

## **Hong Kong's fading collective memory**

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In recent years, with small independent stationary shops retreating from the street life of Hong Kong, skyscrapers start to monopolise the scenery in the city centre. Due to surging rent, small stationery shops are being forced out of business and can no longer survive in the urban area.

Jack Chan, aged 67, is a stationery shopkeeper in Sham Shui Po and has been running this business for 30 years. Selling piles of second-hand books and some comic books, Chan usually saw groups of secondary students coming in to 'shop'. 'It was great to see them enjoying their after-school life here, yet, I'm afraid it's never going to happen again,' Chan sighed. 'Nowadays, students prefer going to bookstore chains instead as they offer more choices than us,' he added. Facing such a daunting challenge, Chan planned to close down his shop next month and retire.

Apart from fierce competition with bookstore chains, another reason that leads to the continuous closure of small independent stationary shops is the unaffordable rental brought by rapid economic development. 'The rent in Sham Shui Po keeps surging continuously, from HK\$15,000 to HK\$25,000 within two years,' Chan mentioned. He also spoke of how high rent drives a tremendous number of small local shops out of business. What's more, he failed to reach a compromise of his rent with the landlord several times. Then, he can no longer afford the high rent and has to close its door for good. In fact, chain stores of international luxury products dominate the market.

In addition to the unaffordable rent in the main urban area, the urban renewal project carried out by the government indeed directly causes the closure of small local businesses. Sham Shui Po, one of the inner-city areas with historic buildings, was included in the urban renewal project in recent years. It was discovered that more and more small local businesses closed down within several years once the announcement was made. May Lim, a resident living in Sham Shui Po since her childhood, claimed that it is sad to see such a situation but cannot deal with it with her own effort. 'Regrettably, we have to face this situation soon and have no choice but to leave our own homeland,' she commented.

Facing the rapid change in our society, it is never easy for businesses like Jack Chan's to survive. 'I hope the government and society can work hand in hand to preserve such a precious culture so that our next generations and tourists can still enjoy the street life of Hong Kong in its full vigour.'