

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 2011

Youthful activists encourage 'reverse' shopping at Kwai Tsing mall

Anti-consumer idea hits the shelves

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Armed with a wide variety of their own belongings, a group of young people descended on a Kwai Tsing shopping mall yesterday on a mission to spread the message of anti-consumerism.

Their goods carried big "\$0" price tags and a message reading: "Please take me home and enjoy me. I was secretly put here by a Reverse Consumer who bought me but hardly ever used me."

They entered various shops in the mall and left their goods on the shelves for people to take for free.

It was all the brainchild of Elena Simons, a social inventor from the Netherlands, who organised the Reverse Consumption Movement for participants at the second annual MaD (Make a Difference) youth forum at the weekend.

"We should think more about circulation instead of accumulation," said Simons who added that although she had not been to Hong Kong very often, she had found the "materialist culture very visible".

Her MaD event attracted 61 people between the ages of 16 and 30, who split up into small groups at the mall so as not to attract too much at-

tention. In a sports equipment store, Agnes Chan Suet-po swiftly took out her branded T-shirt and hung it on the rack along with the other T-shirts.

"I got it for free this morning at a marathon competition. The size is too large for me," said Chan, a strategic affairs manager at the HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity.

Minutes later, a shopper saw the T-shirt. She would not take it even though it was free, because it was second-hand. "But what they're doing is quite environmentally friendly," she said.

Another participant, Mavis Hou

Enough is enough
'Reverse consumer' days
focus on items people
do not need or use

One participant put one of his
basketballs back on a store shelf
because he already had this many

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Hsiao-chun, 30, from Taiwan, left her pencil case in a book store. "I bought it in a department store because it was cheap. But then I found that it was not very useful as it wasn't big enough," she said.

Her schoolmate at the Taipei University of the Arts, Feng Qi-chun, 22, said the project had taught her to think in new ways. "In Taipei, we usually make second-hand exchanges in flea markets. Putting stuff back on store racks is a very interesting idea."

A Hong Kong participant, Moses Lai Ka-ming, said he was disappointed when a shopkeeper removed the basketball that he left in a sports equipment store. The shopkeeper thought he had left it there by mistake and returned it to him. "I'll consider leaving it again in another shop," Lai said. He had three other basketballs at home and did not need this one.

Simons was happy with the outcome. "The participants enjoyed it so much. One of them saw a customer taking her cuddly toy home," she said. This was Simons' third "reverse consumer" project, after trying it out in London and Amsterdam.

"People should think of alternatives to side-track them from buying things, such as making clothes swaps with friends," said the activist.



Elena Simons (left) and Feng Qi-chun leave a scarf in a store during a "reverse consumer" day. Photo: May Tse