

The report of the tools development of “The Bridge of Human Right”

Prepared by Jaffa Lam

Artist Statement of Bridge

I am honoured to be invited by the Hong Kong Arts Centre to hold a “solo exhibition” in Pao Galleries two years ago. This was my first solo exhibition at a large exhibition venue since “Murmur”, which was held in 2003, so it was a precious opportunity. It happens that this year is also the thirteenth year of my teaching career. Making full use of the “right time, right place and right people”, I cooperated in the form of a “collaborative” with students, seamstresses, crate shop owner and friends to join in art creation and continued my “Micro Economy” project. Through the “transformation” of resources (manpower/capital) in the process of art creation, I hope the audience could reflect upon the causal relations between urban production and discard, while at the same time explore how the public may participate in the “untouchable” – art.

One of the largest works, *Bridge*, showed what it’s like to do art in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is an immigrant city ever since its early development. Yet, discrimination is commonplace among us as we fight for resources. This happens not just with people of a different ethnicities but with fellow Chinese, too. It is never easy to have harmony in the society. I had been a new immigrant in my early life. In recent years, I encountered many workers and heard firsthand stories of the injustice they experienced as Hong Kong immigrants, which deeply imprinted my heart. I wondered if it could make an impact if I raise a hue and cry through art. Can I succeed with one man’s hands? Knowing that it might end up in vain, I was still willing to do it because I believe in miracles. With the involvement of eighteen friends, we inscribed 2,875 Chinese characters in seven months. This was already the miracle.

In recent years, every Hong Kong resident unavoidably discusses politics and social affairs like domestic issues. Is it because we are concerned about the society or, instead, concerned about ourselves? Being a Hong Kong resident, I cannot ignore these questions. I came across the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹ incidentally and discovered that it sums up concisely and objectively the major reasons behind many conflicts. And that is people judge from their own perspectives without being respectful and tolerant to others. Another interesting finding was that the official Chinese version was only available in simplified Chinese. The version used in

¹ Eleanor Roosevelt, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Applewood Books, November 2000). This edition is in six languages: English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic.

my artwork was found in the website of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor (HKHRM)². I cannot resist the raging waves of simplified Chinese and only attempted to seek rebel and persistence in tradition. Tolerance and rebellion, respect and persistence, the pairs are like quarrelsome lovers that never part from and always complement each other.

The content of the *Declaration* was printed in Sung-styled font, copied and modified by hand, then carved on the wooden planks by different people using different methods. Since it was a collaborative and hand-made work and the tools used differed from one another, the completed artwork had a variety of styles which made it very humane. As the base of the bridge, the wooden benches produced by crate shop owner in a crate-making style enriched the content with its social meaning. There are signatures and small engravings on the planks that confuse the identity of carver and donor. Did the audience respond to the artwork by stepping or sitting on it, or standing next to it as a spectator and reader? Did they feel the carvings by touching the characters stroke by stroke, or doing an inscription rubbing with pencil and papers? These were all related to equality and mutual respect.

Hong Kong has very limited space, but large-scale artworks require large space for production, exhibition and storage. *Bridge* prompted me to ponder over the question about artwork purchase and storage.

Many people asked whether *Bridge* was for sale. I said yes, but the “selling” was a bit extraordinary. For this, I established a donation scheme. Anyone who pays HK\$500 or above, can “buy” the carving service and a “space” on the bridge. So when the artwork is exhibited again, the buyers and carvers will be presented on the same platform, manifesting the spirit that “everyone has the right and freedom to participate in cultural activities and enjoy art in the society”³. It also solves the problem commonly faced by Hong Kong people, which is the lack of space for artwork storage. What’s more, buyers will receive photos of their inscribed planks and news on future exhibitions of this artwork. This space-saving artwork storage should be a convenient solution to art collection in Hong Kong.

My other thought was, knowing that the *Declaration* has 403 translated versions⁴, inscribing foreign languages (donors’ names) on this Chinese artwork and showcasing it in different countries will

² “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, website of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, <<http://www.hkhrm.org.hk/database/1a1.html>> (accessed July 2, 2012).

