

The Heart of Hospitality

Fung Scholars Network Newsletter
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FUNG SCHOLARS & FELLOWS
Nurturing Future Leaders
Funded by Victor and William Fung Foundation

Photo: Youssef Naddam

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**The Editorial Board and Victor and William Fung Foundation take no responsibility for the views expressed in this publication.*

Editorial Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this issue of the Fung Scholars Network Newsletter, dedicated to the theme of *hospitality*, a concept as simple as it is complex.

We've invited our writers to interpret hospitality through their own perspectives, curating a diverse collection of reflections inspired from their own unique experiences, travels, and explorations. The Victor and William Fung Foundation has helped facilitate many stories included in this newsletter, including my own exchange semester in South Korea, a transformative part of my life.

As someone who earned a Master of Management in Hospitality, I have long been fascinated by the numerous ways this concept is lived and expressed across communities and cultures. The idea of connection is subjective, which also proves how human it is. Each individual is a colorful piece in the kaleidoscope of community.

Sometimes *hospitality* can be found across the world. Other times, in the person sitting right next to you. And perhaps, within yourself?

I hope these pieces from our fellow scholars broaden our understanding of hospitality, and highlight a hopeful constant in an ever-changing world: our shared human inclination to welcome, connect, and care for one another.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to our writers for their insightful contributions, to our editors for their thoughtful guidance, to our graphic designer for bringing these pages to life, and to the board for their continued support. This issue would not have been possible without this collective dedication.

Sincerely,

Saamia Bukhari

Editor-in-Chief

Foundation Events

JAN

- 18** *FS Chinese Calligraphy Taster Session: Welcome the Year of Snake with Your Own Fai Chun*
Shirley Ko (FS2009/10, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)
- 18** *FS Lai Chi Wo Full-Day Village Life Tour*
Equanimity Fung (FS2011/12, The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

FEB

- 8** *FS Ping Shan Poon Choi Gathering*
- 21** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
John Poon (FS2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)

MAR

- 2** *FS 10 KM Charity Run*
Mariah Stewart (FS2011/12, The University of Hong Kong)
- 13** *FS Networking Lunch_Central*
- 15** *FS Guided Tour of the Hong Kong Flower Show 2025*
Kady Wong (FS2008/09, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

APR

- 13** *FS War Game Challenge*
Leo Lee (FS2023/24, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
- 17** *FS Networking Lunch_Quarry Bay*

MAY

- 3** *FS Mui Wo Rural Life and Farm Excursion*
Ying Ng (FS2014/15, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
- 8** *FS Networking Lunch_Kwun Tong*
Gigi Au Yeung (FS2008/09, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
- 10** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
John Poon (FS2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)
- 25** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
John Poon (FS2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)
- 25** *FS Cuttlefish Fishing Gathering*

Foundation Events

JUN

- 7** *Welcome Gathering for FS2025/26, Hong Kong*
- 12** *FS Networking Lunch_Kai Tak*
- 20** *A Talk in Oxford - Changing China in a Changing World*
Stanley Mitchell (FS2014/15, University of Oxford)
- 21** *FS Fireside Chat*
- 24** *FS Hangzhou Chapter Networking Lunch*
Yan Gong (FS2024/25, Zhejiang University)
- 24** *FS Shanghai Chapter Networking Lunch*
Shirley Xu (FS2024/25, Fudan University)
- 24** *FS Xiamen Chapter Networking Lunch*
Vanessa Lin (FS2024/25, Xiamen University)

JUL

- 1** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
Andrew Poon (FS2018/19, City University of Hong Kong)
- 5** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
John Poon (FS2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)
- 18** *FS Networking Lunch_Central*
- 19** *FS Return Gathering*
- 27** *FS Live Action Role Play Experience*
John Poon (FS2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)

AUG

- 4** *FS Welcome Gathering for FS2025/26, The University of Tokyo (Online)*
- 9** *Welcome Gathering for FS2025/26, Hong Kong*
- 25** *FS Networking Lunch_Admiralty*
- 30** *FS Networking Lunch_Admiralty*

SEP

- 27** *FS Welcome Gathering for Mainland FS2025/26, Hong Kong*

02

FOUNDATION UPDATE

A Brush with Culture: Chinese Calligraphy Taster Workshop

Written by Shirley Ko

(FS 2009/10, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

In January 2025, just before the Lunar New Year of the Snake, I had the honor of hosting my second Chinese calligraphy taster workshop for the Fung Scholars (“FS”) community. Eight enthusiastic scholars joined me, brushes in hand, to explore this timeless art form. It is — a journey that blended creativity, culture, and connection.

Chinese calligraphy, often seen as an art of the past, is far from old-fashioned. It’s a deeply expressive practice that demands patience and precision, yet sparks joy when shared. Falling in love with Chinese calligraphy during a 2012 volunteer event, watching a teacher craft faichun blessings for the elderly, I was thrilled to share my passion. Since starting formal lessons in 2018, I’ve joined competitions, set up market booths, and even opened an online shop, but nothing compares to teaching others.



The workshop was filled with energy and the typical FS vibe. Armed with brushes, ink, and faichun papers, we learnt strokes that embody balance and flow. All FS surprised me with their creativity, some wrote in English, others drew playful snakes, and a few combined with cool jargon. Their confidence and pride in their work were infectious, making us feel like old friends united by art.

A key lesson I shared was “先完成 再完美” (ie first to complete, then to perfect). Calligraphy is not about instant mastery but progress over time: try, refine, improve. This mindset freed us from comparison, letting each stroke reflect our unique journey. For me, hosting

this workshop marked my personal growth. Compared to my first event in the Year of the Rabbit, where nerves made me fumble, I now felt at ease, guiding the group with confidence honed through practice.

This workshop embodied the FS spirit of cultural exchange and leadership. It reminded me of a quote from “The Alchemist” by Paulo Coelho: “When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” Thanks to the support of JennyAnn and Yani, the event ran smoothly, fostering a space where creativity thrived!



Chinese calligraphy is more than just art – it is a bridge to culture and community. I invite my fellow Fung Scholars to pick up a brush and experience its magic. Imagine the joy of giving a heartfelt faichun blessing to loved ones for the Lunar New Year. ♦



Take the Stage: Bringing LARP to Fung Scholars

Written by John Poon
(FS 2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)

“So, what is LARP all about?”



Live-action role-playing games, also known as LARP, or 劇本殺 in Chinese, blew up in Mainland China around 2016. Hit TV shows like *Who's the Murderer?* threw the format into the spotlight. Think of it as a mix of *Clue*, *Mafia*, and improvisational theater, played out on tabletops or in real-life spaces.

You might think LARP is all about solving murders, but it's way bigger than that. Some games hit you right in the feels, focusing on love, looking back, or getting better as a person. Others are just plain funny, made to have you cracking up the whole time. Then you've got games about politics and history, where you're dealing with who's in charge and what's right or wrong. And if you're into it, there are fantasy and sci-fi stories that take you to totally new places. With all that going on, you're sure to find a game that fits what you're into.

With such great fun, the growth of LARP market has been wild. Back in 2021, researchers estimated almost 85% of Chinese internet users had tried an LARP game, and the market was booming to worth about USD 2.6 billion. Plus, the number of places to play jumped to over 30,000 by late 2020—that's 150% more than the year before.

But in Hong Kong and lots of other places around the world, LARP is still pretty niche. That's why it was exciting when Fung Scholars got into these sessions.

When I started running LARP games as a Drama Master (DM) for our group here in Hong Kong, they didn't just like it—they really clicked with it and started creating stories and bonding together.

SOME LARP SCRIPTS WE PLAYED

Over the past half a year, we have brought together four scripts to play around. These scripts vary in terms of genres and experience. No worries – please continue to read as there aren't any spoiler alerts if you haven't played any. Get enticed so that you can get to take part.

Snow-Village Serial Murders (雪鄉連環殺人事件)

Imagine a snowy village during Chinese New Year, with a murder mystery to resolve. It mixes fun gameplay with a touch of suspense. The players work together using clues and twists to find the killer. It's easy for beginners but still has some clever tricks for folks with experience.

Farewell Poem (告別詩)

This one hits you right in the feels. It's a campus story full of nostalgia, fading memories, and a bit of regret. Get ready to tear up. People usually call it haunting yet beautiful.

The Scabbard (刀鞘)

Picture December 1948: an espionage story. Players split into groups without knowing which group you belong to, caught in political games as the Communist underground faces a crazy hard mission. Get ready for intense emotions and mind-bending wartime drama.

Call Me Dad (叫爸爸)

This story is a bit strange but it also can be an emotional experience. It happens on a lively street where you get to hang out with cool people – a barber with special scissors, a teacher that has some words to say, and much more. The story starts kind of funny and then gets real, with both laughs and tears.

THE POWER OF LARP

As a DM, I get to plan everything—picking the scripts, getting props, and setting the mood. I know the story inside and out, and I love giving emotional clues just before the reveals—leading players to those aha moments, good vibes, or big realizations.

Players come in not knowing what to expect and wind up really thinking about things. Some have said that the game made them think about their friendships or the way their life is going, and a lot of them cried. Even the lighter stories help people connect. Hours of talking as your character makes everyone closer than just chatting normally. These games make you think. You might gain better insight, some empathy, or start to recognize the moment you're having — LARP is more than just playing a game.

It's been really amazing seeing people get so into it. After playing a few times, some Fung Scholars are now trying to be DMs. They're thinking about changing up the stories—adding local stuff, fixing the dialogue, and even changing the plots to really fit our group. This makes the game even better for everyone.



WHAT'S NEXT

We've already done about twelve events, and each one has been better than the last. I'm now thinking about new stories that might even need for us to buy new scripts, or create our own original scripts.

For sure, if you haven't got a chance to join a session, just join us. Many inactive Fung Scholars are activated by kickstarting this journey with us, so just sign up and don't be shy when you receive the emails. These LARP sessions are more than just hanging out; they're a tradition of learning, understanding each other, and having fun. ♦

A Guided Tour of the Hong Kong Flower Show 2025

*Written by Kady Wong
(FS 2008/09, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)*

Flower shows, once seen as simple displays of blooms, are now recognised as platforms for creating phenomenological landscapes that offer lived sensory experiences and joyful collective memories. I was deeply honoured to be reappointed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department as the Chief Landscape Designer for the 50-metre-long gateway at Causeway Bay for the Hong Kong Flower Show 2025. Our mission was to build more than just a gateway; it was to create a phenomenological landscape aimed at bridging nature and humanity and creating a space for reflection and inclusivity.



DESIGN VISION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF WELCOMING ALL TO TRAVEL AROUND FLORAL ASIA

The design faces the core challenge of anticipating over 600,000 visitors, a figure far exceeding the typical 5,000-person capacity of a park this size. The design needs to capture the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong, tell the story of this prosperous metropolis, and celebrate the glamour of Asia. Guided by the modernist principle that form follows function, the design adds a crucial value: form must also create phenomenological value through contemporary aesthetics and the emotion of happiness.

To achieve this, the entire gateway is designed with curved, contemporary lines that serve a dual purpose. Functionally, they guide large crowds seamlessly, preventing bottlenecks and creating an intuitive, welcoming flow. Aesthetically, these organic forms establish a visual rhythm that draws the eye forward, evoking a sense of welcome and discovery. The proportions of key structures and the spacing between narrative elements are subtly informed by the Golden Ratio, ensuring the composition feels naturally harmonious and eye-catching. The landscape expresses hospitality by providing barrier-free pathways, shaded seating, and seamless transitions, ensuring that all visitors, regardless of age or ability, feel welcome and included on this floral journey.

A CULTURAL AND FLORAL NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE

The gateway unfolds as a narrative ascent across Asia's iconic mountains, revealing distinct zones defined by a curated palette of uplifting colours, cultural symbols, and regional plant species to create a tangible atmosphere of happiness.



Hong Kong and Beijing: An Overture of Urban Vibrancy

The journey begins with an energetic overture: a radiant pink zone designed to make the visitor experience intensely joyful and dynamic by capturing the urban pulse of Hong Kong and Beijing. Floral and succulent depictions of the panda tram, iconic neon signs, and the Tsim Sha Tsui Clock Tower stand amidst peonies and rhododendrons. These elements evoke Beijing's Temple of Heaven, are depicted amidst panda bamboo habitats, and anchor the experience in both local and national heritage while using vibrant colour to evoke delight.

