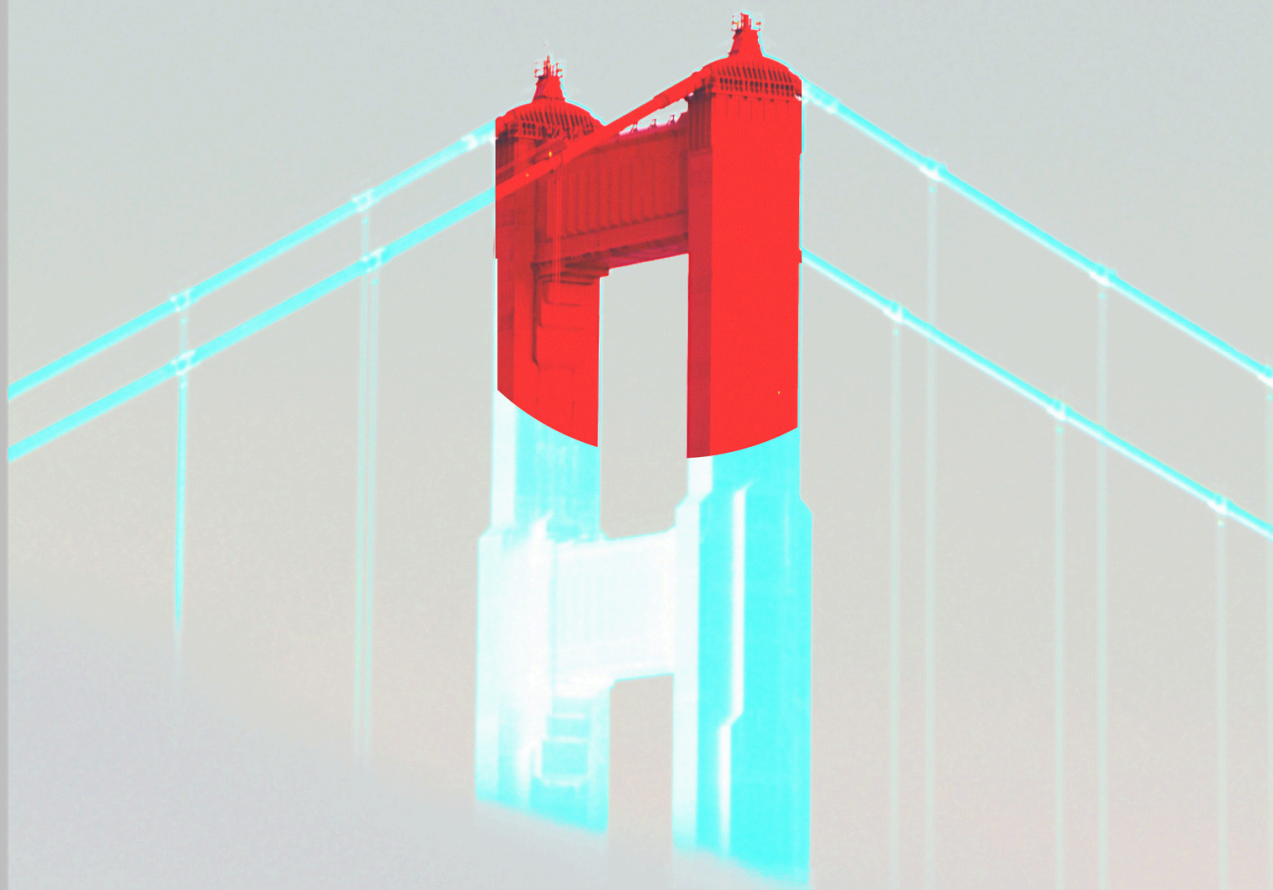


Connection across Contrasts

Vol. 26



馮氏 Victor and William
FUNG FOUNDATION
經綸慈善基金

May
2026

Editorial note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 26th issue of the Fung Scholars Network Newsletter!

It is my great pleasure to present this edition's theme: Connection Across Contrasts. As a sociology student, I have always tried not to stop at personal experience, but to connect my own experiences with those of others and with broader social issues. As a student who has participated in an exchange program, I experienced firsthand the contrasts between cultures and perspectives, as well as the value of seeking genuine connection within these differences. This led me to reflect on how differences shape interactions in broader contexts and among more diverse groups of people. I believe many Fung Scholars who have studied, worked, or lived in different parts of the world may resonate with this experience.

The forms of social interaction shaped by difference are diverse. They may lead to conflict, cooperation, or integration. For this reason, I deliberately chose the neutral word 'contrast', without any emotional or attitudinal implication, to describe this condition.

From the articles collected in this issue, we can see that Fung Scholars have offered different strategies and lived experiences of building connections across contrasts. Some found similarities within differences and used them as a foundation for connection. Others emphasized that the willingness and effort to connect matter most. Some shared how, through their work or practice, they became bridges between different groups and communities. Every story shared here is precious and vibrant in its own way. I invite you to open these treasure boxes in the following pages.

I believe that although individuals, communities, and organisations exist in different environments, and therefore differ in their rules, values, and behaviours, we still share a common human tendency toward kindness, peace, and connection with others.

Finally, thank you to all the writers for contributing your experiences and reflections, to the editors for your hard work, and to the graphic designer for expressing the spirit of this newsletter through its visual design. This newsletter itself is also a product of our connection across contrasts.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and discovering the many meaningful connections shared within these pages.

Yan Lanjing
Editor-in-Chief

May
2026

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I



FS Event
Updates

2025

Fung Scholars Leadership Conference 2025

Victor and William Fung Foundation
Asia Global Institute

4-5 OCT

FS Hiking Day

Victor and William Fung Foundation

15 NOV

FS attending Asia Global Dialogue

Asia Global Institute

21 NOV

FS Movie Night of Fallen Angels

Benny Ng (FS 2023/24, The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

21 NOV

FS Two-wheel Trek

Victor and William Fung Foundation

23 NOV

Welcome Gathering for HKUST FS 2025/26 S2

Victor and William Fung Foundation

29 NOV

FS Volunteering Tai Po Fire

Victor and William Fung Foundation

29 NOV

FS Fireside Chat: Embracing the Life of a Slasher

Guest Speakers:

Angel Lee (FS 2012/13, City University of Hong Kong)

Joscelin Yeung (FS 2014/15, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Leann Wong (FS 2022/23, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Soya So (FS 2015/16, Lingnan University)

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

6 DEC

2026

FS Air Pistol Taster Session

Willie Yip (FS 2009/10, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

11 JAN

The Happy Reset: Play, Connect & Envision 2026

Joscelin Yeung (FS 2014/15, Hong Kong Baptist University)

1 FEB

Welcome Gathering for Mainland FS 2025/26 S2

Victor and William Fung Foundation

7 FEB

FS Chinese Calligraphy Taster Session:

Welcome the Year of Horse with Your Own Fai Chun

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

7 FEB

FS Movie Night of An Autumn's Tale

Karlie Chen (FS 2011/12, Hong Kong Baptist University)

27 FEB

FS Ping Shan Poon Choi Gathering

Victor and William Fung Foundation

7 MAR

FS Guided Tour of Hong Kong Flower Show 2026

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

20 MAR

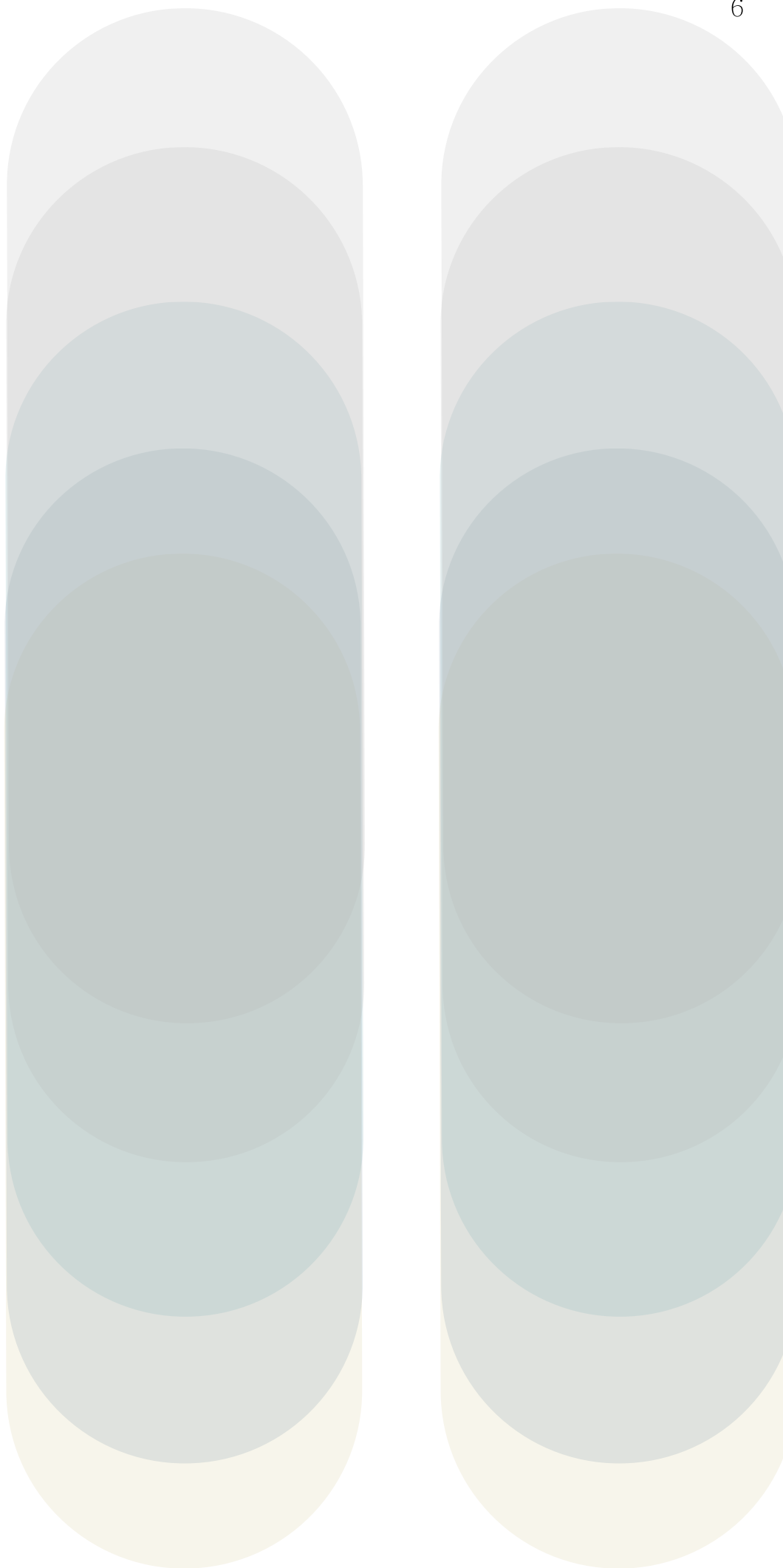
FS Movie Night of City of Glass

Karlie Chen (FS 2011/12, Hong Kong Baptist University)

27 MAR

II

Biography of the Editorial Team



Biography
of the
Editorial
Team



Editor-in-Chief & Writer
Yan Lanjing

FS 2024/25, Nanjing University

Lanjing is a sociology student from Nanjing University. In 2025, she received the Fung Scholarship for her exchange program at the University of Hong Kong. Her academic interest in sociology and anthropology has shaped her persistent focus on cross-cultural communication and interpersonal connections. Her fieldwork on disability issues in Hong Kong further deepened reflects her values of diversity, inclusion, and connection.

Graphic Designer
Sammi Lau

FS 2022/23, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Sammi Lau is a fashion design student and Fung Scholar from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Through the Fung Scholarship, she studied fashion in Toronto and broadened her exposure to international design education. Although she is not currently working as a fashion designer, she is dedicated to contributing her creative skills to the garment industry.



