

A photograph of a dawn market scene at night. The scene is illuminated by warm, yellow streetlights. In the foreground, several people are visible, some standing and some bending over, possibly handling goods. The background shows a large, modern building with a prominent white pillar and a dark sky. The overall atmosphere is quiet and early in the morning.

Neighbouring Trades at 4 a.m.

The dawn markets

Photos and text by Suki Chow, Terence Li and Herman Wong

Seventy-seven-year-old Mr Leung pushed his trolley to Yuet Wah Street in Kwun Tong at four o'clock one morning. He did not start his business there immediately, but chit-chatted with nearby 92-year-old Chow Wai-hing.

Many people, especially those as old as Mr Leung and Ms Chow, gather at the dawn market before the break of dawn. Trolleys were parked beside the road, and goods were hidden under a big sailcloth.

"I dare not start business now," said Ms Chow. "I'm afraid of being caught."

Mr Leung explained to *Varsity* that at around five o'clock every morning, a coach carrying staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department would pass by.

"If they discover we are doing business here, they will stop us and ask us to go home," said Mr Leung. "After seven o'clock, another shift arrives and may catch us. If we're caught, we'll be fined. So we usually leave at about seven."

After a while, Mr Leung pointed at a coach and said, "That's the coach, it is leaving now."

He went straight back to his trolley, which was covered by a piece of ruined sailcloth. He took away the sailcloth and spread it on the floor. He carefully put his old goods, including books, vases and cameras on it.

"I pushed the trolley from Shun Tin Estate (a public housing estate in Ngau Tau Kwok) to here," said Mr Leung. "It's quite far away! It takes me half an hour to push this heavy trolley here."

Having two unemployed sons who are seeking jobs in the mainland, Mr Leung came here in the morning to help ease his sons' financial pressure.

"Sometimes I earn HK\$30 a day. If I'm lucky, I can earn HK\$300," said

Mr Leung. "It depends on what goods I can get."

Mr Leung said his goods are mainly collected from refuse collection points. He goes there just before refuse collection workers have their lunch break or go home after work. Selling in the morning and scavenging in the afternoon is his daily routine.

"Sometimes, some people in the neighbourhood may also give something to me that they don't want anymore," said Mr Leung. "People always help each other."

There are some good times of the year for him. "I can get a lot of new things before Christmas and Lunar New Year, as people traditionally clean up their homes at those times," said Mr Leung.



1



2



3



4

1. Ninety two-year-old Chow Wai-hing starts hawking in the morning.
2. Mr Leung chats with vendors nearby.
3. People hang around at the dawn market in Kwun Tong.
4. Many trolleys are parked along the street.



Mr Leung also told *Varsity* about his neighbouring vendor in the dawn market, Ms Chow, “She’s already ninety-something, but she still comes here every morning. Isn’t it hard?” Mr Leung said. “But it may be better for her to come. At least there are some neighbours whom she can talk to. When she is at home, the younger generation seldom talks to her.”

Cheung Sin, 54, mainly sells dolls at the dawn market. She said she did not let her sons and daughters know she works there.

“They asked me not to hawk like this, and said they could afford to give me a shop, but I refused,” said Ms Cheung. “It’s too boring to be alone in a shop. I don’t like to wait until people come in.”

At the dawn market, some customers are familiar with the hawkers. Mr Chan, 58, goes to the dawn market almost every morning. He usually buys books and clothes there.

“The whole set of clothes I’m wearing is from here,” said Mr Chan. “They cost less than HK\$30 in total.”

Mr Chan showed his pair of shoes and said, “Look at them! They are Timberland shoes, very new, but I bought them just for HK\$10.”

He said that people usually come to buy items that are cheap but good. “I’ve bought an old Tudor watch for HK\$8, and resold it to a pawnbroker for HK\$1,200.”

“The elderly are not able to distinguish what’s real and what’s fake,” said Mr Chan.



Not only elderly buy cheap and good things at dawn markets. There are also the young.

Rachel Yuen, 21, and Kay Chan, 22, said they greatly enjoy shopping at dawn markets. Besides Kwun Tong, they have been to dawn markets at Shek Kip Mei and Sau Mau Ping. Today, they came to a dawn market in Sham Shui Po, just beside Tung Chow Street Park.

“I think it is a treasure trove,” said Mr Chan. “The goods are not only cheap. There are so many things here that you cannot find at other places.”

They showed *Varsity* four packs of Polaroid photographic paper, which he just bought for HK\$10. “Although the package states they

5	6	7
	8	9

- 5. A man is looking for low-priced products at dawn market in Kwun Tong.
- 6. Many elderly gather at dawn markets.
- 7. When the light is not adequate, people use their torches to search for goods in darkness.
- 8. Different kinds of products are available.
- 9. Besides hawking for money, vendors chit-chat a lot with people around.



Kay Chan and his girlfriend bought a box and four packs of expired Polaroid photo paper.



10



11



12



have expired, I think they should still work properly,” said Mr Chan.

“I bought a brand new toy model of Gundam for HK\$8 last time,” said Mr Chan. “The toy shops outside are selling them for HK\$90!”

They said they learned the existence of dawn markets after watching *Stories of One Million People*, a TVB programme last year. “It is interesting, so we went to take a look,” said Mr Chan.

However, to many people from the older generation, dawn markets are nothing worth getting excited about.

Mrs Lam, 79, said she has been a vendor at the dawn market in Shum Shui

Po for over 15 years. That day, she sold a blanket for HK\$20.

“I am very happy about that,” said Mrs Lam. She said she usually could only earn a few dollars a day. “It is enough for me to buy two meals.”

Mrs Lam has to push her trolley from her home in Fa Yuen Street in Mong Kok to Sham Shui Po every day.

“My youngest daughter migrated to the United States, and married a foreigner there,” said Mrs Lam.

She added her youngest daughter has been sending her money every month, and has also employed an Indonesian maid to take care of Mrs



10. A lady pushes her trolley to hawk.
11. Vendors sell various of goods.
12. People walk around a dawn market.
13. A man tidies up before he goes.

Lam's 87-year-old husband, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

At the dawn market, Mrs Lam does not only sell things, but also chats with neighbouring vendors and customers.

"Mrs Lam, I come to see you again," said Ms Wong, a nearby resident on her usual morning walk. She has bought things from Mrs Lam, and the two eventually became friends.

"One time Mrs Lam had a problem with the zip on a piece of clothing she had bought," said Ms Wong, "I knew how to fix it, so I went to Mrs Lam's home to help her fix the zip."


When dawn was breaking, the hawkers, including Mrs Lam packed their goods and put a large sailcloth over the top of them.

"Mrs Lam, I have a Chinese candy box for you," said a neighbouring

vendor who just wanted to be identified as Paul.

He put the candy box onto Mrs Lam's trolley. Mrs Lam smiled, and handed Paul a big black plastic bag. "You do not have enough bags to wrap your goods. Here is one," she said.

As it dawns, the hawkers disperse quickly. Mrs Lam pushed her trolley across the road, leaving the dawn market.

The market eventually vanished and Tung Chau Street became silent again. 

14. Mrs Lam puts all her goods onto the trolley and is ready to go.

15. Mrs Lam and Paul chit-chat after hawking for several hours.

16. A lady pushes two trolleys and leaves the dawn markets as it dawns.



14



15



16



As it dawns
the market
vanishes.