



CURIOSITY





Who am I...?

The path to finding out who we are is like the girl with her puzzle pieces because... aren't we all trying to find and put together all the pieces that define us, such as our family and friends, our passions and indulgences? And what happens when these pieces fall together? Are they merely the sum of their parts, or do they morph into something more fantastical, yet laced with more uncertainty...? As we piece together (or perhaps pick apart) who we are, just as the girl on the cover does as she embarks on this self-discovery... how much autonomy does she really have? Unbeknown to her (or perhaps intentionally kept from her), there are people who influence her identity, or rather... our identity.



ABIGAIL FELISILDA
ILLUSTRATOR FOR COVER

A friendly and committed artist who understands the importance of having a good foundation and is in pursuit of 3D animation. Geeks over music, cartoons/anime, comics/manga, video games. An awkward extrovert who's been told she's a good listener. Am open to freelance opportunities, if you're interested in my work, feel free to contact me!

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editors' note

Dear Reader,

From social sciences to patriarchy and many more, this issue celebrates all people and their relentless need to question who they are...



This Issue is divided into three categories:

SOCIETY - We shall delve into the societal problems that Mongolian women face, discuss the essence of social sciences and have a brief reflection on the idea of patriarchy.

PERSPECTIVE - We will observe many interesting and revelatory insights into human interactions; anywhere from the ruminations of a dedicated teacher, perception of colours in search of the real meaning of debate to how the loss of sight can be a blessing in disguise.

THEME FOCUS - With society's rapid change, it becomes all the more important for one to be able to orient his or her position in this complicated world. The advent of artificial intelligence and the prospect of human clones have, for instance, posed serious challenges to the societal norms we have long been so accustomed to. Should one attribute the copyright of a work created by an artificial intelligence or to the creator of this very artificial being? How can one define the rights and liabilities of a human clone? These were questions raised from our previous issue, which got us thinking...

So thought-provoking and complicated this topic of *Identity* is, we decided to start from the people in closest proximity to us. We conducted an in-depth interview with Professor Gordon Mathews about different types of identity and his theory of the "Cultural Supermarket". In addition, we also venture into the mind of an exchange student, dissecting little by little, what *Identity* means to her.

Aggrandising and contemptuous, positive and negative, happy and sorrowful... these different, often dichotomous, features are all crystallised into this one elusive yet ubiquitous entity — *Identity*. Our mission for Issue 3 is to zoom in on some of the pieces of this condensed entity through the lenses and experiences of individuals.

Yours truly,

TIFFANY PAU
Co Editor in Chief

BERNARD TSENG
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meet the team



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An avid reader and a keen learner. Insatiably curious. Passionate about all things art and science. Creative and artistic. Sometimes jaded. Occasionally sarcastic. Committed to close friends and family. A cat lover. A discophile wanna-be. A clino-phile with no shame.



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A novice practitioner of Stoicism. A student for life who is voracious about understanding how the world beautifully manifests itself. Lover of different cultures and languages. A believer that everything in the world can be explained in terms of statistical models. A firm supporter of freedom of speech.



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ZULAIHA ZULFIKA
WRITER

An emotional fool by day yet courageous enough to face the darkness the night brings along. A biologist with a passion for literature and education. Still believes in the goodness of mankind and that kindness moves even the hardest of hearts. A feminist and an advocate for equal rights. Striving for progress, aiming for perfection. But often found questioning myself on what perfection is, really?



CAROL MA
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Curious Anthropology student who sometimes asks too many questions. Too sceptical to advocate for anything except rationality and happiness (if that even makes sense). Went on a year-long journey to South America looking for the meaning of happiness - came back with an openness to art and emotions.



GRACE TSANG
WRITER

A biology student greedily clinging onto both scientific facts and artistic fictions. Passionately fond of foreign cultures and languages. Loves travelling. An animal lover and a naturalist. Possessing mature thoughts but displaying childish deeds. A typical Aquarius - capricious and obstinate.



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WRITER AND CONSULTANT

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Above all, a lover of guinea pigs.



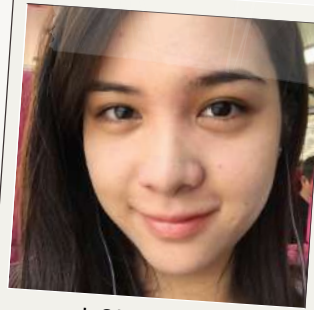
DORIS CHUI
ILLUSTRATOR

Hello, I am Doris. I am a year 3 Fine Arts student. My interest is drawing, especially with the use of watercolour and colour pencils. Taking photography is also another favourite of mine. I believe I am good at capturing beauty and art in real life.



