

**P4** Downgrading English in college entrance exams is a costly move **P10** “Sextortion” on the rise  
**P11** Veteran pro-establishment politician defends Basic Law **P14** Ex-offenders struggle to turn a new leaf **P16** Guerilla warfare with plants **P20** The youth of today are balding

# THE YOUNG REP•RTER *magazine*

January 2014



**Cover** The launch of extra-marital dating website Ashley Madison in Hong Kong in August last year has attracted both considerable popularity among the city's married individual, as well as fierce criticism from religious leaders and family-planning experts who see trouble with its promotion of infidelity.

# In This Issue

FRONT

## 4 View

Downgrading English in college entrance exams is a costly move

## 6 Feature

Canadian infidelity website Ashley Madison eyes huge potential in Hong Kong

## 10 “Sextortion” on the rise

Nude webcam chat is a trap for netizens meeting the opposite sex online

## 11 Veteran pro-establishment politician defends Basic law

Basic Law veteran Ms Maria Tam stands firm by Hong Kong’s mini-constitution

NEWS

## 13 Steep rise in gambling addiction among young people

The growing social costs of legalised gambling are a cause for concern

## 14 Ex-offenders struggle to turn a new leaf

Ex-prisoners struggle to get back on their feet due to low social acceptance

## 16 Guerrilla gardening with “seed bombs”

Guerrilla gardeners challenge public space usage by “seed bombing” deserted sites

NEWS

## 18 Music education is used as a tool for students to succeed

Parents are advised not to pressure their children into learning musical instruments

## 20 Collectible figures are works of art

Figure-making is an arduous process that requires strong artistic skills and years of training

NEWS

*In the November issue, we offered insights into the struggle foreign domestic helpers seeking justice against their employers face as they are forced to give up work while their claims go through the city’s court system.*



## Letter from the Editor

# THE YOUNG REPORTER magazine

In the December issue, we talk to Mr Noel Biderman, founder and CEO of the controversial infidelity website Ashley Madison, about why he has decided to tap into the Hong Kong market and what he has in store for the glitzy city.

We also delve into the city's raging debate on the extramarital dating site, which made its debut in Hong Kong in August this year, by speaking with local religious leaders and family planning experts.

As the political wrangling over the method of nominating chief executive candidates in 2017 shows no sign of abating, we have decided to get up close and personal with veteran pro-Beijing barrister Ms Maria Tam Wai-chu to find out her vision for universal

suffrage in Hong Kong.

On the societal front, we offer insight into a quiet revolution spearheaded by a group of local guerilla gardeners who plant "seed bombs" on the streets to trigger rethink on the ownership of the city's public spaces.

With the rising threat of cybercrime in Hong Kong, we have decided to take a closer look at a recent surge in webcam blackmail cases involving sex chat between Hong Kong residents and overseas nationals.

Finally, we welcome any feedback letters or emails from you on our stories and design layouts.

Last but not least, we wish all our readers a Merry Christmas & Happy Chinese New Year.

**Brian Yap**  
*Editor in Chief*

Editor-in-Chief  
**Brian Yap**

Deputy Chief Editors  
**Rachael Leung**  
**Vanessa Piao**  
**Natasha Chan**

Web Editors  
**Giselle Chan**  
**Celine Ge**

Art Directors  
**Joy Huo**  
**Cleo Tse**

Public Relation Officers  
**Catherine Lim**  
**Cheng Song**

Distribution Officer  
**Ruby Leung**  
**Venus Ho**

Advisers  
**Judith Clarke**  
**CK Lau**

Design Adviser  
**Wade Chan**

Editors  
**Kasim Chan**  
**Jessica Lee**  
**Eunice Leung**  
**Ching Liu**  
**Lawrence Mak**  
**Lavinia Mo**  
**Andrew Wan**  
**Katheleen Wong**  
**Frederik Freiherr**  
**Julie Henches**

Reporters  
**Alpha Chan**  
**Aska Cheong**  
**Tsau Jin Cheng**  
**Whitney Fan**  
**Annie Lee**  
**Karen Lee**  
**Natalie Leung**  
**Stephen Leung**  
**Rainbow Li**  
**Alice Wan**  
**Stephen Wang**  
**Joyce Wong**  
**Nikki Wu**  
**Katrina Yau**  
**Carain Yeung**  
**James Zhang**  
**Vicky Wan**  
**Karen Leung**  
**Yupine Ng**  
**Josie Wong**  
**Caleb Norton**  
**Tiffany Lee**  
**Lokie Wong**

Publisher  
**Steve Guo**

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

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

The Young Reporter  
Volume 46 No. 3  
2014

E M A I L  
[editors@tyr.hk](mailto:editors@tyr.hk)  
FACEBOOK  
t y r m a g  
WEBSITE  
t y r . h k

# View

## *Downgrading English in college entrance exams is a costly move*

Mainland China is probably an ideal place to learn anything but English. Okay, those who strongly oppose my hypothesis would cite the sprawling multi-billion-dollar revenue generated by the country's emerging industry of English tutoring, or mention the burgeoning role of the English department at almost every university in the country. Extremists might even argue that mainland schools teach their students nothing more than propaganda. Well, according to an October report released by China's state-run news agency Xinhua, mainlanders who are fluent in one foreign language — that is English or any language other than Mandarin — accounted for less than five per cent of the total population.

If the survey is credible, this would be an amazing achievement of mainland's English education, a compulsory subject from kindergarten to university. The 1.3 billion people are not stupid though, if you also take their mastery of another mandatory subject into consideration. Chinese teenagers triumphing in the International Mathematical Olympiad have brought home 129 gold medals in the past three decades, ranking the first and far-outperforming its closest competitor the United States.

