

## LIFESTYLE MOMENT

### Exam-crazy HK spawns millionaire 'tutor kings'

HONG KONG

CUT-THROAT competition for exam success in Hong Kong's high-pressure education system has spawned a new breed of teachers: celebrity tutors with near cult-like status and millionaire lifestyles.

With their glamorous photographs showing megawatt grins and flashy attire splashed across billboards and buses, the star teachers claim to be able to transform failing students into A-grade scholars, and earn up to US\$1.5 million (S\$1.9 million) a year.

"Hong Kong has a very examination-oriented school culture and tutoring is regarded as a kind of educational investment," said Ms Kelly Mok, an English tutor who teaches at King's Glory, one of the largest tutorial schools in Hong Kong.

That focus on academic success at almost any cost has turned celebrity tutor Richard Eng, 47, into a rich man who drives a Lamborghini, wears expensive watches and lives in a multi-million-dollar mansion in the city's Yuen Long district.

"Enrolment in tutorial schools is astoundingly high. We're talking about 100,000 students every year," he said.

Mr Eng and other top tutors have successfully tapped that demand using flashy marketing tactics to turn themselves into household names or academic superstars, otherwise known as "tutor kings" in Cantonese.

His empire, Beacon College, employs over 100 tutors and he plans to take the firm public.

Some tutors, like economics teacher Alex Lam, star in their own online soap operas, using it as a way to draw in students.

Despite his own success, Mr Lam warns that some parents and students may be taking educational achievement to the extreme.

"The tutoring culture is getting a little crazy," he said. "Some students are taking tutorial lessons for five to six subjects.

"The truth is...they're better off concentrating on one or two subjects that they're weak at."

A veteran tutor, Mr Lam is also concerned about teaching quality. "The newcomers like to use gimmicks to attract students - telling jokes and being pretty faces," he said.

"They're not focusing on their teaching, which worries me, as the teaching quality is dropping."

AFP

# Have you visited Singa-planet?

By SATOKO NISHIMURA

THE ubiquitous Housing Board flat, home to the majority of the population in Singapore, has become part of the art of a contemporary Japanese artist.

In Akira Yamaguchi's imagination, HDB blocks are seen as historical monuments sprouting out of their green natural setting.

In his book, Singa-planet, the latest compilation of art drawn by the 41-year-old artist, he gives a new, unusual and refreshing perspective of Singapore's quotidian urban landscape.

"I was lost for words to see such beautiful buildings," he told my paper in a recent interview.

The art in Singa-planet was exhibited recently in Singapore at the Japan Creative Centre (JCC), which is run by the Japanese Embassy here, and was a parallel event of the recently concluded Singapore Biennale.

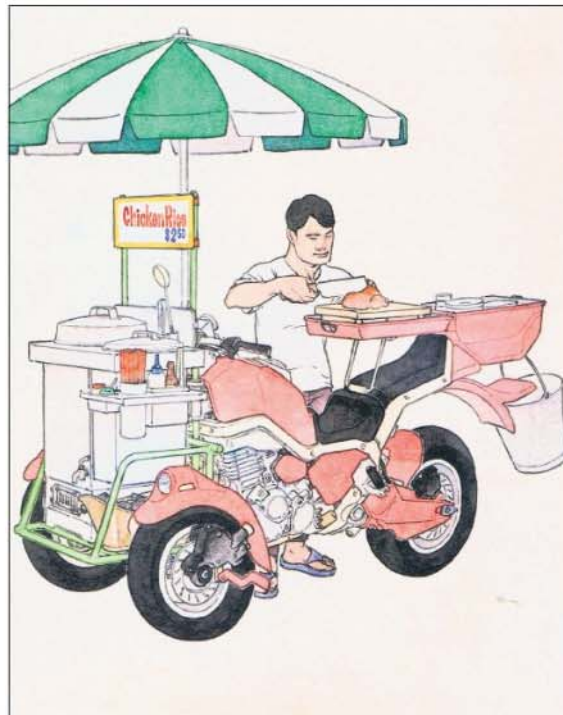
To Yamaguchi, who has visited Singapore twice, it isn't the obvious tourist icons like the Singapore Flyer or the historical statue of Singapore's founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, that catches his eye - or his heart.

