

奮力不懈，堅持下去！ Stick to the fight!




業界仍未從去年下半年的反修例運動中復元之際，不料今年又再受到冠狀病毒疫症重挫：去年七至十二月，訪港旅客人數下跌百分之三十九點一，外遊印花費則減少百分之十二點六；今年一至三月，訪港旅客人數估計暴挫百分之八十，外遊印花費則估計銳減百分之六十五。

業界開始感到疫症打擊的日子，始於農曆年三十(一月二十四日)，因為當天不僅所有內地團暫時不准來港，連農曆新年期間往內地的旅行團也全都被迫取消。接著多個國家對香港的外遊旅客施加種種旅遊限制，但不久疫病就蔓延至世界各地，香港政府於三月中對所有海外國家發出紅色外遊警示，三月底更禁止所有外國旅客入境十四天。

議會約有七成收入來自外遊印花費，外遊業停擺，議會難免陷入財困，於是唯有實行多項節流措施，包括裁員百分之十，由三月起全體員工一律放無薪假等等。可是，議會仍要處理大量工作，包括數量飆升的尋求協助與投訴個案，因此只能勉力應付而已。

在這艱困時刻，議會已竭力而為，除了退回會費，還兩次聯同屬會與商務及經濟發展局長會面，提出多項紓困方案。儘管多方已伸出援手，但業界及從業員依舊身陷困境。讓我在這裡引用美國「爐邊詩人」約翰·格林里夫·惠蒂埃(1807-1892)的幾行詩句，鼓勵大家堅持下去：


狂風怒號，低垂天幕昏灰，
反邀來，三春輕風柔和，
溫煦陽光，普照遍野花開，
更有那藍知更鳥，拍翼高歌。 

Just when the industry had yet to recover from the impact of the anti-extradition movement spanning the second half of last year, it was dealt a severe blow by the coronavirus outbreak this year: from July to December last year, the total visitor arrivals dropped by 39.1% and the outbound levy was down by 12.6%; and from January to March this year, the total visitor arrivals were expected to record a 80% plunge and the outbound levy a 65% dive.

The impact of the outbreak began to be felt on Lunar New Year's Eve (24 January) when all tour groups from the mainland were temporarily banned from coming to Hong Kong and package tours bound for there were all cancelled. After that, many countries began to impose various kinds of travel restrictions on Hong Kong's travellers, but as the pandemic spread globally, the Hong Kong Government imposed the Red Outbound Travel Alert on all foreign countries in mid-March, and then banned in late March all foreign travellers from entering Hong Kong for 14 days.

The outbound industry stopping operation, the TIC is facing financial difficulties as about 70% of its income derives from the outbound levy, with many retrenchment measures having had to be adopted, including laying off 10% of its staff and imposing mandatory unpaid leave arrangements on all. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of work, such as a surging number of requests for assistance and complaints, awaiting the TIC, which could only try its best to cope with it.

At such a testing time, the TIC has done what it could by, for example, refunding membership fees and bringing up relief proposals, together with the Association Members, with the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development in two meetings. Despite many a helping hand having been given, the industry and its practitioners remain mired in difficulties. Let me quote here a few lines from a poem by American "fireside poet" John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) to encourage all of you to stick to the fight:

This roar of storm, this sky so gray and lowering
Invite the airs of Spring,
A warmer sunshine over fields of flowering,
The bluebird's song and wing. 

Alice Chan