Japan and Himalayas: A Transition to Serenity and Majesty

The path rhythmically transitions toward Mount Fuji, where the atmosphere deliberately shifts. Here, a Japanese sand and moss garden, adorned with cherry blossoms and stone lanterns, invites a moment of serene contemplation; the sensory experience is one of quietude and introspection. The ascent continues toward a majestic representation of Mount Everest, where a palette of powder-blue lupins, hydrangeas, and cosmos creates a cool, calming effect. Nepalese prayer flags and prayer stones, alongside the world's first pair of AI-generated Tibetan antelope planters symbolising the fusion of technology and nature, add cultural authenticity and culminate in a sense of awe.



Southeast Asia and Singapore: A Crescendo of Warmth and Connection

The journey culminates in a warm, golden-hued zone reflecting Mount Kinabalu's terrain. This final act is designed as a sun shining crescendo. Lotus flowers, Thailand's golden lotuses, and chrysanthemums are framed by a Thai pavilion, creating an immersive warmth. Vietnam's coconut boats, filled with violet lotuses, are not merely for viewing but invite playful interaction: a key phenomenological moment where visitors physically engage with the design. The path leads to the final destination: Singapore's Supertree Pavilion, a communal space for reflection and connection that unites visitors in a shared celebration of Southeast Asia's rich diversity.



INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND EFFECTIVE EXECUTION

Each zone was crafted using innovative techniques with both aesthetic and functional ambitions. The AI-generated planters marked a striking fusion of technology and nature. Advanced 3D modelling enabled the fluid and curved forms central to the landscape design ethos, enhancing precision while reducing costs and minimising errors. Modular Integrated Construction, combining factory assembly with on-site installation, overcame challenges related to weather, labour, and space, ensuring safety and timely completion. This collaborative effort with horticulturists, contractors, and the client transformed and distilled a contemporary travel experience into a landscape for leisure and recreation, fostering an inclusive connection.

DIALOGUE WITH FUNG SCHOLARS

A design's ultimate success is validated not only by public reception but also through critical dialogue with academic and professional peers. In this respect, the exchange with the Fung Scholars proved invaluable, elevating the Flower Show into a platform for intellectual discourse. Their inquisitive questions about optimal photo-taking locations, visitor circulation strategies, and the selection of diverse flora inspired me to refine my upcoming design project's vision. Furthermore, by sharing their experience in project management and the application of AI, they enriched my understanding of project risks and opportunities, providing a crucial bridge between creative vision and practical execution that was both inspiring and conducive to advancing work efficiency.

I shared that the driving force of my design work is to imbue the visitor's experience with a profound sense of hospitality—the creation of unforgettable happy memories. My inspiration is now drawn not only from a wide spectrum of humanity, including residents of care homes, multigenerational families, learners, and people from every corner of the world, but also from the Fung Scholars. I am also grateful to the Victor and William Fung Foundation for my selection and for the speaking invitation, both of which broadened my design philosophy and global perspective.



DESIGN AS A REFLECTION OF LIFE'S CHOICES

Landscape design embodies choices that create aesthetic and emotional value, champion social inclusion, exemplify technological innovation, and vitalise life through beauty and sensory engagement. The ethos of “all for one, and one for all” guided both the design and its collaborative spirit. Beyond the mountains lies not merely another landscape, but a renewed perspective. May all visitors depart revitalised, inspired by the choices prepared for this flower show, having experienced a journey of hospitality designed to bring happiness to the heart of the city. ◆



Charity Run for Humanitarian Aid

*Written by Mariah Stewart
(FS 2011/12, The University of Hong Kong)*

On 2nd March 2025, two Fung Scholars from Hong Kong, Mariah Stewart (FS 2011-12, The University of Hong Kong) and Karlie Kho (FS 2019-20, Hong Kong Baptist University) participated in a charity run taking place at the Hong Kong Science Park organized by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an international humanitarian organization that provides healthcare to those living in distress and in urgent need of medical assistance. Through the event, Mariah and Karlie challenged themselves in completing a 10km run on a Sunday morning, while supporting MSF's humanitarian work with personal donations. The occasion also provided a networking opportunity for the two Fung Scholars who had never met before! ♦



Discover a Different Hong Kong on Mui Wo Farm

*Written by Ying Ng
(FS 2014/15, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)*



In mid-2022, an unexpected opportunity led me to relocate to Mui Wo, a rural town on Lantau Island, a 30-minute ferry ride from Central, Hong Kong. Many may perceive Mui Wo as a mere rustic place. Little do they know, Mui Wo is blessed with fertile land, beautiful beaches, scenic views, and roaming buffalo, and they mark the beginning of my transformative journey into sustainable farming. Inspired by the “半農半X” (Half-Farmer, Half-X) philosophy, pioneered by Japanese author Naoki Shiomi in the 1990s, I embraced a lifestyle that balances small-scale subsistence farming with my profession as a sustainability-focused YouTuber and educator. Living in Mui Wo's rural setting has allowed me to foster connections and build community through shared experiences. This journey is redefining the urban-centric narrative of Hong Kong, highlighting the importance of local engagement and sustainable practices.

HOW TO SECURE LAND FOR FARMING AS A NON-LOCAL?

Upon arriving in Mui Wo, many, including Fung Scholars, often asked how I secured land for farming in Hong Kong, where land is both scarce and valuable. I became involved with “Good Old Soil,” a local NGO dedicated to community building and sustainable agriculture, which introduced me to a local farmer who became my mentor. Through weekly sessions, I learned organic farming techniques—from planting to harvesting—while also managing his social media and assisting with selling his produce, like winter melon and cabbage voluntarily. In exchange, he allowed me to use a portion of his land for my farming projects. This mutually beneficial relationship not only provided me with land but also created a strong sense of community, reinforcing my commitment to sustainable living.



WHAT DO I GROW ON THE FARM?

With access to land in Mui Wo, I embraced organic farming aligned with the local seasonal calendar. During the spring and summer, I cultivate heat- and insect-resistant crops, such as eggplants, water spinach, and winter melons, which thrive in the high temperatures of Hong Kong. In the milder fall and winter months, I grow a variety of root and leafy greens, including beets, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower. I harvest the vegetables I grow and share them with my neighbours. This farm-to-table approach enables me to enjoy seasonal and locally grown produce, which shortens food miles, reduces carbon emissions, and promotes better health. By encouraging neighbours to share seasonal communal meals using our land's produce, such as the "Winter Melon Feast" in July, we created innovative winter melon dishes to facilitate community bonds and integrate a sustainable lifestyle.



MY MOTIVATION TO EMBRACE “ HALF-FARMER, HALF-X” LIFESTYLE

In Hong Kong, rural areas like Mui Wo are often viewed as ripe for urbanisation, putting farmlands at risk of being repurposed for housing. My work challenges this view by advocating for sustainable farming as an economic driver. By leveraging Mui Wo's agricultural heritage, we can develop agrotourism focused on niche markets, inspired by successful examples like the rice farms in Chishang, Taiwan, and the Obubu Tea Farm in Japan. Regenerative farming and community-supported agriculture can preserve the village's ecological and cultural integrity, create sustainable employment, and ensure rural vitality.

Additionally, I want to demonstrate that diverse lifestyles exist beyond the urban framework. My “Half-Farm Half-X” approach—balancing farming with creative pursuits like content creation—offers an alternative lifestyle. While still relatively new in Hong Kong, this lifestyle is well established in regions such as Taiwan and Japan, where it harmonises work, passion, and nature. By doing so, it encourages residents to explore sustainable and fulfilling alternatives.

MY ACTIONS

I launched the *ying_ecolifestyle* YouTube channel in April 2024, showcasing Hong Kong's alternative island living and sustainable farming to engage audiences locally and globally. With few YouTubers targeting this niche, the channel highlights unique crops like wampee—a tangy, grape-like fruit—and longan, a sweet delicacy, reflecting Hong Kong's agricultural heritage for global markets and culinary platforms. International viewers have expressed surprise that farming still exists in Hong Kong, broadening their perception of the region.

Complementing this digital outreach, I organised Mui Wo Rural Life and Farm Excursion for Fung Scholars in May, bringing them to my farm for an immersive experience. We explored Mui Wo's historical significance and unique attractions, harvested heirloom tomatoes, and discussed their diverse varieties, colours, and flavours. I shared insights on why supermarket tomatoes lack taste due to mass production and its adverse impacts on soil and carbon emissions, enriching their understanding and enabling them to experience an alternative lifestyle in Hong Kong.

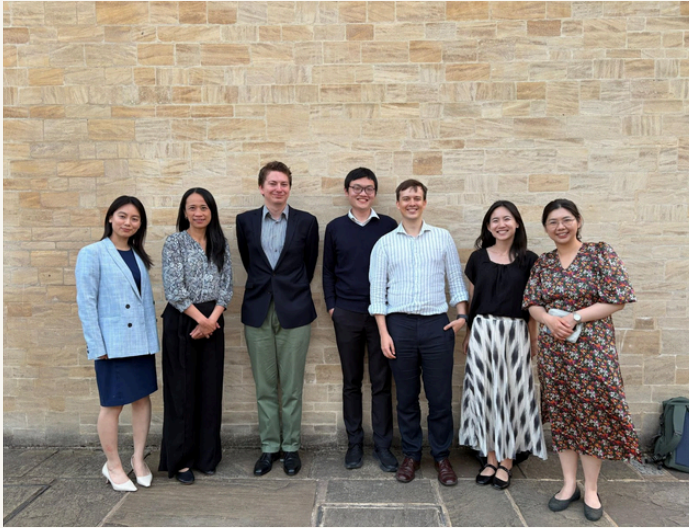


WHAT'S NEXT?

My vision is to promote sustainable farming and an alternative lifestyle in Hong Kong, both digitally and in real life. I plan to emphasise hands-on engagement by hosting farm-to-table workshops this coming winter, where participants can experience the joys of growing and preparing local produce. Additionally, I aim to collaborate with schools and organisations to inspire the next generation to appreciate the value of local agriculture and sustainable living. By fostering a deeper connection to the land and its resources, we can nurture a community that champions sustainability and celebrates the beauty of rural life in Hong Kong. ♦

A Talk in Oxford – Changing China in a Changing World

*Written by Stanley Mitchell
(FS 2014/15, University of Oxford)*



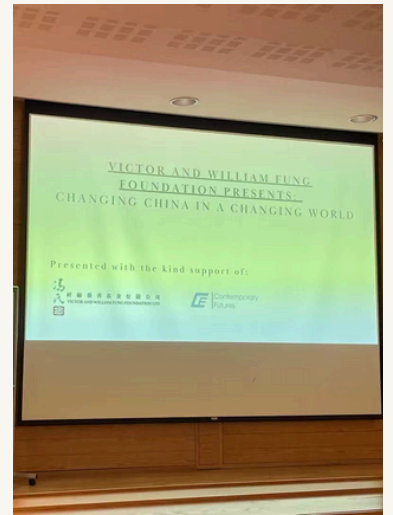
“Bringing the UK Fung Scholars community together”

This June was something of a landmark for the Fung Scholar’s alumni organisation because it marks the first major alumni event since the pandemic.

For so many of us, the Fung Scholars programme has given opportunities and direction in our studies and careers that we might never have had without the incredible generosity of the Victor and William Fung Foundation.

It’s a shame, though, that for many of us, our engagement with the wider community is fleeting. We lose touch, we relocate, and for those outside of Hong Kong and mainland China, the FS community can feel worlds away. I have been working to change that in the UK for the past years. We have had a number of casual meet-ups, and this June, we went big and hosted the inaugural “Changing China in a Changing World” event at the University of Oxford.

This event featured amazing talks from Contemporary Futures, a technology consulting firm, on the development of China’s energy market, and political scientist Yeling Tan, Professor of Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, who discussed her research group’s novel work analysing government priorities through sentiment analysis of state media. It was great to see so many Oxford students attend, and show interest in the work of the Fung Foundation.



Both talks gave scholars the opportunity to consider not just how their own careers might develop, but also how studying Chinese policy (whether that be in communications, or infrastructure strategy) can provide lessons for industrialists and policy makers around the world.

Following the event, a formal dinner was held in the Upper Common Room for 10 Fung Scholars and the speakers. With 44 attendees, most of them FS alumni, it was a huge step up from previous gatherings and a wonderful opportunity for the diverse group of FS to get to know one another and Professor Tan to connect more deeply.

