

5D Ng Pak Hei, Kenny

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The endless skyline and towering skyscrapers of Hong Kong are shrouded by near-impenetrable smog, while our landfills are getting fuller by the hour. It is clear that our beloved city's environment is reaching a point of no return. Your article dated 18 February certainly paints a clear picture, one that is undoubtedly clearer than the skies of our home. The article showcasing the new municipal solid waste charging scheme being delayed is a testament to the city's conservative and outdated mindset towards solving the environmental issues we face. I am writing to inform the public of the outrageous environmental standards that Hong Kong has put up with for years, and the price that we are paying at this very moment.

Compared to other Asian cities, Hong Kong is way out of the league with its policies in place. Take a gander at the streets of Osaka and Kaohsiung and see increasingly progressive environmental measures being put in place, compared to our city's negligible and minuscule efforts.

Osaka, the premier city in the Keihanshin Metropolitan Area, being the business and population center of the Kansai region in Japan, may seem like another boring old metropolis. However, nowhere will you see a trash can filled with garbage on the side of the street. After the deadly sarin attacks that hit the Tokyo Metro in the 90s, the subsequent stigma surrounding trash cans involved in the attack has inadvertently caused their removal, unintentionally boosting Japanese recycling efforts. A majority of Japanese people prefer to recycle or sort out their garbage at home, due to the robust garbage collection system put in place. In Hong Kong, we could learn a thing or two about the societal responsibilities of recycling. Recycling centers are sparse and hard to reach for most busy Hong Kongers, yet those salarymen working overnight shifts in Osaka are just as busy. The government should introduce more recycle-friendly measures like replacing more trash cans with recycling bins, or investing in street side garbage stations in residential estates. We may throw away 90% of the aluminum cans we use daily,

but the Japanese recycle 90% of them instead. It's all about the government implementing more convenient measures for us to start recycling more frequently. Not only that, Hong Kongers are known for our connections to Japan, going to great lengths like citizens referring to the Land of the Rising Sun as their ancestral homeland. Why not learn from them if we feel so interconnected with their culture and lifestyle? Taking baby steps like sorting out paper, plastic and aluminum items to throw away goes a long way in the fight against garbage filling our landfills.

Moving closer to Hong Kong, Kaohsiung, one of Taiwan's most populous cities, has well-developed industrial, technological and shipbuilding industries. Yet, despite all these industries being the culprits of climate change, Taiwan's investments in environmental protection and conservation live up to the leading political party's name - progressive. Just last month, there were official reports of Taiwan's environmental agencies collaborating with cream of the crop scientists from the world renowned NASA. Their efforts on reversing the adverse effects caused by air pollution will undoubtedly improve the air quality in urban areas much like Hong Kong. The government should consider working with foreign scientific research organizations and government bodies. Only through cooperation can we achieve better results by combining our efforts. The government should seek more opportunities with more developed countries and entities such as the European Union, which has been at the forefront of environmental protection, as seen by the replacement of Apple's lightning type charger ports and cables, in favor of USB-C types. That way, the government will be able to obtain valuable data and research to aid environmental conservation.

Despite this, Asia still has a lot to learn from the likes of the European Union, also home to a wide range of eco-friendly power generation sources. The Netherlands is well-known for its windmills, yet we can now also find the presence of wind farms full of wind turbines off the coast of Holland, and numerous hydroelectric dams. In France, nuclear power is gaining the upper hand in its quest for clean energy. Reactors are being built day by day and there is no sign of stopping, with a majority of the nation's power coming from nuclear reactors, the highest percentage in the world by far. Despite the woes brought by Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and Fukushima, nuclear power remains one of the safest and cleanest energy sources, even powering the aforementioned Japan and Taiwan, albeit at smaller scales. In

stark contrast to Hong Kong's own energy input, primarily using coal, 80% of the city's coal is imported from Indonesia. The use of coal has been devastating to not only Hong Kong's, but also Indonesia's environment, not to mention the import costs incurred. Hong Kong has virtually no natural resources for power generation, yet the government's plans on wind and solar power have been stalled for decades. Whether it is bureaucracy or difficulties in implementing such projects, Hong Kong has a lot of catching up to do.

To follow the footsteps of Europe, the government should invest more into the development of wind farms and large-scale solar panel arrays, not unlike those seen in the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia respectively, meanwhile divesting efforts on non-renewable energy supplies like coal and natural gas. Although some Hong Kongers have protested the nuclear power plant in Daya Bay before, wind power and solar power are guaranteed to be safe and sound. That way, Hong Kong can not only be increasingly self-dependent on energy, but also improve the environment in the city, just like the bustling world-class cities of Western Europe and their Post-Soviet Eastern counterparts.

All in all, if the government takes the initiative in environmental protection, the citizens are sure to follow. If so many places around the world, along with our fellow neighbors in Asia, can achieve such astonishing results, our city can also change for the better.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Wong