

that have closed down recently. Several months ago, rice shop **Tak Cheong Tai** on Third Street, finally shut up shop after 70 years of operation. Last week, the 40-year-old **King's Bakery & Quick Lunch** on Eastern Street closed its doors for good, thanks to rising rents. There are more and more venerable shops falling by the wayside.

Some of the remaining community businesses, such as shoe store **Very Good Trading Co.** (16 Western St., Sai Ying Pun, ㉔) and local restaurant **Chan Si Kee** (29 Western St., Sai Ying Pun, ㉕), say developers have already been in touch. "Of course I will accept the offer," says Mr. Chan, owner of Chan Si Kee. "A sum of money will allow us to live comfortably, with a brand new place that's not leaking."

Hoyin Lee, an HKU architecture professor who leads the city's first conservation program, says the loss of small shops and the relocation of long-time residents destroys a district the most. "Once the physical landscape and the social fabric of the area starts to break apart, the street culture that defines Western disappears," he says, "and it's happening."

"Sai Wan is slipping away. Its people, the community, and all the green tin stalls on this street."

**— Lam Mei-fung,
owner of Ng Wai Kee**

The New Western

If the old is on the way out, what is taking its place? Frank Lebiez is executive chef of new Sai Ying Pun hotspot **Metropolitan** (46 High St., Sai Ying Pun, 6271-6102, ㉖), and a partner at the French Creations group, which also owns restaurants in Central and Tai

Hang. He recalls Sai Ying Pun's drastic transformation since he first arrived a little more than six months ago. "It was a sleepy district with nothing but residents, small-scale restaurants, and a lot of stairs," he says. "I was not convinced a restaurant would work here." But with the Centre Street escalator system nearing completion and at least four more upmarket restaurants opening in the next six months, the area looks to be on the verge. "It's becoming the next food street," he claims.

Further west, and Kennedy Town is changing from a sleepy tram terminus into something rather busier. Paul Buxton is the founder and manager of the **Great Vision Group**, which operates **Bulldog's** (7-8 New Praya, Kennedy Town, 2872-5768, ㉗) on the Kennedy Town waterfront. The group is opening a new restaurant in Kennedy Town this month. "At the moment, there are eight residential blocks being built that are 50 stories. It's fantastic."

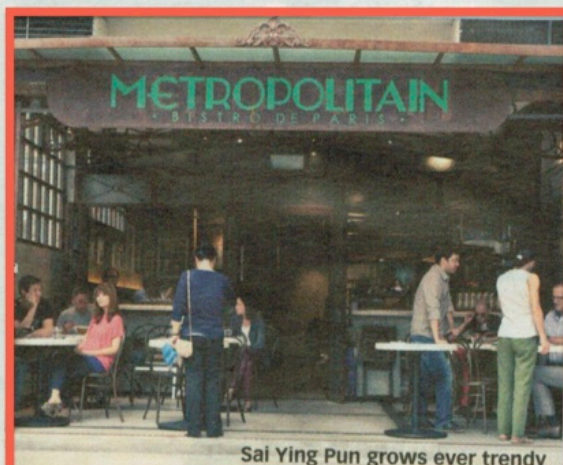
Fantastic for business, perhaps, but HKU professor Hoyin Lee isn't exactly excited. "Very tall buildings sticking out in a not-fully-developed area will catalyze similar developments. Most of the residents in these 'luxury developments' own cars, which will congest the area," he rebuts. "More importantly, rental prices will be driven up almost overnight. Franchises replace neighborhood shops, and the entire district will lose its distinctive neighborhood characteristics to rapid gentrification."

"It's quite scary, to be honest," says Tai Ngai-lung, convener of the "Changes in Western District" Facebook group. He's lived in Kennedy Town for 35 years. "Red banners celebrating successful acquisitions are suddenly hanging from many buildings. I see fewer familiar faces on the street now, and I feel less attached to the community."

Pui Pui To, owner of **2P Contemporary Art Gallery** (23 Po Tuck St., Shek Tong Tsui, 2803-2151, ㉘), knows what it's like to be a victim of gentrification. When she first came to Shek Tong Tsui five years ago, there was nothing but car repair shops, but the affordable rent allowed her to start her ideal gallery, one that curates real content and puts profits second. "If I hadn't found Shek Tong Tsui," she says, "I never could have realized my dream of opening up a gallery. I'd still be a gallery assistant somewhere."



Flashy new bars in Kennedy Town



Sai Ying Pun grows ever trendy