This entire evening was possible thanks to the support of the Victor and William Fung Foundation. I sincerely hope that we will be able to organise more formal events such as this. I want to remind all Fung Scholars that wherever you are in the world, you have a community of fellow alumni waiting to welcome you. ♦

FS Fireside Chat

Written by Evan Chan

(FS 2024/25, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

During the FS fireside chat event, I had the invaluable opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and gain insights from senior FS scholars. As a current undergraduate student, their perspectives significantly broadened my understanding of the professional world.

The speakers engaged in a thoughtful discussion about how their businesses are navigating recent economic challenges, including the US-China trade war and the rapid surge in AI adoption. I particularly valued the diverse viewpoints on AI, as well as the depth and detail of their conversation, which highlighted the strong camaraderie and mutual support among FS scholars.



The event was held at "Explorium," a venue that impressed me with its modern setting and welcoming atmosphere. This choice reflected the Victor and William Fung Foundation's commitment to organizing meaningful and engaging gatherings. The fantastic ambiance made the event even more enjoyable, and we shared a pleasant lunch afterwards, which allowed for further informal networking.



Casual conversations before and after the formal discussion enriched the overall experience, making the day both memorable and educational. This event was a great example of how such interactions can inspire and prepare young FS scholars for their future careers. ♦

From Pawn to Storytelling – Event Highlights of FS LARP Experience 「刀鞘」 “Scabbard”

Written by Andrew Poon
(FS 2018/19, City University of Hong Kong)

*Reliving Historic Moments through the Eyes of a Player, Editor, and Drama Master
A tribute to John Poon (FS 2016/17), for introducing and creating this lovely LARP community!*

I'll leave the explanation of what LARP is to John as he has covered it extensively elsewhere in this issue. Instead, this piece marks my own journey within the Fung Scholars LARP community, one that took me through multiple roles: first as a player, then as an editor, and finally as a host aka the Drama Master. It is the story of how “Scabbard” drew me in, reshaped my perspective, and challenged me to bring its world to life for others.



ACT I: THE PLAYER

The room was quiet, but the air was heavy. Every glance, every whisper seemed to feed yet another hidden agenda. Beyond the thin ceilings and walls, are the enemies among us. It was the final hours of the besieged, Nationalist-held city of Tianjin. On that eventful afternoon, I—together with seven fellow Fung Scholars—stepped into the Republican-era streets of Northern China, 1949.

We were each given a story-rich role, along with a faction, and personal as well as team agendas. The gem of the LARP is that you inhabit an entirely new character and story, no matter what your real background might be. Each of us carried our own backstory and long-standing grudges with certain characters—old tensions that coloured every interaction—along with secrets we could neither share nor fully hide.

My first role in “Scabbard”: 紀寒士 –
Deputy Director of the Tianjin Intelligence Bureau



As the hours passed, I sank deeper into the role – every word weighed like currency, every glance measured for intent. I watched others with the same caution I guarded my own tongue on secrets to be revealed. A single choice in late game could easily ripple outwards, toppling fragile alliances and shattering the line between triumph and downfall. This was the brilliance of Scabbard’s design. It was never about reciting a character’s lines. It was about understanding your own character’s circumstance; it was about feeling the pulse of the room and unravelling the unspoken. And above all, it was about deciding who, if anyone, could be trusted in such a world meticulously built from deception.

Long after the final curtain fell, we remained deeply immersed in the story and its world. I had spent the final moments of the game barely breathing, gripped by the unfolding revelations. What followed the post-game debrief, was a lively and impassioned exchange—not in conflict, but in the shared excitement of revealing every twist and turn. The LARP experience was echoing in our minds even after several days had passed. Then, a thought began to take shape: “Scabbard” was not only a detective interactive LARP, but also a gateway into a rarely discussed chapter of history. What if I could dig deeper—research, refine, and rewrite—so that more FS could experience it as both an exhilarating game and a living lesson in history?

ACT II: THE EDITOR

“Scabbard” has two rare qualities that make it stand out from other LARP stories. One being an exceptionally well-crafted interactive drama and another, deeply rooted in a chapter of history that is unfamiliar to many. If this story could be expanded and reimagined with a greater historical fidelity, it could become more than an entertainment, but an educational and social interactive event for FS.

THE LANGUAGE

The original script was written in Simplified Chinese, shaped by a Mainland narrating style. For many Hong Kong FS, the phrasing and tone felt just out of reach. Some rewriting and conversion could benefit the experience greatly. By rewriting script into Hong Kong styled Traditional Chinese and refining the prose for clarity, resonance, and dramatic weight—the text became more than readable. It became alive, allowing players to step into the story and feel an instant connection with the characters from the very first read.

THE CONTEXT

And the work did not stop there. As a player, I had noticed that parts of the original writing lacked historical rigour—some biased, some inconsistent, others too thin to anchor the story in its time. This became one of the most satisfying challenges of the edit. I turned to the real historic event behind the script—the Pingjin Campaign (平津戰役) —and began weaving its threads directly into the narrative. The world of 1949 Tianjin was rebuilt in layers: the sound of boots on wet cobblestones, the shadows of streetlamps on narrow alleys, the unspoken fear and uncertainty in a stranger’s glance. Political undercurrents and subtle cultural details deepened the world until the setting was not just vivid, but faithful to its time.

THE VISUALS

When we talked about remastering “Scabbard”, it was never just about the words. After all, even the finest script needs a cover – a compelling visual design. Character portraits and visual props were reimagined to echo the aesthetics of the Republican era, so that the atmosphere began to take hold even before the first word was spoken. While costumes might have taken the immersion one step further, but the budget has a practical limit.

By the end of it all, the process felt less like editing and more like restoring a magical, faded mural—its outlines intact, yet its colours in need of deepening, its shadows begging to be sharpened, and its light placed with care. When the final work lay before me, “Scabbard” was both the same story I had once played and an entirely new rendition—more complete, more immersive, and carrying the weight of history in every breath.

ACT III. THE DRAMA MASTER

If playing “Scabbard” had been an adrenaline rush, hosting it was stepping behind the curtain into the heart of the machinery. As the Drama Master, I was no longer a single character bound by personal objectives—I was the keeper of the entire world. Every secret, every motive, every unseen thread of the plot rested in my hands. But the cost of being all-knowing was steep: hours of preparation, meticulous review of every storyline, and an intimate understanding of how each thread could unravel.

Anyone who has joined a LARP will know that one of the hardest challenges is not the acting, nor the plotting—it’s finding enough players to fit the roles, especially when gender-specific casting comes into play. By fortune and persistence, the Fung Scholars community managed to gather a full squad on short notice. And so, fittingly, our adventure began on the establishment day of the HKSAR—a modern date marking the stage for a journey back to 1949 Tianjin.

Hosting “Scabbard” meant wearing many hats at once—moderator, timekeeper, discussion guide, question-taker, and the quiet hand managing each stage of the play. My job was to keep the story moving, the tension simmering, and the players fully immersed without ever stepping into their spotlight.

Most of all, it was about controlling the ebb and flow of drama—letting suspicion build in measured doses, fanning the flames of faction rivalries, and ensuring that when secrets finally emerged, they landed with full force. The conflicts sharpened, alliances wavered, and the air grew thicker with every passing scene... though the rest I would let the future players to discover.



If you want to know exactly how the revelations fell, how the room shifted in those final moments, and which characters walked away victorious, there’s only one way to find out: join the next adventure into the shadows of “Scabbard”!

From player to editor to host, “Scabbard” has been more than just a plot and play – it has been a journey through history, interaction, intelligence and imagination by group efforts. With every run writes a new chapter, shaped by the players who dare to step into these shadows.

The world of “Scabbard” will open its doors again. The city of Tianjin will wait in its final hours, steeped in secrets, ambitions, and choices that will shape its destiny. Seven characters. Dozens of endings. The question is—when you walk these walls and alleys, which role will you play? ♦

03

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Experiences in Georgia Tech

*Written by Jayden Sam
(FS 2024/25, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)*

INTRODUCTION

The winding roads and the unfamiliar accents were a piercing reminder of just how far from home I was as I first set foot on the Georgia Institute of Technology's campus. Arriving with much hope and a fair share of doubt, I was an exchange student from Hong Kong. Would I find friends? Could I ever adjust to such an alien culture? Yet I was not ready for hospitality to change a great deal of my experience.

During my semester of exchange, I was living in an apartment-style dorm with three local roommates. Right from the start, the warmth and willingness to help me of these people made a great impression. Those small gestures of kindness - i.e., they gave me tips for traveling and invited me to hang out with them - did not just make me feel comfortable but, most importantly, welcome. My other offers of kindness have stretched far and wide, from students inviting me to their homes to strangers making a foreign place home.

This essay traces these instances of hospitality that shaped my exchange experience, the cultural lessons they taught me, and the personal development they fostered in me. In these accounts, I seek to show how small acts of kindness can turn a strange land into a second home.

FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH HOSPITALITY

One of the early and special memories of hospitality came from one of my roommates in Georgia Tech. Knowing that I was new in Atlanta, he gave me valuable traveling tips and guides, e.g., places to go, public transportation, and even local food that he enjoyed. I told him that I was pondering walking around the Olympic Park area in the evenings. He cautioned me with concerns about it—not to discourage me or scare me away but out of genuine concern, sharing some of his stories about arriving in the city. Such a little gesture that meant a lot. At a time when everything felt so alien, his presence gave me some treasure of guidance and reassurance. Far beyond just offering advice, his gesture made me feel truly cared for - someone has taken the time to ease my way through the transition.

This little thing he did, is an example that hospitality can start with compassion. My roommate wasn't obligated to make it an extra effort, but he did, and it meant everything. It set the tone for my entire exchange journey, demonstrating that kindness, even if silently practiced, is transformational. That comforting assurance uplifted me.

*“Such a little gesture
that meant a lot.”*

BUILDING CONNECTIONS THROUGH SHARED SPACES

An air of warmth was yet again given by an exchange fellow; a friendly invitation to the dorm room to socialize with fellow roommates. Although informal, it provided one of the most comforting experiences I had coming from abroad. He was preparing dinner for the night and so had taken us on a grocery shopping trip to pick up ingredients. Along the road, we discussed our homes, military times, and of course, cooking. Honestly, it was probably one of the most random moments I have ever encountered, and yet, this very random scenario shared between friends-competitors in a foreign grocery store gave me an inkling of hospitality.

They also introduced me to the rest of the other roommates, showing me the apartment's "legacy" of this photo board with an image of each past resident and an old pedestrian sign recovered into a cute home decoration. Little ways like that add warmth and a welcoming facade to a place.

It demonstrated that hospitality might be as simple as opening a door and saying hi. It was neither formal entertaining nor event organizing - it was about opening up space for relationships. Thus, I, in turn, had become another nationality. It made me aware that real hospitality often comes from peers who understand the sense of not being at home and are ready to make traveling a bit less difficult.

EXPERIENCING AMERICAN STUDENT CULTURE

The sweetest moment of interaction came when I was invited to a fraternity party. Honestly, I was never quite sure what to expect-fraternities have this mix of stereotype and mystique for an international. I originally expected fraternities to be stronger but similar to student hall societies back in Hong Kong, with shades of mystery and maybe some hidden dangers. But upon arrival, I was welcomed warmly and curiously. Students greeted me, asked about myself, and made sure I got into conversations and activities. It was not a party, strictly speaking - it was just one more look at an unconventional side of American college life.

What I found so amazing was how people welcomed each other with ease. I never felt like a stranger as someone visiting. The spirit of hospitality during the evening was a great example of social inclusion as a form of hospitality. Additionally, it gave me more clues about how American students do community building - not just through classes but through shared experiences and traditions. I did not merely observe culture that night - I was absorbed into it.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND REFLECTIONS

Thinking back on my semester at Georgia Tech, the welcome that I found was not an overt invitation by someone but rather one of recognition, encouragement, and inclusion. Every instance of interaction, whether it was the roommate advising me on traveling, the invitation to dine and chat, or the classmates inviting me to their social circles, fostered a kind of growth I hadn't anticipated.

I grew more confident in strange environments, having to lean on others' goodwill and step beyond the boundaries of my comfort zone. These experiences taught me that hospitality is not always great acts—it can sometimes be the little things: a warm smile or a helping hand. Also, I learned that diversity could unite rather than divide. This exposure to openness fostered my empathy and inclusiveness in relationships.

