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[I Know We've Come A Long Way, But...](#)

Posted by [admin](#) on Dec - 3 - 2016 | Categories: [Media](#) | Tags: [Ming Pao Weekly](#)

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By John Batten

Ho Lok-sang, Dean of Business at Chu Hai College of Higher Education has been studying Hong Kong's happiness levels annually since 2005. The latest study, of which he was principal researcher, found that people under 30 years old were the unhappiest they have been for a decade. In a RTHK radio interview, Professor Ho suggested a reason: "If it's within your control, you have to do all you can to do your best. If it's not within your control, you try not to think about it, but young people tend to think a lot about things that are really beyond their control."

Concern about the social and political well-being of Hong Kong and our world is very much on the minds of young people – as it should be! However, government engagement with young people and the inclusion of a younger voice in decision-making has not progressed since the Umbrella protests of 2014. The failure to introduce democratic reform has allowed the same small-circle of decision-makers to dominate government advisory institutions and continue such outdated ideas as obsessive infrastructure concrete-pouring, road-laying and the promotion of big events and big solutions rather than a grass-root, organic, people-first approach to developing ideas and resolving issues.

So, it was no surprise to recently hear of a government injection of HK\$5.8 billion to further expand Hong Kong Disneyland. It fits our government's idea of how fun, leisure and happiness should be: controlled, prescribed and contained within a fence, preferably with fee-paying entry. Hong Kong's government-run parks are similar; the children's advocacy group Playright Children's Play Association report that children are bored by Hong Kong's playgrounds. The play equipment was not challenging and there was little space or grass for free play and ball games.

Ending on Sunday (12 December) is a marvelous art exhibition at Floating Projects in Wong Chuk Hang. At the entrance of the "Toy as Medium" exhibition is a list of quotations about play as activity. Setting the tone of the exhibition is Plato's thought that "you can discover more about a person in an hour of play than a year of conversation" and Carl Jung's "the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct." Outwardly, this exhibition merely appears as a model-makers' workshop, but there is also some serious enquiry – outlined in the excellent explanatory artist notes.

The exhibition is centred around play, memories of childhood, craftsmanship, hero-worship and cultural associations with toys. Lok Man Chung poses "what is it like growing up?" Giving such answers as: "It is the will to accept...the will to confront" and "...the will to believe." But, such sentiments are also lifelong goals and Lok demonstrates this when confronted by a grief-stricken friend whose cat had died. He asks himself, "What else can I do for her?" He decided to build a whimsical cardboard house with a cat inside depicted in different cat poses.

Lai Wai Leung's Model Sceneries are predominantly imagined war scenes, small dioramas, using plastic model war planes, tanks, vehicles, accessories and a variety of soldiers in an open-air landscape of painted dirt, grass and shrubbery. Lai uses ironic humour to depict the absurdity of war. A scene set in Ukraine in 1941 shows a soldier standing atop an armoured car surrounded by tools, he looks down to another soldier and asks, "How can I fix it?"

Cultural characteristics are also explored. Andio Lai set-up a games area for visitors to play Nintendo's 'Super Mario Bros' video game, but it is intentionally situated near the front door. People constantly use the entrance and this replicates a small Hong Kong flat with children playing video games; while their parents annoyingly walk past and in front of the TV!

Lam Kin-choi and Jess Lau ask the audience to draw pictures about their memories of playing as a child. Some of these memories reflect a simpler time: a bedsheet is stretched out and held at each end to replicate the sea, while other children 'swim'. Another make-believe game reproduces cold weather by opening a refrigerator door, while heat is then 'produced' by rubbing two chopsticks together! A zine will later be published from these stories.

Our bureaucrats should visit the exhibition, because play is a simple activity; and, the best fun is done with friends playing together – not necessarily achieved with huge injections of money! It has all been said before, as Cat Stevens sang (and probably heard by our older officials!) in the 1970s: "When you crack the sky, scrapers fill the sky / Will you keep on building higher / 'til there's no more room up there? / I know we've come a long way / We're changing day to day / But tell me, where do the children play?"

www.floatingprojectscollective.net

Cat Stevens, early 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge__1maEIKa