

2012

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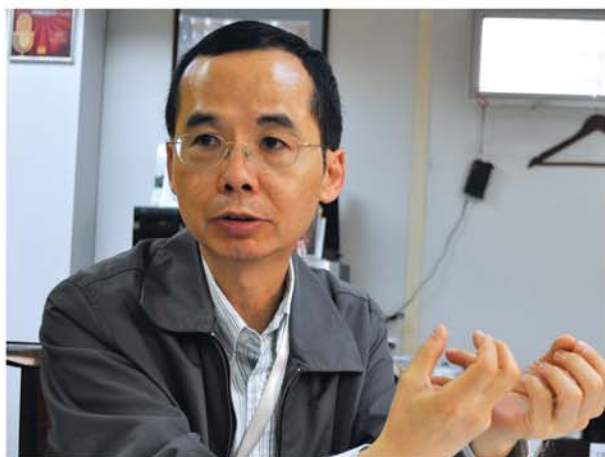
People: O'Ip, The Educator-On-air interviewing Ip Sai-hung (2012). Asia Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies Newsletter, 3, 8-9. Retrieved from http://commons.ln.edu.hk/apias_nlj/vol3/iss1/9

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Interviewing Ip Sai-hung

O'Ip, The Educator-On-Air



Ip Sai-hung, or "O'Ip", is the Head of RTHK Radio 5. He started off his career as a producer and was active in planning of radio programmes concerning ageing and older persons. Having worked also in Radio 1 and Putonghua Channel, he eventually settled in Radio 5. Ip has a special interest in Chinese Opera and was once the host of the radio programme "World of Chinese Opera". He is no strangers to the audience of Radio 5. In recent years he has withdrawn from broadcasting, but his concerns over the welfare of elderly had never ceased. Believing that "knowledge is power", he has been promoting education in old age through the airwaves. Though RTHK, as a government department undertaking the role of a public service broadcaster, is unavoidably being restrained in the allocation of resources, but Ip thinks that "the public broadcasting service should make use of its advantages of low costs and far-reaching to spread knowledge" by providing a new and convenient platform of learning for the elderly.

Ip Sai hung, graduated from the Chinese Department in the University of Hong Kong, has been tied to elderly issues since he joined RTHK. His first job was Producer for elderly programmes. "The production of radio programmes still depends on their market values. Back then, having observed the ageing trend of Baby Boomers, I foresaw there would be an increase in the number of elderly who have different educational and cultural background. The potential market for developing programmes targeting elderly audience is tremendous." In 1988, he was the host of a programme "Hong Kong Current", and has reformed the show into an elderly flagship programme providing tips for everyday life. The programme was then succeeded by a famous disc jockey Lo Sai-cheong, but its mode of operation has not veered away from Ip's blueprint. Though O'Ip had withdrawn from hosting the show, he continued his production in radio programmes for older audience.

In the 90s', there was a trend in advocating that elderly should be cared by professionals such as social workers and medical personnel in elderly centres so that the aged can receive better health and social care services. The Radio Station utilised its influence to call on elderly to get into the community. "Current Action", a volunteer programme derived from "Hong Kong Current" featuring celebrities and artists to visit elderly in community centres, has become a well-known event.

The beginning of elder education-on-air

In terms of elder education, elderly centres or any other organisations usually offer interest classes. "It was not until late 1999 when I was inspired by a book related to old-age learning that I truly understand that the essence of elder education is to promote their quality of life. Undoubtedly interest classes can satisfy the psychological

wellbeing or improve the physical health of the senior citizens, but they do not necessarily help them in solving difficulties and problems faced in daily life. Even if they want to solve the problem, they may not possess the essential knowledge and know-hows." To fill this gap, institutions in the United States had organised practical courses to preach legal, financial and medical knowledge. It was believed that the older adults who acquired the mentioned knowledge can make better options and can better control their own lives. Ip brought back with him this concept to Hong Kong in hope to provide new learning resources to the elderly.

It was when "community education" was still in its infancy, that it was not easy to seek for suitable non-governmental organisations to collaborate with in developing the courses. "Since RTHK is a governmental department, that both our external partners and we are not allowed to charge people for any event." Under such constraint, Ip Sai-hung have no choice but to turn to internal resources and to develop the courses himself. Hence the "Elder Academy On Air" was born.