More than anything, the experiences motivated me to give back. As soon as I came back to Hong Kong, I started practicing hospitality with foreign visitors and exchange students — helping them with insider tips, sharing meals with them, and showing them around town. I wanted to give them the same feeling of warmth and welcoming that I received abroad. Hospitality, I've learned, is an extraordinary bond of connection — and one of the most lasting bequests of my exchange experience.

CONCLUSION

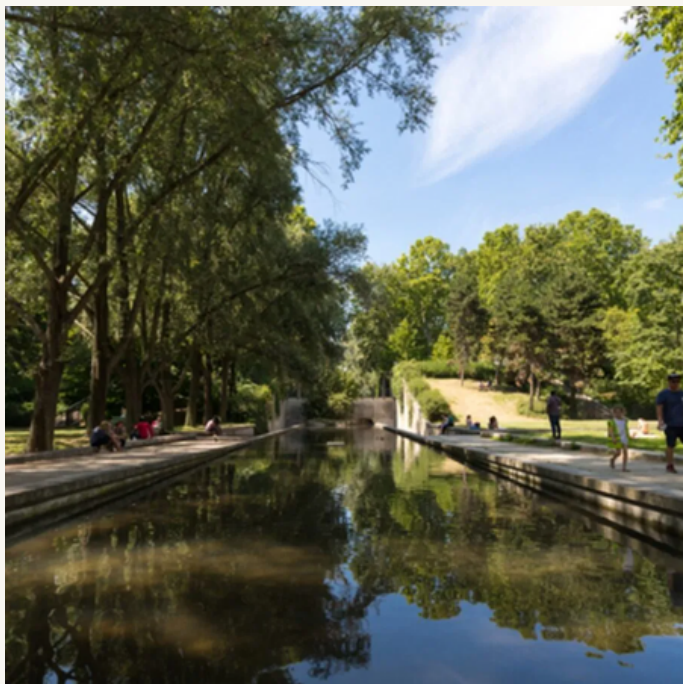
My study abroad opportunity at Georgia Tech was not simply educational; kindness was involved at every stage. Be it my roommates giving me tips, a few peers joining a study group where I was the foreigner, or a whole bunch of social circles that would give their friends-and-me logo a kind nod from across the room — the real acts of generosity helped me to feel at home in a foreign land. The transition was eased by these acts, but these acts had taught me more about what truly means to welcome somebody.

The impact of such hospitality was far-reaching and did not cease once I returned to Hong Kong. Having been inspired and warmed by the kindness I experienced, I have taken the liberty of paying it forward to foreign tourists and exchange students here in Hong Kong — with helping hand, local advice, and implementable ideas for moving forward. Through this, I have come to learn that hospitality is a chain of kindness without borders.

What I learned from the hospitality I experienced overseas, lastly, was that inclusiveness, empathy, and openness are basic universal values. They transform strangers into friends and foreign lands into homes. And that is probably the most awesome thing I came back with. ♦

Trusting a Stranger in Paris

*Written by Anson Cheung
(FS 2024/25, The Education University of Hong Kong)*



One of my Parisian friends once told me, “Generally speaking, no. In Paris? Hell no!”

In Paris, you trust no one, ever. Is it really? I was about to find out.

I was about to part ways with my best friend Jeff, for a while, and get to Berlin on a Flixbus.

Before setting off for Berlin, I had about two hours to kill in the heart of Paris. And, I was travelling alone now, a perfect tourist with luggage and a destination, the exact type of person I’d been warned about.

My Flixbus was set to depart at 6:30 p.m., and as I looked up my destination on Google Maps, the clock told me I had to get going. The map estimated a 25-minute walk, so I knew I would arrive just in the nick of time.

As I entered Parc de Bercy, a park known for being a bit rough around the edges, a man who looked to be in his 50s jogged in my direction. He stopped right in front of me, his face unreadable. I braced myself.

Here it was: the moment I’d been warned about.

He started speaking in a rush of French, which I couldn’t understand: “Bonjour, une crêpe et une pomme pour la bibliothèque?” I just looked at him, completely confused. Then, in broken but clear English, he asked, “Are you taking the bus?”

I said “Yes!” and, out of some naive impulse, showed him my phone with the map. He peered at the screen, scoffing loudly at the digital route. “I know a way! Don’t follow the Google Maps, it’s no good, very bad.”

Everything inside me screamed, “No, hell no!” – just screaming as loud as my Parisian friend would do to me right now. I thought of all the warnings about being taken advantage of by scammers and con artists. This man was a walking cliché: a stranger in a shady park, telling me to ignore my phone and follow him into the setting sun. I was convinced he would rob me, or worse.

And so I said, “OK!” My friend’s warning about trusting no one was screaming in my head, but a strange curiosity, or maybe it was sheer desperation not to miss my bus took over.

I fell in step behind him, my grip on my luggage tightening. We walked for a minute in silence until he finally turned to me with a kind smile, breaking the tension. “How long have you stayed in Paris?” he asked.

“About a week,” I said, a little surprised by his genuine friendliness. “I was travelling with a friend, and now I’m on my way to Berlin.”



“Ahha, you a student?”

“Yes, and you? What do you do?”

“I am a bus driver.”

“That’s cool!”

“Ya, it’s cool.” He then asked,

“Have you seen the Eiffel Tower?”

“Yes, of course! It was very beautiful.”

And you know what he said after? He responded: “Oh no no no! You are more beautiful!”

I laughed so hard when he said that. So I shot back: “No man, YOU are more beautiful!”

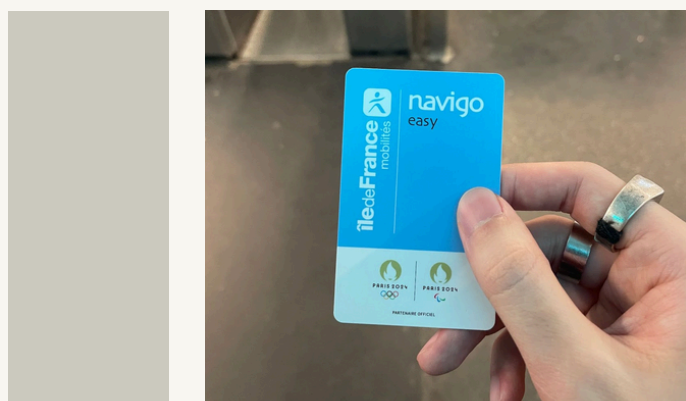


We both laughed. We talked more on the way, and before I noticed, we were at the bus station just right on time. Following him had saved me from a massive detour that Google Maps could hardly navigate the bus station maze. Without his help, I would have certainly missed my bus, and thanks to him, I made it to Berlin.

Before he left, we gave each other a good hug until we saw each other again.

In the end, apart from the food, architecture, and history, the final memory Paris blessed me with was the warmth of a random uncle in Parc de Bercy and the pure, unprompted kindness of a stranger. It seems my friend was wrong — or at least, there are some *beautiful* exceptions.

While it’s always smart to be cautious, my encounter showed me that genuine human connection and generosity still exist in the world, even in a city where I was told to trust no one. ♦



Welcoming People and Embracing Differences

Written by Karlie Kho
(FS 2019/20, Hong Kong Baptist University)

It is easy to lose touch with others if we navigate life alone, and it takes a genuine heart to maintain meaningful relationships. People move in and out of our lives, so it is important to seize opportunities to share your originality, your story, and your journey.

Fung Scholars offers a unique platform to meet new friends not only from Hong Kong, but from many other places as well. While it may be challenging to preserve these connections after exchange studies and various events, social media allows us to stay updated on each other's lives. Even without frequent meetings, you know your friends are there. This presents a chance to introduce tourist attractions and favorite spots in Hong Kong, highlighting the importance of hospitality and a welcoming attitude.

EXPERIENCES OF FRIENDSHIP AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

The first friend I met during my exchange studies visited Hong Kong. Although a delayed flight disrupted her plans, I recognized her need for help and suggested alternative places she could visit. If I had more time during the week, I would have accompanied her myself. This spirit of hospitality continued during a meal shared with a friend from the Shanghai leadership conference. Even a brief lunch allowed us to catch up and exchange views on lunar new year traditions — comparing similarities and differences between Hong Kong and Shanghai. Such cultural interactions foster greater understanding towards each other. Cosmopolitan cities like Hong Kong are enriched by cultural diversity and fusion, making them attractive travel destinations. Of course, every city and country has unique qualities that cannot be compared, and true appreciation comes from immersion.

COMMUNITY AND EVENT CONNECTIONS

Meeting Fung Scholars at different events has been rewarding. With sincerity, we expand our circles and learn from people of all backgrounds. Event hosts demonstrate passion for their professional fields, sharing recent work projects and achievements. Some organize events to promote their hobbies, such as war games and LARP (role play with scripts), catering to participants from beginner to advanced levels.

HOSPITALITY FOR THE COMMUNITY

Hospitality is not limited to intercultural exchange—it thrives within communities. Seeing hosts and participants enjoy themselves and deepen bonds reveals a special chemistry. Each Fung Scholar has a unique charisma, shaped by personal growth, cultural encounters, or a blend of the two. Events are always full of surprises and laughter.

More than a scholarship, this is a place to exchange ideas and broaden perspectives. Interacting with different people, I sometimes find myself more mature or more energetic than expected. We discover new aspects of ourselves in different settings, observing changes in ourselves and our friends. Hosting events is not solely the host's responsibility; helpers and participants can share kindness. Even as an introvert, I enjoy socializing and caring for others when needed. Personality is not determined by tests—it is defined by your choices and actions. Embracing diversity and listening to your heart lets you grow stronger and more sincere. Positive changes become evident through these experiences.

BLISSFUL HOSPITALITY

Hospitality leads to rewarding experiences. A friend from exchange studies introduced me to local restaurants, such as izakaya in the business district and the places that the locals always go. In conversation, she mentioned her involvement in a business expo in Hong Kong—something I only realized months later. I missed the chance of catching up with her in Hong Kong. But I also understand that the path cross again in unexpected place, although sometimes opportunities slip away. Cherishing every moment is more important than being a perfect host.

EMBRACING CHANGE AND DIVERSITY

Unexpected encounters with friends from Shanghai and Indonesia in Hong Kong have taught me the value of being proactive, open, and adaptable. Hospitality is about accepting and embracing change, bringing people together in lasting and meaningful ways. ♦

*“Cherishing
every
moment is
more
important
than being a
perfect host.”*

You Are a Swazi Now: Hospitality as a Cultural Embrace in Eswatini

*Written by Thando Ray
(FS 2023/24, Northeastern University)*

At the beginning of the year, I moved to Eswatini to work with Engineers in Action (EIA), a nonprofit that partners with local/rural communities to build crucial infrastructure. I work with the WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) team, which primarily partners with schools to implement clean water systems. We've had two projects this year - the second involving a group of university students from our U.S.-based chapters. These students, under our guidance, design and prepare the system in advance, then travel in-country to help construct the water piping and pumping system.

As part of their contribution to the project, a family from the community hosts these travelers, their mentors, and EIA staff — teams getting up to as many as 20 people — for the 8 weeks of construction. I say a family, but the community as a whole plays the host for these travelers - helping construct the water system, going to church, to sporting events, talking to each other, forming relationships, sharing meals, language, and laughs. These strangers are embraced into their new community with warmth, kindness, and a deep generosity. This all begins when the travelers are given their Swazi names.

When new people arrive in Eswatini, the community gathers to welcome them and give them siSwati names. Along with learning a few local greetings, it doesn't take long before soon-to-be friends are proudly saying, "You are a Swazi now." Travelers also adopt the surname of their host family. It's not just symbolic — it's lived. While far from their families of origin, they are virtually adopted into their new families, communities, and culture. People referred to others as babe (father), make (mother), bhuti (brother), sisi (sister) — there's new family all around you.



I received my Swazi surname during our first build of the year at Ndlalambi Primary School. I didn't need a new first name — Thando, a Shona name from my homeland of Zimbabwe, is also a Swazi name. I was living at a pastor's home, essentially at the school, with three coworkers. I remember coming to this older pastor's own home — how he would open the gate for the car, and smile and wave both his hands in greeting. He was a kind man — sharing your home is very generous of course, but doing it with such warmth and care makes people feel special. That's where I got my Swazi surname, which gets used more often than my first name (which I write with a smile). Being called by your name makes you feel accepted, that you belong.

