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Lower Intermediate S1

A Troubled Chinese Past

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Traditional Chinese

- A 旺角嘅治安曾經好差。
B 點解咁講？
A 以前成日有黑社會開片。
B 咁誇張？咁而家呢？
A 好咗好多，冇咩大事發生。
B 咁都好啲。

Jyutping

- A Wong6 gok3 ge3 zi6 on1 cang4 ging1 hou2 caa1.
B Dim2 gai2 gam2 gong2?
A Ji5 cin4 seng4 jat6 jau5 hak1 se3 wui2 hoi1 pin2.
B Gam3 kwaa1 zoeng1?Gan2 ji4 gaa1 ne1?
A Hou2 zo2 hou2 do1,mou5 me1 daai6 si6 faat3 sang1.
B Gam2 dou1 hou2 di1.

English

- A Mongkok didn't used to be a safe place.
B Why do you say so?
A There used to be gun fights there a lot.
B Really? what about now?
A It's much better now. Nothing too serious has happened.
B That's good.

Vocabulary

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Traditional	Jyutping	English
旺角	wong6 gok3	Mong kok
治安	zi6 on1	public safety
曾經	cang4 ging1	use to be
點解咁講	dim2 gaa1 gam2 gong2	why do you say so?
一度	jat1 dou6	once
黑社會	hak1 se3 wui2.	the mob
開片	hoi1 pin2	to fight
誇張	kwaa1 zeong1	to exaggerate

Vocabulary Sample Sentences

旺角係香港人口最密集嘅地方。	Wong6 gok3 hai6 heong1 gong2 jan4 hau2 zoi3 mat6 zaap6 ge3 dei6 fong1.	Mong Kok is one of the most densely populated places in HK.
你屋企附近治安咁差，最好就早睇返屋企。	Nei5 uk1 kei2 fu6 gan6 zi6 on1 gam3 caa1,zeoi3 hou2 zau6 zou2 faan1 uk1 kei2.	It's not very safe around your home, so you'd better go home earlier.
呢一帶曾經係好繁華嘅地段，不過而家已經荒廢囉。	Nei1 jat1 daai3 cang4 ging1 hai6 hou2 faan4 waa4 ge3 dei6 dyun6,bat1 gwo3 ji4 gaa1 ji5 ging1 fong1 fai3 saai3.	This used to be a bustling place, but it is empty now.
點解咁講啊？我唔係好同意妳嘅講法喔。	Dim2 gaa1 gam2 gong2 aa3?Ngo5 m4 hai6 hou2 tung4 ji3 nei5 ge3 gong2 faat3 wo3.	Why do you say so ? I don't agree with you.
佢嘅工作一度好唔順利，不過而家越嚟越好。	Koi5 ge3 gong1 zok3 jat1 dou6 hou2 m4 seon6 lei6 ,bat1 gwo3 ji4 gaa1 jyut6 lai4 jyut6 hou2.	He was once unlucky in his work, but it getting better and better.
差人對個班黑社會採取咗懲罰性措施。	Caai1 jan4 deoi3 go2 baan1 hak1 se3 wui2 coi2 ceoi2 zo2 cing4 fat6 sing3 cou3 si1.	The police took punitive measures against the mob.
尋日學校裏面有人開片，搞到有人受傷。	Cam4 jat6 hok6 haau6 leoi5 min6 jau5 jan4 hoi1 pin2,gaau2 dou3 jau5 jan4 sau6 seong1.	Yesterday there was a fight in the schoolyard, somebody was hurt.
唔好咁誇張啦，邊有咁好啊。	M4 hou2 gam3 kwaa1 zeong1 laa1,bin1 jau5 gam3 hou2 aa3.	Please don't exaggerate, it cant be that good.

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Grammar Points

The Focus of this Lesson is a Gaze into the Past

旺角嘅治安曾經好差。

"Mongkok didn't used to be a safe place."

Our grammar section in this lesson is focused on four nouns that are frequently used to refer to the past in Cantonese. In our dialogue, we run into the first of these in the sentence 旺角嘅治安曾經好差 ("Mongkok didn't used to be a safe place"). The word 曾經 here means "in the past." It is similar to the word 一度, which also means "in the past" but differs in the implication that something has happened only once. Look at the following two examples:

1. 我一度差點加入咗黑社會。
"Once, I almost joined the mob."
2. 佢曾經工作上面好唔順利。
"He's been unlikely in work in the past."

Translating these sorts of sentences from English into Cantonese is trickier than the other way around, since English is much more fluid in where time phrases can be placed. In Cantonese the default is to place them either immediately before or immediately after the subject. When time phrases are nouns, they can also be used to answer questions as single-word answers. When did you do it? Sometime in the past.

The next two words we highlight in this lesson are 以前 and 從前. Both of these are relatively vague and open-ended words which mean generally in the past, but also imply that something has happened a long time ago. 以前 is the more colloquial of these two while 從前 is a bit more formal, as in the following examples:

1. 我以前就經常去旺角行街。
"In the past, I often went to Mongkok to go shopping."
2. 從前香港只不過係一個好細嘅漁港。
"In the past, Hong Kong was only a small fishing port."

Cultural Insight

What is Mongkok Really Like?

If your knowledge of Hong Kong comes mostly from movies like *As the Tears Go*

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By (旺角卡門) or One Night (旺角黑夜), you'd be forgiven for thinking that Mongkok (旺角) is a chaotic urban jungle filled with gangs, fighting and weapons. In reality, the area is now one of the most dense parts of the island, with tons of small shops and food from all over Asia. It is also considered one of the must-visit places in Hong Kong by both locals and tourists. And compared to more high-end areas like Victoria Bay (維多利亞灣) and Pacific Plaza (太古廣場), Mongkok gives people more of a feeling of reflecting ordinary Hong Kong life.