"It is our wish that elderly can apply what they learn, and in the meantime the content should not be too superficial or information-based. We adopt a strategy of inviting experts from specific fields such as doctors, lawyers and other professionals to teach their subjects of expertise, in order to ensure the programme quality." Radio 5 applied the development model of elderly centres in the planning of their courses. A semester comprises of six months, where the course syllabus along with the teaching materials are produced by the Radio. Courses were designed to be delivered through radio broadcast supplemented by course materials, which would be convenient for elderly to attend the course in nearby community centres. Until now there are over 60 organisations participated in the programme and the places available for the course are 1200. Elderly who have completed all assignments with a pass will be awarded a certificate.

"Finding stepping stones to cross a river"

To enrich the programme, Radio 5 have attempted to develop various voluntary follow-up events, such as the iPhone-in Tutoriali which allows elderly to discuss course related questions over the phone without commuting to a designated venue. We used to have tutorial classes, but the cost was too high while RTHK cannot charge people for the services, that they were not sustainable and were thus discontinued. The limited quotas available are also unfair to other older students. Ip wishes to contact universities and other educational organisations and urges them to hold independently paid courses related to the broadcast course contents to allow further options for those older citizens who are interested to have a deeper understanding of certain topics.

"We don't want the course to be like a fleeting cloud to the elderly, and it is our will to help those older people nowadays who have a relatively higher educational background to pursue their dream of receiving tertiary education. We are now researching in extending our courses while adding in examinations. The possibility of topping-up is also discussed with various educational units." Ip has sought cooperation with Prof. Chan Cheung-ming, Director of APIAS, and also the Open University in search of the sustainable development for the broadcast mode of Elder Academy.

In Ip's opinion, elder education is currently advocated as one of the means to promote active ageing and to enhance elderly wellbeing, but there is a general lack of research in the modes of course delivery in elder education as well as the modes of learning. Education focuses not only in the design of syllabus or the setup of learning objectives, the students' modes of learning and learning abilities are critical to the deciding of the modes of instruction. "To organise a broadcast course is like what our Ex-President of China Deng



Xiaoping said, "finding stepping stones to cross a river". Furthermore, we have not conducted a whole scale evaluation to review the educational effectiveness of our programme." Yet he is not discouraged, but continued to make use of the advantage of the radio to make innovative attempts in to promote elder education. "We are no social workers, and we have to position ourselves: as pioneers who advocate and try new things. We are no professionals, that we have no fear of any failure in our programmes would affect our professional image. I think radio should pilot in the society when resources allowed."

Money = Effectiveness?

Nowadays, in a consumer society where information technology evolves perpetually in quick cycles, is it easy enough for elderly to access information and knowledge? Is "money" the biggest obstruction to those in the education industry and to the learning of older adults? Ip Sai-hung is optimistic towards these skepticism. "Money is not the problem, but the mentality of considering the elders' needs is." He uses mobile phone designed for the elderly as an example, that it has met the needs of the elderly in communication for having large keyboard and loud ringer, while being economically affordable when compared to the smartphones available in the market. Departed from this point of view he inferred to the planning of all elderly services. "It is very subjective to make judgment on the amount needed to be used. Rather, we should pay attention to whether the money is used effectively. We should first understand the needs of the elderly before taking actions to avoid wasting money. It was so also in education. This is about the means and the ends."

Money spent and actions taken, but have our older citizens benefited from them? Ip pointed out that RTHK offering elder educational courses is to help the older adults through education. By teaching them to find the right resources and rectifying their misperceived common knowledge, not only elderly can be saved from many vain trips, unnecessary waste of governmental and public resources can also be avoided. "When older people were taught to distinguish cold from flu, to treat burns and cuts, and so on, unnecessary harms or damages inflicted by illnesses or injuries on them can be minimized, and they do not need emergency services for every incident. Not only the elderly are relieved from long waits, the government can also lessen its burden in medical expense. Some have noted that it was the limited financial means of the elderly which forces them to use public health system. Ip thinks that it is a question after elder education. "After teaching our elderly to choose services adequately and to use public resources appropriately, it is then the job of the government to offer the different choices and to provide assistance accordingly."

