Lingnan Gardeners, Transition Campus

The Lingnan Gardeners is a pilot project with the following objectives:

1. Firstly, it sets up an organic vegetable garden/orchard inside the campus of Lingnan University in Hong Kong.
2. Second, the project seeks to document the evolution of the garden to produce resource materials for education purpose.
3. The project aims to introduce farming practice and permaculture theories through courses with an added component of community-service learning. Students take the experiential learning approach of learning-by-doing in organic agricultural sites within the campus and at Sheung Shui Farm Land and relate these to reflections on issues such as ecology, climate change, urbanization, peak oil, and food security
4. To demonstrate the model of transition campus.

**What is transition?**

Transition is a movement that has been growing since 2005.  It is about communities stepping up to address the big challenges they face by kick-。starting local initiatives.  By coming together, they are able to crowd-source solutions. They seek to nurture a caring culture, one focused on supporting each other, both as groups and with wider communities.

In practice, they are reclaiming the economy, sparking entrepreneurship, reimagining work, reskilling themselves and **weaving webs of connection and support**.

People do Transition for all sorts of reasons:

* to get to know their neighbours;
* to feel like they are making a difference in the world;
* because the world’s huge challenges (climate change, social inequality, economic decline and so on) feel more manageable if addressed at the local scale (as one person put it, “Transition changed my relationship to the problems”);
* to catalyse all manner of new projects, enterprises and investment opportunities;
* to learn new skills;
* to feel like they are creating a new story for their place;
* to feel connected to other people and to something historic and exciting happening around them;
* because they feel it is “the right thing to do”.

**Transition town**

*“One day 2005, Rob Hopkins, an ordinary British citizen, started knocking on his neighbors’ doors in the small town of Totnes, where he had just settled. He was proposing that they come together to organize nothing less than a new, locally based economy. A new model, the Transition Town, harnessing resources at hand: no longer expect food to arrive from the other side of the planet at great fuel costs, but instead create short food supply chains and cultivate all the available land (gardens, rooftops, municipal parks); no longer complain about pollution, but federate fellow citizens around a project of local renewable energy cooperatives; no longer rail against the banks and the stock markets, but adopt a local currency that enriches the community. His experience has not only been successful in Totnes; it has spread to 1,200 cities in 47 countries. Each of the Transition Towns are transforming their communities, without fanfare, without outside funding, making them more autonomous and more resilient to the crises looming ahead—a network of oases offering a wealth of solutions.”~Rob Hopkins, The Transition starts here, now and together*

*The terms transition town, transition initiative and transition model refer to grassroot community projects that aim to increase self-sufficiency to reduce the potential effects of peak oil, climate destruction, and economic instability.*

*The transition model can be applied to different types of places where people live, such as villages, regions, islands and towns. The generic term is "transition initiative", which includes transition neighborhoods, communities, and cities, although "transition town" is in common usage.*

*This looked at across-the-board creative adaptations in the realms of energy production, health, education, economy and agriculture as a "road map" to a sustainable future for the town.*

**Transition Campus**

The project, Lingnan Gardeners, comprised of a group of staff and students, in consultation with experts, is exploring the feasibility of turning the entire campus into a “transition campus”, according to the Transition Town concept. The “transition campus” aims to make use of all feasible sites for aesthetically designed organic vegetable gardens/orchards.

Students have been involved in discussions concerning the vision, design, and implementation of the transition campus. They have learned the fundamental principles and practices of organic farming and have developed a strong sense of belonging to the university through their involvement in making the campus a pioneer transition campus in Hong Kong.

*A way to rethink how we live together, to tackle the upcoming climate, energy, and economic crises, based on shared, beneficial, and successful degrowth.*

*- Rob Hopkins and Lionel Astruc,The Transition starts here, now and together*

**Lingnan Gardeners**

“Lingnan Gardeners” is a special campus farming project. The project is hosted by the Culture and Sustainable Livelihood Cluster under the Kwan Fong Cultural Research and Development Centre/Unit, supported by the Cultural Studies Department, and was officially launched on 22nd September 2014.

Under the leadership of Professor Lau Kin Chi, by the effort of the team members Yan Xiaohui, Jin Peiyun, Lee Kiu Chi and Auyeung Lai Seung, and with the support of the University, various campus locations have been transformed into farming sites.

