

Zero Heroes: Hong Kong's Most Inspiring Zero Waste Kings & Queens

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As humans, we make choices every single day that matter so much more than it may seem. Your life today is a result of a cumulative series of decisions you made yesterday. Collectively, as a race, we have made decisions – good and bad – that have brought our ecosystem to where its at now. There is no denying that our climate is changing. The earth is warming up and an overwhelming scientific [consensus](#) is that we, as humans, have caused this (read: global warming). In the wake of Mr. Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement (an accord in

which nearly every nation on the planet, including North Korea, has agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions), we need to take matters into our own hands and get to work on the local level. While this agreement is essential if our precious planet is going to have any chance of taking on this global threat, we can no longer sit back and wait for the government to decide. There is no time.

We are part of the solution, people! Zero Waste, the philosophy and lifestyle that aims to reduce the trash being sent to landfills or incinerators, is a movement that isn't just for hippies anymore. Thanks to global zero waste activists like Bea Johnson of [Zero Waste Home](#), Lauren Singer of [Trash is for Tossers](#), and Celia Ristow of [Litterless](#), the zero waste life has taken hold to be the change we desperately need in this world. This isn't just about keeping things out of landfills. It's about educating the public that might not know what waste prevention really is- let's be real, the word 'zero waste' does sound overwhelming- and bringing awareness about reducing demand for things that the earth cannot break down (read: plastic straws or takeaway boxes. And in our very own home of Hong Kong, we are blessed to have a growing community of Zero Waste pioneers who are bringing about a much needed change in our city. These movers and shakers are coming up with diverse solutions based on their respective skillsets and putting into action a movement that cannot succeed without people – *you!* From locals e-shops that encourage sustainable living, entrepreneurs leading zero waste philosophies in their businesses and startups aiming to curb waste in the food and fashion industry, meet some of Hong Kong's Zero Heroes.

Ed. Note: *This list is by no means exhaustive- there are many many zero heroes among us and this is only a shortlist; shoutout to heroes like Tracey Read & Dana Winograd of [Plastic Free Seas](#) and Gary Stokes of [Sea Shepherd HK](#) for their commitment to ridding our seas of plastic and the founders of the Hong Kong's many food waste charities Kevin Yeung of [Feeding HK](#), Vanessa Hwang of [Foodlink Foundation](#) and Gigi*

Tung of Food Angel.



Zero Waste Lifer Hannah Chung

London transplant Hannah Chung has been living a zero waste life for the past six months. Determined to commit to a whole year of zero waste, she is attempting to bring the amount of leftover waste she produces as close to nothing as humanly possible. Dedicated and practical, Cheung is tweaking every aspect of her life, from making her own toothpaste to participating in clothing swaps, and [documenting](#) her everyday journey on social media. Inspired by the movement led in the states, Chung felt the need to address a growing global issue in a city [notorious](#) for its gratuitous packaging: **“I feel like convenience is the major thing here in Hong Kong,” says Chung. “No one talks about zero waste and there’s a sense that you have to be perfect in order to practice it**

but it's not about being perfect. The whole idea why I started was just to spread the message of what an individual can do, however small it is." To begin living more green, Chung suggests abstaining from paper cups and plastic anything while out and about. Coffee drinkers, if you bring your own mug or tumbler, Starbucks will reward you with a discount. She also encourages everyone to pack baggies with you in order to avoid using plastic bags.

Next up for Chung is finishing out the rest of her zero waste challenge (she's got a few more months to go!) while continuing to spread the 'waste less' message everywhere she goes and inspiring others to enact their own zero waste challenges. Talk about leading through example!



F&B Waste Advocate Christian G. Mongendre, Founder of Home Eat To Live

Founder and CEO of one of [our](#) favorite plant-based eateries, [HOME – Eat to Live](#), Christian Mongendre is a Hong Kong's trailblazer when it comes to implementing a zero waste philosophy as a restaurateur. With HOME's flagship location on Des Voeux Road, Mongendre upcycled pieces of the former business (an old Burger King, of all places!) to prevent as much trash from being sent to landfills as possible. In the everyday operations of HOME, waste is at the forefront of all they do: produce is sourced as locally as possible, packaging is recyclable and compostable, cooking oil (they use high quality sunflower oil) is upcycling into multi-purpose dish soap that customers can use in their own homes, organic plastic soy milk bottles are repurposed into hot sauce (you can also take that home and then return the bottle to HOME for a discount off your next meal!), water filters ensure they don't partake in water bottle waste, scraps are composted...it's a 360 degrees approach. **“Every time we can be ingenious [about waste] to keep things that make business sense and makes sense to our ethos, we are going to do to the max,”** explains Mongendre. **“Even though we are a business, we want to respect certain core values that have been ingrained in HOME's DNA since day one.”**