Editor & Writer
Natasha Ho

FS 2025/26, The University of Hong Kong

Natasha Ho is the recipient of the Fung Scholarship award for 2025/2026 and went on exchange to the University of Warwick in the past 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 read, and binge-watch comfort shows, as well as hanging out with friends and family.



Editor & Writer
Eve Zhang

FS 2019/20, Xiamen University

Jing Zhang, Fung Scholar of 2019/20 from Xiamen University. She is an educational ethnographer and a PhD candidate in education. In the past four years, she has lived with different local host families across Europe and the UK, where she conducted her teaching and research work. She will be visiting Yale in the US for the 2026-2027 academic year. She holds an M.Ed. in higher education and a B.A. in anthropology.



Biography of the Editorial Team



Editor Ishrat Fatima

FS 2014/15, Asian University for Women

Ishrat Fatima, FS recipient of year 2014 to 2018 while studying at Asian University for Women, in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Also, she has completed her Master of Science in Public Health from Aga Khan University, Karachi, in 2024. Currently, she is working on community based research projects at Aga Khan University. She attended FS conference 2017 at Hangzhou and has been part of our editorial board in a previous newsletter. In her spare time she loves reading books, traveling and vlogging. She is also interested in maintaining a healthy lifestyle by doing exercise and also shares her workout videos online.

Editor & Writer Krystal Law

FS 2024/25, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Krystal is a final-year student at PolyU with a love for history, culture, and new experiences. Friendly, outgoing, and always up for a challenge, she brings a fun and energetic vibe to everything she does. She enjoys discovering the stories and meaning behind the past, but she is just as excited to dive into something new and unexpected. Outside of editing, she is really into hiking and loves getting outdoors for her next adventure.



Writer Hau Ching Wong, Oki

FS 2023/24, Lingnan University

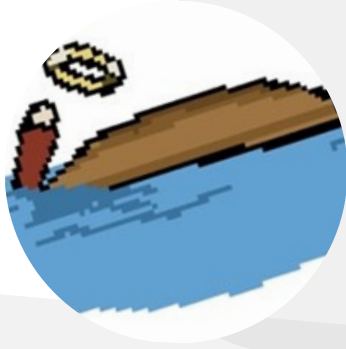
Hau Ching has multiple identities. Apart from working in an NGO to serve the elderly, she is also a trilingual interpreter (Chi-Eng-Pth), piano and flute instructor. She is eager to design meaningful and recharging activities for the elderly. She received the Fung Scholarship for a semester exchange in Scotland while completing her bachelor's degree in translation and interpreting with first class honours. She received the second and third prize in interpreting competitions at Lingnan University. Besides, with her professional instrument training, her students won numerous prizes in the PIARA Hamamatsu Piano Competition, Bangkok International Piano Competition etc.

Writer Sam Chan

FS 2019/20, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Sam Chan, FS Scholar of 2019/20, currently working in higher education administration. Driven by both his personal journey and his professional background, Sam is interested in student wellness, mental health, and building resilient peer support networks. His work also explores social services, service learning, and fostering meaningful cross-cultural exchanges.

Biography of the Editorial Team



Writer Kingyo Zhang

FS 2022/23, Peking University

ZHANG Xinyao, Kingyo, FS Scholar of 2023, currently studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for an MPhil degree. Inspired by his interest in how people in ancient societies thought and communicated, he is doing research on pre-modern Japanese and Korean societies.

Writer CPY, Pui Yi Chow

FS 2024/25, Hong Kong Baptist University

CPY graduated with first-class honours from the Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) in Acting for Global Screen programme at Hong Kong Baptist University in 2025. She also completed an acting exchange semester at the University of the Arts London and has undertaken actor training in Toronto and Bali. Yep, she has a great passion for travelling. Another interest of hers is... washing dishes. She is currently trying to survive as a freelance actor and performer.

Her recent stage experiences include SmileMind Interactive theatre "LaamTin: Shattered and Reborn" (2026), Heart Global Japan Fall Tour (2025), Polka Theatre X UAL Wimbledon London "Pansy and the Salamander" Children Puppet Devising Musical (2025), Taipei Fringe Festival X Cinematic Theatre "Cinderella and the temple" 2.0 and its Hong Kong premiere (2024), and HK3ami International Arts Carnival: "The Enchanted Bookshop Musical" (2022). Her recent screen experiences include: music videos such as POZER "SHANGHIGH NOON" (2025), Jer@MIRROR "Melancholy Pen" (2024), and Hins Cheung "The Last Mad Surge of Youth" (2023).

Feel free to find her on Instagram @cpypuiyi_ / email her at cpypuiyichow820@gmail.com



Writer Oscar Shum

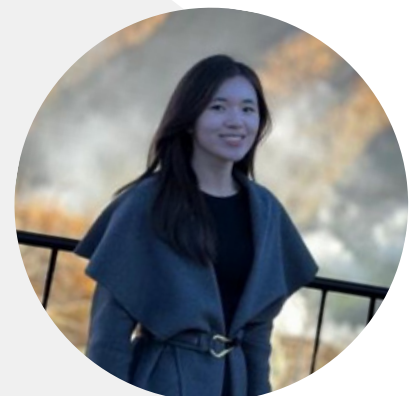
FS 2022/23, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Oscar is a young researcher at the CUHK, specialising in Chinese politics. He co-founded The Arch Club Hong Kong, a platform for students and young professionals to exchange ideas through training programmes, workshops and field trips. He also works as a freelance policy analyst with a public affairs consultancy, focusing on geopolitical risk and lobbying.

Writer Kristen Xie

FS 2024/25, The Education University of Hong Kong

Kristen is currently pursuing her degree in English Education at The Education University of Hong Kong. While her heart lies in language, she's no stranger to the business world, frequently challenging herself in business case competitions. Kristen's reading list is as diverse as her interests, spanning from literary classics to non-fiction. For her, nothing beats the flow state found in a great book—especially when paired with the peaceful atmosphere of a quiet cafe.



Biography of the Editorial Team



Writer
Evan Pun

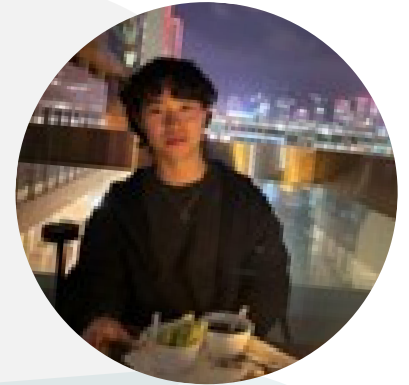
FS 2022/23, Lingnan University

Evan Pun is the founder of CantoNet, where he helps non-local students survive and connect in Hong Kong through real-life Cantonese. Originally active in university debate, he pivoted into language education after realizing that true connection goes beyond words and into lived experience. Having grown up between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, he is driven to bridge cultures through language, community, and shared moments.

Writer
Anson Cheung

FS 2024/25, The Education University of Hong Kong

Anson is a final-year student pursuing a dual degree in Language and Education. He is committed to serving the local community and is driven by a genuine passion for education. A keen traveller with a strong interest in cross-cultural exchange, he spent exchange semesters in Germany and Canada during his studies, where he formed many meaningful connections and lasting memories. Versatile, enthusiastic, and communicative, he lives to bridge cultural divides and inspire meaningful growth.



Writer
Nikita Hayward

FS 2013/14, University of Oxford

Nikita Hayward began her journey as a Fung Scholar in 2014, when she was awarded a Li & Fung Scholarship to undertake a summer internship at Beijing Normal University, which also happened to be her first trip to Asia. In subsequent years she has travelled across the continent to live and work in China, India, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Nikita attended the Fung Scholars Leadership Conference in Hong Kong in 2023 and has since returned there to explore the diversity of the urban and natural landscapes. She is interested in cultural heritage, improving her knowledge of Mandarin and learning Cantonese! She currently works as a Speech and Language Therapist in London.



Writer
Suruchi Shahi

FS 2014/15, Asian University for Women

Suruchi Shahi is an epidemiology graduate student at the University at Albany, SUNY, pursuing her MS with a focus on Maternal and Child Health. She also holds a Master's in Gender Studies from Tribhuvan University, Nepal, and brings over three years of field research experience as a researcher and program associate at a public health research consulting firm, where she collaborated with several health organizations. She spent five years studying biological sciences and public health at the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh as a Fung Scholar. Post-graduation, she completed Teach For Nepal fellowship where she taught in a rural village in Lalitpur. Before she moved to the United States for higher education, she most recently was working a role as program coordinator in a youth-led organization. Outside of academia, she enjoys nature walks, has a soft spot for trees and flowers in bloom, and likes to unwind with a good feminist book or film, usually in the company of her two cats, Binx and Fucche, who have strong opinions about her schedule.



Do u recognise it?

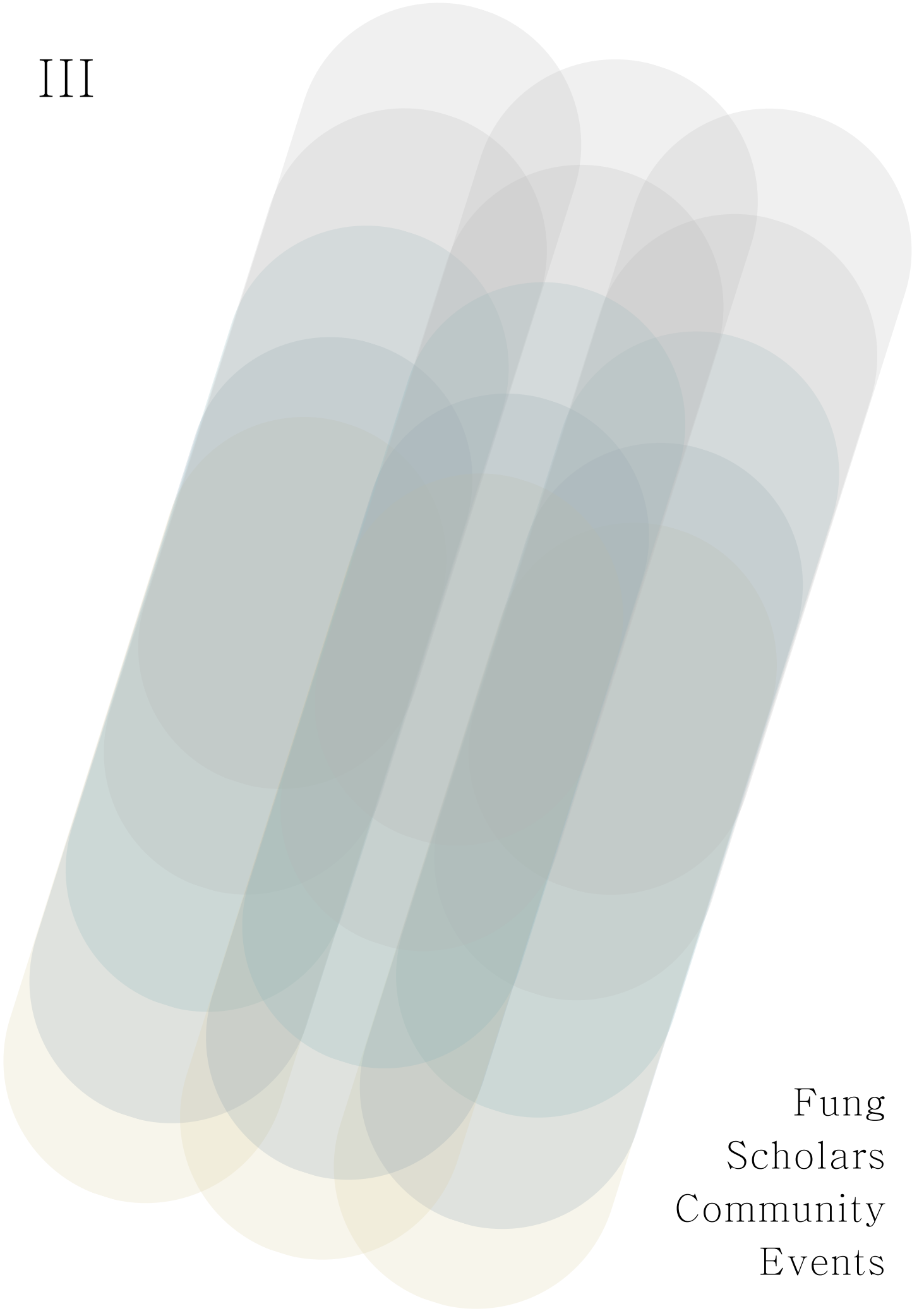


A merry-go-round

...it is a bridge.



