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TYR

The Young Reporter

by HKBU journalism students since 1969

Cover story - Mega redevelopment

Living history - Old vendors in Sai Wan

Michael Chugani - What journalists live for

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Community Issue

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Editor's Note

This should be the very last editor's note I write here.

The good times I worked for *The Young Reporter* hover in my mind. I still remember how I ran my very first story, which was on the now defunct Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate, for *TYR* when I was in year one – I was so shy that I hesitated at the door of the estate office before people inside noticed me and asked me what I was doing out there. I managed to finish my draft – a not-so-focused piece which I learnt reporters should pick an “angle” to write on.

Then it came to my second year, when I realised one of the true values of being a reporter for a student publication, is that we have the luxury to run investigative stories. So I did a couple of investigative stories which made a little noise. That really made my journalistic juice flows. I found myself enjoyed doing investigative stories, which bring along intangible and unmeasurable satisfaction.

When I was really into this publication, I spotted some flaws and faults that await someone to make changes. Ideas began to develop in my mind. Then I spent the whole summer to work with my team, while we were having our internship, to make *TYR* a more contemporary and readable publication.

It is easy to make changes, but hard to make the right ones. You always have to be bold, but careful, to make changes, especially to something traditional.

I am very happy to work with a team of very dedicated minds that made my ideas come true. We revamped *TYR* into a magazine, which was quite well-received. I dare not say it is the best *TYR* ever, but it should be a great leap forward for the publication. We still have much to learn and improve, so please do not hesitate to mail us your opinions.

As the oldest journalism students' publication in Hong Kong, *TYR* deserves more. It is deemed to be lagging behind. But I strongly believe that it is never too late to build up our reputation and authority. With the absolute editorial freedom we enjoy and unreserved support we receive, I am sure *TYR* will be more widely recognised in the future.

Issue 7 is a community issue. We hope to gather news at community levels which show the unique and grass-root face of Hong Kong. Enjoy your reading!

Issue 8 will be passed on to the next editorial board. I hope you can continue to support *TYR*.

Simpson Cheung Wai-ming
Chief Editor

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(Left) The construction site near some residential buildings in Tai Po.
(Below) The widening project involves killing 10,000 trees and all that is left on the once tree-filled slope are stumps now.



ENVIRONMENT

Tolo Highway widening project: A struggle between environment and development

BY JESSICA ZHANG

The ongoing Tolo Highway widening work involving the felling of more than ten thousand trees is raising a mixed opinion from the public.

The Tolo Highway widening project was launched in November 2009. It was to counteract the increasing traffic pressure due to the development of northeast New Territories and increasing cross-boundary transportation.

The major aim of the project is to widen the Tolo Highway from a dual three-lane to a dual four-lane road. Ten thousand trees have to be cut down to make way for it.

Some residents living in places beside the section currently being widened such as Wan Tau Tong Estate, King Nga Court and Classical Gardens are dissatisfied with the project.

They said it affected their daily lives and destroyed their living environment.

Mr Wong Ching-wah, who has lived in King Nga Court for more than 20 years, usually takes a walk after dinner with his family every day. He said they enjoyed the moment very much in the past. It was quiet and they could see a lot of trees and take a breath of fresh air.

However, there are now lots of tree stumps, machines, and bare slopes instead. He thought this project made a huge damage to the environment as well as to his living standard.

"This scene really can't bring me a good mood," Mr Wong said. "Protecting the environment is such an important issue these days, how could they still cut so many trees?"

The Environmental Impact Assessment Report of this project said the woodlands affected were of low to medium ecological value.

According to the written reply from the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Ms Eva Cheng Yiu-wah, to the question raised by Legislative Councillor Mr Chan Hak-kan in a Legislative Council meeting, more than 3,620 large trees with diameter over 75 millimetres, 44,000 seedlings and 50,500 shrubs would be replanted after this project.

After taking ecological and aesthetic factors into consideration, new tree species, such as *Sapium sebiferum* and *Litsea glutinosa*, will be planted.

Ms Song Wai-lam is a volunteer of Green Power who lives in Classical Gardens. Although she was happy that the government would plant new tree species after this project, she thought the government shouldn't have cut so many trees.

Ms Song has joined and organised many tree planting activities in Hong Kong as she wanted more trees in the city. She believed every tree counted, no matter if it was of high or low ecological value.

"The new planted seedlings and new species may die or [may not adapt] to the environment here," she said. "They also need time to grow, so they couldn't compensate for the loss of cutting these big trees now."

Tolo Highway was opened in September 1985. It connects Shatin and Tai Po and is a major expressway on Route Nine. Cutting trees is essential to the widening project. But in Ms Song's opinion, the project itself is unnecessary.

"I drive to work through Tolo Highway every day, but I don't feel there is any traffic problem," Ms Song said. "Sometimes there may be traffic jam, but it won't last long and I think it's normal for every road."

When the project is completed in mid-2012, the number of one-way vehicle trips per hour during peak hours is expected to increase by about 700, from around 4,200 to 4,900.

"I support this project very much as there will be less traffic jam on the highway," Mr Lau Kit-hoi, a taxi driver who always drives around Tai Po, said. "For us taxi drivers, time is money."

Mr Lau said the traffic problem of Tolo Highway was not as serious as some other parts in Hong Kong.

However, he would be happy if there was no traffic jam at all as he could spend less time in traffic and have more time to seek passengers.

"The society needs development and we need more convenience," Mr Lau said. "I think widening the Tolo highway is a must and I really don't think cutting some trees is such a big deal. We have to sacrifice for development."

EDITED BY VANESSA YUNG



The kids' playground on the Ma Chai Hang Recreation Ground will not be rebuilt after the construction.

SOCIETY

MTR demolishes park to make way for new rail line

BY EDWARD MA

Some 70,000 residents in Chuk Yuen are going to bid farewell to their only recreation ground, as soon as this year, to make way for a new MTR line.

The 2.16-hectare Ma Chai Hang Recreation Ground is going to be expropriated by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTR) for constructing ventilation facilities and emergency exit for the Wong Tai Sin section of Shatin to Central Link (SCL) railway.

"It is a fantastic place for residents to relax and take deep refreshing breaths," said Mr Chow Sau-keung, a frequent visitor who lives in the nearby Chuk Yuen Estate, "The construction will definitely mess up our neighbourhood."

Mr Tsui Kai-man, an engineer from mobility division of Siemens Limited said ventilation system was compulsory for underground railway tunnel longer than 230 metres.

The construction in Ma Chai Hang will be completed in about four to five years.

The football pitch, tennis courts, fitness trail and children playground on the ground will be demolished and only the football pitch will be rebuilt after the construction.

The construction stirred discontent among residents before they can really enjoy benefits of the new rail line.

"It's a pity for us to lose this lovely recreation ground, I have to go to Morse Park to spend my leisure time, which is much more farther away," said Mr Lo Kam-tim, a retired Chuk Yuen resident who spends his leisure time everyday in the park.

Ms Doris Chan Lai-ngor, a Tin Ma Court resident, concerned much about the pollutions that may be brought by the construction.

"My flat is directly facing the recreation ground, it is annoying for residents nearby like me to live with noises, dust and other pollutions for five years," she said.

The SCL will link up several existing railways and connect the Northeast New Territories and Hong Kong Island via Southeast Kowloon to serve a population of 300,000.

The construction work of the new railway will start this year. However, some residents like Mr Chow and Ms Chan, are unaware of the construction under The Young Reporter spoke to them.

Mr Andrew To Kwan-hang, District Councillor representing Chuk Yuen (North) Estate, slammed MTR for lacking transparency.

He said the MTR only consulted the district councillors representing the housing estates closest to the recreation ground, namely the Chuk Yuen (South) Estate, Tsui Chuk Garden, Tin Ma Court and Tin Wang Court.

"The construction brings tremendous influences to the residents, the MTR should consult them before finalising everything.

They should also seek possible alternatives to minimise impacts brought to the community," Mr Hui Kam-shing, District Councillor representing Chuk Yuen (South) Estate, said.

An MTR spokesman said that they had already submitted consultation documents to the Wong Tai Sin District Council and held a few public consultation meetings in Wong Tai Sin.

They plan to build a temporary football pitch at Kai Tak East to meet the demand for sports grounds.