At our second project at Herefords Primary School, with students from Cornell and Duke, I got to see another dimension of Swazi hospitality. This homestead was filled with children — many of them students at the school. They quickly became part of the team's daily life: playing games, asking questions, teaching homestead chores, and learning names. They eagerly bonded with the student travelers. Their warmth and openness helped other kids at the school feel comfortable too. Before long, we'd hear our names whispered in the hallways and receive shy, and then brave, waves and notes from passing classrooms. Everyone was excited to welcome — and be welcomed.

Because hospitality is a two-way street. Good hospitality means that guests make an effort to appreciate and integrate into their host's way of life. It means helping with chores, cooking, cleaning, learning the culture. There is shared respect and commitment to the betterment of our space, our people, our family. Love should flow all the ways.

Hospitality here wasn't limited to words or shelter. Every evening, our host family cooked dinner for the entire student team. Community members and parents regularly joined to assist with construction. People gave their time, labor, space, and care — all to support the creation of a clean water system for their school and community. There was genuine concern for our wellbeing, deep appreciation for the work being done, and a strong sense of responsibility. Day after day, big sacrifices were made to bring this vision of safe, drinkable water to life.



This work isn't just about infrastructure. It's about relationships. EIA uses a community-building model based on shared investment — not just in the final product, but in each other. We build with people, not for them. When community members work side by side with student teams, the transfer of technical knowledge, the exchange of culture, and the formation of relationships are accompanied by something just as critical: a shared sense of commitment and ownership. This in turn drives the maintenance, operation, and upkeep of the system.

That's what makes a project sustainable. Not just pipes in the ground, but people in relationship. Sustainable engineering relies on trust, shared purpose, and human connection. Hospitality here isn't passive. It's not just a thumbs up or a meal — though those matter, too. It's active, physical, and communal. It's the open gate, the offered name, the steady hands lifting bricks, laying pipes, and mixing concrete alongside you. It's generosity that doesn't draw attention to itself. It simply says: You are one of us now.

I feel incredibly lucky to be here — to live, work, and learn in a culture where hospitality isn't a transaction but a transformation. In Eswatini, I've come to see hospitality not just as kindness, but as a framework for collaboration, sustainability, and meaningful connection. It's one thing to be welcomed as a guest. It's another to be absorbed into the life of a place — folded into the rhythm of a community. That's what happens here, and it's beautiful to witness.

In my experience growing up and working in different parts of Africa, hospitality has always meant that other people are an extension of us. And if they're in our community, contributing to something that brings health, joy, a better future — like a clean water system — we treat them like family. It's a community thing. We know we're doing well if our community is doing well.

This experience has deepened that understanding for me. As I look ahead, I'm equipped not only with the technical skills but also a responsibility to build relationships with the same openness and generosity I've been shown. I'm eager to discover the next communities I will come to call home — and to practice this shared hospitality as both guest and host. ♦



Planning Life, One Language At a Time

Written by Isra Shabir
(FS 2011/12, Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

It was June 2011, the air was tense from final exams, upcoming graduation preps, last minute internship searches, farewells and move-outs, and the end of a long winter - Spring had skipped Cambridge, MA that year.

My freshman year at MIT had just ended. I desperately wanted to fly home to the UAE to see my parents, and at the same time, I wasn't sure how to best spend the long summer days ahead. Before college, summer meant time off from school (homework free life), visiting cousins and relatives (sometimes unwillingly), and renewing long lost fitness resolutions (that never stuck). What most people call "chill time" or "bumming around".

Yet here I was looking ahead to an American summer, where making productive plans with three jobs, two part time courses, and a few hobbies thrown in the mix was a key part of the growth process. The idea of that kind of summer was still foreign to me. I didn't feel ready to apply to summer internships, but I also did not want to spend my time wondering and wandering.

I always had a curiosity for foreign languages and a passion for travel. My brother lived in Berlin, Germany and I was fascinated that he could speak fluent German, despite growing up in a country where one hardly saw the German alphabet. He would tell me how complex German is, how so many words in the language are a compound of individual words - ApfelBaum is literally Apple + Tree. What a cool language to learn, I thought. As I read up more on both the language and the country, it also dawned on me that Germany is a powerhouse of Europe. Which meant learning German could open up so many opportunities beyond satiating my curiosity to learn the language. And so, when an email popped up from the Fung Foundation offering study abroad funding, my mind jumped to action without a second thought! And just like that, after a few weeks of paperwork and hoops (more on that on another day), I was off to Berlin!

As my plane landed, nothing short of an adventure awaited. From convincing immigration to let my teenage self in, to navigating the underground U-Bahn (oohbaan) train lines, to asking directions for hard to pronounce streets (I was still using a motorola flip phone at the time), every little experience taught me something new about the city, the culture, and the people of Berlin.

Soon after settling in, it was the first day of class at Frei University of Berlin - a leading academic institute in Germany. Having left home at 6 a.m., I miraculously showed up on time to a morning class for the first time ever. Germans are known for their punctuality, and I wanted to start with a good first impression.



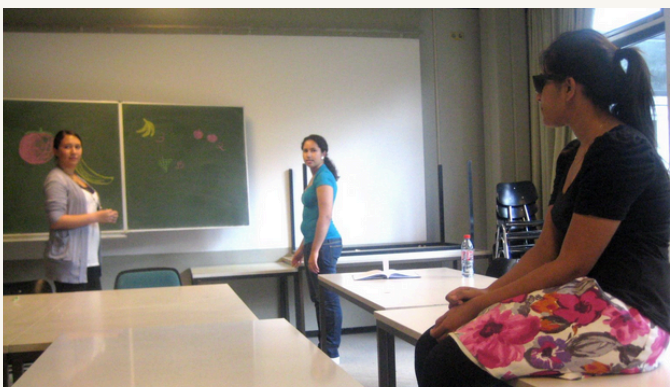
And yet, as I stepped foot in the classroom, familiarity struck again. My class was not a room full of Germans (makes sense in hindsight?) but a mix of Americans, Asians, Latinas and even Europeans - all gathered and eager to learn beginner German, or "A1 German". Whatever nerves I had to impress any Germans went straight out the window. I strutted across the classroom to find my spot, all while the room was mumbling some German greetings to our teacher, Susanne - who, to my surprise, was responding in English! Miss Susanne was a well traveled young lady with a great sense of humor. She had definitely seen enough novices to not make anyone feel unwelcome on their first day. It only took her a few morning greetings to know that we didn't speak a word of German but we were all too stubborn to give up without a try!



Home away from home. As the weeks passed, our bonds quickly deepened. Can't say much about our German language skills. I had pursued this program to study a language, but each day we all showed up to class eager to make plans on what part of Berlin to explore next. After all, what's textbook learning without some field experience? Even though we were all in a third country on a "study abroad" program, Berlin started to feel like home with each passing day.

The only difference? The abundance of Beer! For context, growing up, alcohol was a big taboo for me both culturally and religiously. Even at MIT, alcohol was hard to find and my American peers were secretly smuggling it for parties on campus. Out in the streets of Boston, any time I saw people concealing something in black bags, I knew it was alcohol. Bottles were not to be exposed as public drinking was prohibited by the law. And here I was, almost pouring beer in my cup instead of diet coke in the school cafeteria on the first day! Easily speaking, this was the biggest culture shock for my nineteen year old self. I quickly learned, when in Germany, a meal is truly incomplete without the two B's: Bier and Bratwurst. Needless to say, my American friends were having a ball!

Back in the classroom, time was flying by. My favorite memory of the course was the final group assignment. We were supposed to come up with a play and act it out, something easy enough for us to display satisfactory language skills. After hours of brainstorming, we came up with a play depicting the backstage of a movie... the most meta idea one could come up with. Now I did say we were trying to learn the language...but to write, direct, and act was a whole different challenge. That too in German. Soon all the happy bickering was flying into heated conflict. Conflict over who gets the part, conflict over the kind of ending, conflict over one's performance and pronunciations. Miss Susanne left us to our devices and gave us open time to work it all out. Which made sense – no one wants to walk into a room full of teenagers speaking a version of German only they understood, all while arguing over a class project.



And so several practices, retakes, and a whole lot of translation struggles later, the day arrived when we performed. Remember when I said we were all too stubborn to not give up on learning German? The last day was a testimony to that. Once we got into groove, not one of us forgot our lines, nobody gave death stares over pronunciations, none of us felt out of sync. Each one of us took our part up a notch, surprising not just our teacher but even ourselves... That was the day Miss Susanne spoke to us in German – we had all passed German A1! As the class ended, we cried happy tears and felt bittersweet for the farewell...pure emotion and no acting, not even in German :)

When summer started, I had no idea what my plans would look like and what productive ways I would grow. I simply followed my heart and curiosity, fully living the experience of wherever the two led me. To my surprise, learning a challenging foreign language built my self-confidence. The following term, I even enrolled in German I which became one of my favorite classes at MIT. Experiencing the unique teaching styles of one of the finest universities in Europe opened my mind to constructive differences. Not to mention, I felt more cultured and braver to adapt in any new environment. Connecting and bonding with new peers over a shared struggle helped me see that meaningful connections require something deeper than a good time. I still follow the stories and updates of all the people I met that Berlin summer, 14 years later!

The realization that the generosity of a scholarship created all these opportunities for me was truly humbling. My experiences stacked up beyond the simple act of learning a language, and yet it was the pursuit of that simple act that enriched life in ways far more than I had planned. Now in 2025, as I reflect on this beautiful time, I am grateful to the Victor and William Fung Foundation for the opportunity to follow my passions. And this is the lesson I wish to carry today and forward – it's not the perfect action plan that opens paths. Rather it is authentic action led by courage, an open heart ready to connect despite borders and languages, and a wild curiosity which leads to meaning in life :)



*Vielen Dank
fürs Lesen.
Auf
wiedersehen!*



Lessons from Dong'ao Village

*Written by Jason Lam
(FS 2025/26, The University of Hong Kong)*

Hospitality is an ancient thread woven through the fabric of every culture. Its truest expression is found in small, everyday gestures—moments when strangers become friends, and communities open their arms to the unknown. I never fully understood the transformative power of hospitality until I spent a season as an exchange student in Dong'ao, a quiet village nestled between Taiwan's lush mountains and the restless Pacific.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: WELCOMED BY A VILLAGE

Though the emerald rice paddies and misty peaks are unforgettable, my first impression of Dong'ao was not about its natural beauty. Instead, it is of Mrs. Pihu, standing in the doorway of her modest home, smiling with her whole face and beckoning me inside when I first arrived at the residence. I was nervous as — my Mandarin was clumsy, and I was a world away from the familiar rhythms of my own country. Yet as she offered a steaming bowl of fish soup into my hands and urged, "Eat, eat —, you must be tired," my anxiety melted away. Her hospitality extended beyond providing me with food and shelter. It was about making space and embracing someone else's vulnerability.

THE SUBTLE ART OF HOSTING

In Dong'ao, the hospitality was a lifestyle, and not only practised occasionally: The elderly fisherman, who took me out on his boat at dawn and enthusiastically pointed out dolphins with a boyish grin. The shopkeeper of the nearby coffee shop, who always serves me with a cup of sweet, milky tea, and keeps on trying to converse with me, even if it's only gestures and laughter. My neighbour, who brought over a basket of fresh lychees when he heard I had a cold.

What strikes me the most is the generosity of spirit. Every act of hospitality was given generously, and no one expected anything in return.



HOSPITALITY AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS

As an exchange student, I am unfamiliar with the local culture, and I often feel left out. Yet hospitality bridged that gap. During the Lantern Festival, the villagers all gathered to send glowing lanterns into the night sky. I originally decided that I wouldn't be participating, but the locals insisted I join and write a wish. They even helped me find the right words. At that moment, I no longer feel like a guest, but part of the community—my hopes and dreams right beside theirs, just as the glowing lanterns were launched.

The hospitality that I received is not only grand gestures towards others. It is about building connections—recognizing the humanity in one another and building a common ground, however fleeting. In Dong’Ao, I learned to be comfortable with vulnerability: to accept help, to stumble through unfamiliar customs, to offer my own stories in return.

THE HEART OF HOSPITALITY IN LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

What I witnessed in Dong’Ao reshaped my understanding of leadership and learning. True leaders, like my host mother (Mrs. Pihu) or the village chief, led by example—through quiet acts of kindness, through the patience to listen, and the courage to embrace the unfamiliar. They understood that communities are built not by enforcing rules, but by fostering a sense of belonging.