BILLY CHAU
GUEST WRITER

Proud introvert who is secretly opinionated about everything. Enjoys reading philosophy and linguistics, emphasis on “enjoys”. On the road to becoming a know-it-all (hopefully?), so still dogged by an acute sense of inadequacy and a serious case of inferiority complex. Incidentally, how do you do?



LOK PING
GUEST WRITER

Love reading biographies of great people who made personal compromises for the public good as a reminder that there is still good in a miserable world full of hypocrites who can't stand the temptations of fame and money.



ANAND BENEGAL
GUEST WRITER

I am a year 4 Global Studies student who is a social science enthusiast. My research interest include multicultural groups and their dynamics, Internet memes and their social impact. I am also passionate in general about integrating different approaches and philosophies within the social sciences.

In my spare time, I play jazz piano music, watches and trains in kickboxing, and loves to play football.



FELIX YUE
GUEST WRITER

I believe writing is a form of learning. Those who write, think. And those who think, know. To communicate ideas effectively would first require listening, and after a decent amount of knowledge is acquired, may one truly understand.

Zuckerberg once said “Ideas won’t come out fully formed, they become clear as you work on them.” And he was right. Work on your ideas, and learn to realise them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dr Isabel Hwang is the Assistant Dean of Student Support and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine. In addition to teaching, Isabel enjoys meeting and working with students from different backgrounds.

She embraces diversity and justice in a society. She also believes *CURiosity* is an important human quality that can motivate and inspire people.



DR. KLAUS COLANERO
SUPERVISOR

Klaus Colanero teaches for the General Education Foundation Programme of CUHK. He has always felt the urge to contribute to a more integrated and rigorous understanding of the world for as many people as possible.

His main research interests are science education, the relationship between scientific knowledge and human values, and the foundations of quantum mechanics.

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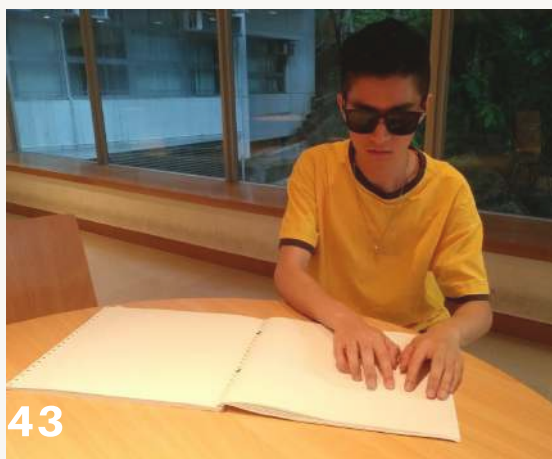
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THE SCIENCE OF YOU, THE SCIENCE OF US

HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF THE HUMAN
SCIENCE, ITS AVENUES OF LEARNING, AND
ITS GROWING LEVEL OF PRECISION

BY ANAND BENEGAL

Source: Pexels

Very often, the social science(s) get massively confusing and there isn't much work done by means of introduction. As a result – most of us feel very lost. What are the social sciences? Is it even a science? Are they the same as the humanities? Where do we begin? What do these words “society”, “development”, “poverty” mean? Is it all just philosophy? Which philosophical view is most coherent and logical?... and so on.

While philosophy (coming from its Greek roots “philosophia”, or the love of knowledge) is what all science emerged from, the social science's intention is to be that – a science. To observe and record patterns and regularities. To determine background context faithfully and to extend human insight.

The complexity of social thought, our inability to frame a universal objective language to discuss human society (such as how mathematics is used in physics), and the biases generated by our lived experiences come together to create widespread confusion about the social sciences. In writing this article, I want to share with you my perspective. I will present a unified view of the social science, and how it works today.

Before continuing further, I do wish to share a caveat: theorising (or even thinking for that matter) is an emotionally guided process, and emotional self-awareness is the key to accounting for our own feelings amidst our narratives. With that in mind, I want to let you know that I'm writing here with a sense of wonder... I feel that no matter how close we get to theorising and encapsulating human experiences and social patterns in objective, measurable, and predictable terms, we will never be able to capture the unbridled essence of humanity. Each of us is fated to capture only a glimpse of our reality in this world.

THE HUMAN UNIT

At its foundation lies the study of the individual. Disciplines like neuroscience and psychology attempt to solve the puzzle of how humans tick. How our memories work. What makes us happy or sad. How types of individuals vary in personality and behaviour, and conversely how we are all so very similar in behaviour. In what motivates us, and what causes us grief. These are a few of the sense-making concerns that the social science puzzles over. At this level of the human unit, we are trying to better observe and understand

ourselves as singular human beings.