Growing Areas

We farm on wooden-framed beds with soil on concrete ground and ploughed small plot of fields on vacant land as well as slopes. There are several cultivation sites, named as “Wonderland, Paradise Lot and Fragrant Garden”, located between buildings, at the south and north wings of Wing On Plaza and the adjacent site of Ho Sin Hang Building with more than a hundred species of plants, including grains, fruits, vegetables and herbs, all of which have borne rich harvests. Highly visible, the vegetable and herbal gardens attract curious students, staff and visitors. According to the security guards, when tourist buses bring dozens or even hundreds of local visitors to the Lingnan University campus on Sundays and the public holidays, the vegetable and herbal gardens are very popular sites. We have put up signs requesting visitors not to pick vegetables or fruits without permission, but at the same time attach information providing the names and attributes of the plants, even offering recipes! Visitors are usually amazed and attracted by the fruits, herbs and vegetables.

**Campus and Outing experiences**

Lingnan Gardeners provides an opportunity for students of the Cultural Studies Department and senior citizens to practice farming and also provides outing farming experience at Sheung Shui. It is the first pilot project of transition campus among the universities in Hong Kong.

Links of examples of Farming Classes videos:

Farming Course Autumn 2017: <https://youtu.be/Zn3aLFrnnWg>

Gardeners' Activities in January-April 2018: <https://youtu.be/UtlVHh7PwTw>

Lingnan Gardeners web site: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/ihss/crd/ln_gardeners.htm>

**For community**

Besides student farming courses, we have run occasional farming classes requested by the Community College, the Elders Academy, the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, RTC GAIA School and some secondary schools and community centers.

Farming Classes are also provided for the staff, alumni and their family members and the community on evenings as well as on Saturdays and Sundays. These are opportunities for them not only to learn more about farming but also enjoy the experience. By relating to the land, we can return to simpler and more convivial ways of life and adjust our habits and lifestyles in tune with the seasons. Our members, including children, have had the experience of harvesting vegetables, tilling the soil, planting and watering, and so on. Many have never had the experience before and so very much enjoyed it. Frogs, earthworms, caterpillars and snails …, even these little creatures have provided much excitement for them.

As the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi says, a journey of a thousand miles can be undertaken only with the accumulation of every single footstep. Because of the step-by-step nature of our activities, the distance among students, staff, their families and their friends has diminished.

**Exchange Knowledge**

Lingnan Garden was visited by the students and scholars from mainland China, Australia, Switzerland, the USA, the UK, Brazil, Mexico, France, Ecuador, Japan, Venezuela and etc. Some of the scholars have also been interviewed about their life story and thought in the Garden. All the edited videos are uploaded onto the Global University for Sustainability website, <https://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/>.

For examples :

* 20151013 - Life and Thought - Jonathan Dawson
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzzmTKps9Lo>

# 20160601 Life and Thought -Tani Barlow

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52n0NpTR39I&feature=youtu.be>
* 20171113 Interview - Nuria Costa
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdS2ajDYVSE&feature=youtu.be>
* 20180120 Life and Thought - Gunter Pauli
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rf7LvEDISeE&feature=youtu.be>

**Joy and Fun**

Food sharing gatherings are organized monthly, using as main ingredients the organic produce from Lingnan Garden. Students, colleagues and members from the community are invited to join and bring their own dishes. Everyone shares a delightful meal while getting to know one another.

Through such activities, Lingnan Garden is not only an experimental field for the “transition campus” but also a physical site the university utilizes establishing relations with the community. Lingnan Gardeners has actively promoted to university students and the public the opportunity to learn farming. It has also made use of the specialty produce from the project to spread the message of organic farming and transition campus to the public.

“Do it yourself”- dumpling, pita pun, icing cookies and pizza classes have been organized for the students, colleagues, alumni and community members, giving all an invaluable social opportunity to get to know each other.

Films screening and the public talks were organized to the public for sharing knowledge. All the public talks were videoed and edited. Below is the link, <https://www.ln.edu.hk/ihss/crd/ln_gardeners.htm>

For examples :

* Economics of Happiness by Helena Norberg-Hodge <https://youtu.be/gsXf88fy8FU>
* Jonathan Dawson - Buddhist Economics <http://youtu.be/2h_0Fa4yQoI>
* Hollywood's Revenant - Film, History and Ecology, by Prof. Dai Jinhua,2016:<https://youtu.be/jimpK5fLI6o>