In education, too, hospitality matters. My teachers in Dong’Ao didn’t just impart knowledge; they created a safe space for curiosity, mistakes, and growth. They celebrated our differences, encouraged us to share our cultures, and taught us that learning is a reciprocal act, enriched by empathy.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT: BRINGING HOSPITALITY HOME

When I returned home, I carried the lessons I learnt in Dong’Ao with me, and I found myself noticing opportunities for small kindnesses here and there — to welcome a new neighbour, to provide a listening ear for a friend, to treat a person to a meal. I realized that the heart of hospitality is not limited to any place, it is a mindset: an openness to others, a willingness to meet them where they are.

In a world that often feels divided, hospitality is a quiet revolution. It asks us to slow down, to look beyond differences, and to recognize the shared humanity in every encounter. Whether in a quiet Taiwanese village like Dong’Ao, or a busy city like Hong Kong, it is these acts of welcoming — big and small — that remind us to treat others nicely.

CONCLUSION: THE ENDURING GIFT

Dong’Ao taught me that hospitality is more than a social nicety; it is a profound act of generosity and courage. It is the choice to open our doors and our hearts, to make room for others in our lives, and to believe that in doing so, we find ourselves incredibly enriched.

In every handshake, every shared meal, every encounter with the villagers, I saw the heart of hospitality — a force that shapes not only individuals, but communities. I am forever grateful for the warmth of Dong’Ao, a small village in Taiwan that embraced me as one of their own. ♦

*“To open our doors
and our hearts, to
make room for others
in our lives, and to
believe that in doing
so, we find ourselves
incredibly enriched.”*

He whānau kotahi tātou: Finding Kinship in New Zealand

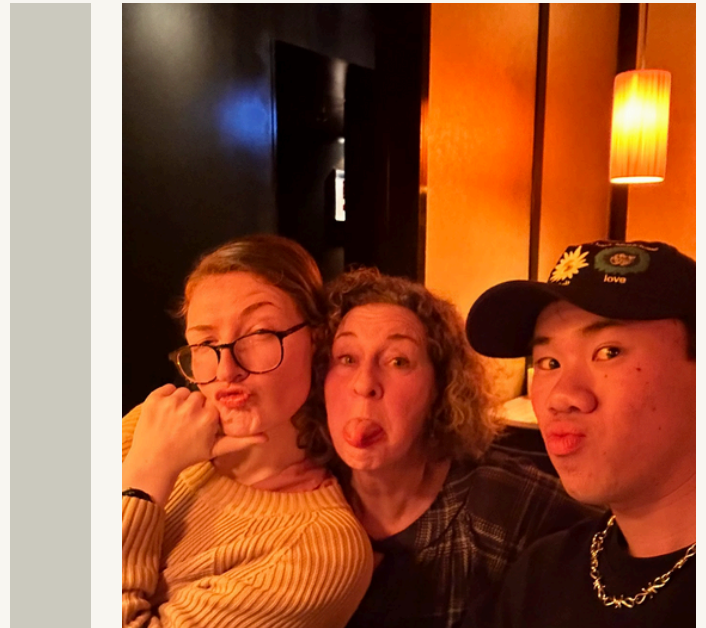
*Written by Anakin Wong
(FS 2023/24, The Education University of Hong Kong)*

If you search for the word ‘Hospitality’ in its etymology, the earliest recorded definition comes from Old French ospitalité, which delineates it as “the act of being kind and cordial to strangers or guests.” From the surface level, this is no different from robot-like platitudes like “Make yourself at home,” which we all know are standard etiquette. At least that’s what I believed before travelling to New Zealand.

During my 10-week homestay tenure, it was evident that they permeated core Māori principles, such as Manaakitanga and Whānau, in their daily lives. It was not the kind that was just for show; as a matter of fact, I learned to understand He whānau kotahi tātou (We Are One Family) as I became part of their kinship.

A TASTE OF MANAAKITANGA AND WHĀNAU

Manaakitanga is about fostering mana (prestige and spiritual power) and conveying aroha (love and compassion) to others, including those you have just met for the first time. My immersion in Wellington, New Zealand, exemplified this Kiwi culture at its finest—and this was evident before I had even set foot on the porch of my homestay family. Just as I greeted Vicky and Lauren with my souvenirs, they scurried over to hug me excitedly, exclaiming, “Welcome to Aoetorera! We’ll be going over to my grandparents tonight for dinner, so you’d better get unloading that luggage of yours!” Mind you, I had not even checked out what the house looked like, and I was getting invitations to visit their extended family. Unbeknownst to me, this welcome dinner would be their way of subtly welcoming me to be part of their Whānau.



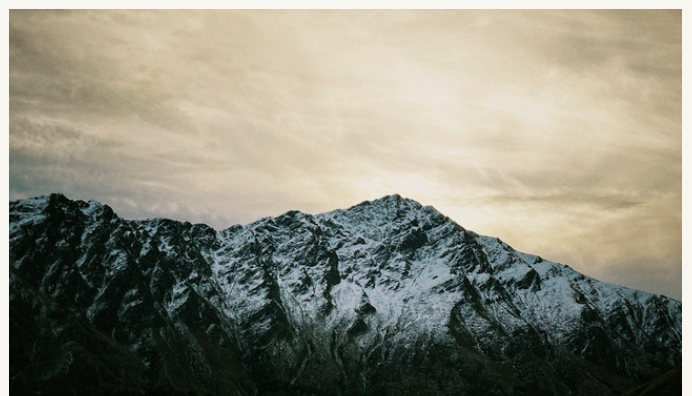
After a long 2-hour car journey to their grandparents, I was warmly greeted by their relatives and nephews, and to my surprise, a lovely lamb roast was sitting on the kitchen counter. While I had mentioned in my introduction letter that my favourite foods were lamb and tiramisu, I was not expecting to have such an extravagant feast as my first meal. It was during dinner that I later found out that my homestay was pescetarian, to which one of the uncles jokingly jibed that this dinner was a “luxurious 5-star hotel treatment” since they typically only had salmon at previous family reunions. As we had to say our goodbyes, I was overwhelmed with joy by the warm and receptive atmosphere. Looking back, I realised that the heart of hospitality is not limited to providing basic physical needs, such as a roof over one's head and adequate food. Paradoxically, it was the communal aspect that made my homesickness go away.



The fictive kin I had developed with my homestay's extended family, especially with their nephews, Manate and Felix, on day one, turned into a strong whānau relationship over the next 10 weeks. It was more than being another guest in a guesthouse; I was treated like a family member, a brother, dare I say. They would invite me to hang out with their friends, take me on their annual family ski trip, celebrate each other's festivals, and even gift me a handmade Māori necklace as a farewell gift.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand was manaakitanga in motion, a testament that hospitality goes beyond treating strangers with courtesy; in fact, it taught me an important lesson in life: Your whānau is the people and the place where you feel that you belong. Vicky, Lauren, and their extended family treated me not as a temporary guest, but as whānau—despite not being blood related, they still chose to embrace me with open arms, regardless of our differences in race and culture. ♦



Cleats & Connection

Written by Saamia Bukhari
(FS 2021/22, Boston College)

The bus driver offered me a polite nod as I boarded the private bus with my trusty athletic bag and earbuds in. Other young adults with backpacks slung on their arms, piled in after me. We were all headed to the same place: Seoul National University. But for different purposes since it was almost six in the evening. The bus lurched forward, commencing a short journey to the heart of campus from the bustling streets of Sharosu-gil.

At my stop, I hopped off and walked to the stadium. The fluorescent lights illuminated the soccer field, and my smiling teammates came into view. A grin automatically spread across my face as I dropped my bag on the turf and pulled out my favorite light green cleats.

Show time.

Only two months ago we were strangers. I was one of four exchange students in the Seoul National University Women's Football Club. I was an outsider. However, I was determined that my dedication and skills would change things.

I made the first move, speaking limited Korean to my local teammates. At the end of the first practice, I went from no one to someone after scoring two goals, earning praise from my Korean teammates. But more than conversation or skills, what made the most difference in cultivating friendship was showing up to every single practice. Twice a week, two and a half hours each. For the love of the game, and also connecting with my teammates.

I continued introducing myself to all members of the team, making small talk, and pouring in my full effort to each training session. The point in which general friendliness turned to *jeong*, a Korean word that relates to "a feeling of love or affinity," was when I participated in games with other universities, and the most important competition of the season: Korea University Sport Federation's (KUSF) Women's Club Finals in which women's soccer teams all over the country competed for the top prize (La Shure). While I have close friends in the U.S., *jeong* in Korean culture operates at a much deeper level in society: a feeling of belonging, "we-ness," and loyalty (Chung & Cho, 2006). A certain unspoken bond.

I felt *jeong* after our first game of the KUSF Finals. We won a highly anticipated game against Yonsei University, the first time in four years. The team stayed the night in an Airbnb just across our competition stadium. Everyone was in high spirits.

Split across two tables, teammates refilled my plate without even asking. They passed food to me and included me in conversation. We had an arm wrestling competition in the kitchen to decide which members of the team should clean up. My table group nominated me since they knew I was strong (I never skip arm days), and I won, much to the delight of my team, earning lots of hugs.

Chung, Christopher K., and Samson J. Cho. "Conceptualization of Jeong and Dynamics of Hwabyung." *Psychiatry Investigation*, 2006 February, www.psychiatryinvestigation.org/upload/pdf/0302006005.pdf.

La Shure, Charles. "Korean Concepts." *Korean Language and Culture*, 1 Nov. 2021, Seoul National University, Seoul. Class Lecture

We watched a playback of our game on the television. It was the sixteen of us spread on a couch in our pajamas, eating chocolate chip muffins our coach had brought us, laughing at how the announcer of the game mispronounced nearly everyone's name, except for mine, the only non-Korean on the field.

At that moment, I felt a certain sense of inclusion and the warm hospitality of Korean *jeong* that I couldn't quite explain. They acknowledged and appreciated my different background, skills, and friendship.

Teammates who previously didn't look at me were hugging me, offering genuine soccer advice, sharing food with me, and at the very least, smiling. The difference in treatment from being an outsider to an insider was immense. We placed third in the competition and on our way back, my teammates and I started talking about our collective and individual performance, and then more personal things about ourselves. A natural development of trust.

After the competition, one of my friends who has been on the team for years shared with me that I was the closest exchange student ever on the team. The captain then chimed in to say that I was the first exchange student to participate in competitions. They noticed commitment. Who knew it would be the gateway to something deeper?

I think back to my early days on the team, when I was no one. Joining SNUWFC was the best decision I made while studying abroad. It took time and effort, and the sincere bonds were like nothing I could have ever imagined to experience as an exchange student.

Probably the number one factor in helping cultivate a deeper bond was simply showing up. Because I love soccer so much, I made it to nearly every practice. I even earned a giftcard at the end of the month for having the highest attendance among newly-joined players. The medium-sized group of players that showed up consistently were the ones I formed bonds with, and we respected each others' discipline and dedication. I also made an effort to get to know people on the team, speaking in whatever Korean I could and being genuine.

Ultimately, being consistent, welcoming, and encouraging helped make *jeong* possible. The bonding that occurred over games and competitions reinforced a shared identity. That I am not just an exchange student who plays soccer, but the team's forward, the team's friend.

Sometimes connection is formed over time; slowly but meaningfully. Each shared experience is a brick in the house of friendship, opening the door to warmth. The spirit of hospitality is to truly be part of a team, not just a name on a roster. ◆

“Sometimes connection is formed over time; slowly but meaningfully.”

Hong Kong Hospitality: Is Change Needed?

*Written by Natasha Ho
(FS 2025/26, The University of Hong Kong)*

Tourists from the Mainland or elsewhere are turning up specifically to the Australian Dairy Company, a Cha Chaan Teng in Jordan, as part of their itinerary in Hong Kong. You might guess that the reason is to taste authentic Hong Kong cuisine, such as ham and macaroni, or scrambled eggs. But according to a lot of tourists, the reason this place has become such a must-go is because of their infamous ‘nasty service attitude’, as a reflection of the true spirit of Hong Kong workers–bad hospitality. On social media platforms such as Threads or Rednote, you will see restaurant-goers reflecting on how the service quality wasn’t as bad as they imagined. One even admitted that she was so nervous she blurted out her order the moment she sat down, only to be told by the waiter to calm down and take her time.

