



THE MOONLIGHT TRIBE

With last month's paycheck sitting nicely in my bank account and my finances in somewhat better shape than the week before, I got to thinking about a Chinese saying that refers precisely to the unwelcome no-cash phenomenon most of us face at the end of every month: the 'yue guang zu' 月光族 or moonlight tribe.

So-named because the characters for "moonlight" sound the same as the phrase "spend all your monthly salary", adherents of this 'zu' (or tribe) end up with empty pockets by the 30th of each month. Living fast in an epicurean delight of designer fashion, food and parties in the consumer-oriented bubble that is modern China, young 20 and 30-somethings reject the work-save ethic of their forbears, putting nothing aside for a rainy day or their future. Their economic departure from the spending habits of their parents is solely based on a false confidence in the belief that their lives are better than the last generation's, and that their paychecks will continue to rise as time goes on. Their appearance has triggered heated debate in a country known worldwide for its high saving rate, but it's not only the young working-class in China who suffer from this occurrence – the typecast fits anywhere, be it the U.S., U.K. or Europe (the only issue being a higher quality of life isn't certain in Europe any more).

Consumption is increasingly driving China's economy, perhaps marking the country's much-needed transition to a more sustainable model. The PRC's huge domestic market presents enormous buying power, and the yue guang zu's newest adherents – the free spending young women in entry-level jobs – are a driving force behind the growth in expenditure. Yet these Chinese office girls who spend all their monthly salary on the good things in life (to the delight of retailers and credit card providers) may not exactly have been the consumers the Beijing government had in mind.

However the only difference between the 'yue guang zu' and me is that instead of spending until I drop satiating my desire for worldly pleasures, it seems as if all my money goes on necessities, with only a small portion of the pie devoted to pleasure so to speak. With the recent sky-high rents in Macau, inflation, the high cost of living and crazy food prices, it's all I can do to try to put aside spare cash each month. And I'm a Westerner, so I can only think how most ordinary people in this city cope. If I were living in Hong Kong where high property prices are notorious, at least I wouldn't delude myself into thinking I could save. But like a crab in a pot of slowly boiling water, as the heat rises and rises, I somehow don't get out.

Perhaps the solution is either to wholly get into the "moonlight" spirit and spend more on enjoying myself, then at least I wouldn't be left with an empty feeling as well as an empty bank balance at the end of the month. Or maybe I should try harder to be like the Chinese super-savers of my parents' generation, sacrificing more and putting away for my old-age nest egg. But wait a minute – there's always the third option beloved by spendaholic Chinese girls everywhere... that of the 'jia wan zu' or "marry the bowl tribe" – finding a husband with a government job. Now that would be a whole other column...

THE BUZZ LAWYER: VATICAN EXPERT HAD LITTLE MOTIVE TO STEAL

The lawyer for a Vatican computer whiz insists his client had little motive to risk his 20 years on the job to help the pope's former butler steal confidential documents.

Claudio Sciarpetti is accused of aiding Paolo Gabriele in the theft of papal correspondence and other documents from Pope Benedict XVI's apartment. His attorney Gianluca Benediti, says the two weren't great friends and

that Sciarpetti would be unlikely to help a person he had no special relationship with.

Gabriele, who is serving the 18-month-sentence, had been scheduled to testify about their relationship yesterday, but neither he nor other witnesses, including a Swiss Guard commander, took the stand. The hearing was adjourned to Saturday to give the defense more time to prepare.

Q&A JORGE RYDER TORRES PEREIRA, PORTUGUESE AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND

"Historians and diplomats must work together"



Viviana Segui

PORTUGAL'S Ambassador to Thailand, Jorge Ryder Torres Pereira, last week participated in the international conference "Portugal and Southeast Asia: 500 Years of History", organized by the University of Macau (UM). The attaché gave a speech entitled "Interaction between historians and diplomats in the common goal of raising awareness of the history of the relations between Portugal and Southeast Asia". Afterwards he explained why this interaction is so important and the reason it should be continued.

MDT - Why should there be more interaction between historians and diplomats?