III



Fung
Scholars
Community
Events

Rethinking Leadership Under Fire: Every Action Counts

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly defined by sustained volatility, where rules shift faster than institutions can adapt. Against this backdrop, the Fung Scholars Leadership Conference 2025 took place in Hong Kong in October, serving as a platform for ideas and debate. The central question was both simple and profound: what kind of world are we living in, and what challenges must we confront?

The conference, as it does every year, was more than just a gathering of bright minds. It felt like entering a space designed for genuine dialogue, where every conversation carried the weight of real-world struggles. The energy in the room was distinctive. Participants were not merely discussing abstract theories; they were confronting pressing challenges faced by people worldwide. Problems were identified, vulnerabilities were acknowledged, and ideas were shaped openly. This marked the first step toward developing cross-sector solutions in a world that increasingly resists simple answers.

The theme, Navigating the Tariff War: Leadership Under Fire, framed discussions around trade disputes, but the conversation quickly expanded. What emerged was a broader interrogation of how leaders operate when circumstances are constantly changing. A recurring sentiment sharpened the perspective: leadership today is the art of navigating “unknown unknowns”. The familiar “known unknowns,” such as policy changes or predictable geopolitical shifts, felt almost reassuring by comparison. It is the unpredictable forces that reveal how fragile our assumptions can be.





Acknowledging our limits does not diminish agency; instead, it clarifies where our agency lies. When we lose long-term visibility, focusing on the present becomes a more defined strategy. Leadership under fire is not about grand gestures; it's about effectively managing our immediate sphere of influence. While few of us can impact global trade negotiations, we still have complete control over our disciplines, our judgments, and the small decisions that strengthen our organisations from within.

The keynote addresses set a positive tone for the event. Mr. Andrew Sheng reminded us of the importance of preparedness and adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Dr. William K. Fung encouraged us to confront turbulence in our own unique ways, while Dr. Victor K. Fung emphasised the necessity of navigating complexity with resilience and innovation.

Equally compelling were the presentations by the AsiaGlobal Fellows and Fung Scholars, who shared their personal journeys. Ms. Khatia Dekanoidze spoke courageously about challenges of reforming institutions and the personal sacrifices that public service demands. Ms. Christina Monroe reflected on the nuances of leadership across cultures. Meanwhile, others, such as Ms. Saule Agatayeva and Ms. Sunika Joshi, explored ESG in action and inclusive leadership in a time of disconnection.

Their collective contributions highlighted that leadership is not limited to one sector or geographic area; rather, it is a shared responsibility that spans various disciplines.

My sense of agency was heightened during the Ideas Polygram. I discussed spatial politics, arguing that space is not just a passive backdrop, but an active force that shapes behaviour and power. The room served as evidence of my point: the arrangement of chairs, the tempo of facilitation, and the style of engagement dictated how trust was built and how creativity emerged. The contributions of fellow scholars were equally inspiring, and they shared empowering young talent through game-based learning and designing educational environments that stimulate curiosity instead of compliance. Although each idea was different in form, they were united in purpose: **to build platforms where diverse minds can meet on equal terms.**

During a break, I had a conversation with a participant from the education sector. Over coffee, we compared our insights on how leadership differs in classrooms compared to boardrooms. Our exchange was brief but enlightening. Whether we are shaping young learners or guiding institutions, the challenge remains the same: creating an environment where trust and curiosity can thrive.





Oscar at Ideas Program

The cross-sector interactions revealed a quiet but powerful truth: trust is not a soft virtue; it is important for navigating complexity. It grows not from formality but through honest, iterative exchanges. In a global economy “under fire”, these deliberative spaces serve as sanctuaries. They are not escapes from reality; rather, they are incubators for clearer thinking. The conference itself was a kind of relational framework, that allowed participants to challenge established assumptions and regain clarity amidst complexity. In times of geopolitical fragmentation, such networks are not luxuries; they are crucial assets defense.

One of the most enduring insights about leadership in a volatile age is that it rarely announces itself through dramatic gestures. Instead, it operates more subtly, focusing on the ability to notice weak signals, to maintain credibility amidst chaos, and to confront uncertainty with disciplined curiosity rather than performative certainty. However, the real test comes after the conference ends. Momentum can fade unless it is deliberately sustained. As we return to our own respective fields, we face the challenge of holding on to that sense of micro-agency. Our roles are not static assignments; they serve as platforms from which we must remain intellectually vigilant.

The storms will continue to come. However, resilience does not mean the absence of volatility. Rather, it is the practice of responding to challenges with clarity, precision, and the courage to take action on the small things we can control. That is the true essence of leading under fire.

by Oscar Shum
FS 2022/23, The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Between Speeds and Stakes

When the invitation to the Asia Global Dialogue 2025 arrived, one word caught my eye: “Changes.” As a humanities student one year away from graduation, I feel that the world seems to be telling my cohort that everything we've trained for is being rewritten. AI has become the question I can't escape: what will be left for us to do? What kind of work, what kind of life, waits on the other side of this transition? I went hoping for answers. I left with something less tidy but, I think, more honest: a set of critical insights that have reshaped how I see both the technology and my own place in it.

The Transition Problem is Bigger Than Jobs

The opening panel brought back Dr. Victor Fung, Prof. Michael Spence, and Mr. Andrew Sheng — a decade after they first asked whether AI would destroy more jobs than it creates. This time, Victor Fung didn't entertain the old debate. He said it's over: AI will create more jobs. The real challenge is transition — **how do we retrain billions of people who are still prepared for yesterday's work?**

That framing shifted something for me. The question isn't whether new jobs will exist; it's whether we have the institutions, the patience, and the political will to move people into them before they're left behind. This reminds me of Yuval Noah Harari, in *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, warns that the rise of AI could create a “useless class” — people who are not just unemployed but unemployable because their skills are no longer economically valuable. The antidote, he argues, isn't more technical training but continuous reinvention: the ability to learn new skills again and again throughout life.

As a humanities student, I've been asking myself if my skills — close reading, critical thinking, contextual understanding — will still matter. But maybe the question is backwards. Maybe the real scarcity won't be coders, but people who can navigate the messiness of transition: who can design retraining programs that actually work, who can help communities adapt, who can ask what kind of society we're building, not just how fast we can build it.

One line from the speaker stuck: “It's not really a choice. Competition will force you to use AI. You will be absorbed by it eventually.” That's uncomfortable. But it clarified something: my anxiety isn't about whether I'll use AI tools effectively; it's about whether I'll still be able to ask the kinds of questions that a purely technical education trains you to ignore.



The Asymmetry Behind the Hype

Mr. Andrew Sheng introduced a framework that made the global stakes visible: “ACI Plus” — America, China, India, and the rest. Building frontier AI models requires massive compute, talent, data, and market scale. That concentration means a handful of countries set the trajectory; everyone else rides it.

But then Mr. Sheng added a twist that reframed everything. AI is only as good as its data. Rubbish data, rubbish AI. That means the real foundation isn't compute — it's the digital infrastructure that collects, organizes, and makes data useful. He pointed to India's leap to a national digital identity, where almost every citizen now has a QR code. It's not flashy, but it's a quiet revolution in inclusion. It changes who can participate in the digital economy.

This matters because we tend to obsess over models and ignore the data ecosystems that feed them. If you control the digital rails, you don't just influence AI; you shape what counts as knowledge. For someone trained to ask who gets to speak and whose stories are told, that felt like familiar ground.

Harari's work reinforces this in 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, emphasizing that control over data will be as crucial as control over land or factories was in earlier eras. The question of who owns the data — and who gets to interpret it — is a question of power. The AI conversation, then, is also a conversation about democracy.



Speed is the New Asymmetry

The word I heard most often was speed. AI is compressing decades of change into years. Global supply chains are being reconfigured faster than we can model the consequences. One speaker noted that finance is the second-largest spender on AI — and that's changing how we define value itself, right down to tokenizing assets. When money becomes code, what does economic stability even mean?

A moment of honesty came when someone said: “It terrifies people.” I appreciated that. Fear is rational when the structures you've built your life around are being rewritten in real time. As someone about to step into a job market that feels like it's being redesigned while I'm standing in it, that fear is not abstract.

Harari writes that the 21st century's defining feature is that we can no longer predict the future —not just because it's complex, but because technology moves faster than our ability to model it. The most important skill, he argues, is the ability to keep learning and to deal with uncertainty.

Another speaker offered a grounding response: “Looking back is helpful.” We've been through technological shifts before — the printing press, electricity, the internet. Each time, the transition was brutal, and each time we eventually built new institutions that made the technology livable. The question is whether we can do that again, at the speed required.

That's where the critical insight lies: speed isn't neutral. It advantages those who can move fast — large corporations, concentrated computing power, countries with deep infrastructure — and it leaves behind those who can't. The conversation about AI, then, isn't just about technology; it's about who gets to set the pace and who gets left behind in the rush.



Foundation team and Fung Scholars participants

What We're Not Talking About

One of the most useful moments for me came when a speaker asked: “What was not being talked about?” I started paying attention to the silences. We talked a lot about AI and jobs, but less about how low-income makers — small-scale producers, informal workers — would interact with this change. We talked about scale, but less about the fact that “quantity is quality itself” when it comes to data: the more data you have, the better your models, which means early movers lock in structural advantages that are hard to reverse. We talked about geopolitics, but often through the lens of great-power competition, leaving out the middle powers and the spaces where cross-cultural integration — China and India, for instance — might actually build bridges.

And we talked very little about the humanities. In a conversation about what skills undergraduates in Hong Kong should be developing, the answer was practical: aided science, cognitive science, coding. All valuable. But I kept thinking about something Dr. Victor Fung said afterward, in a quieter moment. Someone asked whether young people should still study the humanities. He said: “AI will do the transactional work. What we need are people who understand context, ethics, and how to ask the right questions.”

Harari would agree, he argues that in an age of information overload, the most important skill is the ability to make sense of information — to distinguish what matters from what doesn't. That's precisely what the humanities teach: critical thinking, narrative comprehension, ethical reasoning.

by Kristen Xie
FS 2024/25, The Education University of Hong Kong



What I'm Taking Forward

As an attendee, I was supposed to be thinking about how ideas translate into action. AGD 2025 didn't give me a roadmap. But it gave me something perhaps more valuable: a clearer sense of what questions I need to keep asking. Harari's central question — how do we stay sane and free in a world that's changing faster than we can comprehend — feels more urgent than ever. AGD 2025 didn't answer it for me, but it gave me a community of people who are asking it together. I'm grateful to the Victor and William Fung Foundation for the trust that allowed me to be in the room, and to the Asia Global Institute for hosting a dialogue that was as honest as it was ambitious. I came away not with easy answers, but with a sharper sense of what it means to ask the right questions — and to keep asking them.

Learning in the Spaces Between

For a long time, I thought I just wasn't good at languages. After eight years of studying Japanese in a classroom, I still couldn't speak it comfortably. At one point, I had pretty much given up on learning languages. I started to believe languages just weren't for me. Instead of forcing it, I shifted my focus to debate.

In university, debate gave me a different kind of confidence. I learned how to structure arguments, respond quickly, and express ideas clearly. It felt like I had finally found something I was good at — something that I could bring my ideas out and share with people.