As a Hong-Konger, I was surprised that the bad hospitality would be a “selling point” here, or that the service would be considered ‘bad’ at all. I’ve been to Australian Dairy Company before, and while it’s true that they don’t smile and greet you nicely, their attitude is far from being the worst. In fact, many of my friends echo with me that their service quality is on par with almost all Cha Chaan Tengs in Hong Kong. In a Cha Chaan Teng, I don’t expect a warm welcome, or a polite enquiry, I just want to get my orders taken, my meal served, and finish my meals ASAP, so that I can get to my next location quickly. Despite this, a lot of us Hong-Kongers could also see how this mode of service could be perceived as ‘rude, mean or scary’, especially if they’re from cultures with a strong emphasis on outstanding customer service, such as Japan. With such a difference between how tourists and locals see Hong Kong hospitality, some would beg the question: Should Hong Kong do something to try to ‘improve’ its service quality?

It is not as if this is a new discourse as well. As early as 2002, Andy Lau made a famous advertisement raising the awareness of the service attitude in Hong Kong, and showcased a better servicing manner through the examples of a minibus driver and a taxi driver. The advertisement has since been referenced by many internet memes, and even by Louis Koo 22 years later. In recent years, when the catering industry is struggling, some are even arguing that the reason Hong Kong restaurants and stores aren’t doing well is because they can neither compete with the Mainland in terms of its price, nor in terms of its unpalatable customer service. The question remains: Should Hong Kong attempt to be more “hospitable”?

In the eyes of a lot of foreigners, Hong Kong’s hospitality is bad, and they believe that the servants are being rude. They are accustomed to the service both in and out of the kitchen, and expect someone walking to them gracefully and asking, ‘Hello, how may I help you today?’. Instead, they only see a disgruntled middle-aged uncle passing by holding several large dishes, while yelling, ‘Wai! Gei Dor Wai (How many)?’, and the said disgruntled middle-aged uncle even expects the customer to take the initiative to shout ‘Saam Wai! (three people)’. When serving meals, servers will never stop for more than the time needed to place the dishes on the table, and the biggest response you can expect to requests is a swift nod. To tourists, the whole experience is basically: “Hong Kong servers do not care whether you enjoyed your time at the restaurant, nor do they value your experience there.” This is the impression that may be presented to the tourists.

However, contrasting to what the locals usually perceive, it tells an entirely different story. In our (or at least my) point of view, “good” service, or hospitality, as emphasized by foreigners, is often seen as unnecessary. People in Hong Kong may say “I go to the Australian Dairy Company only for the food, and I don’t really care to chat with people there or feel welcomed by the waiters.” To me, conversations that serve no other purpose than being polite only waste both parties’ time: the waiter’s time to continue serving other customers, and my time to get on with my next task. I have never worked in the service industry before, but I get the feeling that, if I did, I would be too bothered to work and give a bright smile and warm welcome, so it would be hypocritical for me to expect the same from them. What locals see is this: “the only thing a server should be expected to fulfil is a quick meal and efficiency”.

Therefore, rather than complaining that Hong Kong has bad hospitality, I think it is necessary to first determine what is considered a ‘good’ service. To me, just because someone is being blunt does not make them rude, nor make them a bad server. This stems from the fact that Hong Kongers heavily prioritise efficiency, and the Cha Chaan Teng serves as a quick and affordable meal, akin to being a fast food shop like McDonald’s. So, unless you are actively seeking out high-end restaurants where customer service is guaranteed, the attitude of the servers should be the least of your concerns. In fact, some locals would argue that good service in lower-end restaurants often meant bad food quality, as the restaurant had to promote itself in some other way to attract customers. Obviously, it goes without saying that, as the rent continues to skyrocket in Hong Kong, from the restaurants’ point of view, the longer you sit, the fewer customers they can serve, which affects their profit margins.

In my opinion, there is no need to change Hong Kong’s usual service attitude. The catering industry has been serving Hong Kong people well for ages, especially the locals, who I think are the most important stakeholders in this debate. Some may argue that people might be dissuaded from visiting Hong Kong because of the service, but as evidenced by the social media posts and the number of tourists who just go to the Australian Dairy Company specifically to ‘challenge themselves’ by encountering the rude Hong Kong servers, I believe that the service here is just an ‘unforgettable experience’ for one to try out. The servers who yell ‘gei wai!’ (how many people?) are not being inhospitable, but only demonstrate the Hong Kong story: A culture that does not waste a single moment doing anything unnecessary. It certainly does not mean that we do not welcome tourists. ♦



What Does Being Intellectually Gifted Mean?

A Letter to Myself of 15 Years Ago

*Written by Harry Choi
(FS 2011/12, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)*

The readership is expected to include a lot of smart thinkers who are intelligent enough to perform well in certain domains. Some of them may fall into the category of the intellectually gifted, which is arbitrarily defined here as those within the top 2% of the population in terms of IQ, even though a lot of them may not know their own IQ.

Although this article about intelligence takes the form of a deeply personal letter to myself, I believe at least part of the intelligent readership can relate and get insights, inspiration, reassurance, or consolation from it. Through this writing, I strongly encourage you to explore the topics of intelligence, IQ, giftedness and neurodiversity on your own. These subjects are complex yet intriguing, filled with open questions, even within academic circles.

If you find this piece meaningful, I encourage you to share this with others who might be benefited and feel free to reach out, if you like to connect.

Dear Harry (2010),

You must be preparing for your exchange trip to Denmark right now. I'm writing to you from 2025 because I have come to understand—and accept—who I really am. You have always had a decent grasp of yourself, but now I have one more piece of the puzzle, one more piece of evidence.

I am going to start by saying that you are exactly who you're meant to be. You are mostly smart, you make wise decisions most of the time, and you stay strong, even when the world tells you that you don't quite fit in.

Yes, you will continue to encounter a lot of, and a lot more socially awkward moments, rejection and criticism about your communication style. This will happen in Hong Kong, Denmark, the UK, Canada and the US, especially when no one can really challenge your knowledge and ability.

You probably won't understand why people surrounding you act like that. It'll feel confusing, just like a typical child trying to understand transitive logic before age seven when "if $A > B$ and $B > C$, $A > C$ " is still not intuitive. You will question yourself, construct your own hypotheses and eventually theories to explain the phenomena you observe, and even get a diagnosis of autism in the US.

But now I've come to realise that all the speculation and the diagnosis of autism were unnecessary. You may simply be knowledgeable enough to convince the doctor that you have autism.

But in reality, when the environment changes, like now, in Japan, I have absolutely no problems related to autistic features. People here consistently praise me for my communication skills.

Back then, people around you said you were doing things the hard way, reinventing the wheel, not collaborating enough. Most people do not understand or sympathize with you. You kept thinking and suspecting the problem was you, because you have not yet accepted how different you truly are.

You are not just a little different. You are profoundly different. You always know you are smart; you learn fast and wonder why others don't. You even got very impatient and irritated when you were a kid. But you still think you are just slightly above average, perhaps in the 60-70th percentile. Even now, I still feel I am at most in the top 10%. But the truth is even more bleak and unforgiving, as if the horror reveals itself. According to 2 valid IQ tests, we are within the top X%.*

That persistent belief that "I am at most the top 10%" might be a cognitive bias because I simply don't have the chance to interact with people with significantly lower IQ, especially those below 70, who are classified as intellectually disabled. You need to understand you are an outlier. Society is mainly built by and for the majority. We are the X%, like the X% prevalence of schizophrenia. We are, in a way, an alien.

By getting and accepting this true "diagnosis", I hope you can convince yourself and conclude that you are entitled to be an alien and you are not wrong. The problem is the environment. So go find one that suits you. Also be cautious of mainstream advice like "get out of your comfort zone", "work harder to improve yourself", "make an impact". These are designed for the rat race and the majority. They may not even apply to you or improve your life.

Re-evaluate the meaning of joining the rat race set up by the majority society and whether it is really for you. At the same time, you are going to read, do research on and learn about intelligence and how most other intellectually gifted people are doing, and get insights from these. Having a high IQ does not automatically mean that you magically know all subjects, or you don't make mistakes, or you are inherently superior, or you are bad, or you are valuable to society, etc. But it means you are abnormal, like those intellectually disabled or with neurodevelopmental disorders; you are neurodivergent, not neurotypical. Your brain is wired differently.

If you still don't believe you are truly abnormal or you still doubt your intelligence, go take an IQ test—neither to prove anything to others nor to chase a number, but to gain clarity for your own sake. The test provides you with an objective method to characterize your intelligence relative to the population. It's not about being better or worse—it's about understanding that your mind works differently relative to the world around you.

As an alien now, I finally found and am sticking to my "abnormal" but comfortable environment, my comfort zone. I quit the rat race. I stopped working hard. I pay attention to my health in all biopsychosocial aspects. I do things for myself, and to be myself. Most of the things may be strange and do not fit in the majority society but it's totally fine, because I am an alien.

*Rest in peace,
Harry (2025)*

Because I see myself as an alien, I don't mind feeling awkward. Quite the opposite, I find feeling awkward entertaining sometimes and definitely stimulating. So feel free to reach out or leave me a message, whatever's on your mind. People like me can be impulsive, driven by sudden bursts of inspiration and burning urge—just like the one that led me to write and submit this article nearly a month past the deadline. Thankfully, the editorial board accepted it.

Actually, I am thinking if people like to write, they may submit their reply/correspondence to the newsletter, making it more interactive. I personally am planning to follow the newsletter more closely and submit my correspondence to interesting articles from now on.

* I intentionally left out the exact number because it's not the point; neither is comparing the exact IQ scores with your peers. Whether one is in the 1st or 2nd percentile, or 0.1th vs. 0.2th, doesn't matter. Scores can fluctuate due to health, motivation and emotional state (as well as practice!), just like any exams. The real purpose is classification, to understand whether you are typical or atypical. And if you are atypical, it's likely that your experience and perception deviate from the majority. ♦

Exploring Korea Through the Lens of INFP

Written by Eva Lee
(FS 2023/24, Hong Kong Baptist University)

What is your MBTI? As for me, I am an INFP. INFPs are often characterised by idealism and deep emotional understanding. I am grateful to the Fung Scholarship for giving me the chance to exchange in Korea in 2023. My time in Korea has allowed me to experience Jeong, a profound emotional connection that transcends words and cultural barriers.



Have you ever learned Korean? Please don't just tell me "annyeonghaseyo" (which means hello). In these six months, I have had several occasions to speak Korean, such as ordering in neighbourhood restaurants and markets. However, one thing that hasn't changed is that I hear compliments every time. I remember being in a restaurant with friends who know Korean. I asked one of them to teach me how to ask for the check, and when I paid the bill in Korean, the staff said, "Your Korean is good! For travelling?" I still remember how fluent I felt answering, "yuhaksaeng nida" (I am an exchange student). One of my fondest memories in Korea was wearing a hanbok with my friends at Gyeongbokgung Palace. We approached local children and asked them to take photos for us. Their faces lit up with joy, and they kept exclaiming, "Pretty!" This simple interaction created a deep emotional resonance, reminding me of the warmth that comes from shared moments. These moments of communal care highlighted the essence of Jeong - people coming together to help one another, even in unfamiliar surroundings.

From my very first days in Korea, I felt a genuine sense of welcome from locals who went out of their way to ensure the exchange students felt comfortable and included. One memorable experience was in my class, where a classmate sat next to me and struck up a conversation. We quickly bonded over our shared interests in food and she invited me to hang out after class. This gesture was more than just an invitation; it was a moment of connection that made me feel included in a new environment.



To be honest, the kindness I encountered, combined with the cultural focus in connection, enriched my understanding of what it truly means to include others. The small steps we take can brighten someone's heart and boost their confidence. It reminded me that at the heart of every interaction lies the power to make others feel seen and cherished - a lesson I will carry with me long after my time in Korea. May everyone have the opportunity to encounter the kindness that brightens their day. ♦



04

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editorial Board



Saamia Bukhari

Editor-in-Chief & Writer

(FS 2021/22, Boston College)

Saamia Bukhari earned her Master of Management in Hospitality from Cornell University's Nolan School of Hotel Administration, and a B.S. in Management from Boston College's Carroll School of Management. Her exchange semester at Seoul National University's business school was transformative, forming core memories and friendships that have developed her as a curious thinker and learner. After researching high-performing regional restaurants, she decided to take her experience and pair it with her inner foodie to publish her first book, *Restaurant Redefined: Exploring Trends in the Restaurant Industry* — a guide to the latest innovations in the restaurant world. Bukhari is passionate about business strategy, health and wellness, and uplifting her community. She applies her growth-mindset, dedication, and positive outlook to all her life pursuits.



