

A concept that worked in 1800s

By LUISA TAM

LICENSING of prostitution is not a new concept to Hongkong — a similar system existed 135 years ago.

Chief Inspector of Mongkok Anti-vice Squad, Mr Robin Jolly, said that in 1857, the Hongkong Government instituted a system for the registration and inspection of brothels at the request of the Navy to stem widespread venereal disease among officers.

All prostitutes were then required to attend a weekly medical check-up.

A similar system enforced in Britain at that time, however, came under repeated attack by moral reformers.

The territory, being a British colony, had to follow suit and abandoned the li-

censing system in 1894 after parliament ordered its abolition.

Chief Inspector Jolly said the result was shocking.

"Prostitutes stopped going for medical examinations and a large number of new brothels opened in city areas which had formerly been free of vice. What was worse was that the spread of venereal diseases became rampant. By 1897 half of the soldiers and sailors attached to the garrison had to be treated for VD."

The colony then daringly ignored London and set up its own extra-legal system of control. During the Occupation in 1941, the Japanese set up their own system of inspecting brothels, which is believed to be the last official recognition of such licensing controls in the territory.