The railway giant also plans to optimise the design of the ventilation system's exterior at Ma Chai Hang so it merges with the surroundings.

Mr Andrew To said the government and business giants should consider interests of different parties and strike a balance before making policy and decision.

"The powers should not misinterpret particular needs as the needs for the majority," he said.

"Policy makers should do their utmost to protect the welfare of all classes in society," Mr To said.

Similar problems arises in other old districts.

At least four parks and one swimming pool in Western District were demolished to make way for the West Island line.

EDITED BY SIMPSON CHEUNG

SOCIETY

Build more female toilets, lawmaker urges

BY LEILA POON

Hong Kong should build more restrooms for women, the World Toilet Organisation urged.

A similar call to rectify the queue issue was also echoed in last year's Legislative Council, by Ms Emily Lau Wai-hing, vice-chairperson of the Democratic Party.

The Buildings Department of the government changed the male-to-female ratio from the original 1:1 to 1:1.25 in the 2005 practice note. The statutory standard was based on an assessment of the number of both sexes in shopping arcades, cinemas and other privately owned recreational spaces.

But the compartment ratio in public toilets in Hong Kong remains an inconvenience for women.

Since 2004, government-built public toilets have adopted a 1:2 ratio in planning and refurbishment.

Recently, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has just finished the construction of female toilet facilities in Victoria Park.

The problem is worldwide, and big cities across the globe are working on the solutions, Mr Jack Sim, the Singaporean founder of the World Toilet Organisation said.

In 2005, New York City passed a law to regulate toilet fixtures in renovated public locations, also at a 1:2 ratio. Japan and Taiwan soon followed.

However, the new ratio has yet to convince concerned parties.

Ms Lau suggested that the government should learn from our counterparts to do a better job, if Hong Kong were to keep up with international standards.

Mr Sim also deemed the ratio in the practice note "too low", regarding the physiological difference between men and women.

"Potty-Parity" is the formal term for gender equality in the restrooms. It traditionally demands equitable space for both sexes. Late advocates are demanding more fixtures for women to ensure equal waiting time.

Studies showed that women spent twice as much time as men in the toilet room. The difference can be attributed to women's menstrual cycles. Other factors include their increased likelihood of securing themselves inside the stall, using toilet paper and taking



Women spend twice as much time as men in toilet rooms.

care of their children.

On the users' part, a survey by the Democratic Party in 2009 backed up their request. Some 85 per cent of the respondents agreed that the ratio should be adapted to include more female fixtures.

"I have to wait for a toilet in shopping malls almost every weekend and holiday. I can't remember how many times I have been trapped in a long line outside the restrooms," said Ms Jane Cheung Mei-suen, a 24-year-old clerk.

She had just spent nearly ten minutes in a lavatory in Langham Place, a shopping mall in Mongkok. More than ten other women queued up with Ms Cheung for three stalls.

And the waiting is not restricted to the ladies' room. Outside the doors were male shoppers waiting for their female companions.

"Men seldom have to wait for a toilet and we can use urinals. I always wonder why they [the women] need to wait for such a long time," said Mr Kelvin Law Chi-hin, 27, Ms Cheung's boyfriend. He leaned against a wall outside the lavatory, alongside a few other men.

"The phenomenon seems so common that everybody gets used to it and forgets to ask why they always need to wait," he said.

Ms Joanna Leung Suk-ching, the chairperson of the Women committee and Welfare group of the Democratic Party said they recognised the problem.

"We have been lodging this problem with the government for years," she said, "But it takes time."

While the lack of women toilet rooms may be a laughing matter to some people, Mr Sim takes it seriously.

He pointed out that the issue could cause urine suppression, low productivity, and is itself a form of gender discrimination.

Letting aside the biological and social consequences, lawmaker Ms Lau addressed the government's role.

"For the government, be it a matter of an attempt to improve the situation, of doing public good or of eradicating gender discrimination, they should be alert to public needs," she said. "What we can obviously see is an inconvenience."

EDITED BY ECHO CHEN

FEATURES

Living history in the corner of Western District

BY THOMAS YAU

In his tiny workroom in Western District, silver-haired Mr Yip Kam-tim bent to look attentively through his thick glasses at the little silver plate on his hand which he just drew from the drawer. With some skillful bending and tweaking, it became a shiny container in less than ten minutes.

In this hustle and bustle city, everything old, ranging from quaint colonial buildings to traditional craftsmanship, is replaced by the new at the speed of light. Mr Yip is one of the very few silversmiths left in Hong Kong.

Roaming around in Western District, the ringing of tram bells reminds people of the old days. The district is one of the oldest in the city. It is where British troops landed in 1841, who then built the Victoria City and developed into the modern city of Hong Kong.

Now that the high-rising buildings and luxury shopping malls have taken over the district. A trace of the old days is hardly in sight. But somehow, at the corners of some byroads lies the living history of our time.

The 76-year-old works in the quaint Wing Lee Street in Sheung Wan, where *Echoes of the Rainbow*, the film that won the Crystal Bear Award for Best Feature Film at the Berlin Film Festival, was shot. He has been in the business since 1943, during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.

"You post-80s are luckier than our generation...when I was a kid many people just starved to death on the street," he said.

The memories of the old days came rushing into his head.

He said that it was hard to make a living out of this business. But he persists because he enjoys the job. Another secret to success is



Loyal customer Mr Tang will very soon bid farewell to the shoe master.

to challenge himself on every piece of silverware he makes.

"What? Can I make a ring? That's just a piece of cake," he said with a strong ego. He can make different kinds of silverware such as containers, rings and trophies.

When he was an apprentice, he did not just sit around waiting for orders from his master. Instead, he looked around the workroom, eagerly searching for inspirations for new designs and techniques.

"That's why I'm so talented today," he laughed out loudly.

But Mr Yip said he would retire very soon because he is getting too old.

"My days are numbered...I want to be a silversmith forever but time doesn't allow me to do so. My strength is waning and my eyesight is not that good now," he said as he lowered his eyebrows for the first time.

He sighed that even after he retired, he would bring his tools home because they have been together like partners throughout the years.



Mr Yip is one of the very few silversmiths left in HK.

Walk down Wing Lee Street and head west is Sai Ying Pun, where in a byroad found World War II guerilla veteran Mr Lui Chun-yui polishing and fixing shoes in his very small shop. It is packed with piles and piles of shoe leathers, shoestrings, heels and tools that the 84-year-old has to do his work sitting at the doorstep.

It is almost impossible to associate his feeble appearance with his past, until he pointed to several wooden bullets on his working table. He made the bullets to remind himself of the brutal war he fought bravely more than a half century ago. The memory was so fresh in his mind he even remembered the name of his captain is Li Wo.

Mr Tang, a customer, sat down on a stool and handed his shoes to Mr Lui. "The sole broke, can you fix it?" he asked.

Mr Lui took the shoes and skillfully fixed it in five minutes. It takes a modern shoe repair shop more than a day to fix it, not to mention the staggering price.

"All you need is a hammer and some glue. I'm so good at it because I used to make shoes myself...I used to have a large shop and many staff members but now everything is gone," he said.

Putting his shoes back on, Mr Tang said he has been sending his broken shoes to the shoe repair master for two decades.

"I still remember when he once relocated the shop, I spent the whole month looking for him," the loyal customer said.

As the clock ticks mercilessly, more and more stories are buried six feet under. Mr Yip's and Mr Lui's stories are only the very few that will soon be forgotten very soon.

EDITED BY PHILA SIU



Restaurant staff usually do not wake customers up during quiet hours from 2 to 5 am, according to the chain's policy.

A good night's sleep at McDonald's

TYR explores how people spend their bedtime in the 24-hour fast food chain.

BY SYBIL KOT

It is 3.30 am. When the city is still sleeping, people in the 24-hour McDonald's spend their time differently. Loud teenagers shout at each other, old friends chat and a few loners sit silently.

With cool air-conditioning, the restaurant gets chilly after midnight as the crowd vanishes. Mr Tong, in his early 40s, who declines to give his full name, shrinks into his jacket at an unnoticeable corner.

"I do have a home," he pulls out a clean T-shirt and a towel from his backpack and says, "my wife has them washed every other day."

