

巴士公司撤優惠落井下石

本港四家巴士公司將由明年初開始取消已經實行了三年的回程折扣及長者假日兩元乘車的優惠，這將是一項極不受歡迎、亦非常不明智的做法，經濟上打擊民生，社會上損害和諧，且與政府大力推動的利民紓困、共渡時艱宗旨完全背道而馳，必將會引起社會各方的抨擊。

兩項優惠，是在二〇〇六年二月份經四家巴士公司與運輸局多次磋商後達致的，而不可忘記的是，當日同時出台的還有一項「可加可減」機制，而九巴、城巴及大嶼山巴士公司亦同時獲得了十年專營權的延長。如今僅事隔三年，市民未見「可減」機制有進一步落實，但「可加」卻已迫近眼前；而更令人費解的是，「可加可減」機制是參考消費物價指數等民生因素而制訂的，而當前狀況是失業率上升、居民收入下降，何以會是「可加」的適當時刻？

對數以百萬計的巴士乘客來說，所謂「取消優惠」，其實就是變相加價。以回程折扣為例，從天水圍乘「九六七」到中環或金鐘，取消優惠後來回車費將由三十八元五角增加至四十二元八角，每日要多付四元，增幅達到一成。而以一個低收入打工仔來說，每月光是這一項車費支出，就要一千多元，一個家庭，如果同時有兩個成人要上班、兩個孩子要上學，每月車費開支動輒三千多元，餘下的收入要應付房租、膳食、水電、醫療……，試問還何來能力娛樂消費？

同樣，取消長者假日兩元優惠車資，「殺傷力」更加直接；對不少低收入長者來說，這假日的兩元車資，簡直就是「天堂」般的優惠，每周末出購物、與親友聚會以至「探孫」，都會留待這一天去進行。如今優惠消失，對這些使一個錢都要「諗過度過」的老人家來說，唯一的辦法就是減少外出以至不外出。

而居民、長者減少外出，這與當前特區政府正大力推動的增加消費、刺激經濟等措施的精神符合麼？與政府大力鼓吹的同舟共濟以及企業精



四家巴士公司以盈利大幅倒退為由，在這經濟困難時期宣布明年起陸續取消優惠，被各界批評罔顧社會責任（林雨桑攝）

神、企業社會責任又符合麼？可以說，如果未來政府真有意派發五百元或一千元消費券，則這「德政」的效果，肯定也會被這兩項撤銷所削弱。對普羅大眾來說，手上有了幾百元的消費券，但坐車已經去掉一截，一家人多去幾次就要「賠本」。

對取消兩項票價優惠，巴士公司負責人當然可以提出一大堆理由和數據，包括油價上升、過海隧道加價以及工資成本等；但是，油價近日已大幅回落，個別巴士公司亦已揚言明年不會給員工加薪，如此未來經營成本只會進一步受到控制

及調低。更重要的是，在專營合約下，巴士公司是享有「可賺取利潤」保障的，如此既在經營上有一定的優勢，在義務上就更應履行一定的社會責任，當不少中小型企業的僱主都在千方百計開動腦筋，開源節流、打開生路而不向員工開刀之際，作為專營的巴士公司卻以顧客、市民為魚肉，試問社會責任何在？企業良心何在？對比內地一些大城市，老人乘車根本不收費，本港幾間巴士連這兩元的一點點「廉價敬老」都要收回，也未免太忍心一點了吧？

2008/12/11 大公报社評

Editorial

Bus companies taking mean advantage

Starting early next year four of Hong Kong's major bus operators will scrap the three-year-old return fare concessions and senior citizen fare reductions that allow the elderly to travel for a flat \$2 on Sundays and public holidays. This will be an extremely unwelcome and unwise decision, hurting people's livelihood and jeopardizing social harmony. It also goes completely against the Government's principle of helping the community ride out hardships and thus is to be criticised by society.

Agreement on the fare concessions for same-day-return trips and for the elderly on holidays was reached in February 2006 after negotiations between the four bus operators and the then Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (now Transport and Housing Bureau). But what should not be forgotten is that a "bus fare adjustment mechanism" was also introduced at the same time, and three bus companies – Kowloon Motor Bus, Citybus and New Lantau Bus – also had their franchises renewed for another 10 years. But now, just three years later, while the "downward adjustment mechanism" has yet to be triggered, the "upward adjustment" is imminent. It is even harder to understand how this is considered a right time for an "upward adjustment" when unemployment is going up and household income going down since, according to the mechanism, bus fare adjustment must be made with reference to factors affecting people's livelihood such as the consumer price index (CPI).