But during my exchange in Leeds, I started to notice something different. Everything starts shifting in my world again. I met people from different backgrounds, and conversations didn't follow the same structure I was used to. They weren't simply about being right or clear. Even when my English felt fluent, something was missing: the conversations worked, but they didn't always connect.



CantoNet at Lingnan University



CantoNet at City University of Hong Kong



CantoNet at City University of Hong Kong

That was the first time I realized that communication and connection are not the same. Coming back to Hong Kong was the hardest part. I hadn't planned to start teaching Cantonese, but the seed has been planted. It happened quite suddenly, as I realized how students from different backgrounds naturally segregated themselves into groups even in the most open environment possible. Therefore I wanted to use “Cantonese” and not just a language for function, I don't want to just teach foreigners “Do Ze” or “Sik Faan” to survive here, I want them to thrive. My ideas caught the attention of a few friends, thus we started CantoNet.

Through building CantoNet, I've met people from all over the world — different nationalities, different backgrounds, different reasons for learning Cantonese. But what they had in common was not talent or prior experience. It was the need to use the language in real life.

So instead of keeping learning inside a classroom, we brought it outside.

We turned the city itself into our classroom. Tram rides became unexpected moments of conversation, barbecues turned into informal teaching sessions, and small group meetups were full of laughter, mistakes, and real-life practice. In these in-between spaces: ordering food, cracking jokes, getting a little lost, asking for help. The language wasn't just studied; it was lived amongst the fluent ones, the broken ones and the laughers.

Over time, I noticed something important.

When students are placed in the right environment, with the right support, they start speaking not perfectly, but meaningfully. **Confidence grows not from memorizing more, but from experiencing more.** And thus, as of now, today we even have students from Europe who have never been to Hong Kong yet speak Cantonese fluently — driven by a love of Cantonese films and the right method.



Tram Party CantoNet

This also changed how I see teaching. I don't see “bad students.” If someone isn't progressing, it's not the student that needs to be questioned first — it's the environment, the approach, and the responsibility of the teacher. Building something like this is not short-term. It requires patience, consistency, and a willingness to go beyond traditional roles as educators.

Looking back, my transition from debate to teaching Cantonese was not just a change in direction. It changed how I understand communication.

Debate taught me how to express ideas clearly. But teaching, building CantoNet, it taught me how to connect with souls.

And in a way, it also changed how I see myself. The same person who once believed he wasn't good at languages is now speaking French and Russian — not because of talent, but because of a different way of learning. And that difference is what I now try to embrace. Even if we don't always reach our financial goals, the work over these years has already reached into the hearts of students across continents — and we are proud of it.



Hidden Gem Hike - Tai O



At the Fireside Chat “Embracing the Life of a Slasher” by the Victor and William Fung Foundation, what stood out to me wasn't just the idea of having multiple roles — it was how natural that actually felt.

Listening to the speakers, I realized I had already been living that path without fully naming it. From debate to building CantoNet, my journey was never linear. At times, it even felt like I was jumping between completely different worlds.

But the conversation reframed that for me, instead of seeing these shifts as a lack of direction, I started to see them as layers — each experience adding something new, shaping how I connect with people and how I approach my work today.

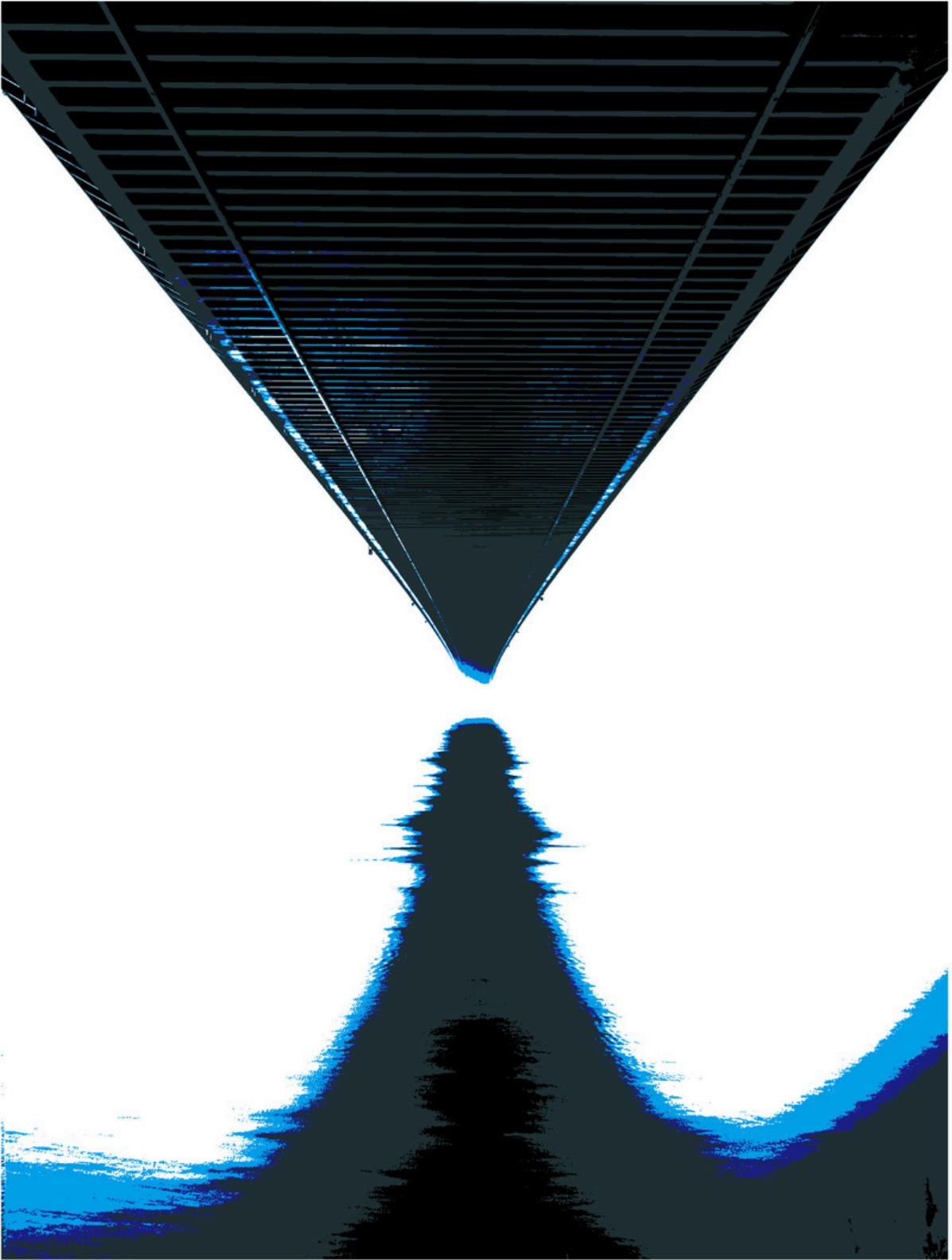
What resonated most was the idea that you don't have to fit into one identity. You can explore, combine, and grow into something that doesn't have a fixed label.

That perspective stayed with me after the event. It made me more confident in continuing what I'm building, and more open to where it might lead next.

by Evan Pun
FS 2022/23, Lingnan University



Do u recognise it?



A fountain pen with ink

...it is a bridge.



IV

Feature
Articles



Hope and Possibility in Infinite Conflicts

I honestly do not know what I can write. Picking up a pen is a struggle. I am trying to be a scribe, to record my life. But writing each word feels like being stripped naked. The author stands naked in the centre of the arena, every part of their body scrutinised by the audience.

I still pick up my pen to fight against myself, to face the beasts that might be released from each cell, because I also believe conflict is eternal. Humans can never truly understand each other. Humans cannot imagine what lies beyond their knowledge.

We need observers and scribes. This is a conclusion I have drawn from my studies. Perhaps every writer is a modern-day reincarnation of medieval bards, singing tales of far distant lands, attempting to create hope for peace amidst infinite conflict. All conflict stems from misunderstanding. We naturally fear those who are different from us, and fear breeds an instinct for aggression. I pick up my pen for myself, to stop myself from aggressing. Perhaps everyone needs to understand the things in this world that are not yet known to them, and record them, passing them on to more people.

I still need to learn. For a long time, I have been pondering the **definition of art**. Some say it comes from the Latin *ars* and the even more ancient Greek $\tau \acute{\epsilon} \chi \nu \eta$, both inseparable from the meaning of human hand. But I feel the hand is an extension of the heart, a tool of the soul. It allows the metaphysical to enter the material world. It **transforms humanity from observers into creators** on earth.

But what can I truly create? Leaving aside the right to define it, I am never granted the right to interpret it. I want to write some stories. Ultimately, I found myself lacking the courage to share. I often feel anxious because the most terrifying thing for a person is the loss of the ability to tell stories.

Finding Similarities in Two Seeming Distinct Languages



Toronto

is a city that thrives on its contrasts. It's a place where the aroma of fresh naan from a Little India bakery can mingle with the scent of espresso from a European-style cafe on the next block. You can hear a dozen different languages in a single streetcar ride. Having stayed here, I became accustomed to the beautiful mosaic of cultures.

Language embodies the complex repositories of culture and meanings, such as idiomatic expressions, culture-specific words, and humour. The beauty of language revealed itself when one time I met up with an Iranian friend, and we had dinner together. Somehow, we landed on the topic of hair. I've always had thick, curly hair, a texture I've spent years battling with straighteners and products. My friend, with sleek and straight hair, confessed how much she admired my curls. "They're so wild and full of life! I love it!" she said. I laughed and admitted, "Not gonna lie, I kinda hate how troublesome it is to take care of it, but thank you!"



My friend's eyes lit up. "This," she said, "reminds me of a Persian proverb: 'مرغ همسایه غاز است'." She carefully translated it for me, "It means, 'the neighbour's chicken is a goose'," The imagery was so immediate and charming. The idea that someone else's ordinary poultry is always more impressive despite being unwanted by the owner! The metaphor about the majestic goose perfectly captured our conversation about hair. I was utterly delighted. It felt like she had handed me a tiny, precious key to understanding a piece of her world.