It is true that Mr Tong has a cozy home and a caring family - with his wife and daughter - but after he lost his waiter job at a Chinese restaurant two years ago, his daily life has undergone a tremendous transition.

Working as a construction worker at a site in North Point, Mr Tong, who lives in Tuen Mun, has given up taking a two-hour bus ride home and stayed in the McDonald's in North Point overnight for three months.

"It saves me more than \$50 and four hours on transport every single day," he says.

The tenacious father holds a faith behind the decision for his 17-year-old daughter sitting for HKCEE this month.

"I know how it's like to live without [academic] certificates in Hong Kong. I know that, and I won't let it happen to my daughter," he says with strong sentiments.

Having a plan to send his only child to study abroad, Mr Tong has chosen this harsh living style to save money.

And more surprisingly, his family knows nothing about it.

"I told my wife I'm staying with a co-worker," he starts murmuring to himself, "I don't want them to worry about me." This sacrifice has so far saved him about \$1,200 every month.

When the night falls, he will have dinner at a co-worker's place, then wander around malls until most of them close. A neighbouring McDonald's is his "residence", where he orders himself a cup of hot chocolate and occasionally, a burger at around 11p.m.

Mr Tong takes naps with the food tray beside him at an inconspicuous table around the corner. To him, what he does is worthwhile.

At the other corner of the restaurant sits a talkative and cheerful man.

"They're all my friends. The manager knows me well. I'm here quite often," Mr Cheng Mun-man, 56, says, waving to the manager as if they are close friends. It seems to him that the McDonald's is a territory of his - customers see him chatting with the staff in a boss-like way light-heartedly and patrolling around to help pick up trashes.

More than that, he never leaves the restaurant without enjoying his coffee refills in every early morning.

"I'm not homeless, I just don't want to go home," Mr Cheng says like a naughty and energetic ten year old boy.

Once living in a luxurious apartment on

Fort Street in North Point, Mr Cheng was born to a well-fixed Shanghai family. However, after a series of business failures and family problems, his wife divorced him. Now he rents a slum-like flat on Kam Ping Street in the district but seldom stays there.

"I like meeting friends and seeing different happenings on streets. It's never funny to stare at the walls inside my flat," Mr Cheng says after he refuses to talk about how he maintains a living.

While the place seems to be a heaven for some people with intriguing stories to tell, the restaurant staff have ways to minimise the troubles they cause.

"We do have policies against people lying down on sofas or chairs, and those who sit here without purchasing items. But we wouldn't bother them if they sit up, buy a drink and stay quiet," Mr Tsang, a junior manager of the restaurant, says.

"Actually there are not really a lot of people sleeping overnight in the shop, so generally it doesn't affect the business," he adds.

Usually he does not wake customers up during quiet hours from 2 to 5 am, but only till the shop is ready to serve breakfast, the restaurant manager will tap on their shoulders and wake them up with silent whispers.

No alarm clocks, no stretching in bed, and no morning toilette - Mr Tong, Mr Cheng and many other walk out of the restaurant when the sun rises - that is how they start another brand new day.

EDITED BY NATALIE WONG

FEATURES

Idle market dies down with poor facilities



Few customers shop in Kwun Chun Market, leaving sellers little to prepare.

BY ELEVEN LIU

Along the empty aisles in Kwun Chung market, some maintenance workers are soldering iron doors of the idle stalls. The annoying sound it makes echoes loudly in the giant yet void area.

At 4 pm, the prime time for housewives to buy food for dinner, stall keepers in Kwun Chung Market are chatting, writing on their account book or simply sitting there. They are not preparing for the peak hours.

Kwun Chung Market has been declining for many years. Many stalls are vacant and few shoppers are found.

If nothing is done to revitalise it, it may face the same fate as Mongkok Market, which was closed down in February.

Built in 1991 and located in Yau Ma Tei, Kwun Chung Market comprises three floors and 216 stalls. According to the Kwun Chung Market Office, only around 150 stalls are currently rented out.

Kwun Chung Market was once a thriving social center in the first few years after its completion. However, with more and more office buildings in the area and residents moving out of the community, fewer and fewer people shop in this market.

"I don't shop in Kwun Chung Market at all. There are fewer choices here. I'd rather go to Yau Ma Tei Market. There are wider varieties with cheaper prices," Ms Ho Man who lives in Yau Ma Tei said.

Many people living around would prefer going to Yau Ma Tei Market. It takes only ten minutes to walk from Kwun Chung Market to Yau Ma Tei Market, which is much more prosperous.

Some stall keepers in Kwun Chung Market are also complaining about the design and the maintenance of market.

The facilities are old and the lift is only going up. People have to walk across the market to go downstairs.

For most of the stall keepers in Kwun Chung Market, their main business is cooperating with restaurants and regularly selling goods and food in bulk. To them, the stalls are more like storehouses for goods than places selling groceries and food to shoppers.

"It is so hard doing business here. Seldom do people go inside this market. Most of my products are sold to fixed customers," Ms Yau, a grocery seller in Kwun Chung Market, said.

She rents a stall at about \$1,000 per month and has been doing business here for more than 10 years. Now she is considering moving out of the poorly equipped market.

In fact the government has introduced

some measures to boost the popularity of the markets, such as putting on festive decorations and holding cooking demonstration show.

However, the effectiveness is so limited that sellers are reluctant to follow.

"The government only holds such activities twice to three times a year. They dispatch some daily groceries like detergents and hand out leaflets. But seldom are people attracted by that. These measures didn't help my business," said Mr Kay Tak-ho, a fish seller in Kwun Chung Market.

Mr Hui Tak-leung, a Yau Tsim Mong District Councillor, also the chairman of Community Building Committee, said that Kwun Chung Market would probably be closed down in the long run as the government has been losing money.

The situation also exists in many other public markets in Hong Kong.

Most of these markets have been built decades ago and they are no longer functional and suitable for the development of the community.

Mr Hui points out that it is a trend for all public markets in Hong Kong to decline given the fierce competition with supermarkets and privately-owned markets.

To make good use of spaces, Mr Hui suggests rebuilding the market and making it multi-functional.

"We could rebuild the whole building. The first floor is the public market while the second floor can be restaurants, and the third floor will be a library. More people will be attracted to go there," he said.

Mr Ip Ngo-tung, district councillor and member of Housing and Building Management Committee and District Facilities Management Committee has another suggestion.

"We are considering improving the utilisation of the market by integrating it into two floors. But there is no mature decision yet," he said.

EDITED BY LUNA LAU



Vacant stall are now closed with iron doors.

Lesbian Filipinos find love in HK

BY MAGGIE TAM

With a crew cut and no make-up on her round face, 31-year-old Ms Hermie Jessica has a masculine look. "My madam said if her child was a girl, she would fire me," she said. "She doesn't want her child to be influenced by my style and my sexual orientation."

Ms Jessica is a typical tomboyish Filipino domestic helper in Hong Kong. She has been working in the city for 6 years. Her style is disliked by her female employer who has described her as "half boy half girl."

She had to adapt a different dressing style at home because her madam was not happy with her style. "On Sundays and public holidays, I would go out wearing a t-shirt and change to a shirt in a public toilet," she said. "I can only be myself during weekends."

"Luckily my sir is okay with that [a lesbian]. We are like buddies. He buys me shirts, hair gel and other male stuff every time he comes back from business trips," she said.

She has a three-year-relationship with her 39-year-old girlfriend Ms Juvy Delay, who divorced her husband few years ago.

"While I was working hard, he had fun with another girl. I don't trust men anymore. I feel more comfortable with Hermie. She's more caring and lovable. I'm more blessed now," said Ms Delay, who is also a domestic helper in Hong Kong, but she has chosen to hide the relationship from her employers.

Every Sunday, Ms Delay and Ms Jessica would attend activities such as band shows and music concerts organised by a private organisation for lesbian's interests. All members of the organisation are lesbians. Together they also rent a tiny apartment in Tai Po so they could spend some intimate moments during holidays.

Though complained by their employers, most lesbians actually feel better here in Hong Kong than in their own country.

"We hold hands in the street. We love Hong Kong as it is more open than our country. People are more willing to admit they are gay," Ms Jessica said. "My Christian friends in Hong Kong accept me. They're more open-minded."

