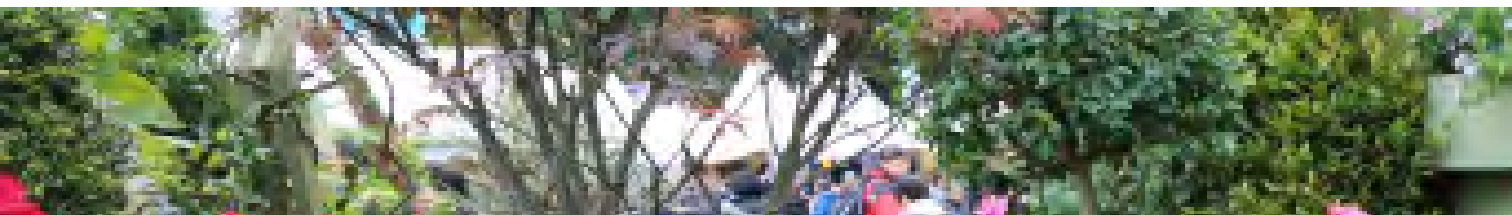
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HEALTH & SCIENCE

Plant-based therapy helps students bloom

Horticultural therapy to alleviate student suicide problem



In a garden of various plants, colorful flowers with sounds from a waterfall and chirping birds, a group of six students with dementia and depression is sitting at a round, wheelchair-accessible table, touching their newly grown plants, listening to the therapist's instruction with smile on everyone's face.

It's more than just gardening. It's called Horticultural Therapy. This new way of therapy is defined by America as the engagement of a person in gardening and plant-based activities, facilitated by a trained therapist. The visual aesthetics of plants can elicit feelings of inner peace, which generates positive emotions toward a meaningful appreciation of life. As the live pressure becomes heavier in Hong Kong, this therapy is increasingly popular in Hong Kong nowadays," said the Hong Kong Registered Horticultural Therapist Tam Sau-han.

"Students nowadays face lots of stress and are more fragile," said Ms Tam, the General Affair Director of Hong Kong Association of Therapeutic Horticulture, "The therapy can help to remedy their mental health problems and alleviate their stress and depression."

Up to 23 students have committed suicides in Hong Kong since the start of academic year in September 2015,

which was much more than the past years, according to the University of Hong Kong's Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention.

What's more, a Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides has been established by the government recently to examine the reasons of suicides and find appropriate preventive measures.

Researches find the therapy which engages people in plant-based activities can treat developmental disabilities and mental illness such as depression and stress-related diseases, said Dr. Tong Wang-chi, a Honorary Consultant of Hong Kong Association of Therapeutic Horticulture.

Many of the people committing suicides because of the feeling of worthless, said Dr. Tong, who is also a counseling psychologist of Adventist Hospital. He said the plants are a medium of treatment, which can make people regain self-worth.

Ms Tam said the advantage of plants over other mediums such as music was that plants was alive. "The clients feel they are responsible for a life."

Ms Tam also mentioned an "Attention restoration theory" claiming that people can concentrate better after spending time in nature, or even

looking at scenes of nature.

"Only in this one-hour therapy will I forget all the unhappy things," said Wong Pui Shan, who has already attended six therapy lessons.

But the therapy is not only about growing plants, the experienced therapists Ms Tam said that they therapists play a very important role.

Horticultural therapists plan several days ahead to set tasks according to the abilities and the physical and mental needs of every individual client. During the treatment, they will use assessment methods to record, monitor and evaluate individual achievements, she said.

"The key principle is people-oriented treatment," Ms Tam said. "It doesn't matter whether the plants grow well or not, but what people can learn from the life and death."

As for the treatment effect, Ms Tam said the changes were obvious among many participants. "A student who lacked a sense of security and seldom talked to people at first gradually started to greet and talk to people after a period of treatment", she said.

"A particular advantage of the plants is it never judge," she said. "It will never response to condemn you."



Dr. Tong Wang-chi, a counseling psychologist at Adventist Hospital, has been the Honorary Consultant of Hong Kong Association of Therapeutic Horticulture for many years.

Some students with depression or anxieties were very sensitive to other people's words. So plants will be a moderate treatment to help them gain connections and re-establish trust.

Ho Kai-pong is a Project Officer and therapist of Serene Oasis which is a local Horticultural Therapy centre. He said another advantage of horticultural therapy was people who were unwilling to see the doctor for their mental problems were not very resistant to this method.

"Because people will think it is only growing plants," he said. "For some people, if they find it is a therapy, they will just walk away because they don't think they're ill."

"Another good feature of horticultural therapy is it requires people's involvement," said Dr. Tong "When people put their time and efforts into something, they will take it more seriously and attach importance to it."

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However, the therapy also has shortcomings. Dr. Tong said the most obvious one was it would only be effective for people not resisting growing plants.

"We find the effect was not very well for those who didn't like plants," said veteran therapists Mr Ho, "because they will not pay attention to the plants and are not willing to think the meanings behind the activities."

"Another shortcoming is that the therapy is limited to its requirements, such as plants and gardens, because

all it needs is a psychotherapist in the traditional psychological therapy," said Dr. Tong.

He added that the traditional therapy has a clear and strict procedure of treatment, while the effect of horticultural therapy is unclear after withdrawal.

As an adjunctive therapy, the horticultural therapy is a great tool to reduce the stress and anxiety of students, and many schools has already exposed their students more to this therapy to help with their mental health, he said.

"The horticultural therapy is quite popular now," said Mr Ho at the Serene Oasis, a 7,000-square-foot garden with over 60 plant species, "Many schools are bringing their students here, which make our garden full of people all the time."

Although the therapy becomes popular, the salary of the therapists remains low. Ms Tam said she never regretted resigning a better-paid job for being a full-time horticultural therapist.

"There's nothing more satisfying than seeing the smiles on those depressed students' faces," she said.



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