However, the deficiency, if not a total failure, of English language teaching has not raised alarm with policymakers. In fact, education authorities in places like Shanghai, Shandong, Jiangsu and Beijing — where students outperform their peers in interior provinces — planned last year to reduce the importance of English language teaching in pre-university education. Consultations have been in the first three places over whether to include English scores in the make-or-break Joint College Entrance Examination, colloquially known as Gaokao. More concrete efforts to reform Gaokao have been made in Beijing, where the total English score has been downgraded from 150 to 100, breaking the balance among Chinese, English and mathematics that used to enjoy the same grading scale in the past.

Moreover, the prospects of English education were further clouded after former spokesman for the Education Ministry Mr Wang Xuming posted on Weibo in September last year calling for "saving our mother tongue," as he felt alarmed by children's declining command of and interest in Chinese as a result of their devotion to English. I had no objection towards his self-claimed mission, because it made perfect sense to provide more nutrition to a malnourished kid, namely Chinese. His solution, however, was to cancel English classes in primary schools, grabbing the last bowl of rice from the least healthy child in a

family while leaving the overweight brother of sciences with abundance of delicacies.

The paradox is, even though no one in China dares to question the importance of English as a lingua franca, in practice most people never bother to learn the language well. Leading British newspaper The Guardian, whose journalistic professionalism deserves my great respect, has termed the attitude among mainlanders in recent years towards English an "obsession," an expression I certainly cannot agree with because it has never been the case. When my parents went to secondary school in the late 1970s, they both heard this quote from their teachers: "One will encounter no problem in the world after having mastered mathematics, physics and chemistry." Thirty years later, my teachers repeated the same idea to me, clearly demonstrating the societal stubbornness towards the conviction that "sciences and technologies constitute the primary productivity" as articulated by China's paramount leader Mr Deng Xiaoping.

Guided by such science-exclusive education mentality, language teaching has become far less significant as people cannot apply it to practice, say, in the construction of high-speed railways and space shuttles, or to cultivation of crops to feed the giant population. Thus it is scientific knowledge rather than anything else that is regarded as practical skill, profit-making craftsmanship and the most tangible asset that one should acquire from Chinese education system. A politically incorrect pun I once heard went that the best professionals in English could only serve as interpreters in China's Foreign Ministry whereas technocrats could rule the country.

From a practical perspective, the golden rule I observed in my high school was that each time in the monthly mock exam in the run-up to Gaokao, all those top 20 students owed their success to outstanding performance in science subjects. The master linguist who scored the highest in either Chinese or English never managed to break the rule even for a single time, although these two subjects contributed to 40 per cent of the overall score of 750. Such unexplainable phenomenon in the exam-dictated education system further confined students to exam papers filled with bizarre math puzzles, and diluted their motivation to learn English.

If the worrying situation persists, the price China has to pay will be too high. In the short term, downgrading English means that other Gaokao subjects will be given greater priority, leading to more pressure on students. The only merit of English education in mainland China is the unbelievable easiness of

The paradox is, even though no one in China dares to question the importance of English as a lingua franca, in practice most people never bother to learn the language well.



passing the exam. I failed the Baptist University admission interview because I literally could not speak English three years ago, but my English grade was only two per cent lower than my classmate who scored nearly full marks on the TOEFL test. In terms of education fairness, students from underprivileged background can only rely on their English grade to narrow their gap with elite students whose competitive edge lies mainly in science-based subjects. Even though the grassroots high-school graduates do not enjoy plenty of opportunities to go on exchange or obtain a decent job, as their English can never reach the standard of Harvard graduate Mr Bo Guagua, it is good enough for them as long as they can get into college and earn a bachelor's degree.

The worst scenario would be the shutdown of English classes in primary schools, which would shatter the fate-changing illusions of those who cannot afford to pay for private language tutoring.

If history is any indication, the lack of willingness to learn a foreign language will eventually lead to egocentrism,

complacency and ignorance towards others in the long run. In the late Qing dynasty, or mid 19th century, one of the famous slogans popular in the corrupt empire was to “conquer the barbarians by learning their expertise.” The Mandarins never respected the “barbarians”- a derogatory reference to Western people – at least they set up schools, sent groups of students overseas for further studies in hopes that they would on day transform the country. Two of these schools later evolved into two of China’s most prestigious universities: Peking University and Tsinghua University. That said, the Chinese government is now sending waves of talents abroad who choose not to return.

As I was concluding this column, my friend one Weibo sent me an update of the famous quote that has stayed unchanged for three decades: “Having mastered mathematics, physics and chemistry is inferior to having a good father.” Fair enough, I do not mean to blame my father, but fortunately or not, I do not need to worry about traffic congestion on the road of English learning.

*by Song Cheng*





# Extra-marital dating website lands in Hong Kong

Canadian infidelity website Ashley Madison eyes huge potential in Hong Kong







**“L**ife is Short. Have an Affair.” This is the provocative slogan of AshleyMadison.com, a Canada-based dating website for people who want to cheat on their spouses – but stay married – to meet their potential partners.

Claiming 20 million registered members worldwide, the 12-year-old infidelity website was launched in Hong Kong in August, dropping its second pin on the map of Asia.

Within three months of its launch, more than 96,000 Hong Kong users have signed up for the site’s “cheating game”, in which men and women, regardless of their marital status and sexuality, hunt for sexual, and probably additional, relationships online.