She said homosexual marriage was strongly opposed by the Catholic Church in Hong Kong but relationships are generally accepted by the public.

Ms May Oblea, a 37-year-old with radiant skin and short black hair, said Hong Kong



Couple Ms Jessica (left) and Ms Delay (right) spend their holidays together.

was less religious than the Philippines. Once a rape victim at young age, Ms Oblea has chosen to be with girls.

"Hong Kong people accept the way we are. My employer is nice to me," she said.

Her employer did not ask about sexual orientation. "As long as I can take good care of her baby, she doesn't bother," she said. "But I have to behave more girl-like at home."

She liked being called "tomboy". "I am real tomboy because I love girls very much and I am very proud of myself," she said.

She said some girls had relationships with tomboys because they did not want to get pregnant.

"Some of my ex-girlfriends just wanted to have sex as they were lonely in Hong Kong without their husbands," Ms Oblea added.

She despised people who pretended to be tomboys. "Some of them are only tomboys in Hong Kong, then they return home as a wife and mother. They shouldn't make fun of it. Being a tomboy is not easy. If you're a tomboy, you can't withstand a man," she said.

"My current girlfriend also has her husband and children in the Philippines. Our relationship is true only here," she added.

Now Ms Oblea is in love with Ms Ginalyn Condrillon, a beautiful woman with wavy dark brown hair.

However, Ms Ginalyn was married and would not accept homosexuals.

"I just treat her as a close friend. I think she has misunderstood me," she said.

Mr Marlin Cometa, the 23-year-old owner of Unique Karaoke, a lounge bar in Central mainly catering for Filipinos, said he had many tomboy customers.

"I think girls love tomboys because there are not enough Filipino boys here. Most Filipinos come to Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers. There're not many opportunities

to meet men. I am one of the few," he said.

Filipino Christian Ms Alma Martei, a friend of Ms Oblea, said she wanted to changed Ms Oblea to normal girl again.

"I don't accept lesbians. But I accept her as a friend. I want to bring her back to god's world," she said.

"I admit I discriminate against tomboys," said Mr Samuel Yuen, the boss of T&H Employment Centre with 18 years of experience for placements of domestic helpers.

"I don't want to recommend tomboys to my customers. I think they are less responsive maybe because they took the role of man in their countries. Men in the Philippines do not need to do housework," Mr Yuen said.

Ms Lea A. Salazar, a Filipino staff working in T&H Employment Centre said, "If I were the employers, I would consider tomboys. They can carry like ten kilogram of potatoes and play basketball with my sons. And my husband wouldn't be interested in the boyish her. Why not?"

"My maid sometimes brought her girlfriend home and my home is like their free hotel!" said Ms Frances Lai Wing-kum, an ex-employer of a tomboyish domestic helper, who fired her maid after knowing she was in a relation with a girl. "She's a helpful worker. But sorry I couldn't endure her private life."

Ms Bella Wulf, a 45-year-old domestic helper who has worked in the city for more than 20 years, said she accepted lesbians but did not think they could easily survive.

"When you're out of your country, you have to be strong and hope for the best. Employers don't always respect normal Filipino women like us, not to mention the lesbians or tomboys. It takes a long time for every one to accept them," she said.

EDITED BY SYBIL KOT

FEATURES



Two traditional tramcars and a Millennium New Tram run side by side.

On the crossroads: old and new trams

BY SARAH LAI

With their tram bells clanking across Hong Kong Island for 106 years, tramcars are still moving steadily as usual on the narrow rails, witnessing the island's changes day by day.

The tramway from Kennedy Town to Shau Kei Wan is no longer along the coast. The Hong Kong Tramways Limited is no longer run by Hong Kong people. Over the past decade, the island has undergone drastic changes, but the tramways and the traditional tramcars remain.

Being the longest-serving public transportation service in town, tram rides have already become part of the local lifestyle.

"Trams are not only a means of transportation. In fact, it is like one of my old friends," said Mr Cheung Shun-kwong, vice-president of the Hong Kong Collectors Society.

Having been living on the Hong Kong Island for nearly 60 years, Mr Cheung has become a frequent tram passenger since childhood. He regarded tramcars as an elegant and classic work of art.

Unlike years ago, taking tramcars is no longer a necessary routine but an enjoyable journey to him. "When sitting on the second floor of the tramcar at dusk, I can feel the comfortable stroking breeze," he said.

Mr Cheung has collected more than 700 tram-related memorabilia including tickets, postcards, photos and even the Hong Kong Tramways' annual reports.

"The first item I collected is a postcard in

which a tramcar is passing by a Western-style building. It looks so beautiful," he said.

Since then, he has fallen in love with trams and has started collecting everything tram-related.

Tramcars have now entered their fifth generation. It is, however, a shared feeling among Mr Cheung and his friends that only by having rides on the old-style wooden tramcars could they recall their fond memories as the Millennium New Trams are only "buses" to them.

Since March, the century-old company has come under full ownership of the French company Veolia Transport.

"I appreciate that Wharf Transport Investments Limited managed to keep the low price and provide great transportation services for Hong Kong people, but the company was low-profile. Why didn't the company put more effort in promoting the trams, the icon of Hong Kong?" said Mr Cheung.

He continued, "I think it is okay to have a French company operate the trams. I have contacted the new management board and I feel that they have an open attitude in improving and promoting the trams."

With the continuous development of the Mass Transit Railway and buses, more people have given up taking trams when they are in a hurry. To them, taking trams is now more of a relaxing, nostalgic activity on holidays.

Mr Tony Mak, a resident who has been living on the Hong Kong Island since the 1950s, said he seldom took trams now except on holidays. However, when going out for shopping on the island, trams are still

his choice because the stations are so conveniently located.

Mr Lee Tsun-lung, member of the post-80s generation, launched a website "My Tramway" in 2006 to provide a platform for tram fans to exchange ideas.

Mr Lee has always wanted his own tramcar since he was a child. "Tram models were rarely sold in the market, but I really wanted my own tramcar, so I came up with the idea of making tramcar models myself," he said.

Mr Lee has created a miniature "tram town" with several tramcar models and a tram rail model. He is cooperating with a factory and planning to put out a tram model for sale. He also proposed his models to the Hong Kong Tramways, hoping that they would be turned into real tramcars that could run on actual rails out there someday.

"The management board of the company has changed and I feel disappointed that Hong Kong people could not run the company better. However, I am already trying to contact the company again and propose my tramcar models to them," he said.

As a youngster, he has a different view on the future directions of Hong Kong's trams. He thought that local trams should not be invariably nostalgic the entire time.

"I think the company can run the new tramcars in commercial areas like Central and Causeway Bay as they will blend well with the modern atmosphere and they can run the traditional ones in old districts like Sheung Wan," he said.

EDITED BY YVONNE LOU

Fire dragon strives to keep its blaze

BY PEARL LIU

It was superstition that led villagers in Tai Hang to perform fire dragon dance. But as development is wiping out our history, the annual plague-dispelling ritual, dated back to 1880, offers us a glimpse to the past and the art of the old days.

Around October every year, a 67-metre-long dragon studded with burning joss sticks is held up by Tai Hang residents and parades through the streets of Tai Hang. But people's passion for the dance is petering out and there are worries that the tradition will disappear soon.

"The whole town turns out' phenomenon will never happen now because fewer and fewer people take part in the dance," Mr Chan Tak-fai, organiser and commander in chief of the Tai Hang fire dragon dance, said. As he flips through the photo albums which records his almost 60-year-long ties with the dance, the good old days of fire dragon dance unfold.

"When I was a little boy, people in our village thought it's a shame on the family if boys did not take part in the dance," Mr Chan said, smiling. "My brother and I were selected as the leaders and my family was very proud of us."

Many parents do not allow their children to take part in the dance nowadays, fearing that they would get burnt by the glowing joss sticks.

Huddled in a corner of the busy shopping area Causeway Bay, Tai Hang used to be a fishing village of the Hakka people.

"Many old villagers have left since redevelopment of the village," Mr Chan said. "They are replaced by outsiders, who could not understand our connection to the dance. So it's hard to convince them to get involved."

Development of the village comes at a cost. When villagers replaces muddy path with pavement, they also exterminate pearl grass, a material for making fire dragon.

