



Tattooist Kenny Chin Chi-shan has tattoos on both arms.

To signify a life change or as means to remember someone are the major reasons for people to get a tattoo, which is still a controversial thing to do in Hong Kong.

Tung Wai-ping, a freelance artist, decided to have a tattoo when he became bored with his job in an advertising firm.

"I wanted to kick-start my life," said 40-year-old Tung. "At that time, I became so numb about my job and I felt like a machine. I couldn't find any satisfaction in what I was doing."

He had an image of embryo, which represents new life to him, inked onto his right upper arm. Although he felt dizzy and hot when it was done, it made him happy and more positive towards his life.

Tung said: "This 'embryo' meant a new start to me. It stimulated me to find a breakthrough in my life. I tried different fields of creative work since then and as time goes I felt much better about myself."

Lam Lung, a tattooist with several years experience, said people get tattoos for all kinds of reasons. Some

clients commemorate important things in their lives by getting tattoos.

"Some asked me to tattoo animals after their pets have died," Lam said. "Some get the names or faces of their relatives who have passed away or something that represents a special event. These tattoos were used to fill in

lost parts of their lives."

Lam, 23, has two tattoos on his arms: one shows two skulls, one smiling and one crying, while the other arm has a face of a clown.

"The smiling and crying skulls represent the good times and bad times in my life and the clown shows how people hide their sadness behind laughing faces," Lam said.

According to Lam, his clients come from a wide range of backgrounds. They range from salesmen, bank workers, office ladies, or even policemen, teachers and firemen. However, students and doctors seldom get tattoos.

"Not many students can afford to have tattoos, while doctors usually think tattooing is not hygienic," he said.

The most popular designs used to be dragons, tigers or phoenixes. Now tattooists tend to create unique designs of all kinds. People can choose from a wide

variety of pictures like human skulls, plants and even the art of famous artists like Picasso.

Grace Lam Ching-yi, 19, had her tattoo of three stars on her right ankle half a year ago. She said she particularly likes a regular pattern. "I like things which are regular and neat. A star is made of straight lines, and I think it's beautiful. So I had this tattoo done," she said.

However, she hid her tattoo from her parents. "They don't approve of this sort of thing. They still believe that tattoos are for gangsters," she said.

In spite of her parents' opposition, she said she would get another tattoo again if she found another suitable pattern. "The older you get, the more conservative you are. I want to try more new things while I am still young," she added.

Like Grace Lam's parents, many people think only bad people get tattoos. Fifty-one-year-old housewife Siu Yin-mui, who is also a mother of two, said people get tattoos just for fun. "Only bad boys had tattoos. If one can study hard and try

to be nice and neat, he will never want to have tattoos. I would never let my kids get a tattoo," said Siu.



Grace Lam Ching-yi has three stars tattooed on her right ankle.

She also disagrees with the view that tattoos are a good way to remember someone. She said the most important thing is to treat loved ones well when they are alive.

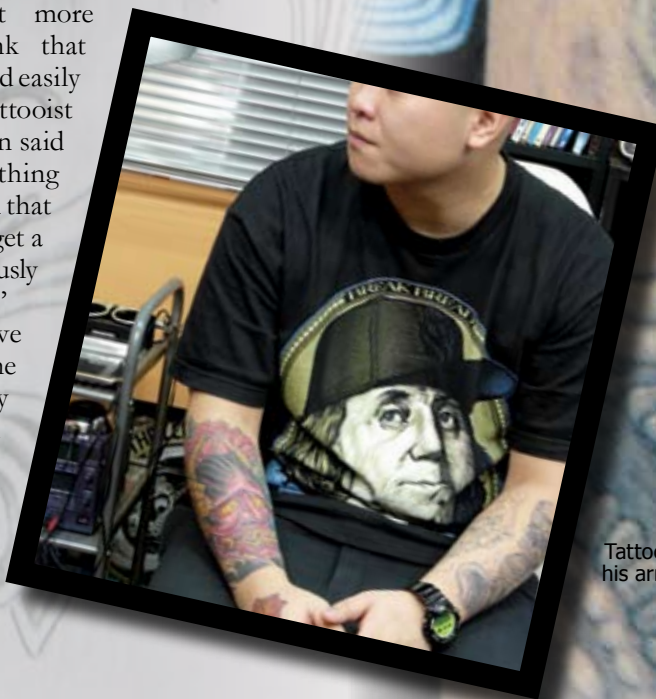
Meanwhile, some people get tattoos because they can conceal scars and restore confidence.

Christine Wu Wei-man, a 38-year-old stylist got tattooed about five years ago to cover scars on her waist after an accident at work. "I hated my scars. My friend suggested me getting a tattoo, so I did. I was glad as I felt much better after I got it done," said Wu.

As tattoos get more trendy, people think that they can get it removed easily if they dislike it. Tattooist Kenny Chin Chi-shan said tattoos are something serious and suggested that people should never get a tattoo without seriously thinking about it first.

"They may live to regret it if the tattoos don't signify something personal to them," said Chin.

Chin said you can remove tattoos with laser or chemicals. But,



Tattooist Lam Lung has two skulls tattooed on his arm to represent times in his life.

**"A tattoo is all about suffering and endurance.
The pain deepens the significance
of tattoos in your mind."**

according to Chin and others in his profession, a tattoo is more than a fashion statement; it is a character-building experience.

Jan Kwok Hoi-ming, a 30-year-old tattooist at the Ink Tattoo Studio, however, said that the

anaesthetic applied to the skin does not get rid of the pain.

"It can only reduce it to 60 to 70 per cent," said Kwok. "The pain comes back when the anaesthetic wears off. I usually warn my customers that they may not be

able to sleep that night because of the pain."

Kwok said tattooing becomes meaningless if there is no pain.

"A tattoo is all about suffering and endurance. The pain deepens the significance of tattoos in your mind," Kwok said, adding that he would not recommend a client apply anaesthetic cream afterwards.

Wong Chi-hung, a 37-year-old part-time tattooist who started to learn tattooing six months ago, shares the same view.

"Japanese people believe in *bushido* ("Way of the Warrior") which suggests men should be loyal and brave. Thus, some tattooists like to use the old-fashioned stitching method, instead of the tattoo gun in order to increase the pain," said Wong.

"It is a very painful experience. However, it is absolutely personal and it makes the message even more unique," said Wong. ▣



Tattooist Jan Kwok Hoi-ming says anaesthetic did not remove all pain.