

Raise your glass to recycling awareness!

*April Lai**

WHAT DOES DEVELOPMENT MEAN?

To many Hong Kong people, development is related to economy; hopefully good income and living.

Hong Kong started as a fishing port, and developed into an industrialized export-led economy. At the time of open policy of Mainland China economy in the late 70's, Hong Kong industries were relocating to the Economic Special Zone, Pearl River Delta region, leaving massive factory workers redundant. At that time, Hong Kong was seeking her position and status in the global and Chinese economy. The chief pillars of economic advancement are trading and logistics, tourism, business and professional and financial services. Six priority industries are testing and certification services, medical services, innovation and technology, cultural and creative industries, environmental industries and education services. The priority industries change according to the different periods of leadership. Nevertheless, they are internationally competitive.

Hong Kong labour power is *flexible* and *productive* and that makes it competitive. *Flexible* in terms that the recruitment and dismissal process is simple and that there is no strong employer obligation in the employment relationship. *Productive* means, labour costs are comparatively lower related to other factors of production. Working hours and overtime payment is not regulated. The average working hours are 49 per week. One of every 10 employees in Hong Kong has to work more than 60 hours a week to make ends meet. That is why a number of low-income workers need two-shifts work to make a living. In this context, Hong Kong economic prosperity, in fact, is at the expense of the substandard working and living conditions of the grassroots people. The economic development doesn't bring well-being to every Hong Kong person.

Cost effectiveness is the priority Hong Kong is striving for, to remain competitive. For those who have no or low market value, 'throwing it away' is the popular and easy way out. Costing is the key issue in business and daily decision-making. When dining outside at restaurants, customers are always served in instant throwaway paper/plastic food and drink containers that cost much less than the labour and time consumed in washing the durable containers and cutlery. Apparently Hong Kongers' daily disposal amounted to 1.27 kg of domestic waste per person in 2011, higher than

Taiwan, Korea and Japan. And waste in some disciplines, is a measurement of affluent society. In Hong Kong, the ‘throwing away’ behavior is prevalent. The development of affluent society is at the cost of destroying the value system and the natural resources we have inherited from our ancestors.

To me the development is spiral, meaning it has to relate all the stakeholders, the living environment and resources.



In 2010, the glass-recycling rate was only 1% contrasting to the nature of its 100% recyclability. To save a waste glass bottle means less river sand is excavated and energy used. Sand is the shelter for a number of living creatures. With no sand, the creatures get displaced. Sand is a substance that absorbs wave hits.

Without a market value for glass bottles, no scavengers care about collecting the glass on the roadside. Cleaners are not happy to sweep or lift up glass bottles for fear of getting hurt by the broken glass. Glass ends up as useless material and gets used in landfills.

I picked up the issue of glass recycling with the aim to bring back glass value and its recycling nature to Hong Kong society. The development of our society is spiral, meaning the focus is not only for profit making, but also ecological responsibility and sustainable development for a global context.

The challenges of glass recycling are the high costs in transportation, collection labour force, placement for collection facilities, awareness of the stakeholders, particularly businesses like the wine companies, suppliers, retailers, bar and restaurant operators; and public glass bottle users. Since there are no glass recycling policies or measures and no precedence in the territories, promoting glass-recycling practice is largely relied on the mobilization of the general public in a trial and error manner. To take the placement of glass bins as the example; the application for placement spots was turned down by the government concerned stating that there was no glass recycling policy.

However, such a bottom up approach is a meaningful exercise to draw in every individual as a key actor in the process rather than delegating it to the third party such as politicians or officials to fulfill the task. This Green movement is not an abstract and lip service, it has to be a personal response and a collective action.

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An activist in labor, women rights and the green movement, She has worked with the Hongkong Confederation of Trade Unions as a union organizer and educator for transport workers, domestic workers and government contract out staff.

Green Glass Green is a pilot glass project to promote glass recycling practice and policy in the territories.

You can view her complete profile and the organisation she is associated with at: http://www.learn2change-network.org/?About_Us__Our_Network__Activists#anker_ApLa