"Some elderly like citric fruits, and they also like ice creams, yet they suppress their wants for fear of coughing. However, when they understand that it is the acidity and coldness of food causing their trachea to contract which cause them coughing, they can alleviate the symptom by drinking warm water after consuming those food. Not only can they tackle the problem specifically, but they can also satisfy their appetites." The role of RTHK as an influential media organisation in Hong Kong is to guide and educate the public by removing any wrong traditional concepts, that the quality of life of the elderly can be scientifically enhanced.

Intergenerational collaboration helps mutual contribution

Education comprises of teaching and learning. Traditionally it is a vertical knowledge transferring relationship, from master to pupil, from old to young, and from top to bottom. Ip has shown to be more avant-garde and unconventional who considers that elder education is about exchanges, but is not a matter between two persons, rather between two generations. "Elder cannot instruct the youngsters from high above, while young people cannot think by themselves the needs of the elderly." It is only by the collaboration between the two generations that they can become each other's mentor through mutual help. They can learn from each other's strong points and making up for their own shortcomings throughout the process when they work together towards a common goal. Hence, both of their learning effectiveness can be maximised. "By designing activities into collaborative tasks, both the old and the

young can contribute their best. Throughout the process the role of the youths is to support the elderly, which is to compensate the deficiency of the older person, but not to save them."

O'Ip thinks that between the aged and the younger generation it is already good enough should there be more communications, interactions and exchanges of life experience. "Society changes and technology advance quickly. What the older generation have learnt in the past may not be suitable to the world nowadays, and what they know can now be easily searched through the internet by the youngsters. As a result, we do not need our newer generations to accept totally or to learn from the elderly's knowledge. To make our elderly as a model of learning to the teenagers will only expose their being outdated and thus become a laughing stock." He suggested that it is already acceptable to have our younger generations to respect the past and history of the elderly and to understand how those experiences have affected their lives. We should not request our young people to adopt completely the value of the older people. Rather, we should face the reality and to seek practical solutions. "Cooking skills, infant care, and many more are now different when compared to the past, so we should not force ourselves to adopt the old standards or values."

Once there was an audience phoned Ip complaining her daughter-in-law for being impolite for not greeting her. He responded that it was a bilateral problem, that on one hand the elderly did not understand the way how the current young people greet, and on the other hand that the youngster was uncertain about how to address her mother-in-law. "When a woman is married into her husband's household, she is an outsider to the family and that it is understandable that she is not familiar in mastering the communications with other family members. In the past the mother-in-law traditionally possessed the ultimate authority within a household as a senior family member, that the daughter-in-law had to obey the order of her parents-in-law as if she was the maid. Yet this kind of relationship will not work nowadays, and we should not bind our younger generations with obsolete traditions." He hence suggested the audience to greet her daughter-in-law first, of whom she was then received positive responses and their relationships have returned to normal. "The knot is that whether you have put aside your arrogance and pride as a senior and as a sage." Intergeneration harmony is built upon mutual respects. We cannot resolve in empty talks or formalism, but practical actions.

Elderly need self-empowerment

There is a lack of respect towards the aged group in our society, should we blame the ideologies transfused from the west to the east such as individualism and utilitarianism? When the socio-economic status of our elderly is low, how should we better the image of them? Ip believes that "knowledge is power". Only with knowledge that they can better adapt to the changes in society and become more independent. "When they are given the opportunity to participate, and thus make contribution to the society in different aspects, the elderly will not be considered by the younger people as dependents who only consume social resources. Moreover, many elderly are talented and capable, but they have been stereotyped intentionally or unintentionally by the social welfare sector as dependents." The society should refrain from victimizing our elderly.

To strengthen their socio-economic status, not only the elderly should improve themselves, but they also have to take actions to influence the society. If one want to transform the mentality of the society, this also means that our elderly should have a better understanding to ageing policies, hence education is crucial. "If you don't voice out, no one understand what you need. If there is no criticism, there will be no improvement." A higher socio-economic status and more social participation will give the aged group a greater influence. However, such status cannot be proliferated only by education. "Are there job opportunities for our elderly? The Minimum Wage is affecting the employment of the older persons, that common and suitable job positions for elderly such as security guards are cut. This is obvious that such policies have not taken into consideration the actual needs of our elderly. The government should listen to opinions. RTHK can provide the elderly a platform to comment on ageing policies, but it is beyond our capabilities to affect the making of policies."