

# ***Wander Type:*** ***The Streets of*** ***Hong Kong***

*Crystal Ho*



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# ***Wander Type: The Streets of Hong Kong***



# Dedication

To my parents, who were definitely more interested in this than me.



# Introduction

The first (and only) time I visited Hong Kong was when I was 12. At the time, it didn't leave much of an impression on me, most likely because the main purpose of my family flying halfway across the world was to attend a temple proceeding for the passing of my paternal grandfather. My stay was also rather short, a mere two weeks, and most of it was spent being either jet-lagged or sick. It wasn't until later, in the comforts of my own home, that I realized the lasting impression the experience left on me, the impression of - for what was more or less the first time - being surrounded by people who looked and spoke like me.

I chose Hong Kong as my location for this Wander Type Project for a multitude of reasons: me wanting to revisit a location that I only vaguely remember; a slight desire to bring eastern type, Chinese to be specific, into talks of typography that mainly centered around the western world; and maybe just a slight curiosity if I could do it.

Using Google Maps, I searched through Hong Kong for handwritten type and signs. I had originally planned to look at large outdoor markets like the Ladies Market in Mongkok, but I soon realized the restrictions of Google Maps. Such markets tended to be open only at night and were dismantled come morning and the process would repeat every day. Google Maps, on the other hand, had their images taken during the day where everything was illuminated and easy to see. After figuring this out, I turned to looking for the every day markets, the ones that sold groceries on the streets and usually had handwritten signs. Thus, I searched through the streets of Hong Kong for handwritten type.

Key takeaways of my research were that these signs were straightforward, albeit rather crowded at times. Because all these stalls were competing with one another, they were often trying to advertise everything in one go. I rather enjoyed scouring through Hong Kong, looking at the daily lives of its inhabitants and how different that life feels from mine in the US.

A challenge I faced was that because Hong Kong does not primarily use cars, but rather prefers traveling by foot or public transportation, the Google Maps images were often limited or far away from the signs. Though I was raised in a Chinese household and fluently speak Cantonese, the writing system is a bit of an Achille's Heel for me, and there were times where I wasn't sure if I had the right character and context or not. This was a bit of a limitation for me when I chose which signs to use, though thankfully, my parents were always happy to lend a helping eye in identifying the characters.

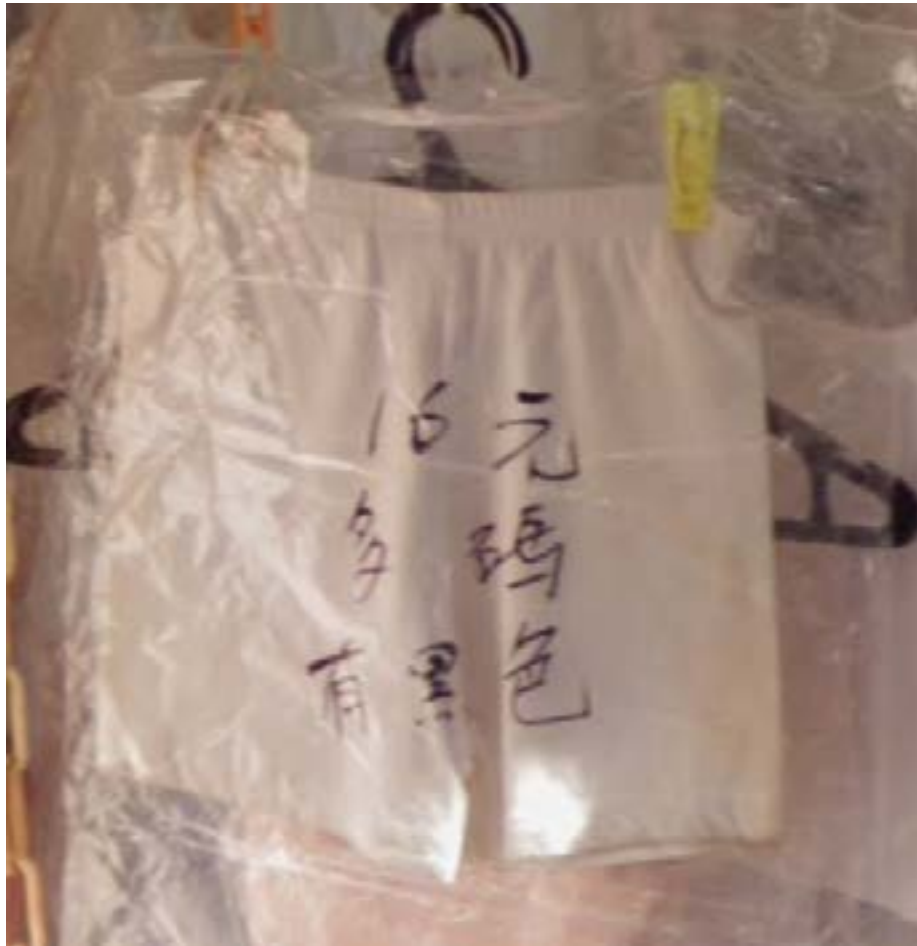
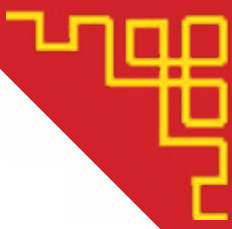
Please partake in this book and may it hopefully spark an interest in Asian type.

*Cynthia*



*Crystal H*





92 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/bH2hLFhxB6NYYK769>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google



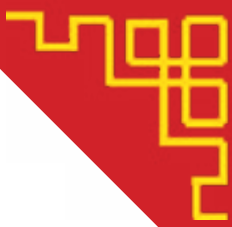
This is the character for “have.” This is handwritten and likely with a chisel marker, as seen by the first stroke, the horizontal line at the top, which is significantly thicker than the other strokes. It isn’t the neatest, but it’s written clear enough for the shoppers of the outdoor market this was found in.

Would you buy it?

Mmm... Well, it's cheap, so maybe.