Mr Tsang Shiu-tim, a fire dragon maker of 40 years' experience, said the grass was readily available on the roadside in the 70s'.

"Now you seldom see them in Tai Hang, not to mention other parts of Hong Kong," he said.

Mr Tsang said it took about three tonnes of pearl grass, which is strong and hard to burn, to make a fire dragon. They have to get



Photo: Thomas Yau

The fire dragon is treated with care before the dance.

the grass from the mainland now and pricey transportation fee ramps up the cost of the grass to \$40,000 for three tonnes.

When the traditional culture is diminishing, some in the younger generation hope to keep the dragon afloat.

Form one pupil Chan Kwok-yu is one of them. The 13-year-old first encountered the dance when he was six, acting as a cloud-lantern player.

"I always drag my classmates to the training and show them how interesting fire dragon dance is," he said.

Burn scars on his hands are testimony to his love for the dance.

"Boys should not fear pain and injuries," he said. "Playing fighting video games is just different. Dragon dancing is much more exciting. And as you dance, you feel like you are a real hero."

Traditionally, only men are allowed to perform the dance. But females are now rising up to protect the tradition from vanishing and to ease their urge to participate in the dance for hundreds of years.

"I begged my brother to let me in before the dance last year, and joined the team half the way on the sneak," Cheung Hiu-ying, 14, said. "A lot of my girl friends do envy me a lot."

Though it is against traditional rules, many old people like Mr Chan is now acquiescing in having young girls like Cheung to perform in the dance to pass down the tradition.

"If you ask me face to face to let the girls in, I would definitely say no. But I could pretend not to see them when they join... Rules have to change someday when the whole situation is not the same," Mr Chan, in his 70s, said with a smile.

Tai Hang fire dragon dance is actively applying for being listed as World Intangible Cultural Heritage now to let more people to join forces and keep the cultural custom.

"The title doesn't really matter too much, but I hope our fire dragon dance could get more attention by the success of the application," Mr Chan said.



Lin Ivy Chan

Lanterns with the Chinese words "Tai Hang Fire Dragon".

EDITED BY JAYSON HUI

COVER STORIES



Mega urban redevelopment: Big promises but empty cheques

Since the government has lowered the forced sale threshold from 90 to 80 per cent of aging building units since April 1, demolition and redevelopment in old districts are expected to speed up. This affects about 4,000 old tenement buildings with over 50 years of history around the town.

While the Urban Renewal Authority stresses a "people-oriented" approach in revitalising homes for many, Carrie Cheng, Tiffany Ho, Brian Law, John Nicolas and Daisy Zhong visited the neighbourhoods of Cheung Sha Wan, Sham Shui Po, Central and Yau Ma Tei to tell us their piteous stories.



Cheung Sha Wan property owners evict tenants from residence

Property owners and developers have a bigger say in building acquisition while tenants' interests are not protected in urban redevelopment.

Ms Yang Yuen-liu, who lives on Shun Ning Road in Cheung Sha Wan with her three children, has a two-year verbal contract with the property owner of the unit.

"The law cannot help us," Ms Yang said, "Issuing a letter to ask you move is so easy. But finding another flat is not that easy for me."

The government has loosened the rental policy in 2004. Property owners can require tenants to move out within a month by issuing a written notice.

The unit on the fourth floor, where her family lives, is co-owned by Man Hing Property and Tung Kong Property.

"Perhaps I have to go for nomadic life," Ms Yang said if she was forced out of the flat, they might have to sleep in parks as she had no plan where to move at the moment.

The mother of three cannot apply for public housing estate as she is a two-way permit holder.

The property owners proposed to offer \$5,400, which is equivalent to the sum of two months rents, as an incentive for removal.

But for Ms Yang, money is not the only consideration of whether to stay or not.

The Urban Renewal Authority has once offered a rental flat in Lai Chi Kok. But Ms Yang refused to move in because her children's kindergarten is far away from Lai Chi Kok.

"At least let me stay until June," Ms Yang sighed, saying that her eldest daughter will be promoted to primary one in the next academic year, so she hoped they could wait until the result of admission comes out.

Mrs Chan Lee Yuk-ying, 81, another residents living there with his son, said she had difficulties in walking up and down the stairs in the residential building with no lift.

She wanted to get into public housing flat nearby because she had lived in Sham Shui Po for more than 60 years, but Urban Renewal Authority still has not reached her to offer any advice or assistance.

"The landlords said they didn't want money [from us], they just wanted the flat back," Mrs Chan said, who was asked not to pay rent since February and was forced to move out.

"Frozen population" refers to residents of affected apartments in the redevelopment project who had registered to the government in an initial stage.

Mrs Chan, who registered in 2009, is one of them. But no authorities have reached her family to deal with compensation or housing arrangement yet.

Ms Yang said the landlords had different strategies on achieving their aim – one attempt is to take away the family's refrigerator and the bed from the flat, or to lock its main door with three metal locks and chains to threaten tenants.

The grass root and the poor have no where to air their grievance about the current situation - it was unfair and totally unreasonable, Ms Yang said.

The forcible removal of her flat had come effective since March 3, her family had no way but to struggle for help.

"The government believes the free market deeply," Mr Frederick Fung Kin-kee, legislative councilor of the Kowloon West geographic constituency, said.

He said the government did not interfere the market for most cases but it was principally wrong for the authority to regard those buildings as commodities.

"Buildings are something we can't see from commodity perspective," Mr Fung said.

"Once people have built up a connection with their neighborhood, it's no longer a mere commodity [that is valued by financial incentives]," he added.

ABOUT SHUN NING ROAD REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT:

The site will be renewed to provide 110 residential units and about 8,300 square feet of commercial space by 2016-2017, according to the Urban Renewal Authority's proposal.

Affected parties include 42 property interests, 81 households comprising 182 local residents.

COVER STORIES

Redevelopment chokes businesses of vendors

Ms Wong Fung-ying, in her 60s, ran a small business with her husband selling Chinese red bean pudding, Chinese glutinous rice dumpling and organic vegetables in Sham Shui Po.

But after the redevelopment project had casted them out of their original place, she had to find a new shop for rent.

Suffering from higher rents and smaller area of their new shop, their business was greatly affected. Her husband recently got a job outside to support the family's living, leaving Ms Wong to operate the shop alone.

The Sham Shui Po redevelopment project K20-23, announced in late 2004, targets the area surrounded by Fuk Wing Street, Un Chau Street, Cheung Wah Street, Hing Wah Street and Castle Peak Road.

Sham Shui Po will see a major facelift upon the gradual completion of the whole project, which involves about 90 buildings and over 3,800 residential units in the district.

It intends to bring better life to residents, but many expressed discontent and distrust to the project.

Residents and shops united to protest and have submitted a proposal of staying in the district but was rejected. Under the law, many were forced to leave their place.

Mr Yeung Kai-ming, who ran a gaming center in a small shopping arcade, was worried about the resettlement. Since the announcement of redevelopment was made, he had been cooperative with the Housing Society. He did all the registration as required and closed his shop before the termination date.

Briefing sections were arranged by Urban Renewal Authority to the affected owners and tenants about the prevailing acquisition and compensation arrangements.

However, he could not obtain a new license from Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority to open a new gaming center in the area because new regulations prohibit gaming business from operating too close to schools. And the Housing Society had refused to offer any assistance.

Mr Yeung once operated entertainment business, like a bowling centre, a snooker centre, and an arcade game centre. He said about his unemployment, "I tried to look for a job in this period, but nobody is willing to employ a 50-year-old shopkeeper like me."

Mr Lee Sui-keung is a garageman who rented a shop in Sham Shui Po. Having been forced out from the original place for redevelopment, he now continue his car maintenance business on his van, but he lost many loyal customers and could not afford the much higher rent in the new place.

"Business in this area is getting worse for almost every shop," he said. "Residents left, offices moved, and So Uk Estate is also being redeveloped. There are fewer people here than ever."

Mr Wong Lai-chung, nicknamed by his neighbours as "the last man standing against the redevelopment project", is one of the few who knows how to build giant flower boards in the city. But after he lost his

court case against the Housing Society, he had to relocate his home and shop.

He now works as the artist-in-residence to teach young generations the art of flower board making in Woofer Ten, a non-profit organisation in Yau Ma Tei, which aims to introduce a lively conception of art engaging with the community.