Academics have attributed the incidence of extra-marital affairs in Hong Kong to flaws in the city’s marriage system.

Prof Petula Ho Sik-ying, an associate professor in the Department of Social Work & Social Administration at Hong Kong University, said that disagreements between couples over

finances were one of the common occurrences that made the system flawed.

She added that the flawed marriage system would turn couples into enemies.

According to Mr Noel Biderman, the 42-year-old founder of the extra-marital dating site, Hong Kong is currently ranked the second fastest growing region by user population out of the 34 countries and territories that Ashley Madison has reached.

A report released by California-based web information company Alexa in mid-November this year showed that the website had seen 12.6 per cent of its total visitors based in Hong Kong.

The city’s divorce rate has doubled over the decade, from 14.8 per cent in 1991 to 33.6 per cent in 2011, according to the Census and Statistics Department.

That is, for every ten Hong Kong couples who got married in 2011, another three filed for divorce in the same year.

“Piz”, who has recently joined the extra-marital dating site, has set his profile as a 36-year-old man married for five years.

Describing himself as a “security senior”, he has moaned in the Ashley Madison’s chat room that his Christian wife has come to “detest sex” and refuse to “make love with [him] for different reasons” since she was promoted to senior arts manager.

“She once said that if I loved her, then [I should not] compel her [to] do things that she [did not] like,” said Piz, referring to a heart-breaking experience in which he was asked by his spouse not to “bother her”.

“Women’s sexual interests and preferences change across their menstrual cycles following

*Mr Noel Biderman, founder and president of extramarital dating website Ashley Madison, launched his website in Hong Kong in August last year after a debut in Tokyo just two months before.*



Photo courtesy of ashleymadison



# “They love their children, their extended family and their economic situations. What they don’t love is monogamy.”

Dr Wong Wang Ivy, psychology professor at University of Hong Kong

changes in their circulating levels of hormones,” said Dr Wong Wang Ivy, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Hong Kong.

She added that accumulating work-related stress was just one of the many factors affecting female hormones.

In spite of his wife’s indifference to him, Piz has endeavoured to arouse her “interest” in him by building a muscular physique through strict control of diet and exercise.

“I feel sad and insulted,” he said.

Instead of seeking a divorce, he is now searching for a secret lover who adores him and admires his efforts in pleasing her.

Currently, men make up 67 per cent of Ashley Madison users worldwide with an average age of 47, said Mr Biderman. As of early December, the site recorded a total number of 97,662 male users and 32,228 registered

females.

But some religious leaders are concerned the website will encourage extra-marital affairs through online dating.

Reverend Lawrence Lee, the chancellor of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, was quoted by the South China Morning Post as saying the website would be harmful to the family as a dating platform for people looking to commit adultery.

Family planning experts, on the other hand, have warned of the serious impact of infidelity on family.

“Any form of clandestine infidelity without the partner’s knowledge or consent substantially undermines family integrity,” said Ms Michelle Chak, a spokeswoman for

the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong.

Singapore had banned Ashley Madison before its scheduled launch in the Lion City in November, thwarting the website’s aggressive push in Asia.

But Mr Biderman, who is father of two children, makes no apology for his business, which has been referred to as an adultery site by critics.

“Introducing online infidelity to Hong Kong is helping the society calibrate the level of this behaviour, time and when it takes place; whether it’s on a daily basis, manual basis or a lifetime basis,” he said.

Mr Biderman believes that people who have turned to “married dating services” are “dying to stay married”.

“They love their children, their extended family and their economic situations. What they don’t love is monogamy,” he said.

## POLITICS

# "Sextortion" on the rise

Nude chat before webcam may be a costly trap

**A**FTER engaging in several rounds of nude chat with a woman over the internet in June this year, a white-collar man in Hong Kong was later shocked to receive a message from her that she had recorded all of their webcam conversations.

The woman demanded HK\$46,000 from him and threatened to release the footage unless he gave her the money.

Despite having paid the full sum of money to the woman, the male victim continued to receive blackmail from her, which led him to report the case to the police.

No arrest has yet been made.

From January to August this year, 248 such cases have been reported to the police, representing a seven-fold surge from the same period last year.

Academics and industry experts have pointed to the difficulty of bringing overseas-based offenders to justice and a lack of public awareness of internet privacy protection.

They say that many internet users wrongly consider it safe to disclose anything on the internet as long as they remain anonymous.

"Most victims didn't know they had been recorded until they were told about it and subsequently blackmailed," said Dr Lennon Chang Yao-chung, an assistant professor of criminology specializing in cyber crime studies at the City University of Hong Kong.

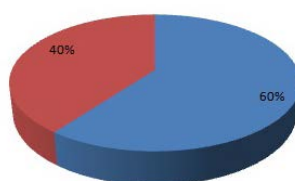
The phenomenon has been dubbed "sextortion", which the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the US defines as a type of extortion or blackmail in which the blackmailer threatens to release the nude images of the victim unless he or she agrees to a sex deal.

But most of the reported cases in Hong Kong involved the extortion of money rather than the coercion to perform sex acts, as is often the case in Western countries.

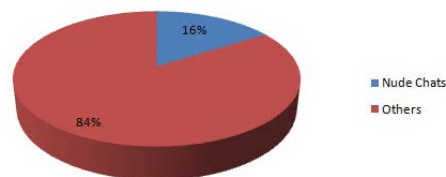
**"Most victims didn't know they had been recorded until they were told about it and subsequently blackmailed."**

Dr Lennon Chang Yao-chung, an assistant professor of criminology specializing in cyber crime studies at the City University of Hong Kong

No. of blackmail cases in 2013  
(January to August)



No. of blackmail cases in 2012  
(January to August)



Reported losses by webcam blackmail victims had amounted to \$160,000 this year by October, 12 times the amount for the same period last year, as reported by the South China Morning Post.

