

## **Hongkongers should spend quality time with loved ones at Christmas**

It is almost that time of the year again. Places are decorated in red, green, and gold. People are rushing to make last-minute purchases for families and friends. Whether you subscribe to the Christian tradition or just enjoy the festivities of it all, Christmas is about the spirit of giving – but have we perverted its meaning?

The holiday has become increasingly tied with excess materialism and waste. Over 2,000 live Christmas trees were imported into Hong Kong in 2012, most of which ended up in the landfill after a couple weeks.

In the UK, more than two million turkeys, five million puddings, and 74 million mince pies are thrown out every Christmas. For an event that lasts for less than a fraction of the year, Christmas accounts for more than 5 per cent of our annual carbon footprint.

Particularly, unwanted gifts are now a feature of Christmas. Remember that gift you have never unboxed and doomed to never see the light of day? No? You probably forgot about it.

An infamous paper in 2001 estimated that about one-tenth to one-third of the gift's value is lost as “deadweight loss” because the recipient does not care for it much. To put things in context, the amount of value destroyed from Christmas gifts in the US alone can be as much as US\$210 billion (HK\$1.64 trillion), or the size of Vietnam's economy.

That is not to say that people should be the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge. After all, there is obviously more to gifts than just maximising their monetary value. We give gifts because we want to build relationships. But instead of materialism, we can give experiences – such as spending quality time together.

There is a growing body of research showing that, compared to material goods, experiences tend to make people happier and for longer. Likewise, an experiential gift is more memorable, and the recipient is more likely to form a stronger bond with the gift-giver.

So, for this Christmas, rather than buying a trinket that will probably just end up in a drawer somewhere, why not spend time with your loved ones?

**Wendell Chan, Friends of the Earth (HK)**  
**South China Morning Post | 23.12.2017**