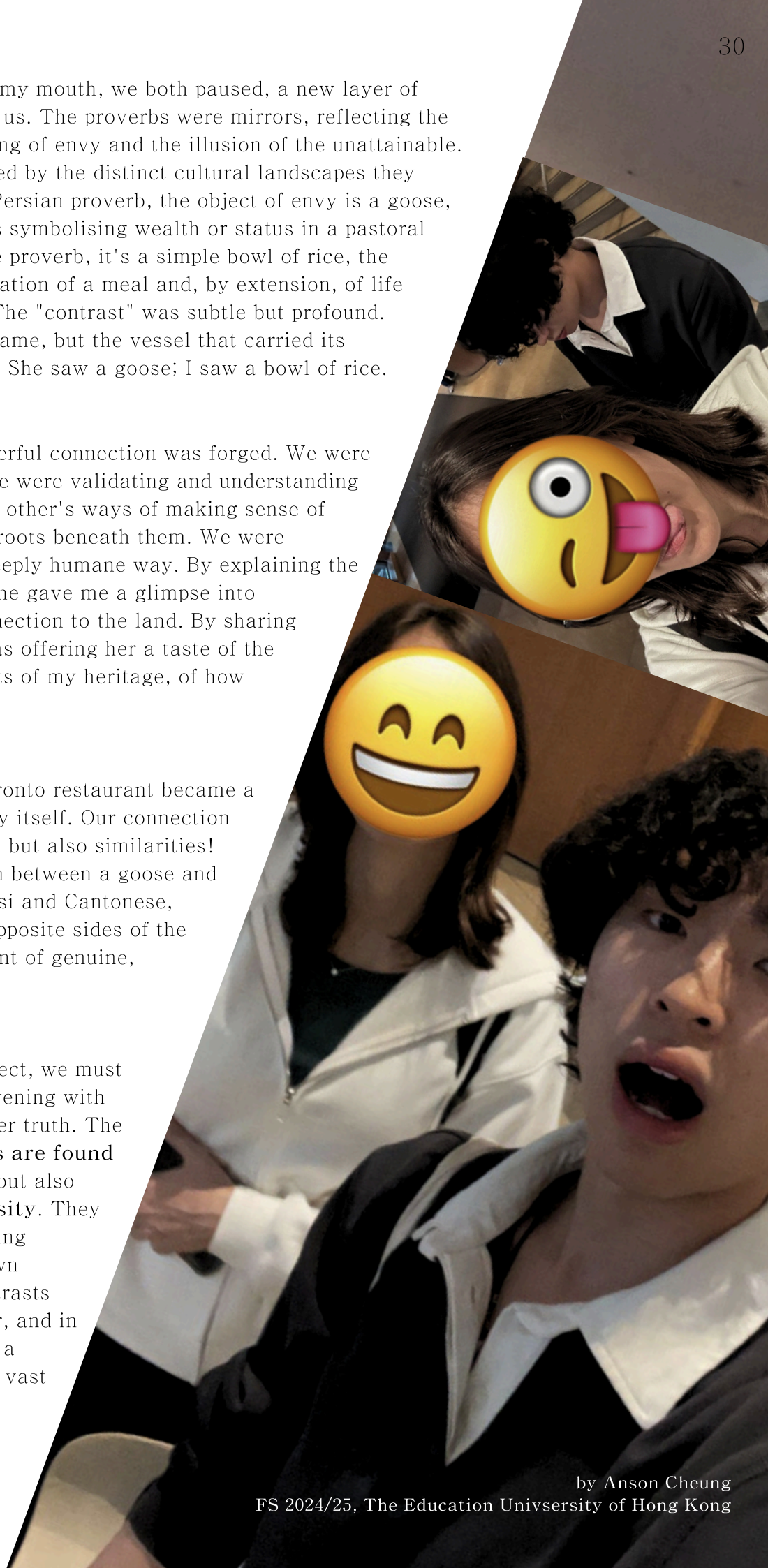
Then, a lightbulb went off in my head as I thought of a Cantonese proverb my grandmother used to say. "We have a similar one!" I told her. "It's '隔離飯香' (Gaak lei faan heung), which translates to 'the neighbour's rice tastes better'."

The moment the words left my mouth, we both paused, a new layer of understanding settling over us. The proverbs were mirrors, reflecting the same universal human feeling of envy and the illusion of the unattainable. In addition, they were shaped by the distinct cultural landscapes they came from. In my friend's Persian proverb, the object of envy is a goose, a creature of value, perhaps symbolising wealth or status in a pastoral landscape. In my Cantonese proverb, it's a simple bowl of rice, the staple grain, the very foundation of a meal and, by extension, of life in a rice-farming culture. The "contrast" was subtle but profound. The core emotion was the same, but the vessel that carried its meaning was uniquely ours. She saw a goose; I saw a bowl of rice.

And in that contrast, a powerful connection was forged. We were two cultures in dialogue. We were validating and understanding each other's proverbs, each other's ways of making sense of the world, and the cultural roots beneath them. We were negotiating meaning in a deeply humane way. By explaining the significance of the goose, she gave me a glimpse into Persian history and its connection to the land. By sharing the Cantonese proverb, I was offering her a taste of the communal, agricultural roots of my heritage, of how much we love rice!

This small moment in a Toronto restaurant became a perfect metaphor for the city itself. Our connection was built on our differences but also similarities! It was the delightful friction between a goose and a bowl of rice, between Farsi and Cantonese, between two friends from opposite sides of the world, that created a moment of genuine, luminous understanding.

We often think that to connect, we must find common ground. My evening with my friend taught me a deeper truth. The most profound **connections are found** not just in the similarities, but also **in genuineness and curiosity**. They are found in the joy of sharing "goose" and "rice" in our own language. It is in these contrasts that we truly see each other, and in seeing each other, we build a world that feels a little less vast and a little more like home.



The Connections I Couldn't See Then

On learning to belong across languages, latitudes, and time

The first snow I ever really lived through arrived without asking permission. Back home in Nepal, winter was something I loved: it was mild, between one to ten degrees Celsius, a light sweater kind of cold. I used to argue about it with my best friend while she drove us around Kathmandu. She hated the cold. I loved it. I thought I knew what cold was.

Then came New York cold.

I have thought about winter at home a lot this year. Not because of the weather, but because of what it made me realize about “connection”. That sometimes, you think you already know something, or someone, or somewhere, and then you actually live inside it. And everything you thought you knew has to be rebuilt, slowly, from the ground up.

I grew up in Nepal. I studied in Bangladesh for five years, as a Fung Scholar, which, at the time, I understood mostly as an amazing opportunity. It is only much later that I understood how that opportunity really shaped me.

Bangladesh, in those years, shaped something in me that I did not have the words for until much later. It was the first time I had been a foreigner in someone else's ordinary space. I was surrounded by young South Asian girls who, like me, were full of ambitions we were all still figuring out—and yet, everything was subtly different. The language, the food, the way people moved through a city, the unspoken rules in each classroom. I was learning, constantly, with or without a syllabus.



After Bangladesh, I came back to Nepal and decided to teach in a rural village through Teach for Nepal. My students and I sat in classrooms with tin roofs that got too hot in summer, too loud in the monsoon, and too cold in winter. I stood at the front of those rooms each day and tried to give them what I had been lucky enough to receive. I was 23 or 24. I was teaching. I was also, without knowing it, learning what inequity looked like up close, in a child's face when they showed up after walking two or three hours to school, or trying to focus through hunger, when the lesson moved faster than their circumstances allowed.

Those years gave me the word I now love more than almost any other word in public health: equity. Not equality which means giving everyone the same thing, but equity, which means asking why some people need more, and then actually doing something about it. I didn't feel that word from a textbook. I learned it in those villages, and I carried it into every classroom I entered after.

Now I am studying epidemiology in the United States, and there is a particular strangeness to learning population-level patterns when you notice which populations are most visible in the examples we study.

When we study preterm birth, I immediately want to know what the numbers look like for Nepal, for Bangladesh. When we discuss interventions, I find myself asking: where does this exist? Who decided it didn't need to? Who was left out of the data? Coming here made me think and ask questions about home that I had never thought to ask when I was there. Distance, it turns out, has a way of making things visible.

As a multilingual person, I think in other language before I speak in English, which is to say that there is always a small translation happening, a beat between what I feel and what comes out. Sometimes the words do not carry everything across. I have learned to be patient with that gap. And I have found, unexpectedly, that the gap itself becomes a kind of conversation.

A friend here was surprised to learn I had never used a music streaming app. We laughed, genuinely laughed, and in that laughter, I felt more connected to her than I had in some longer, more careful conversations. Connection, I am learning, does not always arrive through shared experience. Sometimes it arrives through the discovery of difference, if both people are curious enough to stay in the room.

My mom, who I videocall almost every day, cannot read or write. She teases me sometimes with a laugh that holds something more complicated inside it, how much more I want to study. I laugh back. I understand what she is really asking, and what she is not quite saying: **she gave me the freedom to seek what she never had, and she wants to know if it is taking me somewhere good.**

I think about her when I think about what it means to translate stories into data, which is, essentially, what epidemiologists do. You take a life, a community, a generation of experience, and you try to represent it in a number. The number travels; the life may not. This is the tension I am learning to sit with. I want to be the kind of researcher who never forgets what the number is standing in for.

And as I write this, I think about what it means to be a Fung Scholar now, from this distance, in a way I could not have fully understood when I was one. At the time, I was present but perhaps not fully arrived. I perhaps did not build all the connections I was supposed to. **But here is the thing I have come to believe about connections: it does not always happen on schedule. Sometimes the meaning of an experience catches up to you years later, quietly, while you are doing something else entirely.**

I think I am still catching up to Bangladesh. I am still catching up to those classrooms with the tin roofs in Nepal, to those students whose names I still remember, to my mother's laugh that is also a question. I am still, in many ways, catching up to myself.

The snow has melted now. Walking to class, I look up at the occasional sun—something generous and warm behind the white cumulus clouds and the deep blue sky. I stop for a moment just to feel it.

I am still learning what it means to belong somewhere new without letting go of everywhere I've already been. I am still learning to ask better questions. I am still, slowly and without a clear map, building something that I think might be called home.

Connection, for me, has rarely been immediate. It has been slow. It has asked me to stay even when staying was uncomfortable. It has arrived in grand moments of understanding, as well as in small, meaningful ones like that conversation on favorite weather, a laugh over a music app, or a question I could not stop asking.

If I have learned anything from moving across latitudes and languages and, in some ways, across time itself: it is that connection does not require similarity. It requires patience, and curiosity, and the willingness to keep showing up even when the cold is more than you bargained for.

I am still learning to see it.
And I am still learning to build it, wherever I go.

Close, Yet Distant: Notes from an Exchange Semester in Hong Kong

Before coming to Hong Kong, I carried with me a quiet assumption — that this would be one of the easiest places for me to belong. After all, we shared a language, a set of cultural references, and what I believed to be a broadly similar educational background. I thought connection would come naturally.

It did not.

Looking back, my exchange semester at the University of Hong Kong unfolded in two parallel dimensions. One was visible, structured, and in many ways deeply satisfying. The other was subtle, harder to articulate, and, at times, quietly unsettling.

Academically, everything felt both demanding and unexpectedly generous. The system followed a British model: lectures, tutorials, reading weeks, and a carefully calculated workload that made you aware — almost mathematically — of how much intellectual labor each course required. I still remember opening a course outline and seeing not just the weekly topics, but also a breakdown of the hours one was expected to invest. It felt meticulous, almost caring.

I took courses across many disciplines — sociology, qualitative research methods, urban studies, business analytics, and even forensic science. For the first time, I experienced what it meant to move between intellectual worlds within a single semester. Some weeks were filled with dense theoretical readings and seminar discussions; others were spent learning statistical tools or editing photographs taken with cameras the department generously lent us. There was a certain excitement in this multiplicity, a sense that knowledge was not confined but expandable.

And yet, it was not the classroom that challenged me most.

What I had not anticipated was the difficulty of forming meaningful connections outside of it.

It would be easy to say that this was a language issue, but it was not. Conversations with local students were rarely uncomfortable; they were simply... thin. Polite, functional, but often without depth. We could speak, but we did not always meet.

At some point, I began to realize that what was missing was not communication but curiosity.

I remember speaking with a friend who had spent months actively trying to integrate into local student life — attending dormitory events, investing hours every week in shared activities. And yet, she described those relationships as remaining “surface-level.” What stayed with me was her observation that, in many interactions, there was little desire to understand each other's backgrounds. Not hostility, not rejection — just an absence of interest.

This was perhaps the most unexpected lesson of my time in Hong Kong: that cultural proximity does not guarantee connection. In some ways, it can even obscure the need to ask questions, to explain oneself, to bridge differences that are less visible but no less real.

And yet, the story does not end there.

Some of my most meaningful experiences emerged precisely from moments where connection was made possible — not by similarity, but by attention.

One afternoon, early in the semester, I walked into a professor's office for the first time. I had joined his course late and was struggling to catch up. I remember feeling slightly nervous — it was my first time writing directly to a professor in this system, unsure of what to expect.

What I encountered instead was patience and something more personal than I had anticipated.

He did not simply explain the missed material. He asked about my academic background, my reasons for choosing the course, and how I was adjusting to life in Hong Kong. The conversation extended beyond coursework, moving gently into something closer to care.

That afternoon altered my initial perception of the city. It reminded me that “distance” is not a fixed condition; it can shift through small, attentive gestures. Over time, his consistent encouragement — sometimes as simple as a “Dear Jing” at the beginning of an email or a quiet “You are very capable” — stayed with me more than any formal evaluation.

