



This photo shows mahjong tile artisan Cheung Shun-king posing in his under-the-stair shop, Biu Kee Mahjong, in the Yau Tsim Mong District of Hong Kong. — AFP photos



Mahjong tile artisan Cheung Shun-king displaying his tool set, including a drill stand, carving knives, writing brushes and paint, used to make hand-carved mahjong pieces, at his shop in the Yau Tsim Mong district of Hong Kong.



Mahjong tile artisan Cheung Shun-king using a knife to remove excessive paint from a mahjong piece.



Mahjong tile artisan Cheung Shun-king, 70, painting Chinese characters on mahjong piece.

## Hong Kong mahjong carver among the last of his kind

Eyebrows furrowed in careful concentration as he chisels images and Chinese characters onto mahjong tiles, 70-year-old Cheung Shun-king is one of the last craftsmen of his kind in Hong Kong. Hand carving playing tiles for the popular Chinese game used to be a source of income for many, but the introduction of much cheaper machine-made sets whittled away at their customer base and turned their work into a rarity. Cheung's family alone used to own four separate shops, where as a teenager he learned his trade. Now only one remains.

"I have given my youth to it," he says of his work. "I don't know if I'll have the energy to carry on in a few years, but for now, I'll continue to do it." Cheung's store is on a street lined with mahjong parlours, but none of them buy their tiles from him. "My mahjong sets are expensive," he admits. A full set of hand-carved tiles costs HK\$5,500 (US\$700), he says, whereas machine-carved ones are around HK\$2,000.

The price reflects the time spent making them. Industrial production of tiles takes about an hour, but it takes five days for Cheung to complete the process of carving and coloring his tiles. Many of his customers buy sets as souvenirs and often request customized images.

But Cheung thinks this recent surge in interest in an old tradition may be ephemeral. "It is only in these last few



Mahjong tile artisan Cheung Shun-king, 70, carving mahjong pieces by hand at his shop.

years that people have felt a sense of nostalgia" and come to buy his tiles, he says. "What if a few years later no one feels nostalgia?" Despite his belief that his industry will continue to decline, Cheung says he will work for as long as he can, until there is no demand. He used to conduct workshops for young people but does not want to take on apprentices because of his pessimism.

"To learn (this skill) isn't a matter of one or two months-attempting it wouldn't work if you didn't immerse yourself in it for two to three years," Cheung says. "If,

by then, handcrafted mahjong tiles are no more a trend, then this skill would become useless." Cheung does not know how to play mahjong himself-his interest lies only in crafting the tiles. He says that being called an artist, however, is flattering, and a "big compliment" for him. "If others say it is art, then it is art. For me, it is my job, as I have to make a living." — AFP

## Apple TV+ counts its 'Luck' as fallen 'Toy Story' exec makes comeback

Like all good animated family movies, "Luck" has a thoroughly optimistic premise: that no matter how hopeless or dire your circumstances may seem, something good will eventually come of it. Apple TV+ will be hoping the same is true for John Lasseter, the former Pixar guru who resigned under a cloud of #MeToo harassment claims, and later became head of the new Skydance Animation.

"Luck" is that studio's first film, available to stream Friday, which follows 18-

year-old girl Sam and a talking black cat called Bob on their adventures in the fantastical Land of Luck. In this land of perfect fortune, all the world's good and bad luck is produced by magical creatures including leprechauns, dragons, unicorns and goblins, who then funnel it down to Earth. The movie features a voice cast of Simon Pegg, Whoopi Goldberg and Jane Fonda, along with Broadway star Eva Noblezada in the lead role of Sam, the world's unluckiest girl.

The cast could have been even starrer, had Emma Thompson not very publicly withdrawn in 2019 over the hiring of Lasseter, publishing her resignation letter in the Los Angeles Times. It was a decision that other cast members have mulled over, with Pegg telling AFP he "initially" had qualms before deciding to proceed. "It's a dangerous thing to just write people off immediately, I think, if there's some accountability, if there's some acknowledgement and acceptance," he told AFP.

### 'Complicated'

Lasseter, who transformed Pixar from a small Lucasfilm graphics department into the world's most successful animation studio with hits including "Toy Story," was accused of misconduct at the 2017 height of the #MeToo movement. The powerful studio president apologized to "anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of an unwanted hug," and for "falling short" in ensuring a culture of "trust and respect." The following year, he resigned, acknowledging in an internal memo that he had made staff feel "disrespected or uncomfortable."

Multiple sources alleged that Lasseter was a heavy drinker at company social events who would try to kiss women, place his hands on their thighs and hug them in meetings. In her letter, Thompson said the case of Lasseter was "complicated." Upon his hiring by Skydance, Thompson wrote that "any Skydance employees who don't want to give him a second chance have to stay

and be uncomfortable or lose their jobs."

For Pegg, it was important that Lasseter had "admitted accountability for the things that had been aimed at him." "We're all doomed if we are banished for stuff that we regret and apologize for, and mean that apology. That's the most important thing." Goldberg had a more succinct take: "Everybody steps in it sometime," she told AFP.

### 'Real-world stakes'

In the film, Sam-an orphan who has reached adulthood without finding a permanent foster home-follows Bob the cat (Pegg) into the Land of Luck in order to find a lucky penny. She hopes this magical coin can help her young friend Hazel find the "forever family" she never had. Of course, getting her hands on it is anything but straightforward, taking Sam on a physical journey through the realm's whirring Rube Goldberg machines and glittering waterfalls-and an emotional one.

"I really love that element. It's a film which is the most outrageous environments and concepts but paired with genuine real-world stakes about friendship," said Pegg. "Sometimes what appears to be bad luck can end up being good luck. Not least for Sam, who apparently lives an entire life of bad luck, only to go on this adventure and find exactly what she's looking for." For the filmmakers, the withdrawal of Thompson led to the hiring of Oscar-winner and social campaigner Jane Fonda, playing an elegant dragon who is the CEO of the luck-making operation. "When Jane joined the cast, I looked to her as being such a legendary activist and feminist," said Pegg. "I felt like she was a great person to take the lead from. And it was her involvement in the film that cemented my decision to do it." — AFP



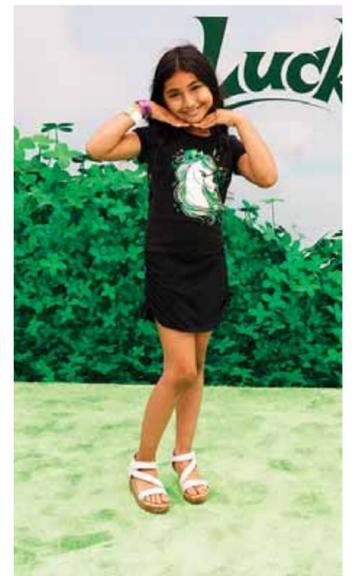
Bianca D'Ambrosio, Chiara D'Ambrosio attend Apple Original Films' "Luck" Premiere Event at Regency Village Theatre.



Eva Noblezada, Adelynn Spoon, John Ratzberger, Colin O'Donoghue attends Apple Original Films' "Luck" Premiere Event at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California.



Juju Green attends Apple Original Films' "Luck" Premiere Event at Regency Village Theatre.



Zara Jirgis attends Apple Original Films' "Luck" Premiere Event at Regency Village Theatre. — AFP photos