For millions of bus passengers, the so-called "cancellation of fare concessions" in fact is a fare hike in a disguised form. Taking the same-day-return trip for example, with the concession scrapped, the round trip fare on bus route No 967 from Tin Shui Wai to Central or Admiralty will jump to \$42.8 from \$38.5 – a passenger will have to pay \$4, or 10%, more per day. A low-income worker will have to spend an additional \$1,000 or more on the bus transport per

month. Thus a household may have to pay an additional \$3,000 or even more, with two adults going out to work and two children to go to school. With the remainder of its income, it still has to pay for housing rent, food, water and electricity charges, medical care...so where can it find extra money for entertainment or other consumptions?

Similarly, scraping the \$2 fare reduction for the elderly on holidays has a more direct "killing power". For many low-income senior citizens, the \$2 reduction on holidays is simply like some "god-given" benefit. They would wait for such a day in a week to go out shopping, meeting relatives or visiting their grandchildren. With the concession gone, these senior citizens, for whom every penny counts, will have to cut down on outings or even refrain from going out at all.

However, does cutting outings for residents and senior citizens accord with the intention of government measures to boost consumption and stimulate the economy? Does this agree with the government appeal (to citizens) "to cross the river on the same boat", with the enterprise spirit and enterprise social responsibility? It can be concluded that if in future the Government would agree to issue \$500 or \$1,000 consumption vouchers to each citizen, the effect of such a "benevolent policy" would certainly be weakened by the cancellation of the bus fare concessions. Even if grassroots citizens were given consumption vouchers worth several

hundred dollars, most of it would be taken away by transport. A household would even be "loss making" if its members went out more.

To justify the cancellation of the fare concessions, executives of the bus companies no doubt could present a lot of reasons and statistics such as oil price hikes, increases of charges of cross-harbour tunnels and of labour costs. But oil prices have dropped sharply lately. Some bus operators have also announced they would not raise pay for their employees. Therefore, their future operations costs will be more under control and reduced. More importantly, under their franchise agreements, bus companies enjoy the protection for their "earnable profits". With such advantages in business operation, they should be more obliged to take up their social responsibility. In a time when employers of quite a few small-and medium-sized enterprises are **racking their brains** and making all efforts to broaden income sources and reduce expenditures so as not to victimize their employees, franchised bus companies want to cruelly put their customers and citizens at their mercy. Where is their enterprise social responsibility? Where is their enterprise conscience? In some Mainland cities, senior citizens need to pay no bus fares. In Hong Kong, in contrast, the bus operators now even want to take back such a tiny token of "respecting the elderly" as the \$2 holiday fare reduction. Isn't this too cruel a move?

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Idiom:

Rack one's brains – To try very hard to think of something.

Examples:

1. Don't waste any more time racking your brains. Go and ask Tom for help with your homework.
2. He is racking his brains to find a way to solve the problem.
3. Sally is racking her brains out to finish this puzzle.
4. I racked my brains all morning, but couldn't remember where I put the dictionary.
5. I've been racking my brains all day, but I couldn't remember her name.

22 萬巴士客搭貴車

，逢星期日及公眾假期，可以2元優惠價乘搭大部分路線。

上述優惠期到明年陸續屆滿，立法會剛在前天（17日）通過4間巴士公司延長長者假日優惠1年，優惠期至2010年，共有約30萬名長者乘客繼續享有優惠；但長程乘客即日回程優惠，各巴士公司的獨營路線將在明年2月18日起分階段取消，聯營

路線會在明年7月1日起取消優惠，每日共22萬人次乘客每程需多付1元至6元車費。另外，根據政府資料顯示，2006年4月11日，香港政府環境運輸及工務局公布有關兩鐵合併後的「可加可減機制」，是一種監管公營服務機構收費的機制，藉以在限制公營機構加價的幅度之餘，亦令他們在通縮的情況下需要下調收費。

中文基本功

闡字粵語讀展

朋友告訴我：香港電台的人，常把闡述的闡讀成善。我反問：你是指闡述、闡釋、闡明、闡發、闡揚的闡字嗎？朋友說：正是。我於是留意。終於在十一月十一日收聽《一分鐘閱讀》時聽到了，果如朋友所言。

這個有關述等五種用途的闡字，粵語一律讀展。廣東人誤讀其他音，不自今日始，也非個別人才誤讀。說得明白一點，這種誤讀，頗為普遍，連掛教授銜的，也是「賢者不免」！就我所聞，誤讀闡字的有兩種情況，一是誤讀善，如港台那位先生；一是誤讀禪字的去聲。

