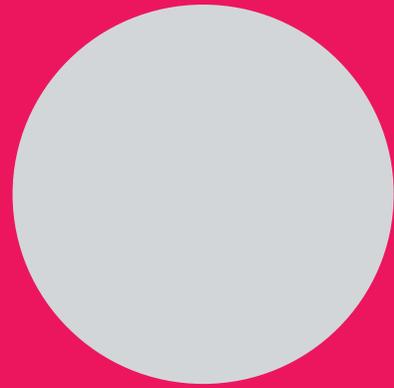


19



# BEAUTY THAT REGENERATES FOOD WASTE AND RECONCILES FAMILIES

DYELICIOUS -  
ERIC CHEUNG & WINNIE NGAI



Eric graduated in environmental applied science and Winnie studied design. The two young people set up Run2 Tree Design five years ago, focusing on environmental and sustainable development, and engaging in food waste recycling and food design. Eric became concerned about the problem of leftover food in Hong Kong when he was in university and initiated the “Clear Plate Campaign”. As implied by the name, it was about eating all the food on one’s plate and not creating leftovers. At first, they mainly worked with large food manufacturers to solve the problem of food waste, such as upcycling food waste into various commodities like soaps, paper, and dyes. Their original “leftover dye” was awarded the “Hong Kong Green Innovation Award 2014”.

After participating in the Good Seed Social Innovation Project two years ago, they have found another use for food waste dyeing in terms of the social aspect. It can be an ideal medium to improve family and parent-child relationships, and educate the public to appreciate food and recycling. As a result, Run2 Tree Design established a branch that mainly organises food waste dyeing workshops named “Dyelicious”.

## THE POWER OF CONNECTION IN FOOD WASTE DYEING

On the day of our visit, they had just moved into a unit on the fifth floor of PMQ. Dyelicious had become their main focus of development, and they would hold food waste dyeing workshops at PMQ. They were striving to create a space where people can feel at ease and enjoy fabric dyeing.

“In future courses for grassroots families, we plan to include a trip to Central to let the participants explore a community that they are unfamiliar with, since they are mostly from the New Territories, North District and Tseung Kwan O. After spending a few months with them, I know they rarely go to other districts. Lacking in money, they may feel uncomfortable going somewhere ‘middle class.’”

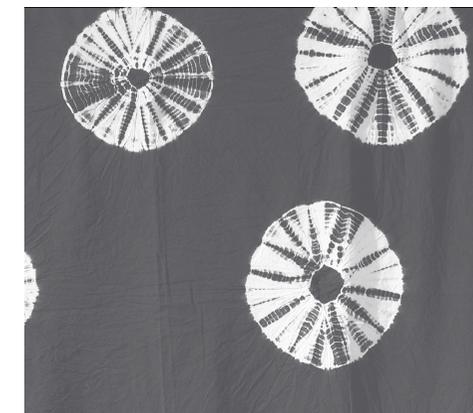
Eric told us that they are actualising the concept of “do well do good” step by step, but he and Winnie do not like to play by the rules. He pointed out that social enterprises focus mostly on poverty alleviation. “We observed that many social welfare organisations were already

supporting them financially, providing them with free goods and food. Could we fill other gaps from the perspective of social innovation? We then realised that the lack of familial love is also a kind of poverty and deficiency. The underprivileged work hard. They are not only short of money, but also short of time. They hardly have common pastimes, and it is difficult even for the whole family to have a meal together. Parent-child activities available in the market are not cheap, and low-income families cannot afford these expenses.” Many of the social issues caused by grassroots families have been exacerbated by long-term alienation and conflicts.