³ “Article 27 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, website of Office of the High Commissioner, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=eng>> (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁴ “Preamble to Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, website of Office of the High Commissioner, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=eng>> (accessed January 16, 2013).

further develop and broaden the concept of “world”, “human” and “inclusiveness”. Presently, news about this project is spread via network of friends to museums and foundations worldwide. See if this dream will come true so that the idea of the collaborative can be further publicized and popularized.

Although the complete *Declaration* has more than two thousand words, what really caught one’s attention would be the few sentences that concern them. From here onwards, I would do inscription rubbing of selected sections to cater modern city dwellers’ “fast pace” culture. This is probably a kind of “expedience” I learnt after living in Hong Kong for quite some time.

Tools Used sharing

Despite schooling or working, those former students all worked enthusiastically and selflessly for art without expectation of monetary returns. Those alumni do not have their own workshop, have to come back school during the weekend working in spare studio. However, they all excited about that.



Some of them worked at home.

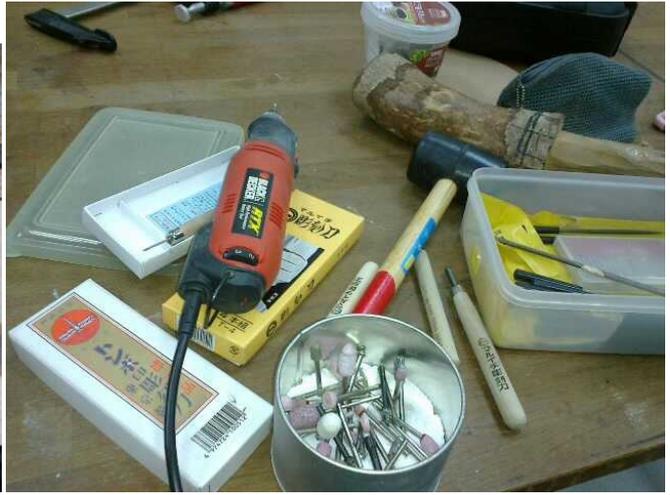
Most of them used motor engraver and carving tools as following picture:



Engraving machine and bits.



The wood cut knife students got from the professional art supply shop.



Combined using motor carving tools and wood cut knife.



Carved by motor engraving bits.



Carved by knife.



Before and after polished by sanding bit.

Process of the carving

We use carbon paper (過底紙) for text “trans-written” on the wood.