Despite the fact that blackmail is clearly stated as an offence under the theft ordinance, no blackmailer has yet been arrested as many culprits were found to be based outside of Hong Kong.

Prof Wanbil W. Lee, founder and president of the Computer Ethics Society, said that blackmailers tended to circumvent the law by using overseas servers, making it extremely difficult for the city's police to arrest them.

"Nevertheless, the government should at least make an effort to work with Interpol, and to collaborate with overseas law-enforcement

agencies," said Dr Chang, referring to the world's largest international police organization with 190 member countries and regions, including the Hong Kong SAR.

Mr Au Yeung Ka-wo, project officer at the Society for Truth and Light, a charity group aimed at addressing social ethics, pointed out that webcam chat blackmail was not a new trend but had unfortunately not been treated as a social problem until now.

Dr Elizabeth Quat Pui-fan, a Legislative Councillor who is a member of the security panel, calls for more efforts on the part of the government to bust up cybercrimes.

"We must encourage the government to put more resources and manpower on cybercrime investigation, surveillance and, not to mention, education," she said.

## POLITICS

# Veteran politician defends Basic Law

Ms Maria Tam says Hong Kong must follow Basic Law in its strive for universal suffrage

*Ms Maria Tam Wai-chu holds a book on the history of the Basic Law, on which she was a member of the drafting committee in the 1980s.*



AS evening falls on a normal weekday, Ms Maria Tam Wai-chu says goodbye to the last departing colleague, puts aside the work she still has to get back to at night, and then delightfully signals she is ready for the interview.

Working overtime has been a routine for her since she stepped into politics 34 years ago. Known as the “quadruple councillor” back in the 1980s, Ms Tam was the only person who managed to serve on the former British colony’s Executive Council, Legislative Council, Urban Council and the Central and

Western District Board at the same time.

“I had no time to think about myself, or my worries,” the 68-year-old politician recalls. “Every day I was just clearing the in-trays and making sure the documents go into the out-trays.”

Currently a member of the Basic Law Committee and a deputy to the National People’s Congress, she played an influential role in shaping the future of Hong Kong in the 1980s, first as an Executive Councillor during the negotiations between China and Britain on the future of Hong Kong after 1997

and then as a member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee.

Ms Tam still considers July 1, 1997, when Hong Kong officially returned to China, as “the most memorable day” and regards the “smooth” and “orderly” transfer of sovereignty as the results of the joint efforts of her and colleagues involved.

But the fervent upholder of the Basic Law is disappointed that some people in Hong Kong spurn the “mini-constitution” most of the time.

“Every time when people have to

look at the Basic Law, there is already a big argument,” she said.

Asked about the current “big argument” over electing the next Chief Executive in 2017 by universal suffrage, she said Hong Kong’s political system, including its electoral system, should be based on the central government’s decision because Hong Kong was not a sovereign state.

“Hong Kong is given the opportunity to have universal suffrage because China says ‘you can have it,’ she said, adding that the concept of one-man-one-vote appears in the Basic Law but was not stipulated in the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984 or any constitutional documents under the British rule.

“When Hong Kong people are looking for universal suffrage, they must look at it within the framework of the Basic Law,” she said. “This is a fact and that is the only answer.”

Ms Tam said on two occasions earlier this year that every citizen’s rights to nominate and stand for election were not covered under Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an assertion much slammed by law experts as distorting the covenant’s provision on universal suffrage.

She also expressed concerns on several other occasions over Occupy Central, a civil disobedience movement deemed as Hong Kong’s last-ditch attempt to win universal suffrage.

Ms Tam told The Young Reporter that the central government wanted to implement universal suffrage in Hong Kong to make it easier for an elected Chief Executive to achieve consensus among people on other issues.

“There is a common goal. The only gap is whether you follow the Basic Law or not,” she added.

The pro-Beijing politician’s “long and dedicated public and community service”, as described in a government press release, won her a Grand Bauhinia Medal this year.

“I think there are a lot of people in Hong Kong who deserve the honour. I just happen to be somebody who has the longest period of service,” she said.

But not everyone think Ms Tam, who is also an adviser on party affairs to the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and

**“Every time  
when people  
have to look at  
the Basic Law,  
there is already  
a big argument.”**

Ms Tam, former British colony’s Executive Councilor, Legislative Councilor, Urban Council and the Central and Western District Board

Progress of Hong Kong, deserves the honour.

Critics including Labour Party chairman Mr Lee Cheuk-yan said Ms Tam was given the medal only because “she said exactly what Beijing wanted her to say”.

“She has always been trying to delay political reform,” said Mr Lee, adding that Ms Tam did not stand up for Hong Kong in 2004 when the National People’s Congress issued an interpretation of the Basic Law that ruled out electing the Chief Executive by universal suffrage in 2007.

Responding to the criticisms, Ms Tam said she did everything according to the Basic Law.

“I don’t need to defend for myself,” she said. “My job is a goalkeeper for the Basic Law, no matter how I’m criticised.”

By **Steven Wang**  
Edited by **Song Cheng**



## SOCIETY

# Steep rise in gambling addiction among young people

The social costs of legalised gambling are a cause for concern



*Hong Kong Jockey Club betting stations, such as this one in Kwai Fong, attract hundreds of people who try their luck at horse racing and other gambling activities.*

**T**WENTY-YEAR-OLD Michael Lo, who is now in high school, started getting hooked on gambling back when he was just in his first year of secondary school.

