

Former honorary consul says the decision to end diplomatic position was mutual

# Fashion mogul and Seychelles part ways

Barclay Crawford

Colourful clothing mogul Samuel Chan Wing-sun – perhaps as well known for his notorious parties as his business interests – has been removed as honorary consul of the Seychelles.

Although Mr Chan manages multimillion-dollar fashion house YGM Trading, handling the diplomatic affairs of the Indian Ocean archipelago – population 80,000 – was apparently a different matter.

A spokesman from the Seychelles Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the government decided to terminate Mr Chan's appointment in December, so his residence on Bowen Road has lost its status as a diplomatic mission and is now just another striking Lord Foster-designed mansion.

Mr Chan, whose day job is managing luxury brands such as Guy Laroche, Charles Jourdan, Michel Rene, Aquascutum and Ashworth, disputes the Seychelles' claim that he was sacked from the role, claiming instead the decision was "mutual".

"If they want to say that, well, it's fine. But the truth is, it is an honorary post and it expired," Mr Chan said. "There was not much to do anyway, and there is no pay, or money or tax breaks, nothing."

But it seems

that in the end, the exotic position had begun troubling Mr Chan, who said his glass-and-steel home had seen "many notorious parties" in its time, including the launch of former football hard man and sometime actor Vinnie Jones' clothing label in February 2003.

There were some "immigration problems" he would not be drawn on and some "accounting problems" involving "liquidation" of some businesses involved with the country.

The businessman says he was not aware of the exact details, and passed them straight on to accounting firm Grant Thornton.

"I really don't want to go into it now because I am no longer



The 2003 launch party for the clothing line of former soccer star Vinnie Jones (left with Mr Chan) at the Lord Foster-designed home and former Seychelles consulate in Bowen Road, the scene of many wild parties. Photos: Chris Walton

representing them," Mr Chan said. "There were some hassles and too much stress ... I can see why Richard Li [Tzar-kai] left so quickly."

For a tiny nation that relies heavily on tourist dollars and lists cinnamon bark as one of its major exports, the Seychelles has certainly punched above its weight when it comes to diplomatic representation – and turmoil.

The younger son of tycoon Li Ka-shing took the consular role for a few months, but quit in January 1999, claiming he was "too busy". Mr Chan accepted the job after previous appointee Albert Kao Ying-fang was arrested by police over allegations he continued to use the title after his appointment was terminated.

Mr Chan said he was ap-

proached in 2000 and gladly accepted the role, having already visited the country.

"It's a lovely place and it's relatively rich for Africa," he said. "You should definitely consider it for a holiday."

While emphasising that he holds no beef with the nation best known as an exclusive playground for the rich and famous, Mr Chan

says he is glad he is no longer involved.

Accounting firm Grant Thornton would not reveal whether they were handling any business involving the Seychelles.

YGM Trading has retail outlets throughout Europe, Hong Kong, the mainland, Macau and Taiwan. The group has a retail network of more than 300 shops and department store outlets worldwide.

As such, Mr Chan certainly does not need anything to interfere with the running of the publicly listed company – or his successful parties. He claims he recently hosted a party for charity Operation Smile, raising \$250,000.

The Seychelles has only one embassy – in Paris – and relies on businessmen taking up honorary roles to spread the good word about the nation.

**"There were some hassles ... I can see why Richard Li [Tzar-kai] left so quickly"**

Samuel Chan  
Former consul

# Tsang takes time out for a date with Anson Chan

Dikky Sinn and Fox Yi Hu in Macau

Political pundits speculate she may run for chief executive, but there was no hint of rivalry yesterday as Anson Chan Fang On-sang and Donald Tsang Yam-kuen met for a gathering of old friends in Macau.

Mr Tsang and his wife, Selina Tsang Pou Siu-mei, had lunch with Macau Chief Executive Edmund Ho Hau-wah at the Legislative Assembly before they met Mrs Chan, the former chief secretary, and a number of former executive council members.

A spokesman for the Chief Executive's Office said the former executive councillors met from time to time. "We often spend time together," Mr Tsang said as he left Macau at 10pm.

There have been rumours of growing friction between the two in recent years, with Mrs Chan's appearance at the July 1 rally last year apparently stoking the tensions. Speculation of a rift was fuelled last month when Mr Tsang said he would leave Hong Kong after retiring to avoid being seen as meddling with the government – a comment apparently aimed at Mrs Chan.

While Mr Tsang travelled to Macau in style by helicopter, Mrs Chan was, in comparison, roughing it with the rest of the travelling public on a ferry.

With her were Rosanna Wong Yick-ming, executive director of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups; Lingnan University president Edward Chen Kwan-yiu; Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp chairman Vincent Cheng Hoi-chuen; and barrister Denis Chang Ken-lee – all former members of last governor Chris, now Lord, Patten's cabinet.

Mrs Chan said: "I had a great time." She would not say whether she and Mr Tsang had discussed the chief executive election.

It is understood Mr Tsang and Mr Ho discussed preparations for a forum on co-operation in the Pearl River Delta, which will be held in Kunming (昆明), Yunnan (雲南省) in June.

