

Global Social Science – and Buses?!



Our Faculty is busy developing a new Global Social Science programme and one of the frequent questions I get asked is – what exactly is Global Social Science? It's easy to say "It's about the globalisation of knowledge" but, what's that? To illustrate, let me share some on buses.

I've always had a thing for buses. Not so much their engine specs, or chassis types, but more about - where are they going, and why? For how long have people being making that journey? In fact, living in Hong Kong is about as good as it gets if you have such a passion, with multiple companies, thousands of buses, and one of the few global brands in the bus industry, KMB. But I'm guessing that, for most *Buddy Magazine* readers, as with my long suffering family and friends, the humble bus evinces not

favor but ordinariness, taken-for-grantedness, sometimes distaste (especially if the engine is poorly maintained) and, worse, downright scorn, not least when you are left staring at the departing bus you have just missed. But for me, the humble bus opens a window on how knowledge is globalised, and why there is value in cross-cultural and comparative perspectives.

Buses are cities working – communities in action! Workers heading to work; kids to school; shoppers to markets; friends to concerts and sports matches; the sick to clinics; buses are the



beating heart of most cities. When you ride a bus you really do witness the city close up and from the inside. One of my favourite rides is KMB's 87D: take it as the sun drops beneath the horizon and thread your way under the translucent neon of Nathan Road with fellow Hong Kongers bound for stops to Ma On Shan and beyond. And because they can be made to be green, buses also offer a way for cities and their people to keep breathing.

Buses are in politics too. Twenty years ago government officials in Mexico City closed down "Ruta 100" and took 4,000 buses off the streets in an attempt to thwart labor unrest and widespread strikes against economic reforms. London's 2008 Mayoral race debated what a proper London bus should look like (this followed an equally impassioned debate a few years before about what colour London's buses should



be painted – red, of course). Mayoral candidate Boris Johnson wanted to see the return to London's streets of a bus with an open platform at the back, so passengers could hop on and off just as they had since the classic Routemasters first appeared in 1948. He won the debate, and the election and, last February, following an international design competition, London's first "Borismasters" took to the streets (there is even a shot of one in the latest Bond movie). Politicians have also come to recognise that buses are an important part of rural life too. Another of my favourite routes is the 232 which, captured below on a lazy Saturday afternoon, seems to paint an innocent enough picture, some might even say "iconic". But, like the phone box and post box, the 232s days are numbered, as public services continue to disappear from rural areas. I should also confess the 232 was a good way to get to some of the more remote pubs in this part of Kent; sadly all but one of these (The Castle) has shut; the bus only runs once a week too, so be careful not to miss it!

To Be Continued...



Buses are also living social history. Recently, the brutal rape and death of a student on a city bus in Delhi caused riots and protests across India and beyond, and drew attention to the treatment and status of women. Almost sixty years ago Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man on one of Montgomery's segregated buses ("blacks at the back") and the ensuing legal case became an important chapter in the civil rights movement in the US. It's harder to know what to make of the infamous "Bus Uncle" incident in 2006 which occurred when a middle age rider on the 68X to Yuen Long argued with a young man; a passenger filmed the altercation on his phone and the downloaded clip went viral on YouTube and now has over 4.1 million hits. Is this a sign of stressed out city life; of boredom; of the power of social media? Easier to read is the circuitous routing of the 84 in Bristol, UK, which takes a seemingly random arc to connect the run down inner city terraces with post war council housing estates. In fact, it is simply mapping out where war-displaced residents were moved to in the 1950s as Bristol, like other bombed cities, built new estates and thousands of residents without cars needed to stay in touch with those who remained: as this generation dies, the commercial basis of the route withers. All of which makes the remarkably un-changing bus routes of Hong Kong so paradoxical, in a city of so much change.

Maybe in the end, my passion for buses was a foregone conclusion – after all, my Dad's first job was as a fitter with London Transport, after which he spent several years as a driver. Maybe, but I think the connection is wider - buses are always going somewhere, and the appeal is about reaching new destinations, sharing cross-cultural and comparative knowledge, and undertaking journeys of understanding. Or, put another way, Global Social Science!

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HKBU Distinguished Alumni Award 香港浸會大學傑出校友獎

The University launched the first Distinguished Alumni Award in August 2013 to recognise the distinguished achievements of HKBU alumni. Chaired by Mr. Cheng Yan-kee, Chairman of the Council and the Court of HKBU, the Selection Committee has selected the awardees and the finalised results will be announced in early 2014. All award recipients and their nominators and supporters will be invited to attend the Award Presentation Ceremony at HKBU Founders' Day Reception in March 2014. For details of the Award, please browse <http://aao.hkbu.edu.hk/en/home/index.php>.

為表揚優秀校友的卓越成就，香港浸會大學於2013年8月首次設立「傑出校友獎」。由大學校董會暨諮議會主席鄭恩基先生擔任主席的評審委員會，經已選出得獎人，結果將於2014年上旬公佈。得獎人及其提名人與贊同人將獲邀出席在2014年3月於香港浸會大學校慶酒會中舉行的「傑出校友獎」頒獎典禮。有關「傑出校友獎」的詳情，請瀏覽<http://aao.hkbu.edu.hk/en/home/index.php>。