**“This inspired us to explore food waste dyeing as a medium. Dyeing is simple, but it is not something one can do on their own. Unlike art jamming, which is an individual form of art, dyeing requires cooperation and communication. Therefore, I thought of using it as an opportunity for parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren to interact with one another.”**

What Eric said was not just an empty slogan. He had put a lot of thought into the design to encourage participants to work together. “A typical workshop or one-off event wouldn’t work. I wanted to make the short communication more intensive and meaningful. We had thirty families participate in our 3-month long-term programme as a test, with one session every other week. These families were referred to us by registered social workers from three agencies, who also observed and analysed them to see if the family communication would change. During those six sessions, I made them sit there and look at one another. They would only start to talk heart to heart during that opportunity. For example, parents would ask their children about secondary school subject selection. On top of that, we designed the programme to make the dyeing process difficult. We would present them with the finished product without giving them detailed instructions and ask them to re-create it to foster communication. They would need to discuss and try out different

approaches like tying rubber bands and marbles. If they were doing board dyeing, which required them to clamp a thick and folded piece of cloth between boards, it would fall apart if it was not clamped or held tightly, leading to conflicts and arguments. The process would bring the usual conflicts to light. The registered social workers would then help mediate and guide them to think of a plan together in a more considerate way.” After the classes, the relationships continue, carrying the memories. “They hang the beautiful works that they have made in their homes, which would remind them of the memories.”



“The Taiwanese writer Chiang Hsun, who has been promoting beauty throughout Asia, once exclaimed that instead of looking for beauty in art galleries or music halls, city dwellers must at least “live an authentic life” in order to discover beauty. Beauty is far more than attires and decorations — it is a sensitivity and pursuit of the good. A young local couple, who started their business five years ago, want to make the world a more beautiful place. They started off by transforming food waste, which most people find dirty and smelly; they wanted to inspire people to reflect on living in excess, on how to eat well, on eating fairly and righteously, on estranged family relationships that people are too lazy to mend, and on all the possibilities in restoring beauty.”

## THE BUMPY PATH OF ENTREPRENEURS

6 months after the prototype classes were initiated, the social workers observed positive changes in all 30 families. After the Good Seed funding period was over, Eric and Winnie were able to secure funding for the grassroots family courses from regular clients, such as property developers and banks, so Run2 Tree does not need to bear the cost of holding these workshops; that, together with the income generated from the fees of non-grassroot family classes, they established a firm footing. They moved into PMQ, and Eric showed great confidence in paying the rent of over \$10,000. The five years of food waste upcycling business and education have not been easy. They had moved their studio four times in four years; finding a physical space to settle and develop is a challenge that local entrepreneurs must face. In 2013, they were forced to move from a 180-square-foot industrial building unit in Kwai Hing due to a crazy rent increase. After that, they successfully applied for the Design Incubation Programme and moved to Kowloon Tong, and then moved their studio to Wong Chuk Hang. After the programme ended, they wanted to move into the PMQ, but no units were available, so they stationed in a PMQ Pop Up Store. After a few

months, they finally “settled down” in their current unit.

“We hope to show the possibilities of food waste to more locals and foreigners here.”

Eric is a careful person, but he is also good at execution. For several years, he and Winnie has been going to public markets and supermarkets to pick up leftovers, edible but unattractive looking fruits and vegetables, and inedible but fresh fruits and vegetables. They took them home for dye tests and persuaded friendly vegetable stall owners to give the edible but unattractive looking fruits to people for free. They also worked with the Vegetable Marketing Organisation to provide a food safety label for unattractive fruits so that the fruits could be sold. They are now focusing on food waste dyes. Eric went to Nara in Japan to learn professional tie-dyeing. It was only then that he discovered his “origins”. His Japanese grandfather happened to be a dyer of the previous generation who ran a dye house in Nara. Now that the dyeing workshop had adopted an industrial and chemical dyeing approach, he decided to go back to the dye house to learn about dyeing methods and the science behind it.



Eric seizes every opportunity, resource, and method to help Hong Kong people rediscover the beauty of food and things around them, from upcycling food waste to reconciling relationships.

“I hope people can rediscover things that they are familiar with but never had a chance to feel, be it cheesy hot dogs or sweet potatoes, or even their families,”

Eric proclaimed. When they were invited by the Milan Expo to share about their food waste dyes in 2015, the organisers said that they had created “the most beautiful colours in the world”, and those beautiful colours not only dyed pieces of cloths, but also touched the hearts of people.

# 20

## I TRAVELLED, AND I SAW THE WORLD AND PEOPLE

SENIO TECH FALL DETECTION DEVICE -  
LEE SUI HA CELIA