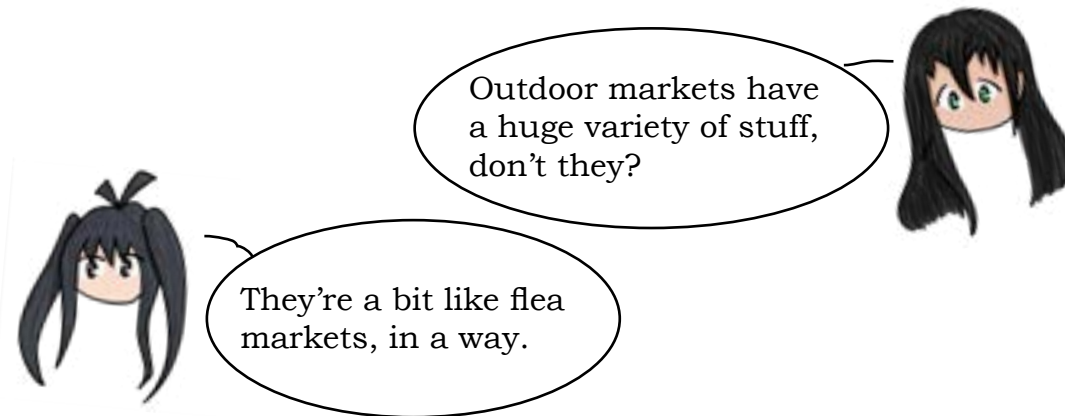
They kinda look gross though...

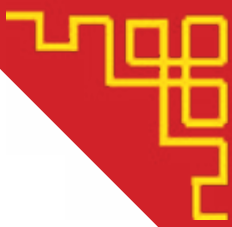




This is the character for “too,” though, as it is written with another character to create another word, it is the first character in the word for “sun.” It is at a stall that is selling various miscellaneous goods, including sunglasses. Like many other signs in outdoor markets, it is handwritten and in a bold marker.

109 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/WNNR7D8nYQ7ugcau7>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google





119 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/V9nHTPMf87k9dzms9>  
Image capture: Aug 2011 ©2021 Google



This is the character for “flower.” In this context, the characters indicates the species of pig. This stall especially sells Hong Kong-style barbeque meats. It seems here that it might have been written with a calligraphy brush, indicated by the flow and thickness of the strokes.

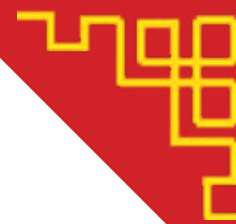


Oooh, roast pork... Aaah, just looking makes me hungry!

I could go for some crispy pork belly. Too bad it's hard to find over here in Florida...







This is the character for “big.” The phrase this character is in is essentially saying, “big sale.” The handwritten character is rather well-written, though it’s rather difficult to mess up one of the easiest characters. The strokes are rather dense too, most likely to get the attention of any passerby.

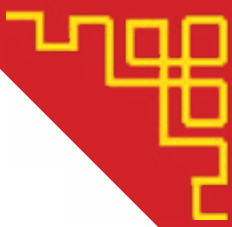
131 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/q4y9nr9KA3RCBVjD8>  
Image capture: Aug 2011 ©2021 Google



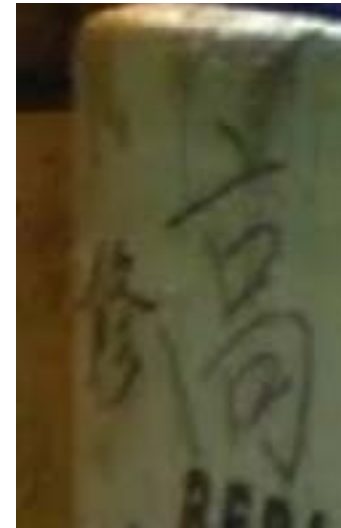
Man, their handwriting is pretty good. Unlike a certain author...\*cough\*

...





139 Apliu St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/YzzyXQ2k9c5dqXUr8>  
Image capture: Aug 2011 ©2021 Google



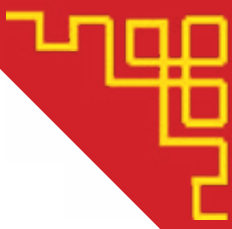
This is the character for “high” or “tall.” In the context of this sign, it means to indicate “high value.” In this handwritten character, the bottom half is supposed to be connected, but it seems here the writer wrote it in a rush, leading to the less-than-typical strokes.



Eh, doesn't look like it. You'd be amazed at how long lasting yet impermanent sharpie can be sometimes.

What a weathered sign. I wonder if they ever had to rewrite the sign?

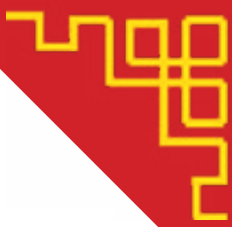




This is the character for “hand.” In this sign, it is used to the word “second-hand,” as the stall this was found at sold second-hand electronics and did electronic repairs. The writing itself is written horizontally, leading to more traditional reading, rather than the slowly growing western style of reading left to right.

139 Apliu St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/YzzyXQ2k9c5dqXUr8>  
Image capture: Aug 2011 ©2021 Google





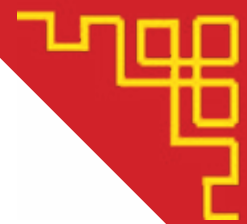
屋

This is the character for “house.” This is a graffiti piece found near outdoor stores. The piece itself says “old house.” The style used here is less conventional and fancier or calligraphy-like and is combined with a bubble-letter sort of graffiti style.

75 Dundas St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/Vn7EoLat9H8PaKSg7>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google

The samurai behind the characters are pretty cool! I wonder what the point of it was though...





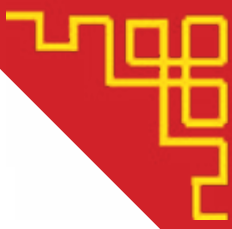
This is the character for “pair.” While recognizable, this handwritten character’s radical on the right is, in contrast of the typically sharper writing, is more rounded though still recognizable. As this was located in Hong Kong, the traditional character was written, rather than the more common simplified version.

92 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/FF5gNi6tvNLPmhtF7>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google

Man, it’s times like this I wonder which side I should take. On one hand, traditional characters are elegant and pretty, but simplified characters are so much easier to write. Which do you prefer?

Hm, well to each their own, but I usually prefer traditional.





This is the character for “bath.” The sign itself is saying “big bath towels.” It is handwritten on a simple piece of paper and fits right in with the rest of the signs in the outdoor market it is located in.