Beyond the classroom, I found other ways of inhabiting the university.

While many exchange students chose not to join student societies — understandably, given how short our stay was — I felt an urge to see more of what lay beneath the surface. I joined the University Choir, the Chinese Debating Society, and China Study Association. My weeks gradually filled with rehearsals, late-night discussions, and occasional trips that took us far beyond campus. I still remember standing in the desert with a group of students I had only recently met in Ning Xia Province, waiting for sunrise after a night of conversations, laughter, and shared fatigue. Or singing in Latin during choir practice, not fully understanding the words but somehow feeling connected through the act itself. These were moments where connection did not need to be explained; it was enacted.

Perhaps that is what I came to understand, slowly and somewhat reluctantly: connection is not something that emerges automatically from shared identity. It is something that has to be made — through time, through attention, and sometimes through the willingness to stay in spaces that initially feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. My time in Hong Kong was cut short by broader social events that disrupted everyday life. Leaving earlier than expected, I carried with me a sense of incompleteness — of conversations unfinished, relationships only partially formed.

And yet, it is precisely this incompleteness that continues to linger.

If there is one thing this experience taught me, it is that **understanding does not begin with similarity but with the recognition of difference — and the decision to remain open to it.**

We often imagine connection as something immediate, effortless, even natural. But perhaps its value lies exactly in the opposite: in the work it requires and in the fragile, fleeting moments when it briefly becomes real.

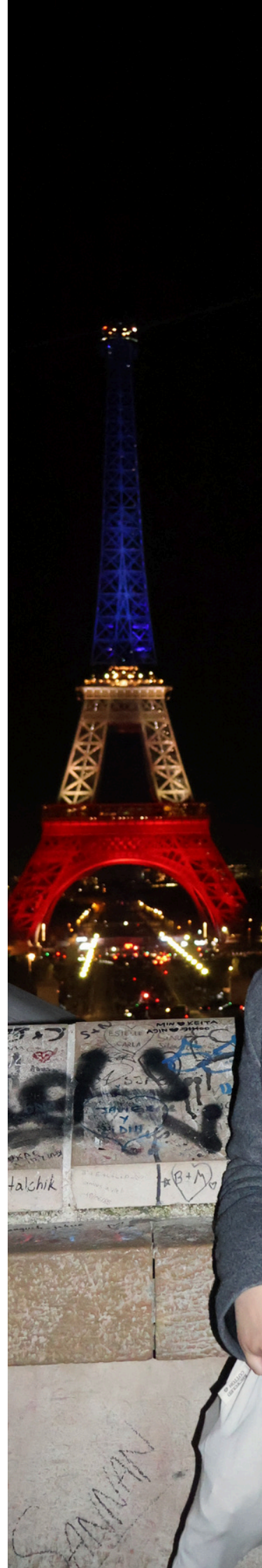
by Eve Zhang
FS 2019/20, Xiamen University

Us vs Them, or is it just we?

Most people, when they go overseas to study, often assume and even fantasise about finding a 'multicultural' friendship. We might all be familiar with the pictures always present on university pamphlets– the friend group consisting of people from different races and cultures laughing together on a patch of grass. However, the fantasy often shatters once you actually arrive and try to socialise, as more often than not people from similar background and cultural experiences just tend to stick together. This is what I initially discovered when I went to the University of Warwick for my exchange last semester. I tried to be as 'diverse' as possible in the range of people I approached, but found myself sticking closest to East Asian/Asian students. After all, there's a lot we can bond on– overbearing parents, stressful academic systems, no shoes in the house, collecting plastic bags etc. I thought grimly to myself that the idea of globalisation and connection across cultures have after all been just that, an idea and a myth and nothing more. I was about to discover that it is not that it was only fantasy, but that fantasy requires hard work to become reality.

During my exchange, I met a girl who was born in Nigeria but came to the UK when she was a toddler. Initially, I thought we'd have nothing in common, as I obviously did not grow up in the UK and also know embarrassingly little about Nigeria save for the meme that parents often have 'eloquent' insults for their children. So I was at first very timid in interacting with her, scared to make any cultural references in fear that I might offend, or reveal just how little I know. I avoided long talks and told myself it's better off if I drift back into 'my crowd', the East Asian/Asian kids who I would most certainly be able to relate to. But she decided to ask me to have a coffee chat one day, and I couldn't find a reason to refuse. I thought it would be a very awkward chat. I'm glad I was wrong.

At first, we were both visibly a bit cautious around each other, but when the topic of parents came up, the conversation simply exploded. Despite being from entirely different continents, we realised that Chinese parents and Nigerian parents share more similarities than we imagined. We trauma-bonded over being guilt-tripped for wanting more independence or saying no, over being told that marriage is something we need after hearing a long complaint about how awful our parents' experience with marriage is, or over the subtle way patriarchy, Chinese or Nigerian, looms over the family structure. Cliche to say I know, but time indeed did pass quicker than we expected, and before we knew it, our matcha drinks were empty and our throats sore from talking so much. We continued to hang out and promised to visit each other in the future when I went back to Hong Kong.



This unexpected connection prompted me to ask: when it is easier to stick to those who come from a familiar background and culture, why do we still bother to seek companionship and collaboration beyond these boundaries? We all understand the general meanings teachers and corporations often ascribe to globalisation: to expand your worldview, to get a bigger network, etc. but what do these things actually mean? What does it mean to go out of your way to know a different person from a seemingly massively different context?

For me, I think the answer lies in the wrong assumption in how different we actually are from each other. As my conversation with my friend at Warwick showed, what we perceive as difference is often the same thing expressed in different contexts. Our parents may be from very different contexts and are strict in their own ways, the over-bearing supervision of a Chinese parent or the never-ending nagging of a Nigerian parent, but once you look closer through conversation, you realise the root of these issues are very human and similar. It is a generation of parents having been through hardship, poverty, and using their own way to try and shield their children from repeating the same mistakes. When my parents sternly question why I wish to study History instead of something more 'useful' like Business, what they are really saying is 'I know what it is like to not have enough money, so are you sure History would be able to save you from going through that?'. When my friend's parents insist on the necessity of marriage, what they are really saying is 'In my days a woman requires marriage to protect her, so I thought you should have a secure and good match to make sure you have a good life.'

This is what it means, in my opinion, to truly find connections across contrasts, to seek understanding despite 'different' backgrounds, because we realise that we are not so different after all. We realise, that despite seemingly varied histories, that we are all human, and share human feelings and human experiences. Only when we reach this conclusion, then we can foster true compassion among fellow humans that people often dream and envision. It is always going to be easier to have sympathy and kindness for people we perceive to be similar to us, so the root cause of why we seemingly do not care for each other in this modern age is not that we are not capable of it, but that we imagine a stern binary between 'us' and 'them'. It is only when we seek connections beyond our familiar understanding, that we realise we are all just the same, sometimes pathetic, sometimes violent, but also sometimes loving, and sometimes kind. A valuable lesson learned from my exchange indeed, and one day, I will sit on a grass patch with my multi-cultural friend group not as a fantasy but rather bonding over being human.

Watching the Cityscape Unfold

In the personal statement for my exchange application to the University of Hong Kong, I wrote: "The main reason I am applying as a sociology student, I wish to broaden my academic horizons and learn more diverse knowledge through intercultural communication... I hope to experience Hong Kong's social life and social systems and to compare, reflect on, and draw lessons from different social environments and cultures from an intercultural perspective. "With the sociologist's mindset that "every place is a field site" and a place-based perspective, I witnessed, heard, and experienced a great deal in Hong Kong and gradually forged a profound connection with this city through this unique experience.

When I first arrived in Hong Kong, I faced an unfamiliar urban landscape, food culture, and way of life. I treated myself as an anthropologist entering a field site and turned to a mode of observation. Hong Kong's terrain is mostly rugged, with roads winding up and down and a highly developed network of footbridges. In my early days, I often got lost and walked back and forth between roads and stairs. From a sociological perspective, urban space nurtures unique forms of social life and local culture. For example, in a documentary shown in class, people experiencing homelessness often appeared in public spaces such as footbridges. This image puzzled me at first, but my confusion was resolved as I walked across Hong Kong's intricate footbridge system. I also recalled scenes from Wong Kar-wai's films. In *Chungking Express*, Faye squats on a sloped conveyor belt and smiles secretly as she watches her beloved pass by. Affection is hidden behind the Central-Mid-Levels Escalator, which captures the unique charm of Hong Kong films.

Beyond spatial perceptions, I also discovered the fun of cross cultural experience in small daily details. For instance, I once bought purple-packaged candies and cold drinks, expecting the familiar taste of grape, only to find they were blackcurrant flavored. Most of the photos I took in Hong Kong are brightly colored: green palms and banyan trees, red taxis, the blue sea, colorful residential buildings, and vivid street posters and graffiti. All these let me feel the city's vibrancy and energy.

When I first arrived at HKU, I paused for a long while in front of a display board from the Equal Opportunity Unit, which read: "The University is committed to creating, promoting, and maintaining an environment of equality of opportunity for members of the University community, free of any discrimination/harassment... As a global university, we must continue to foster the culture of respect, diversity, and inclusion, which enables everyone to grow and flourish." This aligned perfectly with what I had hoped for when applying for the exchange. I believe this pursuit of diversity and inclusion is also the most precious foundation of all cross-cultural exchange.

At the university, I met teachers with diverse backgrounds and academic styles, and my understanding was reshaped through their multifaceted perspectives. My Italian lecturer, who is highly sensitive to anti-colonial and anti-Western-centrist issues, often pointed out content and viewpoints influenced by Western centrism, even including many taken-for-granted ideas I had never questioned before. Through this, I continuously strengthened my sociological critical perspective and my sensitivity to cross-cultural communication. My Spanish teacher, who focuses on disability studies, always insisted on pronouncing my Chinese name correctly, making me feel respected. Whenever I wanted to give up expressing my opinions due to my limited oral fluency, she gently encouraged me to keep going, offering me kindness in an unfamiliar environment. Her insights also inspired me: disability and other minority experiences should be interpreted as diversity, rather than flaws or deficiencies. I believe it's a mindset that helps build a more inclusive world. The lectures on drug abuse delivered by a white male professor and an Asian female professor further made me realize that theories are not absolutely objective but shaped by one's personal background and position. **The charm of academia** is precisely to gain a more comprehensive understanding through **the collision of different perspectives**.

My learning extends far beyond classroom walls. At Oil Street, the site-specific art exhibitions deepened my understanding of the city's spiritual core, and I connected with the artists' vision through interactive installations. At the Asia Art Archive, I appreciated the artistic charm of community building, personal narratives, and inclusive living for people of all abilities. I saw the care for real people behind art and felt how art connects me to the vivid lives and thoughts of others. At the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, by observing how the museum presented the legacy of Bruce Lee and Jin Yong in Hong Kong culture, I reflected on how local cultural identity can be shaped into a unifying spiritual force. In Sha Tin, roadside signposts, art galleries, a unified architectural style, and riverside walkways together form a distinctive cultural community, demonstrating the care and thought put into community building.

Due to luggage allowance restrictions, I left some belongings behind in Hong Kong, yet the city has given me far more in return. It made me realize how wonderful it is to gradually build a bond with a city and culture, moving from strangeness to genuine connection.



Beyond language,
beyond obstacles,
beyond stereotypes and borders,
we can still see the true beauty within one another's hearts.
In the end, we are more alike than we think.

Beyond Language,
Beyond Borders

It was my first time stepping onto the African continent, and Rwanda immediately awakened all five of my senses. It was beautiful, peaceful, and inspiring — so different from the fast-paced life I was used to in Hong Kong, where everything feels crowded and everyone is always in a hurry. At first, I thought I had come simply to help install solar panels. However, during those 14 days of volunteer service, I realized that the trip was not only about technical work. It became a journey that changed my perspective and taught me far more than I expected. Instead of being the one who only helped others, I found myself also learning deeply from the people I met.