But no human's a lone island. We live together, often playing our part in influencing and being influenced by the different communities we belong to, whether they be our families, schools, occupations, close friends, and other online and offline communities... how do we function among groups of people, and

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how do groups themselves function? To visualise these questions that are explosively complex, we now turn to the collective mesoscale.

THE COLLECTIVE MESOSCALE

Collective behaviour impacts individuals: I know how to use chopsticks now because of Hong Kong's high table dinner rituals at my university, and I'll probably download WeChat soon due to peer pressure. After all, everyone in Hong Kong is using it. Likewise, individual(s) impact collective behaviour. For instance, we are often moved by a rousing speech by a personality like Steve Jobs, or inspired by that one discerning friend to change our bubble tea preferences. The mesoscale

executives, as opposed to British managers due to their differing cultural expectations. While disciplines within the social science often diverge, co-interact and/or use different concepts/terms, what is simple to notice is the scale they operate at. At the collective mesoscale, culture and networks of individuals all come together in different contexts, and the social science studies the "what", "why", and "how" of it all. A good social scientist can cut across subject disciplines. They find the explanation that harmonises the most with the question posed to them. For instance, if I was asked "how rich/poor are people in India?", I would use Economics to figure out the quantum of India's national income per person and then factor in the population-level income inequality. This kind of resource-based analysis is what Economics is good at. I



Source: Pexels

is where human behaviour gets wonderfully messy, and as greedy scientists, we want to make sense of it all. Whether the individual disciplines are called economics, social psychology, marketing, or anything else, the aim is usually similar: pick a context, and observe how networks of people behave and do different/similar things within that context. Yield generalisable insights. Refine the process during the next experiment, and so on...

As a marketer, I'm trying to sell you an iPhone by appealing to your desires as a high-income, aspirational consumer. As a social psychologist, I could be observing whether you are more/less accepting of minorities and why. As a sociologist, I could analyse how and why your workplace language and behaviour changes around Chinese managers and economics

would then use techniques in Sociology to elaborate on how much those numbers reflect the cultural realities of living in India. Observing and analysing socio-cultural experiences is a task the discipline of Sociology is more attuned to performing. By using these two disciplines together, I gain a coherent answer to this research question. In the collective mesoscale, one is usually attempting to solve a particular question, often involving group(s) of people.

In social science, more specific research questions are answered with greater clarity. But for some researchers, that specific clarity is not enough. These researchers are even more ambitious. They want the answers to "everything there is". At the structural scale, the social science attempts just that.

THE STRUCTURAL SCALE

The word "structure" implies we can't change the answer easily as it is foundational in essence. For instance, one pessimistic observation was pointed out by Stanford historian Walter Scheidel. According to his research, natural disasters and wars are the only things that have ever put a dent on human social and material inequality across all of recorded human history. This begs the question: does the world really resemble a huge game of 'Monopoly'? The view that inequality is an inevitable function of human society has been lent a great deal of credence in recent years. Thomas Piketty for instance used Economics as his primary discipline: he showed in his book "Capital in the 21st century" how the two World Wars were the major factors in reducing material inequality in the 20th century. This material inequality in global society was otherwise a perpetually growing trend.

Structural answers are aggregated macroscopic pictures. The work of Peter Turchin for instance, attempts to use mathematical models to predict macro-patterns of social order and disorder across recorded human history. In a more contemplative writing style, political theorist Sean McFate predicts the decline of nation-states and the rise of a neo-medieval world. It is a deep-rooted instinct of humans to attempt a prediction of the future. We often do this so we can manage the present and evade the worst of what could be.

Studies in biological evolution, mathematics, genetics, and history, and other newer disciplines like network science, are now assisted by large statistical databases and growing banks of data. These disciplines, along with the ones mentioned above, help us ask those questions that are deeply rooted in our intrinsic humanity. Can we ever end inequality and war? What will humanity's evolution look like? What will our possible future be as a species? Thanks to the wealth of aggregated data we now have on the past and the present, we are now able to make headway into these questions. These humanist questions used to be confined to the realm of philosophical speculation as we had no way of testing/devising studies to tackle them. But with the proliferation of big data banks and the sophistication of social scientific creativity,



Source: Pexels

we can study them better now.

However, large timescale predictions have not much relevance to one's daily use. Can we also predict individual and collective behaviour in the here and now?

SOLVING FOR “X” WHEN IT COMES TO PEOPLE

The complexity of social life means it is very difficult to predict human behaviour over shorter timescales. I don't know whether you will buy the latest iPhone or not. That being said, it doesn't take much data to make a rudimentary judgment - if you're an Apple user, you're very likely to stick with them due to your pleasant experiences with Apple's quality and service. This is how Apple users tend to behave. But this might not be a simple stereotypical fact for you, and there might be room still for a different scenario.

