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Please send all correspondence to: The Asian Reporter
922 N Killingsworth Street, Suite 2D, Portland, OR 97217
Phone: (503) 283-4440, Fax: (503) 283-4445

News Department e-mail: news@asianreporter.com
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Publisher **Jaime Lim**
Contributing Editors

Ronault L.S. Catalani (Polo), Jeff Wenger
Correspondents

Ian Blazina, Josephine Bridges, Pamela Ellgen,
Maileen Hamto, Edward J. Han, A.P. Kryza,
Marie Lo, Simeon Mamaril, Julie Stegeman,
Toni Tabora-Roberts, Allison Voigts

Illustrator **Jonathan Hill**

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News Department e-mail: news@asianreporter.com

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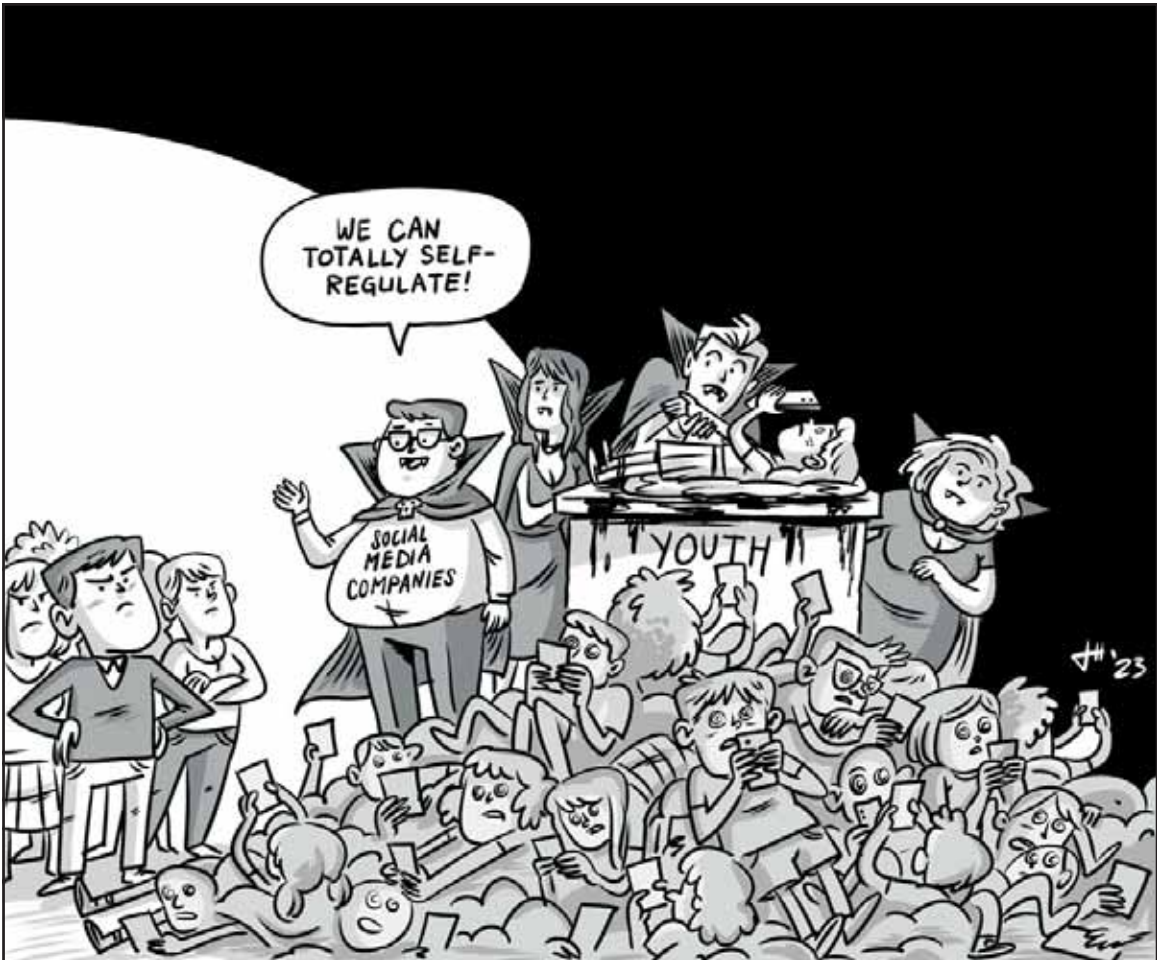
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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



The promise and reality of our Asian vegetable garden

Picture this: A gentle climb into a rolling hillside gives way to an organic family farm with rows of delectable fruits, herbs, and vegetables sprouting up in a celebration of Mother Nature's bounty, nourishing our family with crops our own brood has harvested under the clear skies of Southern California.

This is the vision I had looking at our backyard hillside. As an Asian family, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to grow vegetables specific to Asian cooking. Instead of lettuce — bok choy and napa cabbage; instead of carrots — Asian green beans.

I'm not a farmer. I don't claim to have a green thumb. But, if there's a will, there's a way. And at least for a few months, there was definitely a will.

I started on one small patch of land on our hillside. I cleared the area, dug it up, added rich soil and a programmable sprinkler system, and planted an assortment of Asian vegetables.

Our first harvest was beautiful — an explosion of bok choy, big, healthy bunches of green beans, and napa cabbage galore. I made proclamations: I am a planter! I am the giver of life! I am the grower of things! I am the provider for my family!

Then came the second harvest.

It's like I started my own homegrown zoo of squirrels, rabbits, gophers, snails, and birds. The animals should have been required to tip me 15% for the bounty of food I provided. Apparently, these animals loved the variety of vegetables they can't get from our neighbor's garden.

I tried everything. Nothing worked. I gave up.

Then I had an epiphany. Instead of growing everything in the ground, I bought and built three large, elevated vegetable gardens. That should solve my problem.

Our first harvest in the raised vegetable garden was another beautiful bounty of goodies. Napa cab-

bage galore. A big, bountiful bloom of green beans!

And time for more proclamations: I have beat back the rodents of my previous demise! I am horticulturist extraordinaire! I am greenskeeper incarnate!

Then came the second harvest from our raised vegetable garden. You may sense a pattern here.

Apparently, the animals had found their way into the raised beds. My raised vegetable garden was now an all-you-can-eat vegetable buffet.

I tried everything. I put barriers on the legs of the planters. It didn't work. I put netting around the tops of the planters. The animals forced their

way under the netting.

I started researching what animal could possibly navigate through the sophisticated barricade I'd erected around the vegetable garden. From what I could ascertain, a small bunny can't leap three feet straight into the air to reach the edge of the box! How would birds get through the netting? How could squirrels crawl up what I would describe as barbed wire nailed against the legs of the planters?

Late at night after I went to bed, I envisioned a horde of squirrels setting up an elaborate catapult that flung them into the far reaches of my raised vegetable garden.

In the end, I finally managed to protect my precious vegetables by adding a flexible, metal mesh around each of the raised beds.

I probably now need to revise the original idyllic vision I had in mind and replace it with something a little closer to reality.

Picture this: Three cramped, raised vegetable garden beds that look like a detention center for offending vegetables, forever in solitary confinement until the warden frees them from their involuntary lives of isolation.

Humor writer Wayne Chan lives in the San Diego area; cartoonist Wayne Chan is based in the Bay Area.

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