Before the trip, I thought the language barrier would be the greatest challenge. Yet after spending some time with the villagers, I discovered that body language, empathy, and patience could bridge the gap between us. These quiet forms of communication helped us build trust and understanding. I also learned to respect and embrace cultural differences. For example, people in Rwanda warmly greet others by shaking hands, which felt different from what I am used to in Hong Kong. What surprised me the most was that this service-learning experience was not mainly about installing solar systems, as I had imagined, but about human connection and cultural exchange. The villagers' smiles, kindness, and gratitude made the experience much more meaningful than I had ever expected.



One of the most unforgettable moments happened at a big house, when we were working on installing a solar panel. There, I met a young girl named Kristine, who wore pink clothes and watched us shyly from a distance. At first, she stayed a few meters away, smiling but obviously too nervous to come closer. When we spoke to her, she responded through gestures and expressions, and I tried to understand her by using simple words like “papa” and “mama.” Even though we did not share a common language, we slowly began to communicate. As time passed, she came closer to us, and after the installation, we even played hide-and-seek together. When we left, she ran after us, gently took my toolbox, and insisted on carrying it for me. Then, as we walked back toward the gathering point, she suddenly handed me some beautiful flowers. I was deeply touched — not because of the flowers themselves, but because of what they represented. In that short time, we had formed a bond that went beyond language, culture, and the differences in our lives. Her small but sincere acts of kindness reminded me that **true connection does not always need words.**

Aside from the installation work, spending time with the village children was another unforgettable part of the trip. One day, after finishing our work earlier than expected, my group went to check whether other teams needed help. As we walked through the village, Kristine held my hand, and soon more children joined us, laughing and playing along the way. In those moments, differences in race, nationality, language, and identity no longer seemed important. We simply shared joy as human beings. This experience made me reflect on how easily people sometimes judge others because of where they come from or who they are. Through this trip, I learned to embrace diversity more fully, not only in Rwanda but also back in Hong Kong. It was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life because it showed me that, despite all existing conflicts, genuine human connection is still possible.



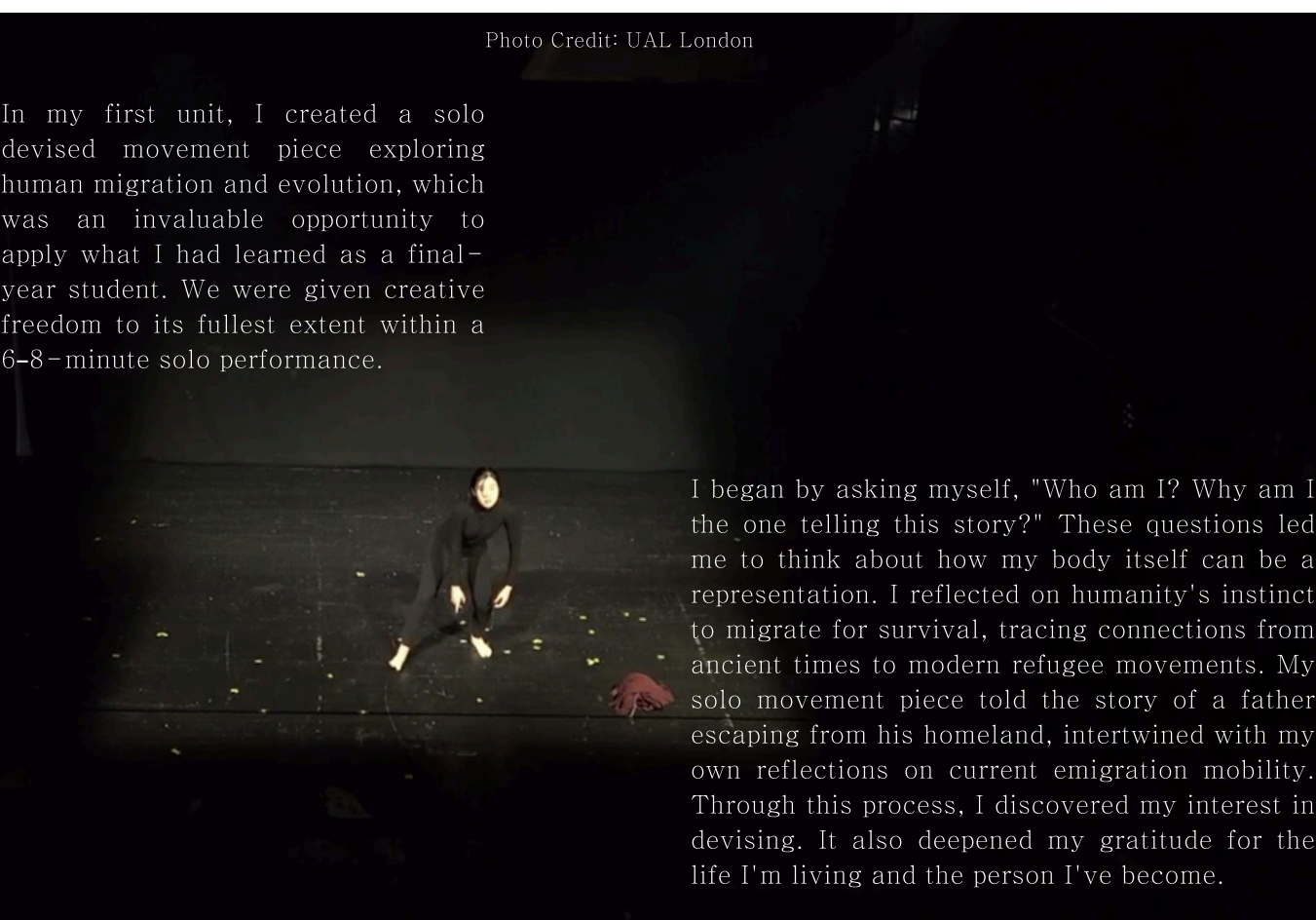
London Exchange and Beyond: A Performer's Journey

From September 2024 to February 2025, I participated in a semester exchange at the University of the Arts London as an acting student, supported by the Fung Scholarship. It was my first time in London — the heaven for the arts. Beyond learning, I had the chance to appreciate the West End productions and travel around Europe, which greatly broadened my horizon as a performer.

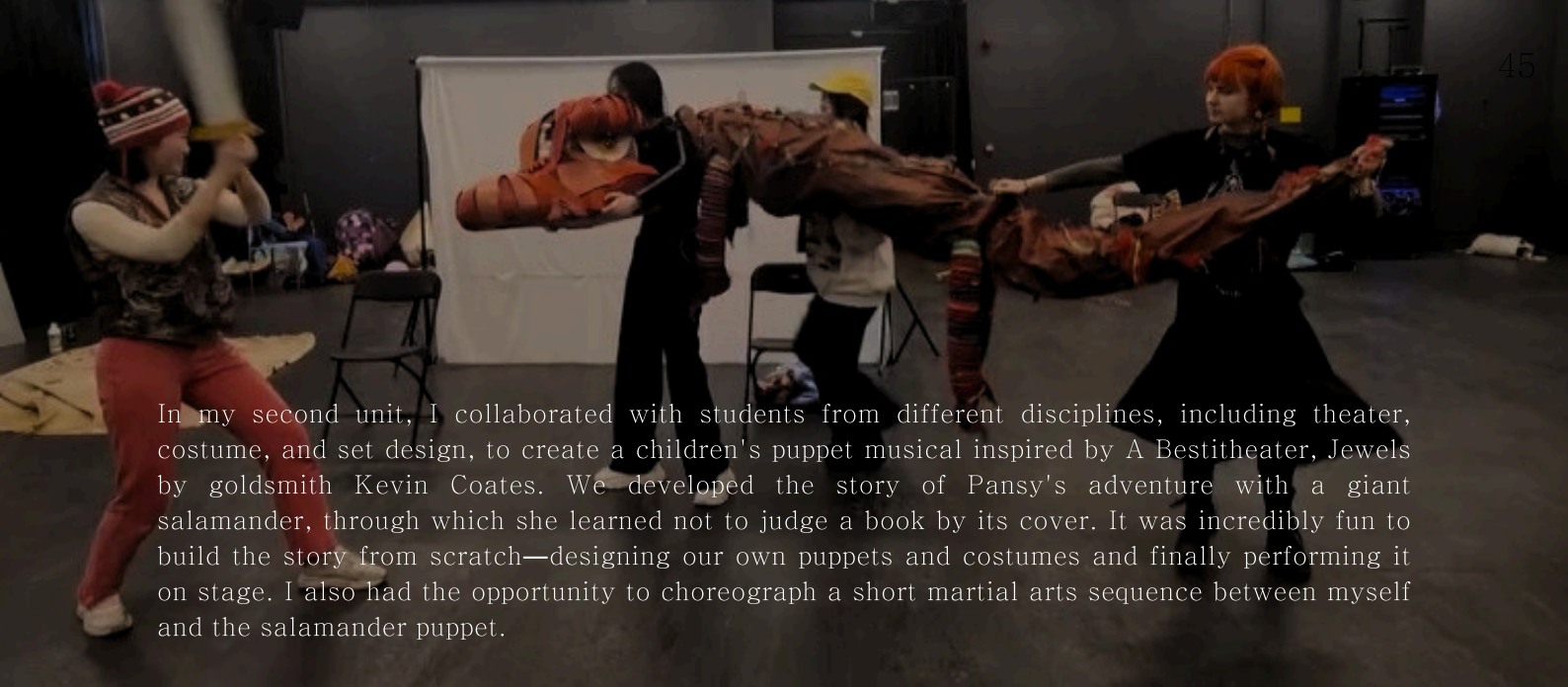
Learning Acting and Performance in London

Photo Credit: UAL London

In my first unit, I created a solo devised movement piece exploring human migration and evolution, which was an invaluable opportunity to apply what I had learned as a final-year student. We were given creative freedom to its fullest extent within a 6-8-minute solo performance.

A photograph of a performer in a dark, minimalist setting. The performer is wearing a dark, long-sleeved outfit and is captured in a crouching or low-to-the-ground pose. The floor is dark, and there is a small, bright red object on the floor near the performer. The background is mostly black, with some faint, out-of-focus lights or structures visible in the upper right. The overall mood is dramatic and focused.

I began by asking myself, "Who am I? Why am I the one telling this story?" These questions led me to think about how my body itself can be a representation. I reflected on humanity's instinct to migrate for survival, tracing connections from ancient times to modern refugee movements. My solo movement piece told the story of a father escaping from his homeland, intertwined with my own reflections on current emigration mobility. Through this process, I discovered my interest in devising. It also deepened my gratitude for the life I'm living and the person I've become.



In my second unit, I collaborated with students from different disciplines, including theater, costume, and set design, to create a children's puppet musical inspired by *A Bestitheater*, *Jewels* by goldsmith Kevin Coates. We developed the story of Pansy's adventure with a giant salamander, through which she learned not to judge a book by its cover. It was incredibly fun to build the story from scratch—designing our own puppets and costumes and finally performing it on stage. I also had the opportunity to choreograph a short martial arts sequence between myself and the salamander puppet.



One of the greatest joyful things during my exchange was enjoying theater in London—I watched 23 performances in five months. Some of my favorites included *The Little Foxes* at the Young Vic Theatre, *Our Country's Good* and *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, and the musical *The Book of Mormon*. I also experienced solo travel for the first time, which was a true privilege. Exploring different cultures across England, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Dublin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Rome, Prague, and Gdańsk made my exchange semester one of the most memorable times of my life.

Photo Credit: @woyshy Andrew Woysner

Life After Graduation

After graduation, I joined the Heart Global Performance Fall Tour in Japan as a cast member. I performed as a soloist and in a trio and took part in ensemble numbers with my team and helped bring workshop participants the joy of performing. It was an incredibly meaningful experience, and I already miss my wonderful host families in Japan.