The convenience of placing bets on football matches through his adult friends or via the internet only drove him deeper into his gambling addiction.

Like many addicts, Lo had to pay high price for his insatiable gambling desire when he lost all his savings and eventually resorted to cheating his friends and family out of their money for more gambling.

He later sought help from mental health professionals through government agencies and, after four months of counselling, was able to kick his habit for good.

A study conducted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2012 revealed that the number of gamblers in the city had increased by more than 30 per cent over the past decade.

Gambling counsellors have attributed the significant rise in the number of gamblers to, among other things, an increase in betting options for horse racing and football matches for gamblers introduced by The Hong Kong Jockey Club.

“The Jockey Club should be responsible for the rise in gambling addiction,” said Mr Alfred Chan, a counsellor with the Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counselling Centre.

According to Chan, the Jockey Club offered 80 different types of betting option for overseas horse racing in the last horse racing season, with a five-fold increase in the average monthly number of football matches open for betting over the past five years.

While the Jockey Club has facilitated bet placement for gamblers with its online platform, it has been funding treatment programmes for gambling addicts in Hong Kong.

The club recently posted a record turnover \$94.37 billion for the 12 months to June 30 this year, in which football betting accounted for more than half of the total revenue with \$50.61 billion, with horse racing having hit a 13-year high with \$11.11 billion.

“The government should life the minimum gambling age from 18 to 21 in order to prevent young people from gambling at a young age,” said Miss Wong Yuk-ming, director of Yuk Lai Hin Gambling Counselling Centre of Zion Social Service.

Miss Wong added that the government should strengthen public education about the negative effects of gambling by incorporating relevant course materials in the liberal studies curriculum, as well as increasing the number of anti-gambling commercials and counselling centres.

By **Stephen Leung**  
Edited by **Mak Lawrence Li**

## SOCIETY

# Ex-offenders struggle to turn a new leaf

Greater social acceptance of discharged prisoners is a boost for the once wild souls striving to get back on feet and put their hedonic past behind

WHEN Mr Ricky Lam Sai-keung was found to have been a prisoner by his colleagues, he was fired the day following.

It took place nearly two decades ago but is still fresh in the memory of Mr Lam, a former inmate who was imprisoned 16 times through 20 years since 1983.

“Back in the 90s, people treated you with absolute discrimination,” recalled the ex-offender with tattooed arms.

Mr Lam is now a social worker at the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention (SRACP), which provides rehabilitation services to former inmates. Having spent years pulling ashore people in the same boat he used to be in, he said there had been greater acceptance of ex-offenders in recent years.

Mr Patrick Lee Chiu-leung, a social worker at Hong Kong Christian Kun Sun Association (KSA), a religious group offering support to ex-prisoners, agreed and said it was much easier

for ex-convicts to land a job today.

“We have witnessed a much more open job market,” said Mr Lee. “Employers are more tolerant of applicants with criminal records, especially employers at private, small businesses.”

The city’s recidivism rate had dropped from around 40 per cent in 2002 to 30 per cent last year, according to the Correctional Services Department (CSD).

Both Mr Lee and Ms Christine Lam Yeung-chu, a manager at SRACP, said the more upbeat employment situation for ex-offenders had played a key role in the decline.

The employment rate for discharged former inmates in the city is unavailable. SRACP successfully arranged 1,863 jobs for ex-offenders in 2012, according to Ms Lam.

With a full-time job, ex-offenders would be less likely to rejoin their “old friends” with whom they went astray and go back to crime again, she said.

While getting a job helps, ex-prisoners are still plagued by other problems.

Accommodation remains a major headache for ex-inmates, most of whom have gone penniless after years with zero income, according to Mr Peter Cheung Kwok-che, the legislator who represents the social work constituency.

“For the money they have, they can only afford squatter areas and cage homes,” he said.

Living with families is not an option available for all. Mr Cheung said it was not uncommon for former inmates who had been in prison for a long time to find that their loved ones had passed away, moved overseas or rejected them as family members.

According to SRACP, 645 of its 2,869 clients requested accommodation last year, but only 350 were admitted into SRACP’s six partner hostels, whose average occupancy rate was over 98 per cent.

Even after securing a job and a shelter, the temptation for the once wild souls to relapse into their hedonic past is strong, according to Mr Lee.

Mr Moss Mok, an ex-gang leader in Tin Shui Wai who currently works night shifts at a restaurant, finds it hard not to doubt his decision to become a law-abiding citizen. The 20-year-old admitted that he could not help feeling jealous when he was with friends still active in gangs.

“I sometimes hang out with them at night,” said Mr Mok, referring to his ex-fellow inmates. “Looking at them, I started asking myself: We were discharged together. Why is it that they now have beautiful girlfriends and all that bling-bling, while I’m working my backside off for just a couple of thousand dollars?”

Hard feelings unleashed by the huge gap between many ex-offenders’ austere present and extravagant past prove to be inevitable and dangerous, according to Mr Lee.

“They used to be bosses, making big money. And now they are waiters and dish washers. This dramatic fall will generate extremely negative feelings,” he said. “Plus they have all the sources and connections. It’s very easy for them to find their way right back to the past.”

“No matter how hard we try, at the end of the day the choice is theirs,” said Mr Lee. “For ex-offenders, leading a decent life requires much more persistence and determination.”