Activities

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Categories | Year | Type | Participants |
| Farming Classes | 2015 - 2018 | Students Farming | 186 students |
|  | 2017- 2018 | Elderly Farming with students | 20 |
|  | 2015-2018 | Staff, Alumina, public | 200 |
| Food Sharing | 2015-2018 | - | 1625 |
| Film Show | 2015 - 2018 |  | 252 |
| Public Talk and Seminars | 2015-2018 |  | 880 |
| Music Performance | 2015-2018 |  | 115 |
| Do it yourself cooking classes | 2015-2018 |  | 203 |
|  |  | Total | 3481 |

**Community Building**

The most rewarding aspect of Lingnan Gardeners has been that it has developed into a meaningful open space. You can always find elderly people reading newspapers in the Garden and enjoying the plants in the morning. The neighbors of the University often come to take family photos. Occasionally the elderly ask for permission to collect herbs to treat their sore throats. Visitors often ask us about the plants’ names and exchange farming experiences with us.

Every month, we organize activities to update participants, including staff, students, alumni and their families, friends and the public about the development of Lingnan Gardeners and involve them in farming and food sharing, exchange opinions about food and the project.

As of December 2018, we had held over one hundred events related to farming and food sharing which alone had attracted over 2000 people. A total number of 3481 have participated in the events organized by Lingnan Gardeners. Moreover, in the last five years, organic vegetables from Lingnan Garden were given away as prizes in the lucky draw of staff Christmas parties. At the Lingnan University Chinese New Year Media Reception in 2015, guests were invited to taste the vegetables from our garden. In March 2015, Lingnan University Equal Opportunities Committee (LU-EOC) and Lingnan Gardeners co-organized the Equal Opportunities Awareness Week.

**Contribution**

At the request of cancer patients’ family members and friends, we have also collected the organic Sabah Snake grass, which is a natural medicine to treat cancer. We have cancer patients from the Cancer Fund Association coming to take plants to grow at home and learn how to consume it. The information is well spread in Hong Kong because the public can search all the news from the website of Lingnan Gardeners Newsletters.

**Seed Bank**

A small seed bank has been set up and seeds have been distributed free-of-charge to visitors and to community centres such as the farming group of Yan Oi tong in Tuen Mun. We aspire to build up a greater sense of self sufficiency.

**Where does the produce go?**

Where does the produce go? That is a question frequently asked. As the farming sites belong to the common for the benefit of all lingnanians, we have rejected the ideas of assigning vegetable boxes to individuals for a fee or even for voluntary labor, as is the practice in some other universities. And we do not sell the produce, consciously discouraging individualism or monetarism. Through email, our WhatsApp group and the monthly newsletter, harvesting and food sharing activities are announced. Members and non-members of Lingnan Gardeners club, actually whoever cares to come along, are welcome to the activities.

**Why food matters to us**

*Food is at the heart of Lingnan Gardeners as it nourishes our learning community on many levels. Much of the learning happens around the kitchen table or while harvesting or cutting vegetables. How we grow our food and what we eat is one of the many questions we are constantly asking ourselves.*

For example, we organize food sharing gatherings every month, using as main ingredients the organic produce from Lingnan Garden that are in season. Students, colleagues and members from the community are invited to join and bring their own dishes. There, everyone shares the gourmet meal while getting to know each other and exchanging fun and experience from their farming practices. Through such activities, Lingnan Gardeners is not only an experimental field for “transition campus” but also a platform that articulates the university with the larger community.

Lingnan Gardeners has made use of the specialty produce from the project to spread the significance of organic farming to the public. Pursuant to this objective, we believe the project could be further improved to not only bridge the gap between Nature and our students as well as colleagues, but also to bring together students and the elderly in a harmony across generations. Take an example, the elderly and the students have cooperated to edit a bilingual recipe:

Part 1 <https://commons.ln.edu.hk/sl_book/3/>

Part 2 <https://commons.ln.edu.hk/sl_book/4/>

Growing for the kitchen and community gives people a dynamic experience of the challenges and solutions concerned with producing food. Engaging with a local food system you end up engaging with a range of issues from food sovereignty, our place within the natural world and also what it means to be a conscious consumer.

Seeking a piece of fertile land, it is right under your eyes in Lingnan instead of somewhere in the horizon far away!

**Publications**

In more than five years since its launch, the project has published a monthly and bimonthly bilingual journal, the Lingnan Gardeners (there are already 43 issues up to now), to share with the public our activities, ideas and prospects.

Lingnan Gardeners Newsletter has recorded our monthly farming activities and is published on monthly base. We edited the first thirteen Newsletters as a book and included the agricultural and ecological essays by intellectuals and students.