He said, "The authorities never evaluate how much damage the redevelopment will do to the people."

Ms Villy Lo Suk-ling, lecturer at the Caritas Francis Hsu College and volunteer social worker in the district, guided her students to understand the neighbourhood.

She said, "The community was destroyed. They used to know and helped out each other here. These kinds of cohesion cannot be built easily."

The URA announced in January that Grandwood Investments Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cheung Kong Holdings, has beaten seven competitors and won the contract for the joint development project in Sham Shui Po to redevelop the sites to provide about 400 residential units.



(Left) Sham Shui Po is one of the nine sizeable target areas that have been designated for urban renewal. Others include Kwun Tong, Wan Chai and Tsuen Wan.



(Right) Business of Ms Wong Fung-ying's stall gets worse after being forced to be relocated beside a demolition site.

Gov't envisions arts shops within "Oasis" in HK's busiest town



Preliminary external artwork of the coming Central Oasis plastered on the Central Market in Central.

Developers and the Hong Kong government plan to turn the 168-year-old Central Market into an urban oasis with arts shops and studios.

Amid backlash in public opinion against inconsistent government redevelopment decisions and poor track record, the Urban Renewal Authority is under close scrutiny.

Built in 1842, the Central Market was not only the biggest but also the most modern market in Hong Kong before World War II.

The future Central Oasis would be an art and culture hub of shops and leisure centres with a rooftop garden, Urban Renewal Authority said.

"Many people wonder if Central Oasis will become a high-end money-making shopping mall. The answer is no," Secretary for Development Mrs Carrie Lam said in a speech last year.

However, government's credibility is in a new low after it flip-flopped on demolition of Wing Lee Street, where the movie "Echoes of the Rainbow" was shot.

The 12 tenements were spared demolition after the movie garnered recognition at Berlin International Film Festival in February.

Other heritages with rich historical values, local and overseas alike, did turn into "high-end money-making" uses.

"1881 Heritage", formerly the headquarters of the Hong Kong Marine Police in

Tsim Sha Tsui, is now where tourists go to satisfy their shopping spree indulgence. The Victorian-styled shopping mall now features Dunhill, Cartier, Shanghai Tang and other luxury brands.

"I see similar, and boring shops in many malls hidden under art décor," Mr Steven Castro, who strolled to 1881 Heritage in February, said. "Malls will be visited once. They are repetitive and uninteresting."

"1881 Heritage's purpose is tourism-based, and so far it is doing its job in bringing tourists and locals to see inside the old headquarters," Ms Fione Lo, Antiquities and Monuments Officer Curator said.

She agreed a new purpose is important to be adapted modernly but it depends on the decision of the private company developers.

Also in Guangzhou, the former Huangpu Military Academy built by the then-incumbent party Kuomintang in 1924 was made into a privately owned nightclub. Government officials closed it after residents complained.

Mainland authorities now want all remodeled club designs removed and the interior restored to its original look, according to the *Global Times*.

It is not known when the revitalisation of Central Oasis would be completed. The URA said the public also prefers a sport centre and a cinema inside the Oasis, but a rooftop garden remains a priority.

Who has the final say on reconstructing historic buildings?

Ten Grade I historic buildings on Shanghai Street were "downgraded" by the Antiquities and Monuments Office in March, revealing the worrying practicality of the historic buildings' grading system in Hong Kong.

The verandah-type shophouses on Nos. 600-626 Shanghai Street were listed as Grade II historic buildings on March 2 this year, downgraded from the assessment in October 2008, said Mr Lui Kin-pui, an assistant curator at the AMO, in a written statement.

The Executive Council approved the draft plan of the preservation and revitalisation of the historic buildings on March 12. But the Urban Renewal Authority said in a written statement that the change of the grading "should not have any impact" on the plan.

The gradings are for reference only and do not "give legal force" to the protection of historic buildings, said Mr Henry Lo Ka-yu, a research project manager of the Centre for Architectural Heritage Research at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"Grade I buildings are not necessarily immune to demolition," said Mr Lo. "It doesn't matter much whether a building is Grade I, II or III. It won't have actual limit on reconstruction plans of the government."

Under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, only "monuments" or "proposed monuments" are protected from reconstruction. The AMO said the URA, headed by the Secretary for Development, has the final say on deciding whether or not the historic buildings are protected by the Ordinance.

The Secretary for Development and the AMO said they would "actively consider" Grade I historic buildings to be listed as "monuments". It is also "possible" for the government to intervene if the Grade I historic buildings are under demolition threat.

From 1996 to 2000, the AMO, under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, carried out a survey of some 8,800 buildings in Hong Kong mainly built before 1950. Among them 1,444 buildings with higher heritage value were studied more carefully between 2002 and 2004.

The grading criteria include "historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity".

The Board, however, does not make decision on listing the historic buildings under the Ordinance.

EDITED BY MILEY LI, KAREN SHIU, ANDREA WONG, DODO YIN, SIMON YIU

INTERVIEW

Life in a wooden hut down a Tai Kok Tsui alley

BY MINERVA CHENG

An old man buys a new fridge every one to two months. It is probably the sixth from a second-hand store within the year. There are two at his home now. One is inside the apartment to keep food cool and fresh, while the other is placed outside the house on the alley. The broken refrigerator becomes a cupboard storing cutlery.

He is Lai Bak (uncle Lai). The 81-year-old has been living in a double-storey wooden hut with his wife in an alley between Tsim Shui Building and Cosmopolitan Estate in Tai Kok Tsui for over 20 years.

As he ages, Lai Bak can barely leave home and walk for a long distance, but still, he enjoys reading newspapers and watching television that draws its electricity from Tsim Shui Building.

"I'd copy Chinese medicine prescriptions or soup recipes from newspapers and television programmes," he smiles with pride.

Lai Bak places stacks of folded monthly calendar sheets, which is indeed his "cook-book" behind a metallic shelf with all sorts of things including pills, metal containers with tea leaves, cigarettes and ashtray inside his 100-square-foot hut.

He also makes use of the space outside the hut. On the left side of the alley, opposite to the front doors of the decrepit row of wooden huts is the laundry area. Clothes line up on a bamboo stick near the "ceilings" made of translucent plastic boards.

Underneath is the laboratory where he experiments with the recipes from newspapers and television programmes. There stands a kerosene stove, a little red plastic stool, and the "refrigerator". A closet, a shoe rack with two pairs of worn out shoes and some clutter are also sitting in the area.

Although Lai Bak is happy to share his recipes, he refused to give his name in full because of his encounters in the community.

"It's really complex here. I am stressed out with all the nightmares these few years. People would just take your name and identity card to do whatever devastating," Lai Bak blurts out.

Men claimed to be "social workers" from the Housing Authority visited the family in late 2008 when Lai Bak was alone at home. They asked for his identity card to help register for public housing. Few days later, somebody yelled out his name and threatened him for money in the middle of the night.

"It may be the 'police' coming next time if I give out my name once more. I don't want to quarrel with my wife for this again," he sighs wearily.

Lai Bak was scolded by his wife not only for giving out his personal information, but also for letting strangers into the hut.

"Security and order has become a big problem to this community since the government allowed more people from the mainland to come to Hong Kong seven or eight years ago. There are more and more people roaming the alley," he says.

"My head may be chopped off if I sleep outside!"

For once, a few men went to Lai Bak and chatted with him about his daily lives. They then requested to go upstairs to visit the bedroom. Lai Bak agreed, but as they walked down the stairs after the visit, the men pressed Lai Bak to the floor and asked him to hand out all his money.

"Luckily, neighbours in front shouted at the thieves and my money was dropped onto the floor," he recalls.

Lai Bak used to sleep in the alley outside his house when the weather was hot in the past. But now, he chooses to sleep in the bunk bed indoor with the fan on.

"My head may be chopped off if I sleep outside!" he exclaims.

It wasn't like this when Lai Bak moved into the alley with his wife, two sons and a daughter in the 1980s. The family used to live in a tenement building in Bedford Road, the other side of Tai Kok Tsui. They moved after he had an accident at work.

"I was carrying a heavy hemp bag of coffee beans on my back as I twisted my waist. I couldn't afford walking up the stairs in the tenement building, so we have no choice but to move," he explains.