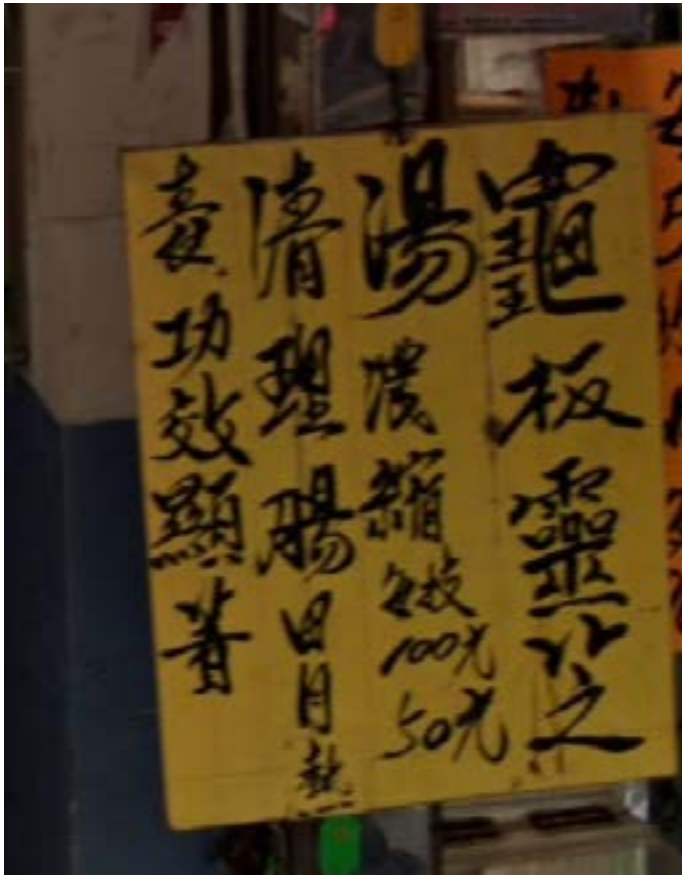
127 Pei Ho St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/WKnDsmd14pArMsCs5>  
Image capture: Aug 2011 ©2021 Google

Huh, about \$2 for a bath towel isn't bad, but the fact that it's been hanging out there grosses me out.



I don't think towels in a store that can be touched by anyone and anything are much better in the sanitary department.





Saigon St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/w3QKNfBYwxpWanqN7>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google

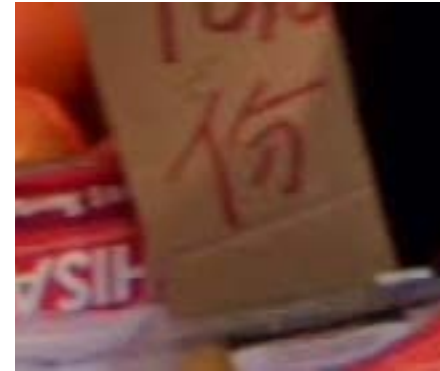
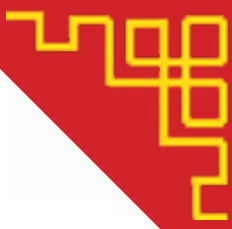


This is the character for “turtle.” This sign is for a stall selling soup ingredients, including turtle shells, which this character comes from. Unfun fact, turtle soup is disgusting. This sign uses the tradition version of the character rather than the simplified one and was most likely written with a calligraphy brush.



WHY IS IT SO WEIRDLY HARD TO WRITE???

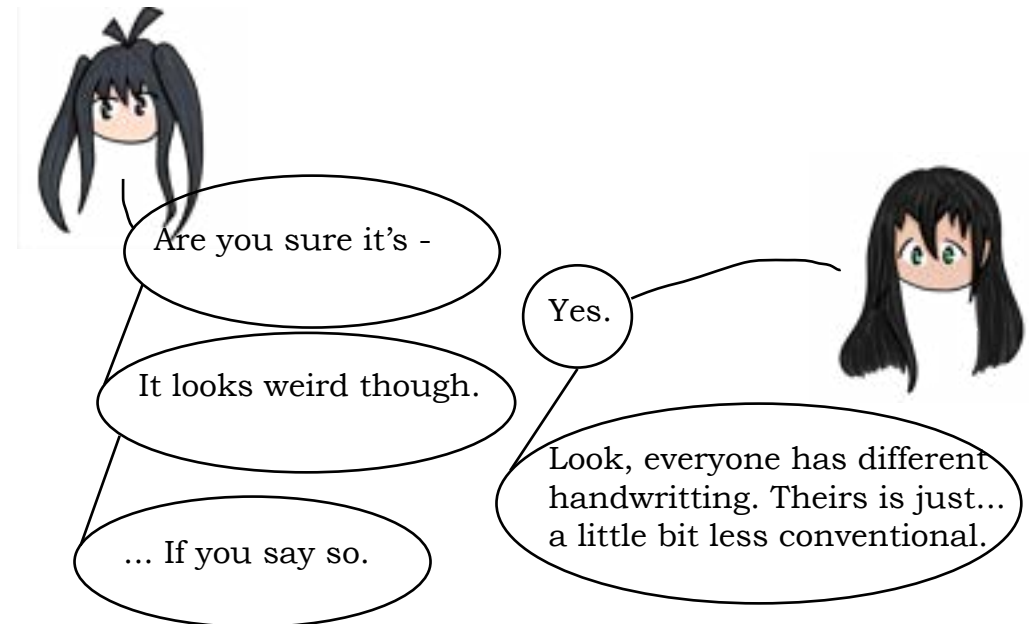
Because this character is really complicated and really hard to write, the author doubly apologizes for their chicken scrawl of an attempt at writing it. (Here's the proper way it's written)



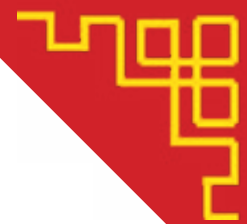
份

This is the character for “portion.” As this sign was at a fruit stall, in front of a bunch of grapes, the context of this sign is for per bag of grapes. Typically, the character’s right radical is written more evenly than how it is currently written on the sign.