Registered social worker Mr Lee Chiu-leung of Hong Kong Christian Kun Sun Association



SRACP social worker Sai Keung and manager of SRACP Ms Lam- Yeung-chu



*Ex-offenders  
living in a  
squatter area.*



## ENVIRONMENT

# Guerilla warfare with plants

Guerilla gardeners are challenging the use of public spaces by dropping “seed bombs” on deserted sites



*Plant activists attempt to add natural beauty around Hong Kong.*

THEY surreptitiously hide the bombs in their hands and then quietly drop them on the streets. It sounds like what terrorists do.

In fact, Hong Kong's guerrilla gardeners are merely trying to trigger a reassessment of the ownership of public spaces.

What they drop are not explosives, but “seed bombs” that are compressed bundles of soil containing live vegetation.

“We take action once we see a free space. There is no use to be too well behaved,” said Ms Kiki Ho Tze-ki of Yaumatei Gardener, one of the pioneering

groups participating in guerrilla horticulture in Hong Kong.

Guerrilla gardening originated in the United States. Aiming to revitalise and reclaim public lands, it involves small-scale hanging of flower pots on walls and large-scale plant transplantation flash mobs on road cracks and neglected lands.

Earlier in June, Yaumatei Gardener held a workshop on the production of seed bombs. They also conducted a field trip to observe suitable characteristics for potential plant sites in Yau Ma Tei district.

Ms Dorothy Cheng Tsz-yan, a co-

worker of Ms Ho, said guerrilla gardening was an educational art programme that provoked people to think about the use of public space.

She said some areas in the city were left empty for years with no schedule for development. She regarded them as good places for guerrilla gardeners to drop their “seed bombs” and beautify the city.

“It is also a form of protest in terms of spatial politics” said Ms Cheng.

For example, one of the workshop participants dropped a “seed bomb” in Sheung Wan to fight against the building of escalators on Pound Street, a move that





*Guerilla gardeners bring attention to deserted public spaces through plant graffiti.*



*Guerilla horticulture in Hong Kong involves dropping seed bombs that are made with soil and live vegetation.*

## “Guerrilla gardening is interesting but has failed in Hong Kong.”

Ms Leila Chan Hiu-lui, a journalist who once expressed her discontent over developer hegemony by dropping pumpkin seed bombs in neglected farm lands

some critics condemned as destroying the area’s aura. Though the bombs failed to halt the construction, it was regarded as a good way of promoting guerilla gardening.

“It can be a daily happening,” said Ms Ho. She said Hong Kong citizens might not be aware that they had become guerrillas by putting plant buckets in front of stalls or back-alleys and growing vegetables in deserted rural areas.

But the movement brings a question: Is it legal?

Though popular in the United Kingdom and the United States, foreign guerilla gardeners can be punished for stepping out of the legal boundaries.

In Hong Kong, even if gardeners are one of the stakeholders of public spaces, they are under government administration and bound by various regulations.

Asked if the gardeners knew if they had violated the law, Ms Cheng said after researching the issue it was found to be a grey area.

In an official reply, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department said under the Pleasure Grounds Regulation, one can be prosecuted for displacing or removing any soil, turf or plant from the planting areas of parks and gardens of LCSD.

According to a spokesperson for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, if a plant pot obstructs a street, an inspector of FEHD will require the pot owner to remove it.

If a gardener plants directly on government property, he can be prosecuted for illegally occupying government land, the spokesperson added.

“Guerrilla gardening is interesting but has failed in Hong Kong,” said Ms Leila Chan Hiu-lui, a journalist who once expressed her discontent over developer hegemony by dropping pumpkin seed bombs in neglected farm lands.

She said guerilla gardening was a kind of graffiti using plants instead of paint and it was more likely to be accepted by the public.

Yet, she said some community organisations started with brilliant ideas but failed to follow them through. They had few intentions to make visual impact and create social awareness.

Similar to her unsuccessful pumpkin growing experience, many local seed bombs either failed to grow into plants or they were removed by street cleaners. No local organisations have succeeded in making a difference by turning sites into beautiful flowerbeds.

Still, despite the obstacles, the guerilla gardeners from Yaumatei Gardener feel obliged to continue.

Ms Cheng and Ms Ho said it is to complain about the time-consuming and complicated approval process of holding street events. They wanted to challenge the bureaucracy.

“We are testing the baseline of the government,” said Ms Cheng.

By **Vicky Wan**  
Edited by **Andrew Wan**

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Music education as a tool in students' race to the top

Parents are advised not to press their children to learn musical instruments

HONG Kong students are pushed to master musical instruments in order to survive in the competitive environment of elite schools. Yet when music no longer serves the interests of children, parents are advised to lessen their pressure.

The Hong Kong Institute of Family and Education revealed in November that 2.5 per cent of parents had arranged for extracurricular classes that were not of any personal interest to their children. Ninety per cent of students aged between six and 18 were forced to join classes below the age of six and 85 per cent disliked the classes and hoped they could join less.

Local children are starting their musical training at a younger age than ever. The figures showing children participating in official music exams are exceedingly high in Hong Kong in comparison to other countries.

According to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority's annual report in 2007, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music received 90,950 entries. The figure constituted 50 per cent of the total number of entries the board received in the whole of Asia, which was almost seven times the figure for Europe (excluding the United Kingdom and Ireland).

Ms Louifa Lee, a graduate of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2002 and now a soprano, vocal and piano teacher, said she was in the choir since the age of six and began learning the piano at the age of nine.

