

# 一路走來不易的香港「書車」 A "Book Van" in Hong Kong that Did Not Come by Easily

Rolling Books - James Chong

撰文 當文尼



「甚麼時候閱讀能像看Netflix，甚至看『愛的迫降』或『雖然是精神病但沒關係』般成為話題呢？閱讀本應普及至這種程度，但現在不是。」愛書之人莊國棟（James）前前後後花了大半生推廣閱讀，他最希望有日閱讀不再只是一小撮人的愛好，而是一個品牌、一股風氣，大眾會覺得讀書「好型」、「好玩」，甚至感到不看書就有所損失。曾開辦書店、兩度參加Good Seed的他，如今帶著裝滿書本的木頭「書車」走遍香港各地。

"When can reading become as popular a topic as Netflix or Korean dramas like Crash Landing on You or It's Okay to Not Be Okay? That's how reading should be, but it's not." Book lover James has spent most of his life promoting reading. His ambition is to make reading popular. He hopes that one day, reading will no longer be just the hobby of a handful of people. It will be a trend and the public will find it cool and fun, and will feel like they are missing out if they do not read. Having opened a bookstore and applied to the Good Seed program twice, James now goes around Hong Kong with a wooden trolley filled with books.

## A group of children and adults are gathered in a circle on a paved outdoor area, likely a courtyard. They are engaged in an art or craft activity. A woman in a brown jacket is holding a book and talking to the group. A man in a pink shirt is sitting on a white stool, looking at a book. There are various art supplies, including paint cans and brushes, scattered around. In the background, there is a wooden structure with a sign that says 'ROLLING' and a string of colorful flags. The scene is bright and cheerful, with a focus on creative learning and community interaction.

James在2004年於鬧市中開辦書店「阿麥書房」，獨特選書品味，加上不時舉辦音樂會、研討會，滋養過不少本地人。最終因經營不善，五年內一間間店子結業。生意失敗，他要到商業機構工作，還債達三四年。愛書之人因為書感到無比痛苦，一度放棄再看書。「書店不去，舞台劇不看，我好像和自己割裂了。」

## 毋須與失敗割蓆

「我不是成功的個案。」這是James在訪問中說的第一句話。原來他曾經兩度參加Good Seed，第一次報名時，他以青年議題結合親子活動的點子申請計劃，可惜無功而回。不過James沒有放棄，再接再厲，結果終嘗成功滋味。

「遇到失敗過程，不要緊，繼續去。」人生的大起大落，令James對失敗看得淡然。沉澱下來，他認真審視落選原因。他認為，自己雖然有數年在非政府機構工作的經驗，對議題熟悉，卻未能清楚向評審展述自己的計劃。或者說，其實連他都不清楚自己想做些甚麼。「我很難說服我是最佳人選去做這個項目……這很重要，當我向其他人推介這個計劃，這計劃和我的關係是甚麼？」

All his life, James has been trying and failing,  
failing and trying.

In 2004, James opened a bookstore called "Mackie Study" in the heart of the city. With its unique book selection and hosting of regular concerts and seminars, it enriched the lives of many local people. But due to poor management, the stores all closed down within five years. James had to work for a commercial company to pay off his debts over three to four years. It was so painful for him as a book lover that he gave up reading at one point. "I didn't go to bookstores anymore. I stopped going to the theatre. I felt like I was cut off from myself."

Ten years passed. After struggling, James was finally able to confront his past and reconnect with what he loves. He established a social enterprise called “Rolling Books” to promote reading with an array of creative activities. “In terms of the financial situation, the bookstores were somewhat a failure. Now that I look back, I realise that I can transform failure into a lesson in life.”

"I am not a successful case." This was the first thing that James said in the interview. Apparently, he had applied for the Good Seed program twice. For his first try, he applied with the idea of combining youth issues with family activities. The idea was rejected, but James did not give up. He kept trying and finally succeeded.

"It doesn't matter if you fail. It's just a process. Just keep going." The ups and downs in life had taught James to make peace with failure. He calmed down and let the reasons for failure sink in. He realised that despite being familiar with the topic after years of experience working in an NGO, his presentation lacked clarity. Perhaps, he was not even sure about what he wanted to do. "I found it hard to convince the judges that I was the best candidate to carry out the project, which was vital. I was the one who was pitching the project, but what did the project have to do with me?"