Saigon St Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/QEgARshKu6aZyCbC8>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google







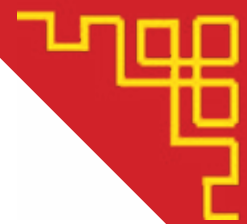
Stanley Market Rd Hong Kong, Stanley  
<https://goo.gl/maps/q5sYSUfXzpFTghyK7>  
Image capture: Oct 2013 ©2021 Google



This is the character for “gift.” In the context of this sign, it is “buy one get one” sign. As this sign was located in a tourist-heavy outdoor market, it is written alongside the Arabic numeral 1 as well as an English translation. Other than being handwritten, it’s fairly normal character.

The Stanley Market is a pretty tourist-heavy location, so it’s to no surprise that a lot of the signs use English in conjunction with Chinese to sell to the tourists.





Stanley Market Rd Hong Kong, Stanley  
<https://goo.gl/maps/SavYf9EMb6oKVhQk8>  
Image capture: Oct 2013 ©2021 Google

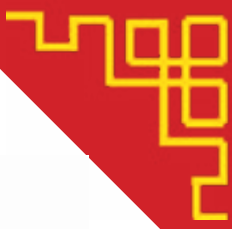


This is the character for “work.” In this sign, it is used to create the phrase “handmade.” This sign was located in a tourist-heavy market, so the English is a lot more prominent than the Chinese characters. It’s written normally and cleanly, a heavy contrast to the rest of the sign.



I like making custom cards sometimes. Not always, but it’s always fun to give someone something handmade. If you can’t make it though, something like this would be the next best thing.





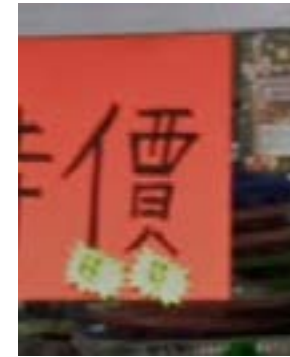
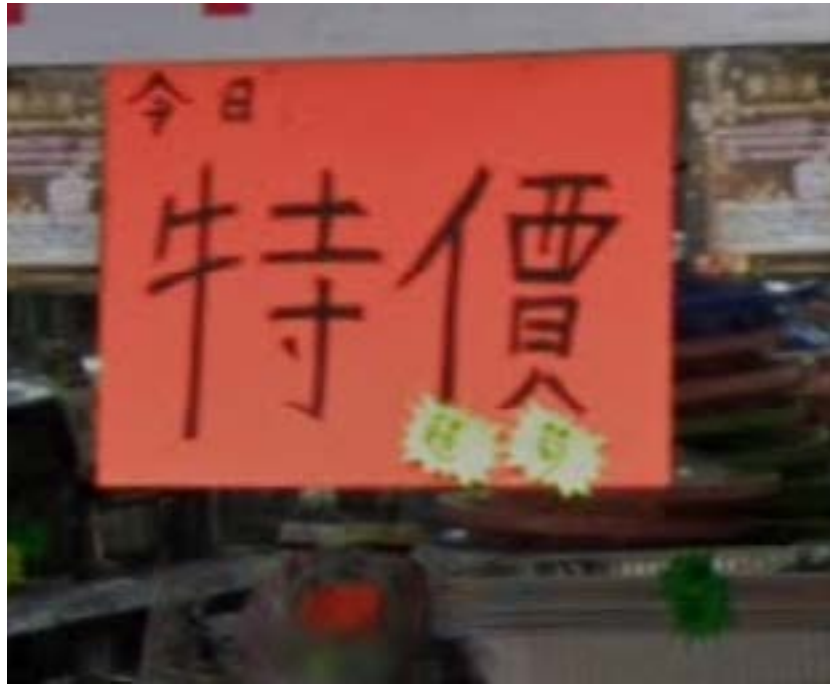
Stanley Market Rd Hong Kong, Stanley  
<https://goo.gl/maps/dWJzvG7FLvjJ839K6>  
Image capture: Oct 2013 ©2021 Google



This is the character for “water.” It is used here to create the phrase “water meter.” This character looks to have been written quickly, most likely because the writer was more interested in function over form. Based on arrow, looks like a lot of people couldn’t find it.

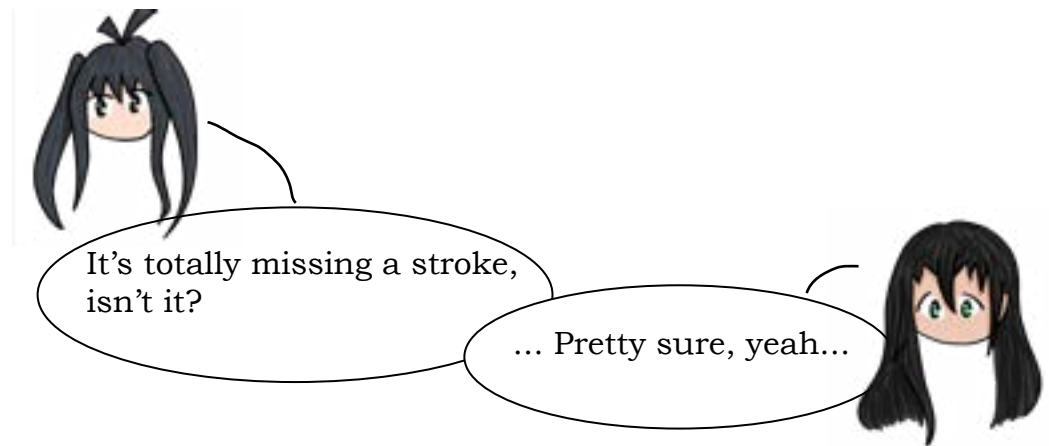
I wonder how many people missed the water meter before somegot got tired of it and literally had to put an arrow to show its location...

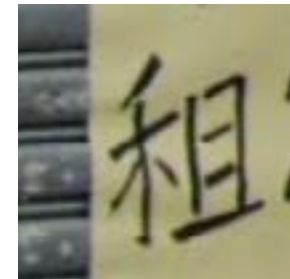
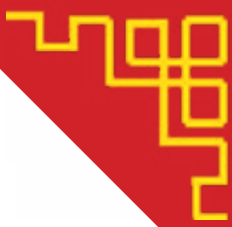




This is the character for “value.” In the context of this sign, it is used to indicate “special price,” or “bargain.” Funnily enough, I’m pretty sure they’re missing a stroke here, though the quality of the image might have just made it hard to see. It’s still recognizable without it.