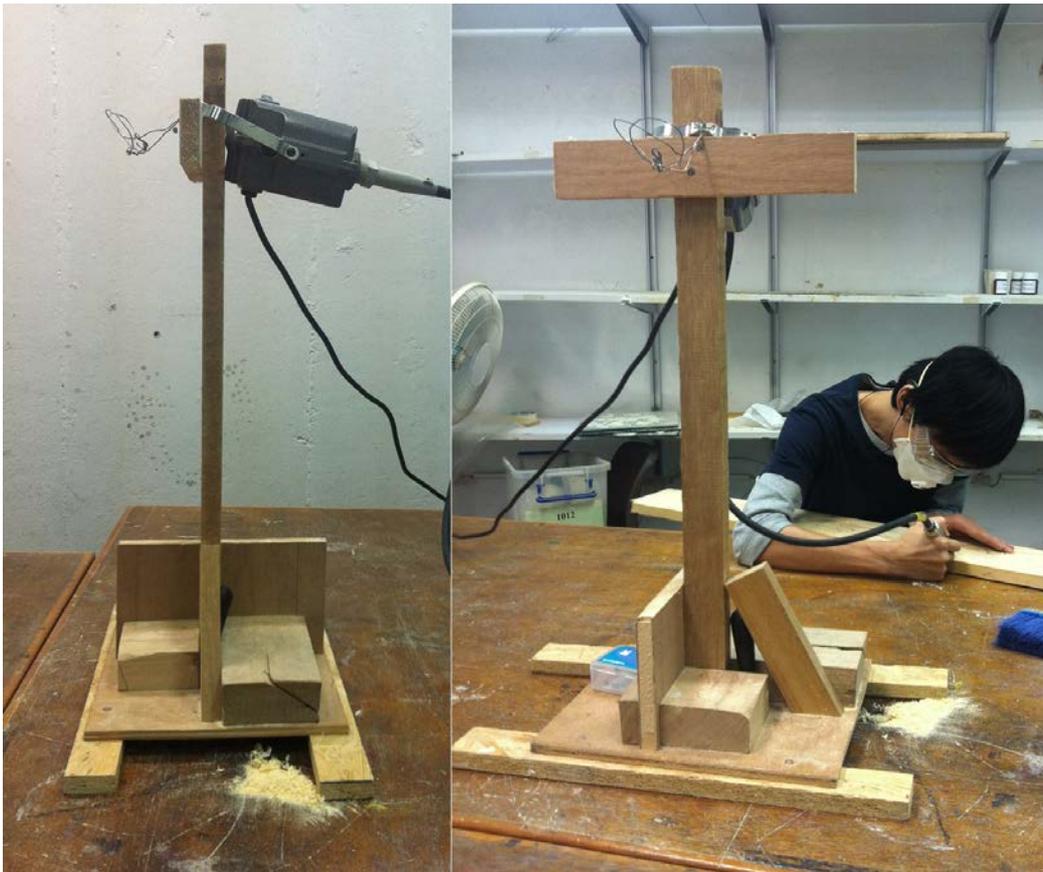
Students come to pick the wood up to their contribution.



The shorter planks appeared due to the limited home studio.



Due to the characteristic of recycled crate plank that is not a perfect material for the text carving, the tools had to be changed several time during the whole process,



The extra stand they made due to long working process.



The glove specially needed for female alumni.



Most of the text made by mainly motor engraver,
but wood cut knife is most important in the fine edge polishing.

An uncle of alumni tailor-made this project



Made by saw blade. Handle is tailor made to fix his hand.



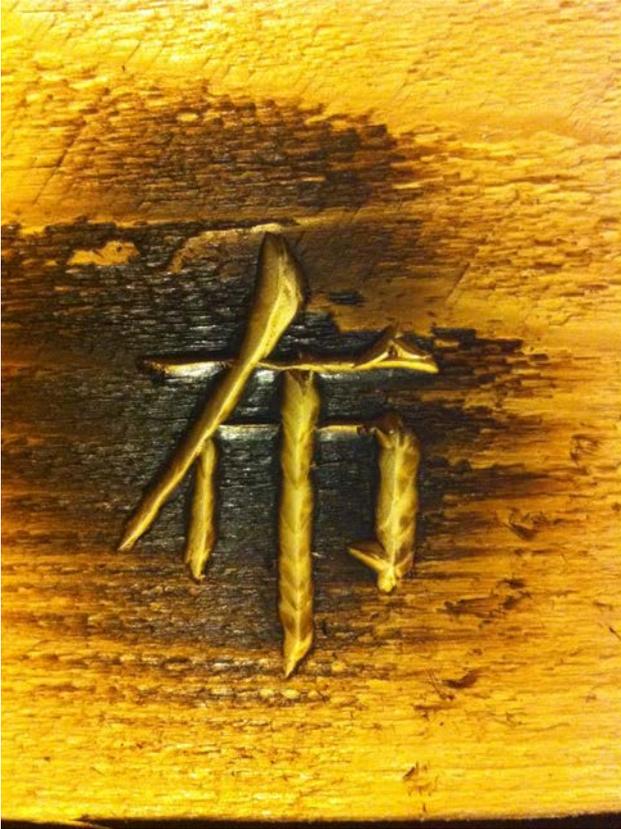
Scale of the knife compares to the text.



The size of the knife was fit in different angles of the text.

The outcome of the text

The outcome is various due to the tools used by different people.