Eva Lee

Graphic Designer & Writer

(FS 2023/24, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Eva Lee is a graduate of Hong Kong Baptist University, majoring in Geography. Thanks to the Fung Scholarship, she was able to begin her exchange at Seoul National University and spend a remarkable time in Korea.

Editorial Board



Chris Yeung

Editor

(FS 2022/23, City University of Hong Kong)

Chris is a law graduate from the City University of Hong Kong and is currently training at a local law firm. In 2022, he received the Fung Scholarship for his exchange program at the University of Oslo, enriching his legal knowledge. While aspiring to become a well-rounded lawyer, Chris enjoys exploring various hobbies, such as learning different new languages and participating in different volunteering events.



Anson Cheung

Editor & Writer

(FS 2024/25, The Education University of Hong Kong)

Anson is a penultimate year student pursuing a dual degree in Arts and Education. Committed to the local community and driven by a genuine passion for education, he leverages multilingual skills and global experiences to make a meaningful impact beyond classrooms. He had his exchange semesters in Germany and Canada during his studies. Versatile, enthusiastic, and communicative, he lives to bridge cultural divides and inspire meaningful growth.



Sam Siu Chuen, Jayden

Editor & Writer

(FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

Sam Siu Chuen, Jayden is a Dual Degree Program student at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Being a cultural exchange enthusiast, he enjoys sharing stories that inspire and build connections. Jayden has become a Fung Scholar since 2024/25, during which he spent an unforgettable semester in the United States. In his free time, he loves playing billiards.

Editorial Board



Kate Lin

Editor

(FS 2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Kate Lin is a seasoned professional in investment content and editorial strategy with nine years of industry experience. As the Content and Editorial Lead at Endowus, a leading independent digital wealth platform in Asia, her work focuses on empowering individuals with personal finance education and financial literacy. She is a dedicated advocate for this cause, a passion that has defined her career from her days at Morningstar. She holds a Bachelor of Social Sciences with First Class Honours in Journalism from Hong Kong Baptist University, where she was also a recipient of Fung Scholarship for her exchange studies in London.



Andrew Poon

Editor & Writer

(FS 2018/19, City University of Hong Kong)

Andrew Poon is an aspiring architect and proud Fung Scholar. He received the Fung Scholarship for his exchange at the Technical University of Munich while completing his bachelor's degree at City University of Hong Kong, and later earned a Master of Architecture at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His exchange experiences span Germany, Austria, and Hong Kong, where he also served as an exchange ambassador. His professional experience covers various projects such as the Sogo Twin Tower Malls in Kai Tak and public housing developments in Hong Kong. Andrew is now practicing architecture in Perth, Western Australia.

Editorial Board



Natasha Ho

Editor & Writer

(FS 2025/26, The University of Hong Kong)

Natasha Ho is the recipient of the Fung Scholarship award for 2025/2026 and will be going on exchange to the UK in the coming Autumn term. Double majoring in English and History and minoring in Journalism and media studies at the University of Hong Kong, she is interested in women and gender studies, online and pop culture as well as Hong Kong history. In her spare time, Natasha likes to debate, read, and binge-watch comfort shows, as well as hanging out with friends and families.



Joseph Maxwell Asamoah

Editor

(FS 2025/26, Lingnan University)

Joseph Maxwell Asamoah is a Fung Scholar (2025) and PhD candidate in Accounting at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His research explores corporate disclosure, debt choice, governance, and capital markets, with work presented at international conferences and published in journals such as *Managerial Finance* and the *Journal of International Financial Markets, Institutions & Money*. Beyond research, Joseph is actively engaged in leadership. He serves as Student Board Member of Lingnan's Faculty of Business, Treasurer of the Research Postgraduate Students' Circle, and has represented research postgraduates at the departmental level. In addition to his student roles, he is also involved in various community leadership activities. Joseph values the Fung Scholars community as a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and building global perspectives.

Editorial Board



Chan Kei Ching, Evan

Writer

(FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

With a strong foundation in project-based experiences that began in primary school and continuing through to my major in Integrative Systems and Design, Evan is dedicated to ideating and rapidly developing effective solutions to solve real-world challenges. He pursued an extended major in AI, driven by my belief in its pivotal role in the future. Currently, he contributes to the NiceGUI library to popularize Python-based web development to maximize the potential of Python's diverse ecosystem of AI libraries. He's happy to chitchat about tech or anything in general.



Lam Lok Hin, Jason

Writer

(FS 2025/26, The University of Hong Kong)

LAM Lok Hin, Jason is a Risk Management student at the University of Hong Kong, currently based in Hong Kong. As a passionate advocate for cultural exchange, he enjoys sharing stories that connect and inspire. Jason participated in the Fung Scholars program in 2025/26, spending an unforgettable semester in United Kingdom. In his free time, he loves playing football.



Wong Weng Hei, Anakin

Writer

(FS 2023/24, The Education University of Hong Kong)

Wong Weng Hei, Anakin, is a final year student at The Education University of Hong Kong, majoring in BEd (Honours) (English Language)—Primary. Passionate about language pedagogy and celebrating cultural diversity, he actively explores inquiry-based learning strategies to foster a vibrant and inclusive dynamic in his classrooms. As an aspiring educator, he has pursued internship placements and academic exchanges in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and South Korea to keep abreast of the 21st-century curriculum models and pedagogies.

Editorial Board



Shirley Ko

Writer

(FS 2024/25, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

Shirley is a dedicated calligrapher and proud Fung Scholar graduating from HKUST, weaving art and culture to inspire connection. For eight years, she immersed herself in Chinese calligraphy. Having showcased her work in two public exhibitions and competed in two contests, Shirley finds joy in calligraphy's transformative power, pushing her to grow and embrace progress over perfection. As a workshop host, she shares this passion, fostering creativity within the Fung Scholars community and beyond.



John Poon

Writer

(FS 2016/17, Hong Kong Baptist University)

John Poon has over 5 years of experience in public policy and public affairs that focuses on public policy analysis, advocacy and stakeholders engagement. He is currently the Advocacy & Engagement Advisor for Asia Pacific at amfori. His role is to implement amfori's advocacy and stakeholder engagement plans and actions in sustainable trade, responsible supply chains and ESG related priority issues in the APAC region. Prior to amfori, he was the Public Affairs Manager at Tencent and Assistant Manager, Business Policy of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce. Beyond his professional role, John is active in youth affairs. He serves on the Youth Service Advisory Committee of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) and the HKSAR Government's Yau Tsim Mong District Youth Community Building Committee (2025–2027). He is also the Convenor of the Youth Development Group of HKFYG's Youth I.D.E.A.S. think tank. John holds a Master of Public Policy from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. Prior to this, he graduated from Hong Kong Baptist University with a Bachelor of Social Sciences in Communication - Journalism where he was awarded Fung Scholarship in 2016–17 for his exchange programme in London.

Editorial Board



Karlie Kho

Writer

(FS 2019/20, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Being passionate about photography, running and various other pursuits, Karlie finds opportunities to explore inner self from diverse perspectives. The exchange study journey transformed her from a creative writing student to a creative arts lover, Karlie then immersed in the international supply chain industry with experience in project coordination and information analysis.



Thando Martin-Weiler

Writer

(FS 2023/24, Northeastern University)

Thando Ray was awarded the Fung Scholarship in 2023 to support a co-op involving biogas technology in Indonesia. After graduating with a Mechanical Engineering degree from Northeastern University, he has been working as the WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Fellow for Engineers in Action, based in Eswatini. His goal is to co-create tools and infrastructure that support long-term resilience, community ownership, and dignity, using his skills and experience as an engineer, along with his passion and training in human services.

Editorial Board



Harry Choi

Writer

(FS 2011/12, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Living in Japan. Frequently working at University of Tokyo. (Hi! FS from UTokyo or Japan!) Killing time. Doing physical and mental exercises to stay healthy and prevent diseases and pain. Getting bored easily and questioning meaning constantly. Always seeking stimulation, especially new, unimaginable and abnormal ones. Used to have a very wide range of interests, actively join FS activities and talk a lot in those events back in HK. Feel free to find him if you can relate (through Foundation [admin@fungscholars.org] or Yani [yanichan@fungfoundation.org] who can give you his email.). His ways of thinking: science, cosmicism, Taoist philosophy.



Ying Ng

Writer

(FS 2014/15, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Ying is a sustainable fashion educator, eco-lifestyle YouTuber, and farmer. She earned a Master of Philosophy (2024) and a First-Class Honours Bachelor's degree from the School of Fashion and Textiles at PolyU, with over eight years of experience in fashion product development, academic research, and sustainable fashion education.

Since 2022, Ying has embraced a "half-farming, half-X" lifestyle on Lantau Island, learning farming techniques from local farmers and organizing multiple farmers' markets and workshops to promote the use of local ingredients to reduce carbon emissions. Recognizing the lack of environmental content creators in Hong Kong, Ying began managing her platforms "ying_ecolifestyle" on Instagram and YouTube full-time in April 2024. She focuses on sharing sustainable fashion, local ingredients, and eco-friendly living tips. Through videos and her expertise in fabric knowledge, she aims to inspire public interest in fun and practical sustainable lifestyles.

Editorial Board



Kady Wong Hoi Kei

Writer

(FS 2008/09, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Kady Wong Hoi Kei is a landscape designer and academic whose work is guided by a humanities-oriented philosophy. She employs phenomenology as a method for both observation and creation, a practice evident in her ongoing series, “Code of Self-learning for Life,” which transforms lived experiences into poems, articles, and design responses.

Kady's international practice includes experience in Italy, Germany, Japan, and Hong Kong, at firms such as Ove Arup & Partners and in the studio of Pritzker Prize laureate Riken Yamamoto. She has lectured in landscape architecture and design at institutions including HKDI, BCU, and PolyU, on subjects ranging from design history and theory to dissertation supervision. Her Master of Landscape Architecture from HKU was distinguished by over ten awards, including three HKILA Design Awards. A co-founder of LEAPS and an accredited NEC4 ECC Project Manager, she is also a Fung Scholar, a credential that supported her academic exchange to Tsinghua University.



Mariah Stewart

Writer

(FS 2011/12, The University of Hong Kong)

Mariah Stewart became a Fung Scholar when she was a Geography undergraduate in The University of Hong Kong and spent a wonderful semester on exchange in Australian National University. She later pursued master studies on Environmental Change and Management in The University of Oxford. Her career spans from corporate sustainability, ESG consulting to nature conservation, taking her to meetings and conferences in major Chinese cities and most recently Africa.

Editorial Board



Stanley Mitchell

Writer

(FS 2015/16, University of Oxford)

Stanley Mitchell participated in the Beijing Normal University International Youth Leadership programme with the support of the Fung Scholarship while he completed his Master's in Molecular and Cellular Biochemistry, specialising in biological logic systems.

Since then he has worked around the world, from Tokyo to Lagos, for industries as varied as oil and gas, defence technology, and agrichemicals, always at the cutting edge of technology deployment. He is now a successful entrepreneur, focussing on commercialising breakthrough new technologies from UK universities.



Isra Shabir

Writer

(FS 2011/12, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT))

Isra Shabir is a technologist and social entrepreneur who leads programs at Girls Make Games, an initiative making video game development accessible to girls and young women around the world. She leads operations, program management as well design and delivery. Together with the team, she is on a mission to empower one million girls by 2030.

Isra graduated from MIT in 2015, earning a degree in computer science with a focus on human-computer interaction (HCI). She spent her early career at different leading tech companies as a software engineer. While at MIT, she co-published a technical paper with Professor Hal Abelson, a pioneer in modern computer systems.

Outside of work, Isra enjoys watching movies, learning languages (currently Mandarin), and spending time with her family. She also supports educational nonprofits and initiatives in Pakistan.

Acknowledgements & Welcome

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all scholars who have contributed their stories and experiences to this edition of *The Heart of Hospitality*. Your insights and reflections enrich our community and foster a deeper understanding of our diverse cultures.

To our newcomers, we warmly welcome you to share your unique perspectives for our next newsletter. Your voices are essential in weaving the vibrant tapestry of our hospitality community.

Thank you for being a part of this journey!



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