

14 years' jail for chef who carried drugs

CHARLOTTE PARSONS

A chef was lured into the drug trade after his bosses went bankrupt and refused to pay him.

Kwok Chung-kee, 51, was yesterday jailed for 14 years after he admitted trafficking in almost 3½ kilograms of heroin.

"The only hope expressed by the defendant and his family is that he has a chance to come out and see daylight before he dies," defence barrister Peter Wan told the Court of First Instance.

Kwok turned to drug trafficking after a friend offered him \$15,000 a month to work as chief cook at a new restaurant in southern China.

The chef, who took up the position in July last year, was delighted because his wife and children lived there.

But the restaurant failed to prosper and shut down three months later.

Kwok did not receive a cent for his four months' work.

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"Time after time he tried to get the owners to pay him the salary, to no avail," Mr Wan said.

A man called Chan then offered Kwok \$10,000 to bring heroin into Hong Kong.

"He was out of pocket and so stupid, partly perhaps because of his low education, that he didn't think much about it and agreed to do it," Mr Wan said.

Kwok was arrested with the drug on February 28 after travelling to Hong Kong by ferry.

Deputy Judge Michael Hartmann said he could not allow sympathy for the cook's plight to influence his decision to sentence him to 14 years' jail.

"It is a sad fact of life that couriers are often chosen because they are easily persuaded to risk their futures for pathetically small amounts of money," he said.

"Young people, drug addicts, the handicapped, and old people like the defendant are chosen because they are down on their luck."