

Drawn together

A glimpse into the lives and careers of six local illustrators.

By HK Staff

Whether they're making a political statement or just making us laugh, everybody loves a cool, clever illustration. And while some may accuse our city of lacking creativity, this selection of just a few of Hong Kong's many talented illustrators goes to show that there are plenty of great artists here—you just need to know where to find them.



衝呀!
 罷呀!



CHI HOI

Comic artist and author Chi Hoi perseveres in following his dreams to touch people's hearts with his drawings. By Gina Ng



It took some time for renowned illustrator and author Chi Hoi to find his path. After graduating from university in 1999, the self-taught comic artist worked in a bookstore and then as a copywriter, a clerk and a graphic designer. But none of these occupations brought him the satisfaction that comes with creating illustrations. "I began to submit my drawings to newspaper supplements when I was at university, and I found that I couldn't quit drawing," he says.

Since 1996, Chi Hoi has published eight graphic novels, including "Hijacking" (2007), "The Train" (2007) and "Still Life" (2003). Some of his comics have been translated into simplified Chinese, Italian and French. In 2006, he collaborated with another local artist, Craig Au Yeung, to release the book "Long Long Road: 25 Years of Independent Comics in Hong Kong." One of the biggest chronicles of the history of Hong Kong's comic industry, Chi Hoi and Au Yeung interviewed 27 local comic artists to tell their stories about how they entered the industry, and their views on independent comics.

In recent years, the industry has been in decline. In the old days, action comics would sell 200,000 to 300,000 copies a week, but now, sales have decreased to just a few thousand. Many comic artists depend on regular comic strips in newspapers and magazines, and their livelihood is greatly affected by the economy. "During the financial crisis in 1997, there were not many job opportunities," laments Chi Hoi. "When SARS struck in 2003, there was no way to get my work published."

In addition to his comic albums, Chi Hoi also creates the comic strip Fa Fa World four times a week for The Sun, a local newspaper. Fa Fa World

is about the daily life of a father and his daughter. It usually takes two to three days each week to finish my comics, so that I can use my free time to create other artworks," he says.

Fa Fa World is a much lighter-hearted take on life in Hong Kong compared to Chi Hoi's other works. "People used to think that I was a melancholy man because my comics were gloomy. The truth is those pieces failed to show my bright side," he adds. "I wanted to pay tribute to Wong Sze-ma [a legendary comic artist who died in 1983]. Few artists used the parent-child relationship as a theme for comics after he passed away—so I wanted to give it a try."

As a freelance comic artist, Chi Hoi said the government is supportive of the industry but that it lacks initiatives to seek out talented artists. "The government could cooperate with magazines or publishers to hold art competitions. Hopefully, this would attract more artists to enter the industry. The government could also organize something like creative markets. In Taiwan, there are many monthly outdoor markets, which give a chance for artists and craftsmen to sell their products."

But no matter how difficult the industry gets, Chi Hoi says he won't give up on his dream: "I would like to draw something that touches people's hearts. I think that's universal."

To find out more about Chi Hoi, visit his ongoing exhibition with four other artists "There Are Trees Above" (until August 6) at Gallery Exit (1 Shin Hing St., Central, 2541-1299), or visit www.chihoi.net.

