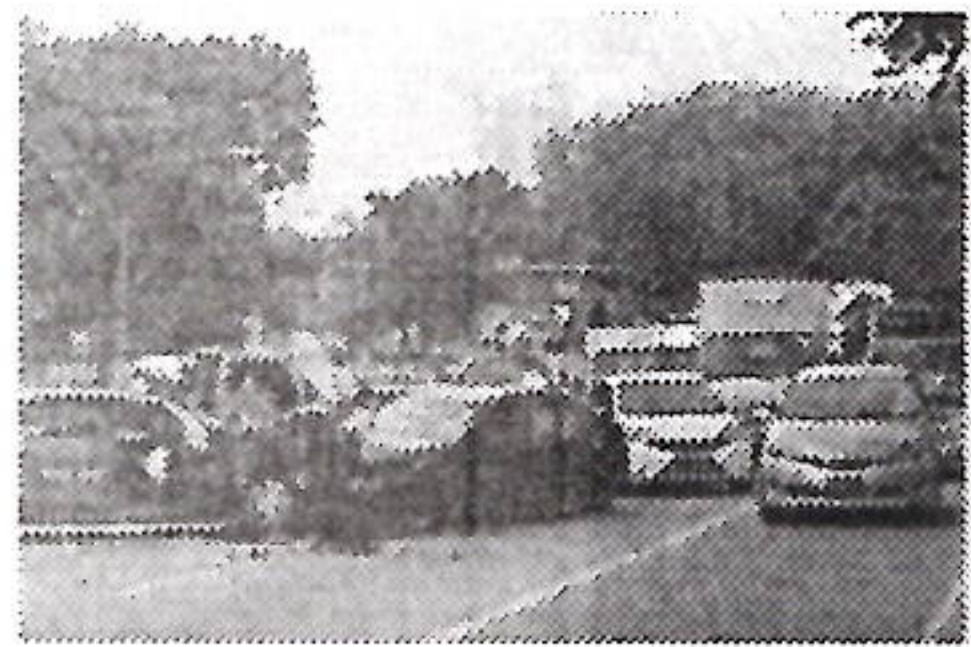




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Bookbinding boss starts a new chapter for a new age



Bynd Artisan employee Tan Buay Heng (far left) with the firm's co-founder Winnie Chan. After working in

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Bookbinding company Grandluxe's 75-year history dates back to when Ms Winnie Chan's grandmother sewed account sheets into books by hand in a workshop.

With accounting software and mobile phone calendar apps now favoured over books and diaries, Ms Chan had to come up with new ways to engage customers.

After working in the family business for 20 years, she launched retail company Bynd Artisan in 2014 with her husband, selling custom-made notebooks and personalised leather products. They have three outlets now and they are opening a fourth this year.

Ms Chan, who is in her mid-40s, told The Straits Times: "We had to make sure we give customers an experience. They interact with craftsmen and they're part of the process of creating the product."

Bynd Artisan was cited by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the May Day Rally as an example of a business that is upgrading and expanding what it can do. He noted that agencies Spring Singapore and IE Singapore are helping other small firms make similar changes.

Five of Bynd Artisan's craftsmen, including Ms Tan Buay Heng, 55, were former Grandlux workers whose jobs were lost when the company moved its bookbinding and printing production to Malaysia.

But after attending customer service classes, they are now employed as craftsmen and shop managers, with a pay rise of around 30 per cent. Some also give bookbinding lessons at workshops.

The older workers were initially afraid of change and made a few mistakes, but have now gained confidence, said Ms Chan. "It's about helping them ease into the role and see how they can add value."

Joanna Seow