9 Sau Fu St Hong Kong, New Territories  
<https://goo.gl/maps/2w27D8kDpWHyRmcb6>  
Image capture: Dec 2020 ©2021 Google

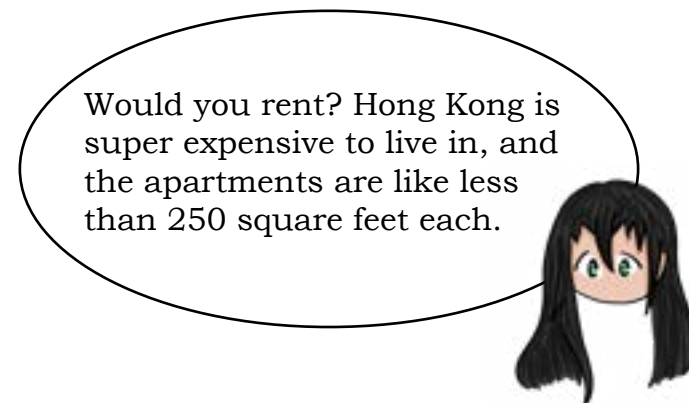




租

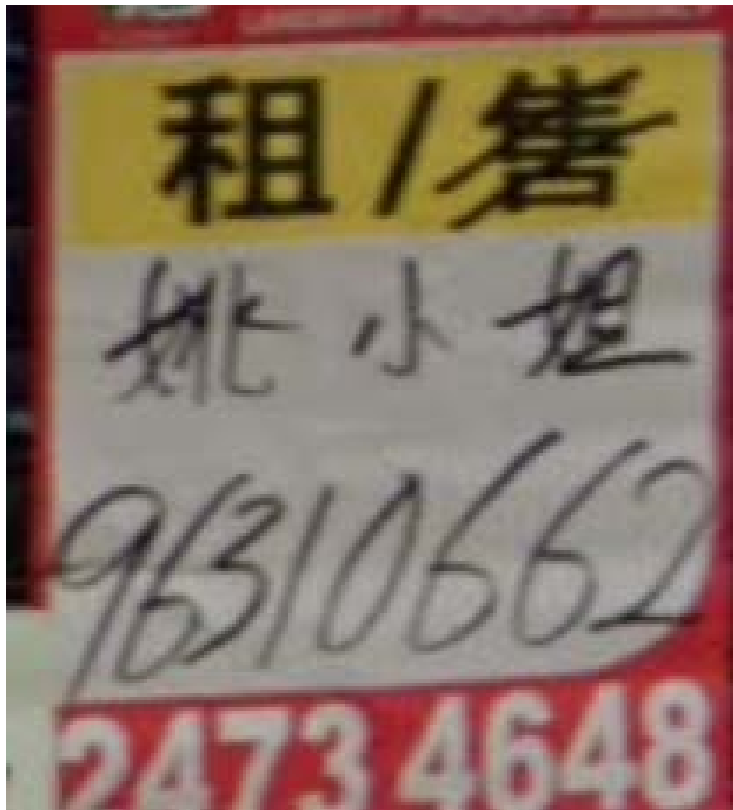
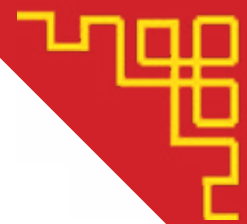
This is the character for “rent.” The context of this sign is that someone is renting a space, most likely an apartment. It’s written in a thick marker and neatly written. It was placed in a random spot in an outdoor shopping area to attract a renter.

9 Sau Fu St Hong Kong, New Territories  
<https://goo.gl/maps/xv3ACrGgVByc6HdU6>  
Image capture: Dec 2020 ©2021 Google

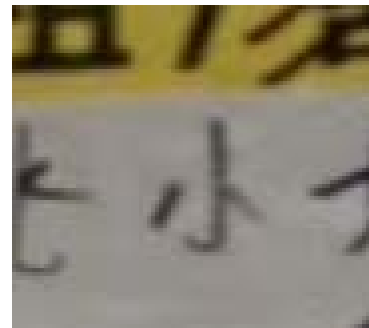


Would you rent? Hong Kong is super expensive to live in, and the apartments are like less than 250 square feet each.





17 Tung Lok St Hong Kong, New Territories  
<https://goo.gl/maps/Zbcsi7QFq27DNXUq6>  
Image capture: Dec 2020 ©2021 Google



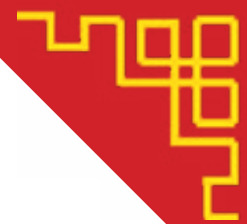
This the character for “little,” though in this phrase, it is used to indicate “Miss.” This sign is most likely for a rental agency, or agent – Miss Yao, specifically. It’s rather messily written, though it is legible. Most likely, Miss Yao had to write her name on many posters, as indicated by similar signs nearby.

Chinese has a lot of formality, especially when it comes to titles. I can barely remember what I’m supposed to call all my relatives, let alone strangers!



Haha, yeah, it’s a lot...





4 Yuen Long Tung Tai St Hong Kong, New Territories  
<https://goo.gl/maps/wREwpqU2RMXB2D856>  
Image capture: Dec 2020 ©2021 Google



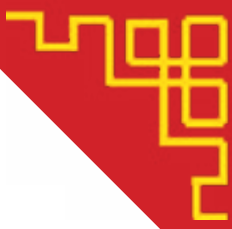
This is the character for “south.” This sign is for a rental apartment complex. The word “east” is in its name. Whoever wrote this most likely made the characters thick to catch attention, but the density of the strokes makes it a bit difficult to read.

Wow, the strokes are real crowded. Do you ever just kinda squint and take a moment to figure out what word it is?



I haven't really thought about it...