“Strolling the Lingnan Garden涓流彩園錄2014-2015” was published and the E-book is uploaded onto the Lingnan Gardeners web site.

Link : <http://www.ln.edu.hk/ihss/crd/ln_gardeners/STLG_20160505.pdf>

Lingnan Gardeners Newsletters No. 1 to No. 43: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/ihss/crd/ln_gardeners.htm>

**Lingnan Gardeners Club and WhatsApp group**

Over 200 staff, students, alumni and their families and friends and public from the community have joined the Lingnan Gardeners club and engaged the activities of both farming and learning. Since the project is a pedagogical one with experiential learning as a component, monthly seminars of soil, food, agriculture, climate change, and political economy have been held, all video-recorded and uploaded to the KFCRD website for public access.

Website Link : <https://www.ln.edu.hk/ihss/crd/ln_gardeners.htm>

In a word, the Lingnan Gardeners club, in taking care of the Lingnan Garden, has sought to promote a sense of belonging to the university through relating with each other and with the nature. It advocates a lifestyle of harmony, care, patience and maximal self-sufficiency, reducing reliance on commodified culture and unsustainable consumption of energy as well as resources, thus, literally and metaphorically, nurturing the roots of both plants and human beings.

South-South Forum for Sustainability

The team members of Lingnan Gardeners have been the chief organizers of the South-South Forum for Sustainability, an international academic and activist conference since 2011. The 1st South-South Forum had the main theme of Food Safety, Food Sovereignty and Food Security on 2011, held at Lingnan University. Fruitful intellectual discussion was conducted among over 50 foreign scholars and 100 participants from mainland China. We also arranged an ecological trip of research field work at Hangzhou for the foreign participants.

Since then, five forums have been held, each with different theme:

1st – Food Safety, Food Sovereignty and Food Security in 2011

2nd - Sustainability & Rural Reconstruction in 2012 at the Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

3rd – Third South-South Forum on Sustainability in 2016

4th- ASIA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: CHALLENGES FOR PEOPLES AND MOVEMENTS in 2017

5th- TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS AND PRAXIS in 2018

Lingnan Gardeners has been one of the co-organizers of the 3rd 4th and 5th South- South Forum on Sustainability. Except for the Second Forum which was held in Chongqing in 2012, the other Forums were held at Lingnan University campus in 2011, 2016, 2017, and 2018. All proceedings of the five Forums were video-recorded and uploaded to the websites of Lingnan University and Global University for Sustainability:

https://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-fifth-south-south-forum-on-sustainability-june-2018/

<http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-fourth-south-south-forum-on-sustainability-4-6-july-2017-2/>

<http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-third-south-south-forum-on-sustainability-july-2016/>

<http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-second-south-south-forum-on-sustainability/>

<http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/the-first-south-south-forum-on-sustainability/>

In 2019, Lingnan Gardeners is again proud to be a co-organizer of the 6th Forum, to be held in June 28-30, with the important theme of Ecology, Livelihood, and Community Regeneration.

*Information:*

*https://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/sixth-south-south-forum-on-sustainability-ssfs6/*

**Conclusion**

After five years of hard work, Lingnan Gardeners with the support from Lingnan University and members has become more colorful, while our various activities, including planting experiments, public lectures, farming and reading have enriched the experience of many students and others in the campus and the community.

There are so many moments of simple joy: when we see butterflies, bees and dragonflies, once rare guests, now frequenting the Garden; when we hold a handful of sorghum or wheat harvested from our land; when the red amaranth is given a chance for a fully lived life and grows to three meters tall, bearing seed for numerous off springs; when we sit with a pot of herbal tea at the Wonderland, and watch children marvelled at the vegetables and fruits….

In the present society where money is king, it is important to establish spiritual values through cooperation, labor and communication. After all, material life gives priority to personal gratification and could easily turn people to selfishness and isolation, whereas farming endeavor requires working together, developing the sense of cooperation. It is our hope that Lingnan Gardeners provides a platform for people from different age groups and social background – from the University and from the community- to learn, to exchange, to impact life with life, and to achieve a more beautiful future.

Lingnan Gardeners deeply appreciates the support from students and staff of the university, the alumni and the community and friends from different parts of the world. A big family is created by the humble platform of Lingnan Gardeners.

*“An ounce of practice is generally worth more than a ton of theory.”*

*― E. F. Schumacher, Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*