## JOB REQUIREMENT: DEEP POCKETS. BENEFITS: HARDLY ANY

If you are a member of the city's elite, there is one title you must have, but the only perks are the occasional official function and some hobnobbing with dignitaries from some of the world's most underprivileged nations.

Not to mention the occasional headache.

They are honorary consuls to nations as diverse as Cuba and the Maldives, and the list of those with the title reads like a who's who of business in Hong Kong. Many could probably finance a large chunk of their developing nation's expenditure and still not overly bother their shareholders.

Cigar connoisseur David Tang Wing-cheung is consul for the country that produces the world's finest, Cuba.

Sir Gordon Wu Ying-sheung, of Hopewell Holdings, puts his considerable clout behind fast-developing Croatia.

Package tour pioneer Jackie Wong See-sum does not represent some idyllic island retreat, but the struggling African nation of Mali.

As millionaire race-horse owner Bob Harilela says, the title is not about lining your pockets but



David Tang (top), Sir Gordon Wu (centre) and Bob Harilela.

helping out and giving something back to Hong Kong. Mr Harilela, honorary consul for the Maldives, says his duties revolve around facilitating business between the city and the Indian Ocean archipelago.

The only benefit he says he receives is an on-the-spot visa.

"I go once a year, in July, when it's too hot here," he said. "It really is a beautiful place." All the family members and friends he has recommended to holiday there have had "a wonderful time".

Mr Harilela ensures his official guests are "well looked after" when they are in Hong Kong. "But they spend their own money on hotels, which is different from some countries," he said.

One mover and shaker – who has given up his role – said the title can come with unexpected burdens. "Some nations expect way too much," he said. "Someone's cousin, no one important, might just turn up on the doorstep and you are expected to look after them – all from your own pocket of course."

Fortunately, most of those pockets are deep.  
Barclay Crawford

# HK activists join fight against UN use of simplified characters

Donald Asprey

Thousands of Hong Kong activists have signed an online petition against an apparent attempt by the United Nations to purge traditional Chinese characters from its documents by 2008.

As of yesterday, there were 156,188 protest votes worldwide on Gopetition.com. Taiwan led the way with 105,785 votes, while Hong Kong contributed 11,905.

But the petition comes several decades too late. A UN spokesman said the organisation had been using simplified characters since the 1970s, when Chinese representation on the world body switched from Taipei to Beijing.

"The UN never used both forms simultaneously. We saw media reports about a switch to simplified characters that would happen in 2008, but they are not correct. We already use simplified characters," said Brenden Varma.

Traditional characters, once belittled on the mainland as "the writing of ox-demons and snake-gods", were simplified in 1956 to help boost literacy. Taiwan, Hong Kong

and Macau continue to use traditional characters.

The online petition has been gathering steam since March, after Xinhua quoted mainland linguistics scholar Zhou Youguang (周有光) as saying that the UN was about to abolish traditional characters.

Mr Zhou, the chief inventor of the Pinyin system of Romanising Chinese characters, said it was only a matter of time before simplified characters became the only benchmark of the written language.

"Simplified characters are a huge step backwards," said petitioner Miranda Yeung Siu-man, a Chinese-language journalist. "Many words have been grouped together, and many characters have been butchered to reduce the number of strokes. It's like forcing the English to write in shorthand."

In contrast, the chairman of the translation department at Chinese University, Gilbert Fong Chee-fun, said the sooner Hong Kong moved towards simplicity the better.

"With the rise of China, the role of traditional characters is diminishing, even archaic. Hong Kong ought to switch to simplified char-

acters to stay competitive," Professor Fong said.

Angel Lin Mei-yi, associate professor in the faculty of education at Chinese University, said that because traditional characters distinguished Hong Kong from the mainland, the topic was often viewed through a political lens.

"It's an emotionally charged issue," Dr Lin said. "From an educational point of view, we have done a lot of research on the benefits of the two written forms."

"We've found that traditional characters are easier to learn, because there are more indicators as to what a word means, while simplified characters are easier to learn to write."

After the website's compilers confirmed that the UN had, in fact, already stopped using traditional characters, petitioners were urged to carry on the fight.

Meanwhile, the *Taipei Times* reported last month that a group of scholars was applying to the UN for protection of traditional characters as a world cultural heritage.

■ Talking point – A10

## IMPRESSIONIST & MODERN ART EVENING SALE

EXHIBITION: HONG KONG 25-27 MAY 2006 AUCTION IN LONDON: 19 JUNE 2006

AMEDEO MODIGLIANI  
Jeanne Hébuterne (Au Chapeau)  
circa 1910  
signed Modigliani (upper right)  
oil on canvas  
92 by 54 cm., 36 1/4 by 21 1/2 in.  
Estimate: £8,500,000-12,000,000  
HK\$122,000,000-172,000,000

Suites 3101-3106, One Pacific Place, 88 Queensway  
ENQUIRIES - Amy Chien 852 2822 8142

34-35 New Bond Street London W1A 2AA  
ENQUIRIES - Melanie Clore Philip Hook Simon Shaw  
+44 (0)20 7293 5363  
www.sothebys.com

Sotheby's  
EST. 1744