Other experimental trial, by fired polished. (Not applied in the end)

The story behind the project

The words from some of carving member:

李雪盈：「這五個多月的刻字過程中很多時候要在工作、學習與創作之間作出取捨，很多人都說生活和藝術是互相緊扣，可在現實中，有些人為了生活，連藝術是什麼都可能沒空想，是個人的問題還是大環境所做成？在趕工的時候，腦中亦閃過『這麼辛苦值得嗎？』的想法，心裡懸浮著不定的因子，直至完成的那一刻，望著成果，滿足感代替了那些不定的因子…之前的辛苦好像變得不重要了。」

“For more than 5 months carving words onto crate board, I had to struggle between work, education and artistic creation. People say life and art are closely connected, but in reality a lot of people are too busy making a living that they did not have time to even think about art. Is this a matter of the individual or the circumstance in general? When I was working on a deadline, I did wonder if this was worth it. My mind was filled with uncertainty until I saw the fruition of my hard work before my eyes after completing the work. I realized that a sense of satisfaction overcame the previous unsettling sentiments, and the hardship did not seem to matter anymore,” Lee Suet Ying.

阿Boy：「『天將降大任於斯人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，所以動心忍性，增益其所不能。』林嵐有否這樣想過呢？」

“Have Jaffa ever thought of the Chinese saying, ‘Thus, when Heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. It exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty. It confounds his undertakings. By all these methods it stimulates his minds, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetencies.’?” Boy.

李潤環（李植芝的叔叔）：「以前讀書時喜歡藝術，成人後就忙於做生意，現在退休了，可以種花、寫書法，甚至參與藝術項目，我感到快樂。集體創作時感受到年輕人的活力，我認為藝術在香港還有很大的發展空間，政府應多給予支持。」

“I used to love art when I was at school. Growing up, however, much of my time was contributed to my business. Now that I am retired, I can spend my time planting flowers, practicing calligraphy, and even engaging in an art project. This makes me happy. I could feel the vitality of the youngsters during the time we collectively created the work. I believe

there is plenty of room for arts development in Hong Kong, the government should render much more support in this area,” Mike Lee (Shirley Lee’s uncle).

林英豪：「刻字刻意志；灑雨灑毅力。蒙林嵐老師不嫌惠賜機緣，祝合作社各團員藝途順心。」

“Inscribed is not only the words but also the will, sprinkled is not only the rain but also perseverance. I am honoured to be offered the kind opportunity by Jaffa, my teacher. Wish every member of the collaborative every success in their pursuit in art,” John Lam.

Bryan：「林嵐曾說在香港做藝術的空間很少。很開心可以參與今次展覽的製作，讓我在家庭和工作以外，再次投入藝術世界。」

“Jaffa once said there is little room in Hong Kong for the arts. It’s my pleasure to engage in this exhibition production, which allows me to be drenched in art once again apart from my work and family,” Bryan.

Leo：「現在回想可以準時完成真的不可思議。可能大家看那木橋時，都有不同的反應，但對我來說在整個製作的過程可說是一場內心的爭鬥。每次進入工作室雕木時，就如進入一個時間的黑洞，時間不經不過地流走，雕完一條木時，已經過了六小時了，所以我開始不時找來不同的藉口延遲自己進入工作室，哈哈…同時面對著這麼大量的文字和木板時，我開始意識到它們的內容和意思已經變得不再重要了，它們已變成了點、直、橫、鈎，不同的符號！」

“Looking back now, I find it really amazing that it could be finished on time. Different people may have different perspectives towards this wooden bridge. To me, the whole production process was an inner struggle. Every time I entered the studio for the wood carving work, I felt like entering a black hole. Time slipped away unknowingly and, when I completed one plank, I realized that six hours had passed! So, I found all sorts of excuses to be late to the studio, haha... Also, facing so many words and wooden planks, I realized that the meaning of the text became unimportant, as they have already condensed into symbols - dots, hooks, horizontal strokes and vertical strokes!” Leo.