Yet despite the overwhelming options and classes that are available now, children today are reluctant to engage in music education, whereas most children back then had to beg their parents to enroll them in instrumental classes.

The youngest student Ms Lee ever came across was only four-years-old, and a few of them who were forced to take up piano lessons were even unwilling to place their hands on the pianos keys.

"Parents' attitude may kill their children's interest in music," Ms Lee said. "Especially when they bluntly express their expectations to have their children either winning the

*Ms Yu, a choir conductor, hopes her students will take the initiative to continue singing after graduation.*



Hong Kong School Music Festival or attaining the highest standard of certificate as soon as possible.

"But I realise parents do not have much of a choice because they are simply following the rules of elite schools. A nice portfolio can get their children into a good school even if the children's academic results are unsatisfactory," she added.

In some elite schools such as Heep Yunn School, students are required to be able to play more than one instrument,

# “When you give music any extra-musical meaning, you ruin it.”

Dr Annie Mok On-nei, who supports the notion of “One Sports/ Art in Life”.



excluding the piano.

Ms Joyce Yu Chi-man, a music teacher at Heep Yunn School, said such policies have to do with the objective of “One Sports/ Arts in Life”, which was put forward to facilitate full-scale development for students.

Dr Annie Mok On-nei supported the notion of “One Sports/Arts in Life,” yet casted doubt on the sustainability of music participation. “When you give music any extra-musical

meaning, you ruin it,” she said.

Dr Mok said musical training had become a tool for competing to enter elite schools and was not a desirable outcome since students did not find it meaningful if it was all about academics.

Even though students may be capable of playing numerous musical instruments, when the participation in musical training no longer reflects one’s passion in music, it cannot guarantee the finest technique.

“In Hong Kong, 30 out of 40 students in a class can play the piano, but it’s a different story in Italy, where only two or three people out of a village of 1,000 can play but all of them are fine pianists,” said Mr Pierre Tang Long-tao, a music student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who had been to Italy for vocal and piano master classes.

Dr Mok pointed out that the sustainability of music might even be higher in the developing parts of the world, such as the Philippines and the city of Chiuchow in Guangdong Province.

“I have interviewed an 80-year-old Chiuchow musician who persisted on playing his instrument for more than seven decades, even when he had a hard time to earn a living in Hong Kong,” she said.

“Chiuchow people learn music as a form of leisure out of their own will to do so, whereas music teachers in Hong Kong spend so much time drilling scales and exam techniques which scares students away,” she added.

Dr Mok said she would not wish to see students who only knew how to play songs from graded exams or the competition syllabus. “Hongkongers do things from a utilitarian point of view and focus on how to impress others through the achievement of oneself.”

Hong Kong people need a concrete reason to do things and the mere enjoyment of music might not be a valid enough reason for them to pick up musical practice, she added.

“I hope music education in schools will be less knowledge-based and more creative instead, it should not be boring,” said Dr Mok. “Active participation in music is what is most important.”

By **Carain Yeung**  
Edited by **Catherine Lim**



*Adding detail to figures  
by carving out features  
is a difficult process  
which requires high  
levels of accuracy*





## ARTS&amp;CULTURE

# Collectible figures are works of art

Your favourite action figure possesses the spirit of your superhero because of the skills, passion and patience of its maker



Collectible figure lovers are happy to spend handsome sums of money on their favourite hand-made action figures.

Yet they may not know that figure makers take years to hone their skills and it is hard to put a price tag on their effort.

Mr Bob Yu Hon-wan, a visual arts teacher, has taught figure making for eight years. He imports teaching tools and textbooks from overseas and designs teaching plans for figure carving. Yet despite his efforts, he remains dissatisfied.

Mr Yu said it was difficult for a figure-making class to survive because it was hard to teach the skills it required. Many students also neglected the importance of basic practices such as sketching a draft and visualising the three dimensions, he said.

“Students request to advance to the next level only one or two months into the course because they find the training in basic skills boring,” said Mr Yu. “It is only when they realise their techniques are insufficient that they start to know how important the basic steps are.”

Mr Chan Man-fai, a figure lover but rookie figure maker, was one of these students. He realised his lack of basic skills and spent two years improving his drawing techniques so

that he could start making his favourite collectible figure, Predator.

“I didn’t know the basic steps were so useful until I found that I couldn’t make the details of a figure perfect. If I didn’t master the basics, it would have been impossible for me to make a good product,” said Mr Chan. “The perfection we strive for is to have zero flaws.”

Aside from skills and techniques, Mr Joseph Tsang Ngai-Yan, a local figure maker who works at Hot Toys, said figure making required dedication and modesty. “Hong Kong is losing its advantage in figure making to Korea,” he said.

“The competition between Korea and Hong Kong has been intense. The former puts in more effort in carving training, while the latter focuses on ideas, creations and designs and treats basic training as time-consuming,” said Mr Tsang.

Although there are figure making experts in Hong Kong, they are not willing to join the industry because they do not like being criticised for their products, he added.

“Film companies keep modifying the figures of the characters in their films and a figure artist has to know how to take others’ comments, make corrections and meet the requirements as soon as possible,” said Mr Tsang.

By **Alice Wan**  
Edited by **Cleo Tse**

## HEALTH&amp;BEAUTY

# The youth of today are balding

Typically seen as an indicator of old age, the problem of hair loss is affecting more and more young people



*Chinese medicine practitioners use acupuncture and moxibustion as a topical treatment to cure hair loss.*

A 13-year-old male secondary student suffered from severe hair loss after spending his two-month summer holiday playing computer games.