Next up for Mongendre is rallying other restaurants in the city as part of a zero food waste alliance to have better lobbying power in terms of getting support from the government.



Ethical Food Practices Preacher Dr. Daisy Tam, Assistant Professor & Academic Researcher At HK Baptist University

Assistant Professor and academic researcher at [Hong Kong Baptist University](https://www.hongkongbaptist.edu.hk/), Dr. Daisy Tam specializes in ethical food practices and food waste in Hong Kong. Her passion for our food system began in London while doing field research selling apples in Borough Market on the weekends: “I spent five years meeting people from all walks of life, from the mornings with all the regular customers, to the tourists in the afternoons, and in the evenings the people who would recuperate the leftovers, and that was how I began being very interested in that particular economy, this alternative economy of surplus food.” Returning home after completing her PhD, the Hong Kong native took her interest in food waste to another level and sought-out to answer the question: how does Hong

Kong deal with surplus food and waste? **From her TED talk last year, Dr. Tam gives some scary [statistics](#) on Hong Kong's broken food system: for a city that produces only 2% of the vegetables we consume- meaning we essentially have to rely on other countries to import the food we eat- our city throws away 3,600 tonnes of food every day!** To educate her students and the rest of the world through lectures and workshops on being less wasteful, Dr. Tam suggests a shift in our attitude toward food consumption. For instance, the buffet. Hong Kong is a city that loves its all-you-can-eat buffets. These orgiastic food celebrations may seem wonderful for gourmands, but what you don't realize is that due to the government's health & safety regulations, residual food from a buffet once they've left the the kitchen cannot be donated to food banks or repurposed in any way. So yeah, those piles of noodles and heaps of shrimp you filled your plate with earlier? They cannot and will not be given away. (The leftovers in the kitchen, however, can be donated.) **“The food and beverage industry works on supply and demand,” explains the Goldsmiths grad. “Can we think further beyond our own plate?”**

Next up for Dr. Tam are more talks, lectures and workshops to raise more awareness academically and socially.



Fashion Waste Innovator Michelle Bang, Co-Founder Of BYT

Did you know that the fashion & textile industry is the second biggest environmental global polluter overall AND the second biggest polluter of clean water? That's right – despite textiles (meaning yarn, cloth and clothing) being almost 100% recyclable, fashion leaves behind tonnes of waste on a daily basis. To put this in perspective, China alone generates 26 million tonnes of textile waste each year; that is equivalent to 11,400 buses filled with textile waste every damn day. And that is exactly what [BYT](#) founder, Michelle Bang, is determined to fight against. An new affordable luxury up-cycled fashion brand, BYT will use sustainable socially responsible supply chains in Asia to create fashion pieces from unused surplus waste materials. **“I am definitely a fashion consumer. I love the aesthetics behind it, I love the artistry behind it,”** states

Bang. “I had no idea about the waste and what was happening behind the scenes.” A former investment banker, Bang switched over to a career in fashion after attending Harvard Business School where she worked alongside top tier luxury department stores like Neiman Marcus, Lane Crawford, and Harvey Nichols. After meeting [Christina Dean](#), founder of [Redress](#), an environmental NGO working to reduce waste in the fashion industry, Bang was recruited as their COO and a few years later, BYT was launched as a social impact business pushing Redress’ ethos with the native New Yorker at the helm. The first up-cycled collection is now underway and BYT will officially launch this September to coincide with Redress’ [EcoChic Design Award 2017](#) grand final. A capsule collection of 15 pieces will be unveiled and available on BYT’s [upcoming](#) e-commerce platform as well through Lane Crawford, a big win for an upstart company. **“I’m realizing as I’m launching BYT there are so many people that don’t know what’s happening in fashion because they see the surface of it,” explains Bang.** “But they don’t see the waste behind it and that’s one of the reasons why we want to launch BYT, together with Redress, to inform Asian customers at least on the fashion side. **And hopefully what we’re doing beyond fashion is creating a platform of a whole lifestyle change around sustainability so that you can see a lot of sustainable innovators along different verticals.**” For fashionistas (and people who like wearing clothes, in general) looking to lower their textile footprint, Bang suggests renting pieces for one-off events (like Bang’s HBS friends who started US-based online platform, [Rent the Runway](#), that provides designer dress and accessory rentals), buy secondhand vintage, or swap clothing with other friends. Green Queen has some [great resources](#) for this.

