

**Bills Committee on Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants (Amendment) Bill  
2017,  
Legislative Council, HKSAR**

**21<sup>th</sup> August, 2017**

I am a Hong Kong youth who was born shortly before the Reunification. The special historical background of this city developed my interest in history and cultural heritages, especially those of Chinese origin. Consequently, I studied both History and Chinese History for my senior years in secondary school. I am currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in History at King's College London while serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the magazine of the Student Union History Society.

Two months ago, after I came home for summer, I learnt that the government is going to phase out local ivory trade to show its commitment to protect endangered species. I am conflicted about the prospect of this plan. Doubtlessly, it is paramount for us to support the protection of endangered species and the crackdown on illegal hunting and smuggling. Be that as it may, as a student historian, I am more concerned about the legacy of ivory. My father once told me that when he was young, Hong Kong was an artistic centre and a trading hub of high-value Chinese ivory to which many people from across the world were attracted. Ivory artworks of magnificent designs which were crafted by the most skilful artists could be seen in many places in Hong Kong. Sadly, when it comes to my generation, all these have become the untouchable past and unrelatable story, for the industry has declined and there could hardly be any chance for us to see them for real.

The first time I could finally see these artistic treasures was during my visit to the British Museum. Brought together from different countries, the vast and impressive collection of ivory artworks, including human figurines, sculptures and chesses, shows that various forms of ivory arts have been an important part of cultures around the world. In China, the history of Chinese ivory products as royal- and aristocratic-exclusive luxury goods dates back to the first millennium B.C.E., if not earlier, and has been developing since then. In 2014, ivory carving technique was included in the very first Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory of Hong Kong. Given the long history of ivory, the city's once prestigious status in ivory businesses and, ironically, the government's recognition of its cultural value, I could not help but wonder why, while it is being treasured greatly in other countries, ivory art is now discarded, disgraced and forgotten in my hometown, that my whole generation is deprived of the privilege to learn about and see it with our own eyes as our parents once did.

It sure is pity for our generation to lose the cultural connection with ivory art, as much as it is a shame for African businesses and governments to participate or allow elephants to be illegally hunted and killed, ignoring lives and their importance in sustaining the species and the ecosystem. However, it is important to note that my support for preserving the cultural heritage of Chinese ivory art should not be mistaken as support for illegal hunting for production of more ivory. Nevertheless, the destruction of this heritage which was passed down by our ancestors unbroken for millennia is an absolute cultural disaster, and no prize worth such a heavy cost. As such, I hope my government could make the right choice, and do whatever in its power to rescue our culture whilst phasing out ivory trade in Hong Kong. For example, establishing an iconic museum for ivory arts.

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