James then recalled the experience he had during the low point of his life. After his bookstores closed, he was depressed and “unfriended” all his customers and friends on Facebook. It was only when his health began to take the toll, that he started jogging alone. This habit of jogging later inspired him to organise a “jogging book club”, gathering a group of people to jog together in the city and read stories about the routes they took. To his surprise, the “running and reading”



這時，James想起低谷時期的經歷。書店結業後，他一度陷入抑鬱，更在Facebook上unfriend所有書店客人、朋友。直至身體出現警號，他開始獨自跑步。成為習慣後，他舉辦了「跑步讀書會」，招募了一伙人在城市裡慢跑，再閱讀與路線相關的故事。未想到「以跑會書」重新連繫上一個個舊友，他又能用上昔日經營書店的觸覺，挑選書籍，設立主題。James才發現，原來昔日經營書店的人脈和經驗，可以在往後事業、計劃、興趣上大派用場。「以後做的事，不一定要和以前的自己割席。」

### 走入校園社區說故事

人生總是離不開「書」，James想，何不回到自己最熟悉的範疇，把閱讀結合社會議題，透過大小創新活動推廣閱讀文化。於是他參考台灣、日本案例，以「滾動知識車」的概念，再次報名Good Seed，終於成功入圍。「好多人認為social innovation需要破天荒，我反而覺得不需要，創意不是忽然有一件好新的事出現，有時可以很簡單。」

開始時，James計劃將「書車」帶入學校，向學童推廣閱讀。所謂「書車」，其實是租用「貨van」，再加以佈置。James坦言，書車外型不討好，一次最多只能容納廿多人，令學校難以安排學生參與，所以計劃失敗。「於是那一年，就是拿著這些經驗，不斷轉變(計劃)原型。」

他快速變陣，改用精緻的木頭車，再到市集、嘉年華、書節推廣，反應不俗；在學校，則改到禮堂向一整級學生舉辦戲劇、小丑表演，以另一種方式說故事，好令校方容易接受和安排。

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activities reconnected him with his old friends and old passion. He started to curate a theme and select books for the book club again. James realised that the connections and experience he had were useful for his future career, plans and interest. He pointed out, “You don’t need to cut yourself off from the past to move on.”

### Storytelling in Schools and Communities

With his life entangled with books, James naturally went back to what he knew best and combined reading with social issues to promote reading culture through different activities. With the concept of “Rolling Books”, he succeeded in his second attempt to apply for the Good Seed program. “Most people have the idea that social innovation should be something unprecedented or brand new, but I don’t think so. It could be something simple too.”

At first, James planned to bring a book van into schools to promote reading. The book van was a decorated rented van. James confessed that its appearance was not too appealing and it could only accommodate around twenty people, making it hard for schools to arrange students to participate. The plan failed. “We learnt from the experience and kept adjusting the plan after that.”

The setback prompted James to think of an alternative. He started using a delicate wooden

trolley to promote reading at different events, such as markets, carnivals and book fairs. It was well received. For promotions at schools, he changed the venue to the school hall, and held drama performances and clown shows. This alternative way of telling stories made it easier for the school to arrange students to participate.

### Supported and No Longer Fighting Alone

Generally, if the operation of a business goes wrong, one would need to pay a heavy price for a second chance. But James pointed out that the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund) does not require participants to strictly follow the plan proposed in the application. “They understand that we are starting a business after all. They allow space for us to improve and adjust the prototype.”

James told us that more than a decade ago, the only way to promote reading in Hong Kong was to open a bookstore. But to keep a bookstore in business, one needs to have connections, invest a lot of money and handle rent, salaries, stocks and so on. For him, it felt like fighting a lonely battle. Now that they are running a social enterprise, they receive a lot of support. “First of all, there is financial support. In addition to that, being a social enterprise and collaborating with Good Seed is like having a guide on how to achieve your goal step by step. It is a kind of support we had never experienced.”



### 同路人支持 不再單打獨鬥

一般而言，經營生意一旦發現運作模式出錯，或需付上沉重代價才能再試一次。但James說，社創基金不會硬性規定計劃成果須百分百按照申請原型執行，「他們明白你是在創業，要經歷prototype(原型)不可行、再調節。」

James說，十多年前在香港要推廣閱讀就只有開書店一途，但「養書店」如無底深潭，要兼顧租金、人工、存貨等，投放金錢、運用人脈去經營，感覺單打獨鬥。但現在運作社企，得到不少人支持。「首先有人給錢你『做生意』。第二，以前不會有人教你怎麼『做生意』，但某程度上現在做社企，或者經歷Good Seed及隨之而來的其他項目，好像每一步都有人教你怎樣做。」

### 推廣閱讀不只是辦活動

是否完了以前開書店未完的夢？James說：「我覺得只不過是繼續，和以前一樣，但以另一種形式去做。」

James承認，人們不會因為參加某個活動，就突然愛上閱讀，但他希望透過活動帶出閱讀的樂趣，改變大眾對閱讀的觀感。「令小朋友感覺到，閱讀過程中不用飽受閱讀報告帶來的壓力，或者限制於『這個故事教訓我甚麼……』的閱讀方式，所以我覺得推廣閱讀其實是很長遠、持續的過程。」

### Promoting Reading Is Not Just Holding Activities

Was it some sort of unfulfilled dream come true? James said, "I think of it as a continuation of the past. It is fundamentally the same but in another form."

James understands that participating in a certain event would not make people fall in love with reading all of a sudden, but he hopes that the activities would introduce the public to the joy of reading and change their impression.

"I want to relieve children from the pressure of writing a book report after reading a book and free them from the mindset of learning lessons from stories. Promoting reading is a long-term goal to be reached with a sustainable method."