Jorge Ryder Torres Pereira - I just celebrated the anniversary of 500 years since the arrival of the Portuguese in Siam. With my experience in organizing these kinds of commemorations, I realized how in a number of ways diplomats and historians need to

work closely in order to attain this common goal of raising the awareness of our history. Historians cannot comfort themselves with publications or seminars, and diplomats can't be satisfied with official celebrations of these events in the presence of countries' authorities. It's necessary to exchange experiences and work together.

MDT - Where are the difficulties in this collaboration?

JP - The diplomats want the commemorations for different purposes. We want them as a way to have an easier entry into local societies and for more trade prospects. Historians of course want them to progress their own research and opportunities to publish.

MDT - What kind of interaction has there been so far?

JP - We had a Facebook website for this commemoration and case studies, which I then transmitted to the historians. I will see how they react. I'm also accredited to se-

veral countries in Southeast Asia, such as Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Malaysia. So I use this experience with Thailand to think what would be interesting to commemorate in these countries. Vietnam is about to celebrate the centenary of the arrival of the Portuguese and of the first Jesuits. A practical example for this interaction is that I have been in discussions with the foremost expert of the Portuguese in Vietnam, Ms Isabel Mourão, on how we could raise awareness of the pioneering role of Francisco de Pina and Gaspar de Amaral (Portuguese Jesuit missionary) as the one who first turned the Vietnamese language into Latin script, which led to the development of the present Vietnamese alphabet. We are going to have a contribution in a conference in Hanoi about that. This is the result of the work between historians and diplomats.

MDT - Who can profit from the work between diplomats and historians?

JP - The general public. For example during the commemorations in Thailand, the Portuguese celebrated their friendship with the Thais. It was interesting for us Portuguese people to remember that our presence here is a really ancient and pioneering one; it does not originate from the colonialism of 200 years ago. And for the Thais it was also interesting to remember that their history does not start now or 200 years ago, it's also much older. For our actual relationship with the countries in Southeast Asia, it's also a good trump that we have had these relations for so long. We are not new. It can of course be very helpful when we try to have more business with these countries.

WORLD BRIEFS

ISRAEL The remains of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will be exhumed Nov. 26, a Western diplomat said yesterday, as investigators began determining how best to dig up the grave and extract samples.

GREECE enters three days of escalating anti-austerity strikes, in the lead-up to a crucial vote that will determine the shaky government's future and, ultimately, whether the debt-crippled country stays in the euro currency bloc.

FRANCE A plan to legalize same-sex marriage and allow gay couples to adopt was a liberal cornerstone of French President Francois Hollande's election manifesto earlier this year. Now, as the Socialist government prepares to unveil its draft "marriage for everyone" law, polls show wavering support for the idea and for the president amid increasingly vocal opposition in this traditionally Catholic country.

VATICAN CITY The trial this week of a Vatican computer whiz over his alleged role in an embarrassing scandal of filched confidential papal documents is offering a chance for an insider glimpse at the Holy See's security workings. Among those expected to testify in the trial are the pope's top bodyguard, a commander of the legendary Swiss Guards and a Vatican security official connected to an Italian company with expertise in detecting eavesdropping devices.

UKRAINE's opposition parties are protesting alleged election fraud in last month's parliamentary election.

NETHERLANDS Queen Beatrix swore in a new centrist Dutch government under Prime Minister Mark Rutte yesterday, even as the conservative leader faced harsh criticism from members of his own party over a plan to hike health care premiums.

BRITAIN Prime Minister David Cameron hopes to spur British arms sales with a tour of the Gulf and Middle East – but faces a challenge from France's leader, who has also visited the region to tout his country's defense exports.

Director Danny Boyle has joined leading British arts figures urging a cash-strapped local authority not to sell off a valuable Henry Moore sculpture – arguing it should be erected in London's Olympic Park instead. "Draped Seated Woman" is owned by London's Tower Hamlets Council and stood for years on a public housing complex in the city's East End.

USA A mother's attempt to give her two-year-old son a better view of wild African dogs turned into a tragedy at the Pittsburgh Zoo after the boy fell into the exhibit and was killed by a pack of the animals as relatives and bystanders looked on.