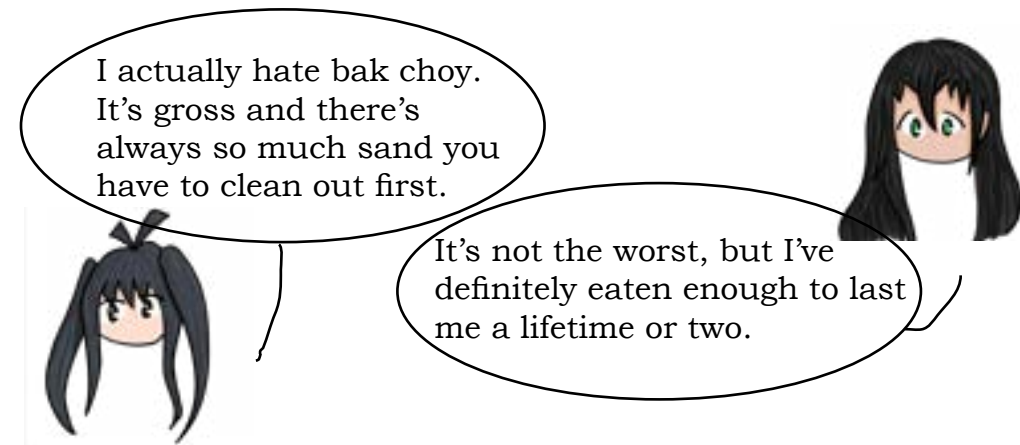




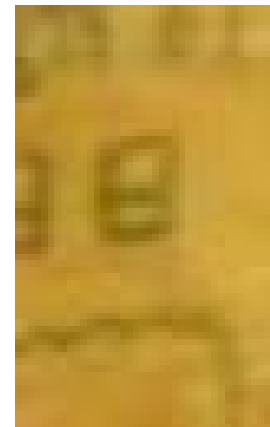
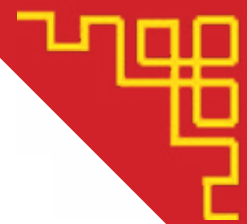
白

This is the character for “white.” In this sign, it used to spell the word “bak choy,” a type of Chinese cabbage. The vegetable does not have an English name equivalent. It seems to have been written a bit too big on the whiteboard, as the rest of the characters in the line are a bit squashed.

Lok Yeung St Hong Kong, Hong Kong Island  
<https://goo.gl/maps/2VVTqDBgPEhvgRaN9>  
Image capture: Nov 2020 ©2021 Google







This is the character for “day.” In this phrase, where the character “day” is written twice, it means “daily” or “every day.” This sign was at an outdoor grocery stall, most likely to advertise that its wares were “fresh every day.” I really hope so, for the sake of the shopper’s digestive system at the very least.

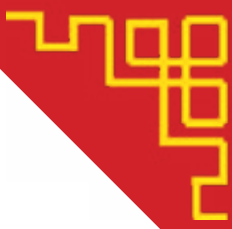
177 Aberdeen Main Rd Hong Kong, Hong Kong Island  
<https://goo.gl/maps/rYGR53e3HAtFg4z5A>  
Image capture: Nov 2020 ©2021 Google

It’s honestly pretty appealing to have a mini grocery store just downstairs from where you live.



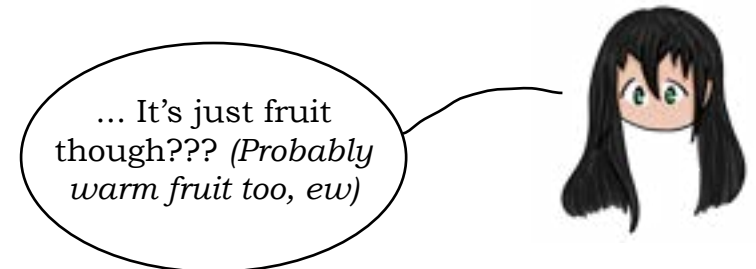
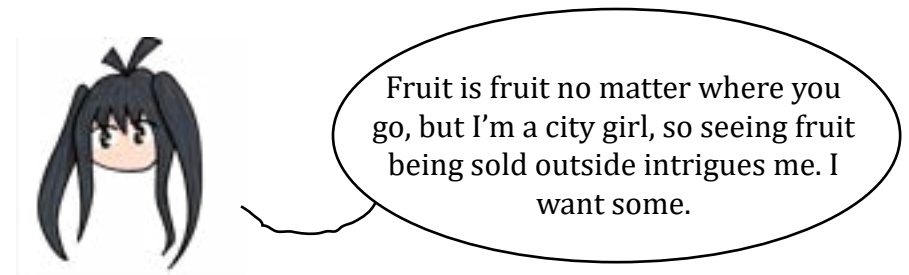
There’d be a lot less traveling for sure, with a bonus of fresh food on a daily basis.

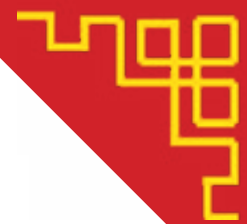




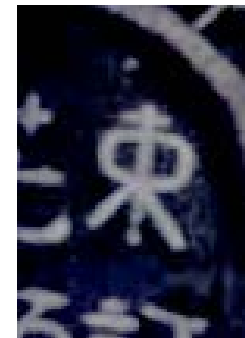
This is the character for “bag.” This sign was at an outdoor fruit stall, in front of the grapes, to indicate price per bag. This character is typically written with the top part and body not touching, but it is still recognizable.

19 Tung Sing Rd Hong Kong, Hong Kong Island  
<https://goo.gl/maps/8C4CCPZNRSFKePBM6>  
Image capture: Nov 2020 ©2021 Google







56 Flower Market Rd Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/aL3qayBR3UJcpZkw6>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google



This is the character for “bind.” In the context of this sign is that they will press or bind flowers to cards. This is written on a chalkboard and is very stylistic in that it’s bubbly. While a bit cute, some of the characters in the sign are difficult to read because of that.



Like how English can have bubble letters, Chinese bubble letters are rounded and cute too!



Though, I suppose it’s not very distinct for those unfamiliar.