A friend of Lai Bak then introduced him the wooden huts in the alley. He bought the house at \$40,000 in the 1980s.

A neighbour of Lai Bak, who has been living in the alley since it was formed, says the latest price of a wooden hut in the alley is over \$100,000.

Mr Wong Ming-sun also says the row of wooden houses was built by a hardware retailer in Li Tak Street, where Tsim Shui Building is, in 1974. The businessman planned the huts for his personal use, but then sold them out as someone else bought his hardware shop.

The huts in the alley then become home to about ten families, says Mr Chan Chung-kit, representative from Tai Kok Tsui District Resident Livelihood Concern Society. Most of the dwellers are 50 years old or above.

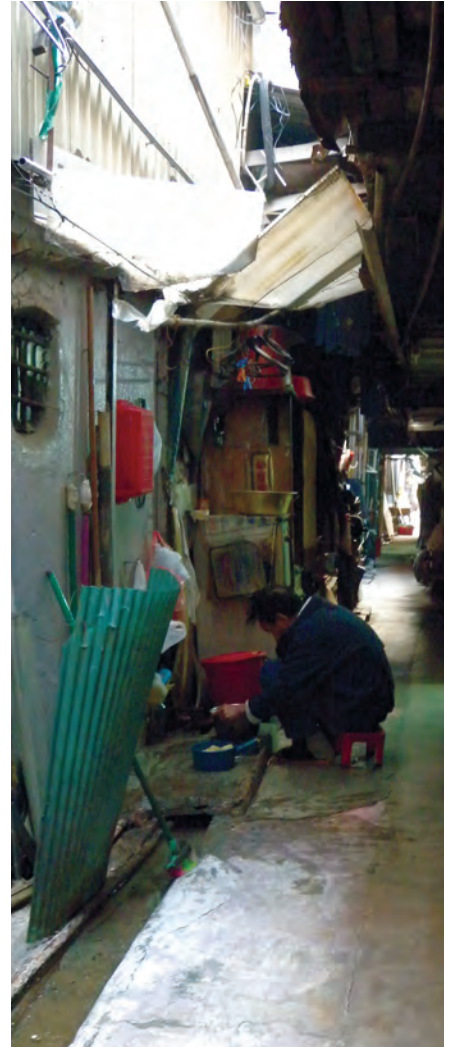
Being one of the oldest residents in the alley, Lai Bak is contented with his life in the alley despite the shortcomings. His leg injury and financial situation limit his choice of accommodation.

His case was once followed by the Housing Authority, but he didn't receive any response from them until now. To him, moving to public housing is just a bonus.

EDITED BY JOJO CHOI



81-year-old Lai Bak has lived in the 100-square-foot hut for over 20 years.



(Top Left) Clutter next to Lai Bak's "outdoor kitchen".
 (Bottom Left) The broken fridge now serves as a cutlery-storing cupboard.
 (Top Right) The huts in the alley have become home to about ten families.
 (Bottom Right) Lai Bak uses old calendar pages to jot down recipes.

REVIEW

Time travel restaurant takes people back to old HK



Tak Yue Restaurant has been serving dim sums at affordable prices in a time-honoured setting for over 80 years.

BY ALAN KWOK

At the corner of Shanghai Street and Pitt Street in the busy Yau Tsim Mong District lives one of the last few Chinese traditional restaurants left in Kowloon.

While landmark restaurants Lin Heung and Luk Yu attract mostly high-end tourists, the over 80-year-old Tak Yue serves traditional dim sums at affordable prices in a time-honoured setting.

It has four storeys. The ground floor is a lobby, which looks like an old movie theatre, stands the sales counter and a bakery selling traditional Chinese Bridal Cakes.

The second floor is now closed but the third floor is a bustling dining hall with round tables at busy hours, with a delicate aroma of Po Lei (Pu-erh tea), filling in the air.

A hanging crystal lamp between every two beams creates a classic and graceful atmosphere with its dim yellow light. I randomly grabbed a table near the corner and started this unbeatable “time travel” experience.

“What kind of tea do you want to drink?” a waitress asked. “Po Lei (Hong Kong old generations’ favourite),” I uttered and soon discovered that some customers were aware of my presence perhaps because I was probably the youngest among them.

I lowered my head and washed my cup and bowl in the first pouring of tea - an ordinary

procedure you never attempt in western-style restaurants.

Dragon and phoenix sculptures on wall, which are indispensable to Chinese restaurants, seem to be staring at my dishes.

With their wooden dark-brown appearance, they looked even more mighty and fearful than those in modern Chinese restaurants with sparkling eyes.

Dim sum trolleys were travelling from one floor to another by the lift. Ladies pushed the trolleys and yelled out the dim sums’ names on and off like singing a dim sum song composed by themselves.

Ladies pushed the trolleys and yelled out the dim sums’ names on and off, like singing a dim sum song composed by themselves.

“The business is so-so, not very good,” an old dim sum trolley lady in her 70s said.

Dining tables are usually shared by customers. Mr Lai, a loyal customer, sat down at my table and wondered why a young man was sharing a table with him in this age-old restaurant. We started a long chat with his personal favours of yum cha.

“I’m more than 70. When I was small, Tak Yue has already been here,” Mr Lai said.

“After I moved to the US, it has been a

long time I paid a visit here. This is my short visit to Hong Kong to walk around - and I come to Tak Yue for sure,” he said.

Almost every customer had a newspaper in hands. They drank their tea and read the news leisurely. Hong Kong people are always in a hurry but at least not in Tak Yue. Here, time goes slow.

Mr Lai shared his attitude of drinking tea in Tak Yue restaurant: Yum cha (drink tea) should be Tan Cha (enjoy tea). But he worried the restaurant may have gone when he come back to the city next time, as it is too old and has no choice but to be demolished.

If you would like to spend an leisure afternoon in Tak Yue, do pay attention to its opening hours. Arrive before 1.30 pm as it closes at 2.30 in the afternoon. It is a usual practice for traditional Chinese teahouses to open and close early. Every day, Tak Yue opens at 5 am to serve its regular patrons who have worked overnight in Yau Ma Tei Fruit Market. Go earlier if you want to try out the very rare dim sums such as Siumai (pork and mushroom dumpling) with Quail Eggs and Chicken Ball Big Bun (a bun with chicken filling).

I was there until the very last minute. While people were leaving, Tak Yue quieted down. I heard a piece of Cantonese opera music was actually playing in the air.

The aroma of Po Lei lingered and recalled my childhood. It was a leisurely afternoon in Tak Yue, a time travel to the old Hong Kong.

EDITED BY SAMSON LEE

TYR'S SELECTIONS



Terrace outside Red Bar,
IFC mall

The terrace outside Red bar offers public seating on top of IFC Mall.

Enjoy your own food and drink beside the terrific Victoria Harbourview. One piece of advice to the public from floor supervisor of Red Bar Ms Sherriff Ho: Clean up the space before you leave.

Level 4, IFC Mall, 8 Finance Street, Central

A guide to hidden breathing space in HK

In Hong Kong island's crowded bustling scene, *TYR* uncovers three quality public spaces hidden in concrete-heavy corners.

BY CARRIE CHENG



Public seating of Dragon-I,
Wyndham Street

The outdoor terrace of Dragon-I is open to the public for 24 hours according to the Sino Property Services.

Though it is common to see 'Reserved' signs put on the tables, don't be frightened, just push aside the sign, grab a seat to relax in this popularised tavern.

UG, The Centrium, 60 Wyndham Street, Central

Hong Kong Island



The rooftop of The Pawn,
Wanchai

The whole building including the roof is leased to the restaurant operator - which is not considered as public open space, according to Ms Rowena Wong, external relational officer from the Urban Renewal Authority.

But the rooftop is open to members of the public when there is no private function.

When you go there, do pay attention to see if there is any notice displayed on the glass door of the Pawn's ground floor lift lobby. Notice will be put up if there is private function.

No food is allowed on the rooftop.

11am to 11pm
62 Johnston Rd, Wan Chai



MICHAEL CHUGANI

What journalists live for

So many experiences helped cut my teeth as a journalist that it's hard to single out one as more worthy than the others. But that's what we journalists are required to do all the time – face pressing deadlines in singling out the best stories to tell.