原來，闡字和禪字，都包含一個單字。禪字粵語可讀蟬可讀善，前者佛教用語，後者指讓位如唐虞禪讓。

如果讀書不求甚解，但求望文生義或者有邊讀邊，則讀成禪字去聲或讀成善，可能與此有關。

同時，單字除了一般讀丹，也可以讀蟬（如用於匈奴君主的單于），更可讀善（如姓單）。這與闡讀禪字去聲和誤讀善，也未嘗無關。

有人把粵人誤讀闡字歸咎於受普通話影響。我不敢苟同。因為，在普通話裡，佛教用的禪字，與蟬字、蟬字、蟬字，屬同一聲母的第二聲，而闡字在這個聲母中屬第三聲；至於比喻讓位的禪，以及姓單的單，卻是不同聲母，而且屬第四聲。假如誤讀的人，要把普通話翻作粵音而誤讀闡字，不是有點離譜？

容若

五星級英文



學好第二語言要有耐性

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在冰島首都Reykjavik步行時，從沒看到有人追巴士、追的士。巴士的班次並不頻密，乘客都像美國近郊乘巴士的人一樣，很了解巴士行車的時間表。的士呢，我有個星期天在街上邊走邊找的士，找了半小時，才在一個巴士總站附近找到一個的士站。的士不會在街上轉圈找客，它們會在的士站等。酒店職員說，乘的士的人通常會電召。

接觸到的冰島，是個有條理有系統的地方。接觸的人，說話的節奏也像他們生活節奏一樣，比歐洲南部慢一點。這無疑是受環境影響，在漫長嚴寒的冬天，日子並不容易過，尤其在以往科技不發達的時候。

若以達爾文適者生存的理論看，生性沒有條理、思想不夠周密的人，在大北方物競天擇的過程裡，早已經被淘汰了。雖然說今日冰島或北歐的人生來有整理、儲存資訊的能力，未免流於妄下定論。但研究他們是否有利於學語言的質素，卻是個有趣、值得思考的課題。

舉一個生活小環節為例。以前冰島沒有巴士，也沒有的士，其中一種

交通工具是用狗拉木頭車。狗不像馬般有力，通常至少要七八隻狗才可拉一架小車。要載人又載貨，或者加上打獵得來的獵物，就要十幾隻狗才拉得動。這種看來甚有詩意的物流工具，背後原來需要車長很大的耐性和堅忍。1996年我在格陵蘭生活了3個月，曾和獵人一起去打獵。原來把一隻狗用繩綁上木頭車是需要5分鐘以上的過程。要打繩結，有時要把手套除下，在攝氏零下的氣溫徒手處理細緻的繩結，與在自動波汽車軚盤前按紐有天淵之別。

需放下原有邏輯概念

冰島今日是個幾乎戶戶有汽車的國家，但上述那種生活態度至少這一代人仍未失去。我在往機場之前，跟接送的司機談天。他說，冰島人必須有很強的忍耐力。上個月下大雪，他就在這條往機場的路上困了5小時。

有這種耐性的人學第二語言，能學不好嗎？

學第二語言是需要放下本來已有的邏輯概念，這點與耐性也有關，下文再談。

(冰島行 · 下)

社經「數」描

既要保經濟又要破房產泡沫

內地要保經濟增長（保八），推出一系列擴大內需政策，包括調低利率、加大政府公共財政投入等等，都顯示中央政府對「保八」的決心。不過保八並非房地產泡沫。

兩難局面進退維谷

前任人大副委員長成思危指出，房地產對推動經濟、促進經濟快速發展具有重大意義。

中國有13億人口，房地產還有巨大發展空間，中國大約有20%的家庭需要通過租房解決居住問題，20%的家庭通過經濟適用房和廉價解決居住問題，剩下60%的家庭理應可通過

市場解決居住問題。中國在金融海嘯下要保住經濟增長，又要平衡房地產市場不再泡沫，實陷於進退兩難局面。

全球新一輪經濟調整，基本上各國皆出現房地產泡沫爆破現象；內地經濟增長較顯著的一線城市，也隨着調整發生變化；不過，政府推出保經濟政策，間接保了房地產，誠如中央政策清楚不過房地產是民生問題，可是如今在一線城市的樓價並非60%的市民可負擔。看來，內地房地產還需調整，既可保八，又可讓泡沫消失才是。

專業教育培訓顧問 呂康

通識記憶體

4間專營巴士公司：九巴、新巴、城巴及龍運於2006年2月19日開始，向使用八達通的乘客提供為期3年、全新的八達通「即日回程車資折扣」。優惠期內，乘搭車費在15元或以上路線，即日來回每程可獲八折優惠，共涉42條路線；而車費介乎10元至14.9元的長途路線，即日來回可獲九折優惠，共涉56條路線；60歲或以上長者使用八達通卡