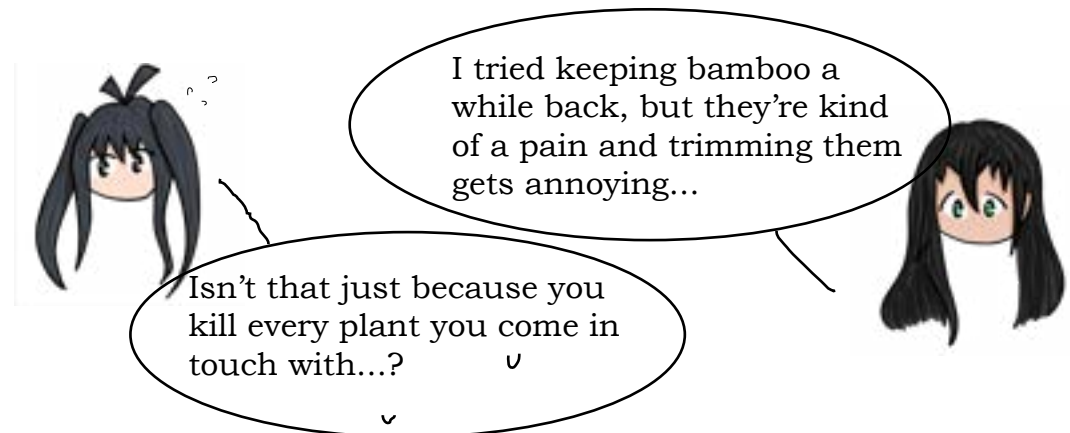


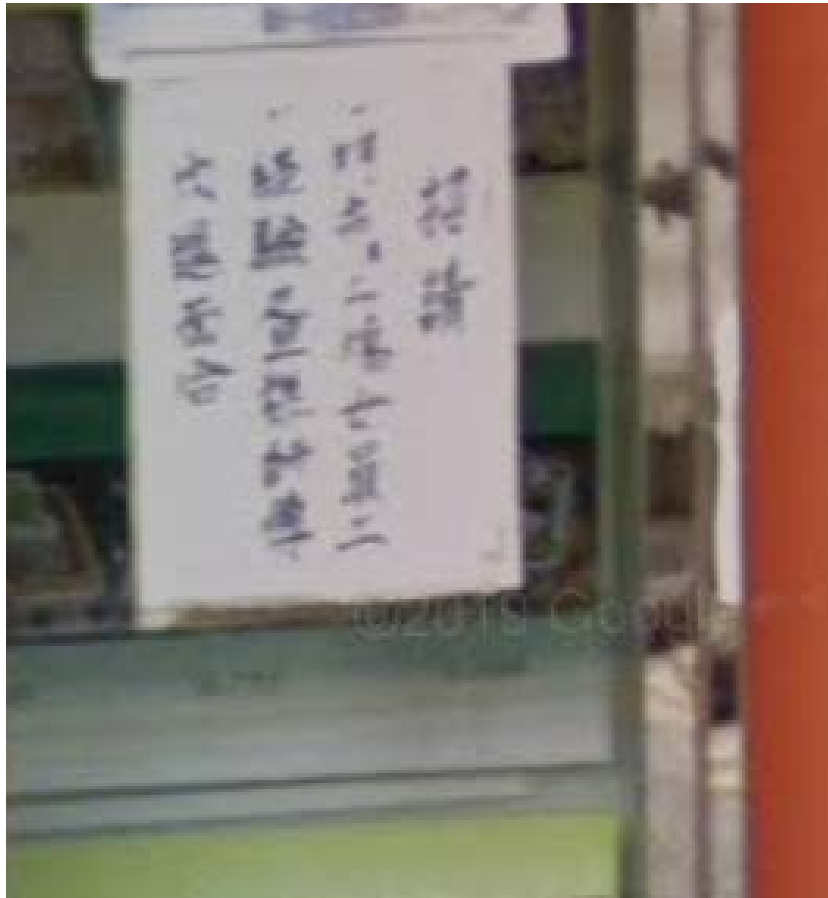
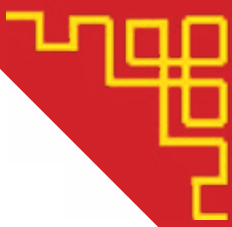


竹

This is the character for “bamboo.” It is a part of the phrase for the type of bamboo that the merchant is selling. Due to the smallness of the characters it’s rather difficult to read, a vast contrast to the size of the writing of the price.

38 Flower Market Rd Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/cfoGjSioRCpnpQGNA>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google





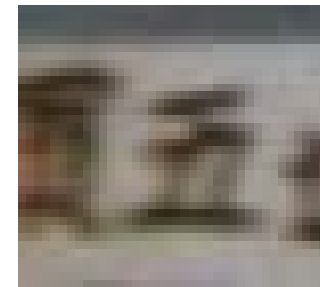
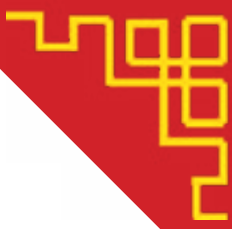
This is the character for “two.” Here, this sign is saying that they are looking to hire two people. While the character is rather difficult to mess up as it is literally two horizontal lines, the rest of the sign seems to have been written hastily.



The characters for one, two, and three are super easy to remember! They’re just one, two, and three strokes.

178 Prince Edward Rd W Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/4DYbQ6bh2fypKCeFA>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google