Photo Credit: @woyshy Andrew Woyshner

I also attended the Advanced Actor Training in Bali organized by the Fitzmaurice Voice Institute. There, I completed mask work training from Budi Miller, clown training from Orlando Pabotoy, Fitzmaurice voice work from Micha Espinosa, and Balinese traditional music and dance training from Balinese masters. The experience was both spiritual and inspiring — I learned deeply from my talented peers and immersed myself in Balinese culture. Taking quality classes may not guarantee more opportunities, but I believe that continuous training is essential. Just like going to the gym, consistent practice keeps a performer growing and evolving as an artist.



Photo Credit: SmileMind



Back in Hong Kong, I took part in “Laam Tin: Shattered and Reborn” (2026), an interactive theater play by SmileMind. It was a powerful experience exploring workplace bullying and engaging audiences in finding constructive solutions together.

Conclusion

Being a performer in Hong Kong is not easy, but I hope to keep doing my best and live without regrets —to stay open to life, keep learning, and create something that can truly move and inspire others.

by Pui Yi Chow CPY
FS 2024/25, Hong Kong Baptist University

Culturally responsive modified meals in Hong Kong

I try not to think about work when I'm away... but it has a way of following me. As a Speech and Language Therapist, people mostly only know about communication work that is part of the profession, but there is a completely different side not mentioned in the title at all - swallowing.

I'm not a specialist in dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) and I haven't studied it for years, but I'm always interested to see how different societies respond to the challenges it brings, including social isolation. Perhaps that's why, in Hong Kong, a place known for its food and a culture which prizes eating together, an innovative idea has emerged...

Why not sell modified meals? These would be safe for people with dementia, the elderly, stroke, head and neck cancer survivors or those with learning disabilities to eat - in the same place as their family and friends may be eating standard food. This would theoretically allow them to choose meals based on an appropriate texture which has already been deemed safe for them by medical staff or a Speech and Language Therapist.

These foods would align by the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (hereafter IDDSI) levels, which refers to an international standard in which the terminology of describing the texture of food and consistency of liquids is standardised. This is an essential part of dysphagia management.

For example, previously thicker liquids, which flow slower were thought to be easier to manage for people with dysphagia. However, recent research and new guidance from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in the UK is challenging this, and there is now a movement against unnecessary prescription of thickener without a thorough swallow assessment.

Making these meals more accessible in popular fast-food restaurants or for takeaway is something I've yet to see in the UK. These meals are still more expensive than standard, non-modified texture meals, but at least some effort has been made to capture the flavour of much-loved and culturally sensitive dishes (e.g. 'soy sauce chicken leg', 'Peking style pork ribs').





豉油雞髀 Soy Sauce Chicken Leg 雞肉、西蘭花、 粟米、蓮藕

Modified meal at IDDSI Level 4



Street mural in Cheung Chau, showing iconic 'Peace Buns'/平安包 - another integral part of Hong Kong's food culture

“食飯” - sik fahn, the Cantonese equivalent of “bon appetite” or “let's eat”, is a popular phrase, highlighting the centrality of food in all kinds of relationships and settings.

To date, I've seen modified diet meals on sale in the cafe chains Fairwood (大快活) and Cafe de Coral (大家樂) in Hong Kong, and it seems Fairwood was the first to introduce these in late 2024. A leaflet from Fairwood describes these meals as “appetising” and emphasises that people should be able to “rediscover the joy of eating”.

These modified meals allow for greater inclusion around mealtimes, and hopefully the chance for more people to experience eating as a social experience rather than just nutrition. I hope to see more texture modified meals which comply with different IDDSI levels being served in different countries, especially the UK. For me, exploring Hong Kong has always been synonymous with culinary delights and sampling new foods, I hope that this will continue and become more accessible to all.

*Disclaimer, I am not a dysphagia trained Speech & Language Therapist. If you need advice on what is a safe texture for yourself or someone else to eat or drink, please consult a qualified professional. I also haven't tried these modified meals myself, so this isn't an official endorsement.

A Small Reflection: Finding Connection in the Gaps

It's been about two or three years since I finished my MPhil at CUHK and started working in higher education administration. Lately, I've been trying to figure out what I'm actually doing here and how I can make it more meaningful. I often tell myself, "Don't try to find the whole meaning of life in your job." It's a good way to stay grounded and avoid burning out. But I feel lucky that my first "real" job was at a university college. Even among all the dry paperwork and the routine office tasks, there is still so much human stuff happening.

I remember clearly how it felt when I first started university as a student. I was struck by this massive contrast between the life I knew and this new, wide-open independence. Honestly, I didn't handle it well. I felt lonely and anxious, mostly because none of my close friends from school came with me. Because I entered university after retaking my public exams, I also felt much older than my peers. I was that "loner" student, just trying to stay afloat.

Looking back, I've realized that the feeling of not fitting in isn't something a formal system or a bigger budget can fix. It's a human ache, and it needs human connection to heal.

I feel fortunate that my current role lets me do something about this. I've tried to take my own experience of being "that" student and use it to build bridges in unexpected ways. I'm under no illusion that I'm changing the whole world, but through some new programs we've initiated, we're trying to help the freshmen who feel like they're on the outside looking in.

We use simple ways to start a real conversation. We provide basic mental health training to our student ambassadors, who then serve as mentors or buddies for freshmen —especially for those who, for various reasons, miss traditional orientation programs and find themselves without a roadmap. We also help them organize fun activities, like board game nights, where students can join. The goal is just to ensure they have a good starting point at university, a chance to meet some friendly people, and someone to turn to. I want them to know they don't have to start their journey all by themselves.

In such a big school, it's so easy to just "go through the motions" or stay at a surface level. But when I can actually help a student get used to university life and feel a bit more comfortable, it gives me a real sense of grounding —a feeling of something real (sat gam 實感).

To me, that's more than enough. 🙌

Caring for Elders: A lesson in Health

Currently, I have my first full-time job at an NGO focused on outreach services for the elderly. For those Fung scholars interested in serving the elderly or working in social welfare, I would like to share my experience.

During my exchange in Scotland two years ago, I discovered that I connected more with American seniors than with teens I met there. This experience solidified my desire to serve the elderly rather than focus on SENs (Special Educational Needs) or children in my career. The elderly always evoke my empathy and care, and I feel compelled to contribute to those who have dedicated their lives to building a brighter Hong Kong.

I have been working at the NGO for a few months now and I am still learning and familiarizing myself with my job responsibilities. Basically, I work as an “agent” between volunteer groups and elderly homes. We facilitate events organized by volunteer groups and design games and leisure activities for the elderly residents.

Can you guess how many elderly homes we are serving?

A total of 90!!



Holding a group activity <<快樂幾宮格>> in an elderly home

During festival days like Christmas and New Year, we invite young children and their parents to visit the elderly. The event begins with children showcasing singing and dancing performances, following that they engage in a festive activity, such as creating paper Christmas trees or making paper fireworks together for new year. Finally, the children present additional performances which might include harp or hip hop dancing to show their talents.



Holding a 1-hour festive activity

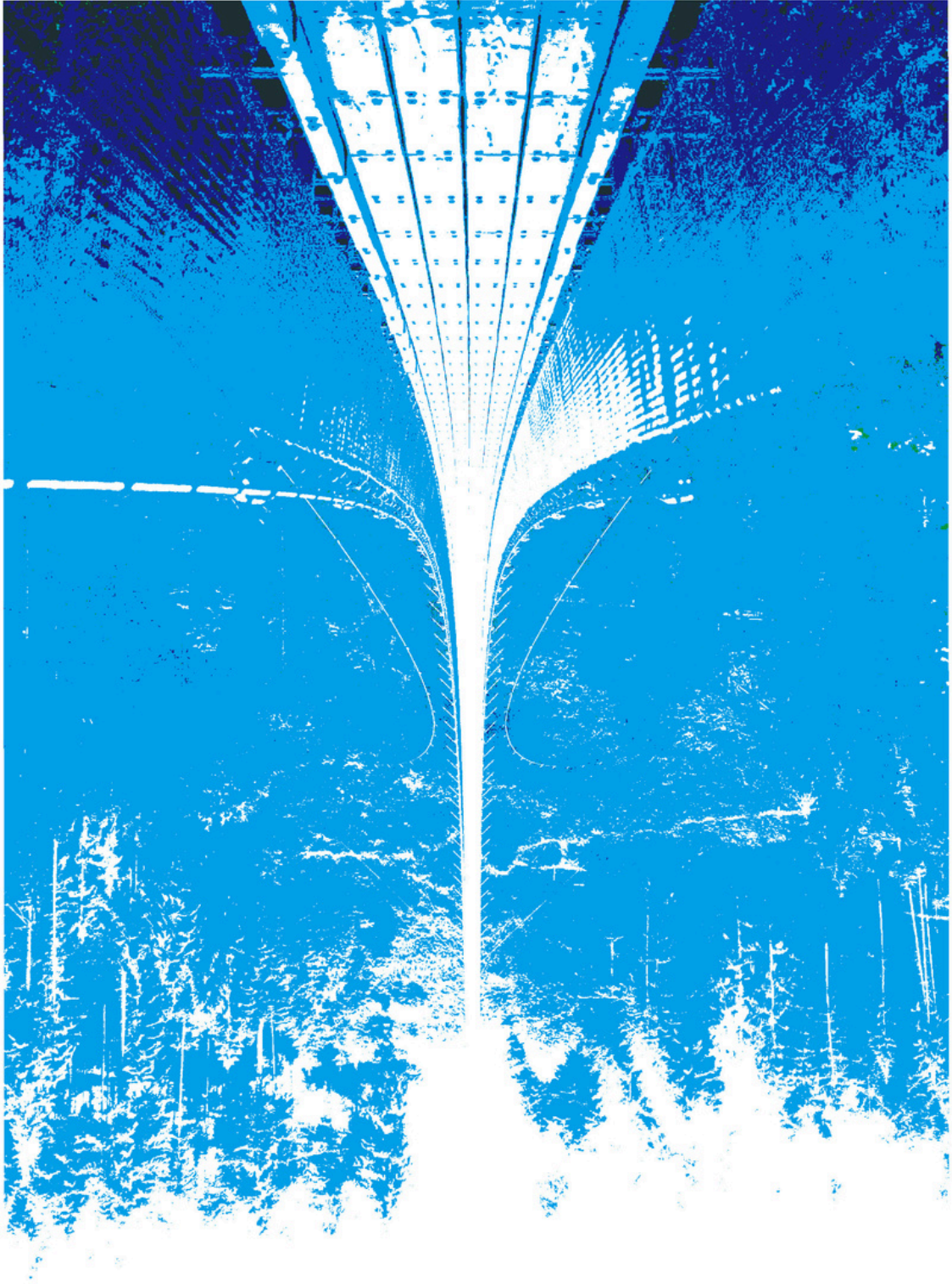
The Elderly residents in the nursing homes are often frail, with limited abilities to speak and walk. Many of them also suffer from dementia.

**Can you guess how old the oldest grandmother I have met in the elderly homes?
She is 106 years old!!**

While interacting with many elders, I remember a remarkable 106-year-old grandma. She walks well and does not require a wheelchair. Fortunately, she is generally in good health, despite having poor eyesight. Working with the elderly serves as a reminder for me to take care of my own physical and mental health. We should prioritize our own wellbeing first, so that we can better contribute to our society. This is my experience sharing about my job for anyone interested in serving the elderly or working in NGOs for social welfare. I hope to see you and have a chat at FS gathering events someday.

by Oki Wong
FS 2023/24, Lingnan University

Do u recognise it?



A fountain/ zip jacket.

...it is a bridge.



V

Acknowledgements and Welcome Message

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all contributors. Your collective efforts are the best embodiment of Connection across Contrasts. To our newcomers, we truly look forward to the fresh energy and vitality you will bring to our community. You are warmly welcome to join any of our events, meetings, and community-building initiatives!

VI

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