Instead, it is the humble HDB abodes and things in Singaporeans' daily lives, such as a chicken-rice stall or escalators in a shopping mall, that give him inspiration.

Representative of his peculiar visual perspective is the pencil-and-watercolour artwork on the cover of Singa-planet, in which Singapore is depicted as a huge ship sailing strongly against the wind.

There is no clear indication whether the vessel is sailing in the sea or soaring in the sky.

Heading skywards is a skyscraper that is a mix of Singapore's modern condominiums, a helicopter port, HDB blocks, churches and Indian temples. Also included are Malay-style kampong houses, a busy shopping



BLENDING OLD AND NEW: Singa-planet (top, right) is a compilation of art by contemporary artist Akira Yamaguchi - who has a Master of Art in oil painting - that gives an unusual perspective of Singapore's quotidian urban landscape. (PHOTOS: AKIRA YAMAGUCHI)

mall, and even the outstretched arm of a construction crane - reflecting the fact that the building of concrete structures is a continual process here.

In blending the past and the future, Yamaguchi creates unexpected beauty. His drawings contain both abstract and obvious messages and tempt the audience to scrutinise details to seek clues to the artist's intent.

In doing so, the audience becomes a part of his art.

The Tokyo-born Yamaguchi lives and works as a contemporary artist in the Japanese capital. He has a Master of Art in oil painting from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Almost every year,

he holds either solo or two-person exhibitions, the latest being City Strollers, at the Fukuoka Mitsukoshi Gallery.

His art is on display at Narita International Airport and in the Tokyo Metro, as well as at several museums in Japan, including Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.

Commenting on Singa-planet, Mr Rikimaru Takahashi, deputy director of the JCC, said: "The artist, who has sublime talent in painting, gives us new and refreshing perspectives (of) Singapore through his art."

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Singa-planet is now on sale at the Japanese graphic section

of Kinokuniya bookstore at Ngee Ann City. The book is priced at \$23.90, with GST.

The writer is a Web designer with AsiaOne, the news and lifestyle portal of Singapore Press Holdings.

### HELPDESK 我的字典

Compilation: 編集 biān jí

Visual perspective: 透視感 tòu shì gǎn

Abstract: 抽象的 chōu xiàng de

Sublime talent: 超群的才能 chāo qún de cái néng

## Grieving mothers adopt life-like dolls

LONDON

WEIGHING 5kg, with perfectly combed hair and eyes closed in sleep, Abby looks like a baby girl.

But she is a doll, adopted by a grieving mother to help her come to terms with the loss of a child.

"She reminds me of my daughter," said Ms Eve Hasty, a 57-year-old American who lost her daughter to leukaemia. She finds Abby - which she bought for US\$300 (around S\$370) in

2009, three decades after losing her daughter - comforting.

Her case is far from unique. Ms Nikki Hunn, the 35-year-old British designer who created Abby, said that she has made half a dozen "reborn babies" for bereaved mothers.

Not all dolls are custom-made. Today, hundreds can be found for sale on websites like eBay, with starting bids that can run up to US\$3,000.

Psychologists are divided on



UNCANNY: Dolls which look amazingly life-like, like the ones above, can be found for sale on websites like eBay. (PHOTO: AFP)

the benefits of such substitutes. Dr Ingrid Collins, a consultant psychologist at the London Medical Centre, said a fake baby "could create more problems than it solves". But Dr Sandra

Wheatley, a psychologist who specialises in family issues, said a "reborn baby" could be helpful as a "physical tool to help (parents) mourn a child they have lost".

AFP