By the time the boy sought medical attention, his hair had thinned so much it resembled that of a 70-year-old man. “Even most of his eyebrow hair fell out too,” said Dr Iris Yeung Man-ting, a Chinese medicine practitioner and specialist in pediatrics and dermatology.

Dr Yeung said the boy she spoke of was an extreme case and that examining his physical and mental wellbeing enabled her to find the root of the problem. “The boy had ignored regular sleeping patterns and eating habits,” she said. “This disrupts the normal functioning of the body’s kidneys.”

In traditional Chinese medicine, the kidneys are responsible for the physiological functions of the body and regarded as organs that store “yin and

yang” as well as nutrients.

“The result of hair loss is an indicator of the body’s wellbeing and that the balance of yin and yang is disrupted,” said Dr Yeung.

Apart from a physical imbalance in the body, mental wellbeing is also another important factor that needs to be observed in order to explain hair loss, said Dr Yeung.

According to a report conducted by Svenson hair care centre, 70 per cent of hair loss problems were work and pressure related and nearly half of Asian men experienced hair loss in their lifetime. Up to 60 per cent encountered the problem before the age of 25.

A Form Five student at Lok Sin Tong Wong Chung Ming Secondary, Tommy Lee Chun-yin, played computer games every day after school. The 16-year-old said this helped relieve him of pressure from his rigid study schedule.

“People should find the correct way to relax and maintain a happy life,” said Dr Yeung. “Many patients suffer from hair loss because they cannot find a healthy way to relax themselves.”

Dr Yeung described the appearance of hair loss as an indicator of old age. “In the past, hair loss used to occur when people had to bear a lot of family responsibilities, but nowadays pressure from studying and working are the key factors that lead to an increase of hair loss among the youth,” she said.

Tommy’s mother, Ms Cheung Ngan-che, said her son sometimes work until midnight to finish his homework. She reckons many teenagers are put under stress due to the pressure for students to do well at school.

“Some of them have tutorials and revision lessons after school. In my generation we didn’t spend much time on study preparation, but now students have to prepare a lot more for their exams,” she said.

Dr Yeung said heavy workloads could generate emotional stress, which will inhibit the normal function of the liver to create a smooth flow of energy and blood throughout the body.

“If the liver suffers, there will be insufficient amounts of blood circulating to the head,” she said. “If there isn’t enough nutrition for hair follicles to promote growth, the result would be loss of hair.”

“In the perspective of Chinese traditional medicine, hair is the extension of the blood in our bodies,” she added.

Dr Yeung said the lifestyle and mental states of patients suffering from hair loss needs to be examined so that the correct adjustments can be made to the internal imbalance in their bodies.

“When their physical and mental state returns to normal, then the symptom of hair loss will be relieved,” she said.

By **Tiffany Lee**

Edited by **Natasha Chan**





綠色都市協會  
Urban Green Community  
綠色生活 全因有你



Look with a difference: Open our eyes wider, in order to gain knowledge from personal experience.

Eat with a difference: Think about what kind of food we choose to eat, and choose to eat green! (Please bring your own cup and chopstick)

Play with a difference: Use games to share the joy and experience the fun of being green.

Listening with a difference: Listen with your ears and feel with your heart. Please come to experience and listening something different that is "Green".

# The Art of Living Green & Social Engagement

“ Be inspired by the four elements -  
- Play, Look, Eat and Listen -  
and feel the difference of a green movement!  
”

In our busy world, we are so preoccupied with paying bills and making money, that we have neglected the costs of our busy lifestyles, and the negative effects this has on our environment. With the goal of protecting our environment and stopping pollution, we as a group of pro-green people have come together and are working to encourage others to participate and contribute to the protection of the environment and nature in Hong Kong. We want to inspire others to 'go green with a difference'. We must begin by using our hearts and minds to pay closer attention to the changes in nature happening all around us. We can learn from the East and West in order to create a green movement that expresses the best of both worlds, for our own community.

## Invitation

We cordially invite you to join us in creating a different environment in Hong Kong, along side the people with disabilities, family, and Boy scouts. We can all learn from, and enjoy the 'landscape green arts' in this event.

## Participants

Anyone who is interested in protecting our environment, and who cares about having a green future for our community.

Entrance | Free

Date | Feb. 15 - 23, 2014.  
(Note: Lectures, Activity Programs and Green Workshops and Performances will be held on Feb. 15-16; Feb. 22-23, 2014 only)

Venue | Cattle Depot Artistic Village  
Address: No. 63, Ma Tau Kok Road, Ma Tau Kok, Kowloon.

Time | 11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. every day



# Canon

Delighting You Always

# viva FREEDOM!

## 融入EOS影像智慧 自由轉換逾60款EF/EF-S鏡頭

- / 1,800萬像素APS-C CMOS影像感應器
- / 多點觸控式3吋104萬點Clear View II LCD螢幕
- / 高速DIGIC 5數碼影像處理器
- / 混合式CMOS自動對焦系統，配合STM鏡頭
- / 廣闊感光度可擴展至ISO 25600
- 短片拍攝更靜更流暢

## EOS M



佳能香港有限公司成功榮膺ISO9001:2008・ISO14001:2004・OHSAS18001:2007 佳能香港有限公司 本地銷售辦事處 九龍紅磡都會道10號都會大廈19樓  
Canon Pro Solution Hub 九龍尖沙咀彌敦道26號17樓 Canon Image² 佳能數碼影像坊・佳能客戶服務中心 九龍尖沙咀彌敦道63號國際廣場20樓 | 熱線: 3191 2333

EOS M

SEARCH