Next up for Bang and BYT post launch will be the expansion of their collection to dress men and women of all ages, followed with a children’s line in the near future.



Single Use Plastic Crusader Lisa Odell, Founder Of Plastic-Free HK

One of the first Hong Kong [e-shops](#) to sell sustainable and eco-friendly wares, [Lisa Odell](#) launched [Plastic-Free HK](#) with the goal to give Hong Kongers access to products that can get them one step closer to being plastic free. This means cloth produce bags, bamboo toothbrushes and reusable cutlery. For those looking to get started living zero waste, **Odell's number one suggestion to stop using single use disposables: "Plastic straws, plastic cutlery, plastic bags, plastic water bottles, you get the picture,"** says the former real estate broker. "Create a simple 'BYO' kit to always have in your purse, backpack or luggage." Though many zero waste resources can be hard to come by, which may be why it's difficult to begin leading by example (and the reason Plastic-Free HK began in the first place!), Odell has been seeing an uptick

of Hong Kongers embracing the movement: **“I believe there is a big ‘awakening’ happening right now,”** says Odell. **“Many people are voicing their concern for the environment and their desire to live more in alignment with Mother Nature.”**

Next up for Odell is the continuation of stocking up Plastic-Free HK with as many products as she can find to spread the zero waste message. In fact, the e-store has just become the first and only retailer of the wildly popular eco-friendly, non-toxic [Planetbox](#) bento-style lunch boxes. If you haven't seen them yet- have a look-see! They are pretty cool!



Food Waste Pioneer Florent Sollier, Co-Founder Of Food Savior

Co-founder of [Food Savior](#) Florent Sollier, along with his co-creators Liz Thomas and Adrien Hay, has built a [platform](#) to let Hong Kongers lead the

way when it comes to food waste change. By connecting consumers with restaurants that offer last minute deals on their unsold stock, the site is a solution to Hong Kong's growing food waste problem where everyone – patrons, restaurants, and the environment – wins. **“We could see that there was a huge surplus of food in Hong Kong, and we could also see there was a need to reduce food waste,” says Sollier about how Food Savior came about.** Stepping up eco-friendly efforts in his own life, Sollier follows the ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’ philosophy at home. To reduce packaging and waste, Sollier makes his own bread and is currently experimenting with homemade coconut yoghurt, which is stored in repurposed glass jars. To limit plastics around the home, he uses refillable bottles, bamboo toothbrushes and wooden earbuds. “We have a toddler and a lot of his toys are preloved,” says Sollier. **“It sounds harsh, but Hong Kong is so transient that there are plenty of groups selling nearly new toys. This way, there’s less packaging and the toys are getting a second chance.”** To get started living zero waste, Sollier suggests starting small and work up from there. Carry a water bottle and a cloth bag wherever you go, and say no to straws.

Up next for Sollier are expansions across Hong Kong island, Kowloon and New Territories for Food Savior. They are working to include French gourmet retailer and deli [Monsieur CHATTÉ](#), award-winning Arabic cuisine spot [Oh Food Halal](#) and much-loved New York style bagel maker [Shragels](#) on the site. Be on the lookout for the launch of their wholesale division: they are working with big F&B producers to sell their overstock through Food Savior.

Images courtesy of Pexels (lead), Hannah Chung, HOME – Eat to Live, Daisy Tam, Chivas Regal, Lisa Odell and Florent Sollier.

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Jenny Star Lor is Green Queen's resident wellness writer. Originally from Los Angeles, she now calls Hong Kong home. She has worked for global publications such as The Hollywood Reporter and US Weekly. She is also passionate about pole dancing and teaches in Hong Kong.