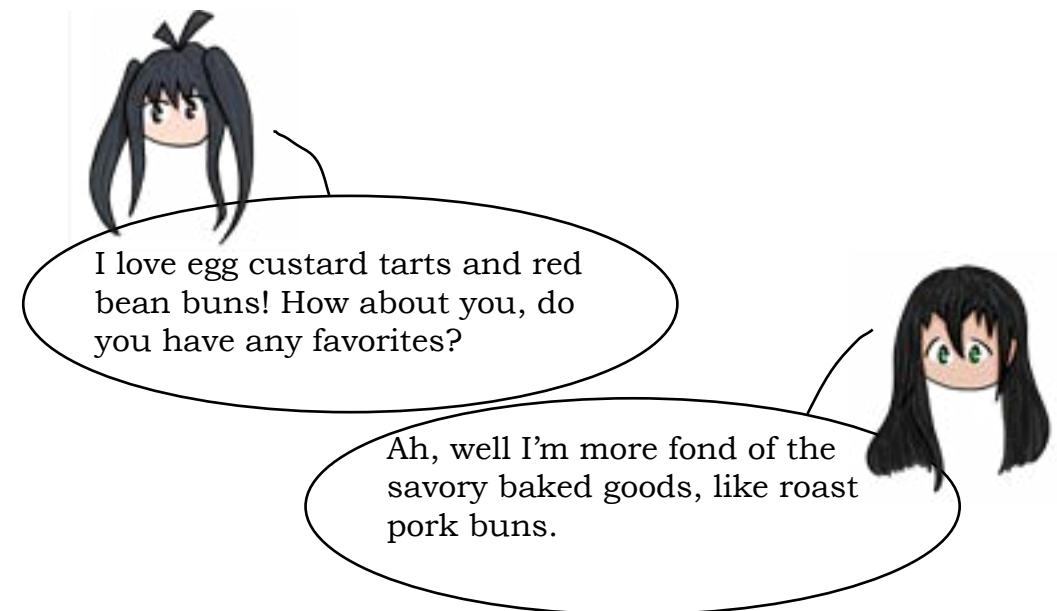


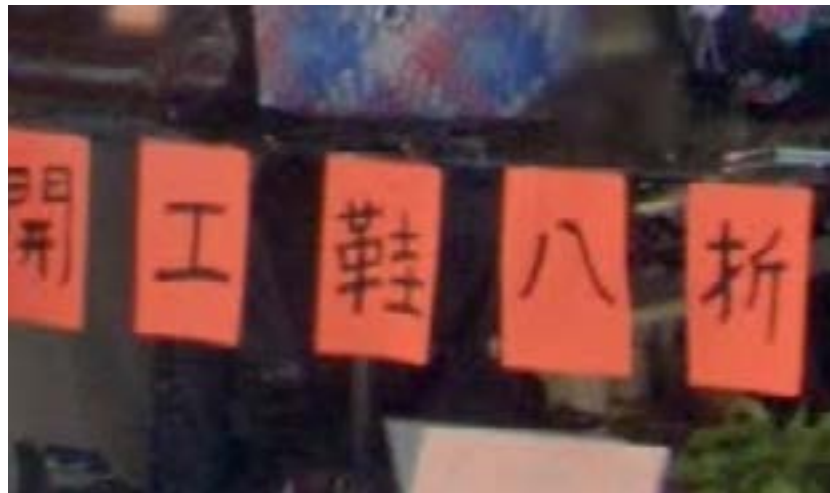
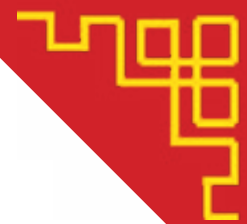
五

This is the character for “five.” In the context of this sign, it says “buy five get one.” This sign is at a bakery, meaning that you can buy five breads/pastries and get one for free.

It was written with a thick marker to attract attention.

178 Prince Edward Rd W Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/ccyX9KzmtedyJmdR8>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google





172 Prince Edward Rd W Hong Kong, Kowloon  
<https://goo.gl/maps/msd4oMsEh2L9Fg1g6>  
Image capture: Oct 2019 ©2021 Google



This is the character for “shoe.” In this sign, it is a part of the phrase “work shoes,” the first three characters. The sign as a whole, says “work shoes twenty percent discount.” This character seems carefully written, as well as the other characters in this sign.



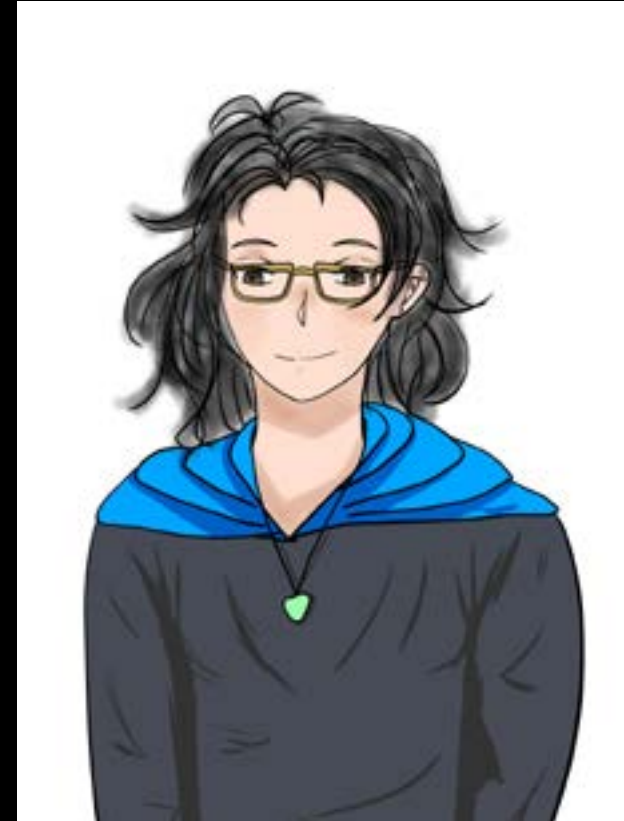
Sounds complicated.

Something I find interesting is that in the sign, rather than saying “20% off work shoes,” it says - literally - “work shoes eighth value,” meaning the shoes cost an eighth of its original price.




# About the Author

Crystal Ho is a student at Nova Southeastern University and is majoring in computer science along with a minor in graphic design. Crystal was born and raised in South Florida and has been drawing and designing for many years for both herself and for family and friends. As an avid reader and creative mind, Crystal has an active imagination that comes in handy in her works. Her graphic work is primarily illustration-focused with a love for aesthetics and visuals. Crystal is a big fan of animation and gaming and aspires to immerse herself more in those skillsets.







The city of Hong Kong is a very interesting and vast location. It has much to offer and a rich history, yet too often, it is overlooked for the grander and more well-known cities near it, like Seoul and Beijing. With its millions of people, it is filled to the brim with different ideas and ideals.

Asian typography is often skimmed over and ignored in favor of its western counterparts, but the field of Asian type is immense and fascinating. The difference between Asian type and western type can be like night and day at times, but that is what makes it so intriguing. Where western type uses an alpha-numeric writing system, Asian type use characters. This book focuses on Chinese writing and type in Hong Kong. The Chinese writing system, in contrast to the western one, has thousands, upon thousands, of characters, each one with their own meanings.

In this book, Chinese handwritten type is explored and looked at throughout the region of Hong Kong, with the streets and its markets being the primary focus. From the signs written in marker to attract customers off the streets to the graffiti sprayed onto the walls of the streets, the vernacular type of Hong Kong is analyzed and discussed.