I remember well my constant trips in late 2000 from my home in Seattle to Vancouver where I built a trusting friendship with the lawyers of mainland fugitive Mr Lai Chang-xing who was seeking asylum there. A day before Mr Lai's first refugee hearing I gained exclusive access to his written testimony in which he claimed he was tipped off about his possible arrest by none other than immigration official Mr Leung Kam-kwong who was killed in a sensational arson attack at the Immigration Tower, a story that sparked a storm here. Also etched in my memory was being granted the very first exclusive interview with Mr Lai after he was released from prison to house arrest. I remember how he showed off to me his big-screen TV in his Vancouver suburb flat while hired guards made sure he didn't leave his home. He ordered his driver to bring back Singapore noodles, a dish he so liked he ate it often for lunch during his many hearings for asylum status.

Then there was the time in Washington DC when I found myself becoming a virtual go-between for the Chinese and the Americans during particularly testy Sino-US trade talks. I had built up contacts on both sides during my many years as a Washington DC correspondent. In the course of trying to get details of the closed-door negotiations from both the Americans and the Chinese I somehow turned into a source for both sides. My contact from each side would ask me what the other side was thinking and what their bottom line was. Being in such a position is a reporter's dream. I ended up with a lot of scoops. But it can also be risky. Towards the end of the talks I got an important story horribly wrong when one side fed me something to throw the other side off track.

But there was one experience which really got my journalistic juices flowing. It had all the ingredients that put reporters on a high – an exclusive, a very tight deadline and a story of major significance. It happened in late 1991

when Sino-US ties were in a terrible state as a result of the Tiananmen crackdown. Local people, jittery over the approaching handover to China, were emigrating in droves.

I received an evening call from the office of Senator Mitch McConnell who is now the Republican leader of the Senate. I was asked to go to his office the following morning but was not told what it was about. I thought it was a prank since I didn't know him or the person who called. But I went anyway and was astounded to be met by the senator himself who personally briefed me on something so controversial I knew right away it would cause a stir in Hong Kong and infuriate Beijing. He was going to introduce into the Congress a bill that would make America's relations with Hong Kong separate from that with China. Called the Hong Kong Relations Act, it was similar to the Taiwan Relations Act which spells out Washington's ties with Taiwan. He told me he wanted legislation to make clear the US would treat Hong Kong differently from the rest of China after 1997.

After concluding the interview he told me he was on his way to file the bill which would then make it public. It was very late at night in Hong Kong. I knew if I missed my deadline the story would have to wait a day which meant I would no longer have an exclusive. I had just minutes to read the bill and find a pay phone since mobile phones were unheard of at the time. I found one nearby, called the *SCMP*, but was told it was too late to take even an exclusive story. I couldn't believe it. I explained the importance of the story and pleaded with them to re-do the front page but was told to call back after they had discussed it. I then called the *HKEJ* which instantly recognised the story's significance. Since I had no time to sit down and write out a story I had to quickly dictate one from my head just by glancing over the bill. I then called the *SCMP* again and this time was told they wanted the story. I dictated it one more time. The way both papers played up the story the next morning is what reporters live for.

Michael Chugani is a regular contributor to *SCMP* and author of the bestsellers *Double Talk 1, 2 & 3*.

Letters to the Editor

The way out of temptation

When we come to the world, there are myriads of temptations challenging us. A story in the Bible, about Adam and Eve who ate the fatal fruit when tempted by Satan, tells us that if we cannot resist temptations, we will suffer the same fate.

In Hong Kong, students live under great pressure, cramming for public examinations. Parents and teachers attach inordinate importance to their academic results that creates a sense of desperation to students.

Many cannot find a positive way to release their pressure. Then they will easily fall victims to the temptations of drug or alcohol, in hopes of indulging in a world of fantasy.

Sadly, some temptations lead juveniles to the way of death. They become obsessed with those bad habits. And soon, they cannot control themselves.

The recipe for overcoming temptation is to strengthen your mind so that triggers no longer overpower your resistance.

One helpful advice is to teach your mind how to visualise the consequence of your action. Temptations will not suddenly disappear from your environment.

Since temptation is a constant part of the world we live in, it is best to create a plan to deal with it. This plan must be portable, easily accessible, and simple enough to be activated at a moment's notice.

Youth can play sports with their friends to resist temptations and relieve pressure. The government can promote the importance of playing sports, for example, ensuring at least two PE lessons per week in schools.

Schools, parents and students can demonstrate passion for sports. As a result, youngsters will be willing to work out to relieve pressure.

People at a tender age are highly vulnerable to peer pressure. Schools should play an active role in helping students to resist temptations. By and large, teens growing up in a comfortable and loving environment can resist temptation stoutly.

CHIU WING-SUM, CHRISTY
Hong Kong True Light College

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EDITORIAL

New life for old factories kills creative industries

BY CONNIE WAN

Since the late 1970s, the open door policy in China has attracted Hong Kong manufacturing industries to relocate their business to the mainland, especially for the clothing and textile industries that take up much space for machines and intensive labour force.

Many local factories have remained vacant for years, with some located in bustling areas of the city like Kwun Tong, San Po Kong and Cheung Sha Wan.

The government has earlier announced the "six pillars" to drive Hong Kong economy, which include the educational service, and cultural and creative industries.

The government has unleashed new measures for over 1,000 potential industrial buildings for redevelopment.

Some owners have already rented out their vacant blocks for music recording studios, arts workshop or retail outlets at a relatively low rent.

But before they can begin their business, owners of industrial buildings or developers have to pay fee for changing the land use,

which involved collaboration of 90 per cent of the ownership of the buildings.

However, from April 1 this year, the Urban Renewal Authority has a new package of measures for the developers.

This includes lowering the threshold for compulsory sale and financial incentives such as waiving the fees for changing the land use and offering discount on premiums.

Besides, some government offices will move to the revitalised factories too.

This was meant to add values to the old industrial buildings. But apparently the government has done harm with good intentions.

After the announcement of the policy, the rental fees for art groups in the industrial area have been raised by landlords.

It is because factory owners foresee that many big corporations would apply for turning the industrial buildings into hotels or shopping centres that can generate higher revenue.

Some tenants, including several independent art groups, are even forced to move out. For them, it is very difficult to find another affordable place which is as convenient as their original industrial blocks.

As a result, the revised policy may have

marked an end of their creative efforts. Individual groups staying in factories in Kwun Tong initiated a squatting movement to fight against the new policy.

Some art groups urged the government to guarantee sufficient rental space for the studios and art workshops after revitalising the industrial buildings and to provide supporting funds for them to sustain their work. One way is to exempt the waiver fee for the creative industries for six months to one year.

The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre in Shek Kip Mei, jointly operated by Hong Kong Jockey Club and Hong Kong Baptist University, showcases a sustainable example that tells the government the appropriate direction it should go.

It is not necessary for you to travel a long distance to Shanghai or Beijing to visit world class art hubs. Cities like Shenzhen also set up art hub by revitalising old factories. That can also be a role model for Hong Kong government to learn from.

The revitalisation project shows high potential to boost the local economy and create job opportunities, but it risks wrecking the creative industry if not handled with wise procedures and supervision.

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Horse racing lovers bet on a good time





Horse racing has been with the Hong Kong community since 1846. The integration of sports and gambling attracts people from all walks of life and makes it a signature of Hong Kong.

Middle-aged men, young couples, photographers and tourists shout for their favourite horses in the race course every Wednesday night and Sunday, creating the weekly hustle and bustle in Happy Valley and Shatin.

Each year, over one million people attend the races while providing business opportunities for the organiser, Hong Kong Jockey Club, to generate about \$3.09 billion of profit margin in the year 2009.

The culture and community of horse racing developed along with the Hong Kong history. From the 1880s colonial period to World War II, horse races have never stopped in Hong Kong.

And in 1980s when China and Great Britain was negotiating about Hong Kong's future, Deng Xiaoping, the former leader of the Communist Party of China made a promise to Hong Kong people, "So the horses will keep racing; people will go on dancing".

The Jockey Club is the largest single taxpayer in the city and one of the largest charity donors in the world.

**TEXT & PHOTOS BY CANDICE WONG
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