How would I know? From your personal information, your Google searches, and by tracking your browsing activity, I'd be able to model you as a customer, and target you with a bespoke advertisement that exaggerates any pains you face. This increases my chances of selling to you the moment you are ready to buy a new phone. I just have to make sure I understand what you desire, and communicate that I have that in abundance in my advertisements. A politician could use the same principles in their campaign advertisements - targeting their opponents' negatives and framing themselves in accord with their audiences' desires. Using social insight in an application sense is more of an art than a science due to human complexity. But it is an art aided by science, nonetheless. The reason behind why some communications strate-

gists run successful political campaigns consistently (APCO Worldwide, Blue State Digital, etc.) is because they understand this aspect of the social science and are experienced in their craft.

It is often difficult to translate social theory into practice; theories themselves are refined and updated over time and implementing and applying theory is often imperfect (since it is us biased humans that are applying them). But artistic practitioners are often both able and willing to study an environment - testing, tweaking, creating knowledge and solving problems by applying social ideas. These practitioners don't need to have an academic background, for (almost) every human being is born with an innate social sense and the curiosity to learn. Moreover, academic theorists are often willing to engage and discuss and revise their imperfect findings with a wider audience. The book “Influence” (1984) by psychologist Robert Cialdini is an example of an early book theorising on psycho-social influence - which became a go-to book for marketing professionals worldwide. His newer book “Pre-suasion” (2016) reads like an updated field manual, building on previous work. Cialdini was one of a team of behavioural consultants who advised on Barack Obama's 2012 US Presidential Campaign.

But if I succeed in persuading you to buy into my brand, have I predicted your behaviour. Or have I influenced it and changed its course? We'll get to the answer soon.

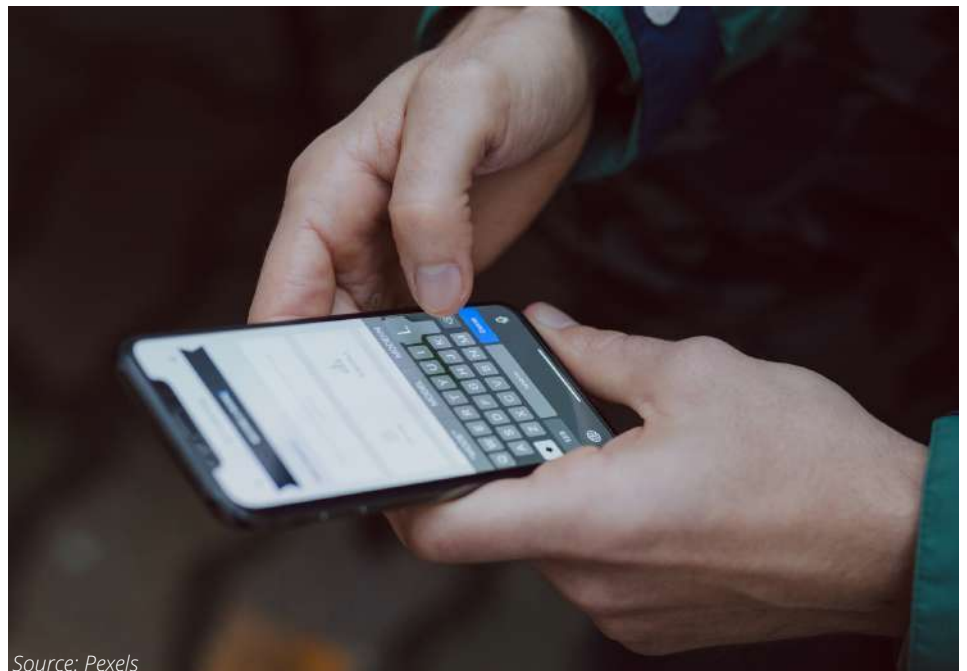
At present, social science is synergisi-

ng with data science. More data means more trends to analyse and more patterns to record. It also increases the nuance with how companies/politicians/institutions understand different customer audiences which helps them create better products/services/social campaigns/political advertisements, etc. These end-products are tailored to harmonise with the audiences' values and psycho-social backgrounds.

To give an example, it's strange to me how YouTube's algorithm knows me so well: it knows which song to play next on an auto-generated playlist. The song doesn't have to be the perfect match for my mood. It just needs to be good enough to keep me from switching to another website. I am browsing food recipe videos, and I immediately get a Gordon Ramsay ‘Masterclass’ advert which wonderfully holds my attention throughout the ninety seconds. If I was slightly wealthier and staying in my own apartment with a kitchen, I'd have signed up.

**TO BE CURIOUS ABOUT
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
COULD BE THE KEY THAT
UNLOCKS OUR TRUE
HUMAN POTENTIAL – AND
CREATES A MINDFUL AND
SELF-REFLECTIVE FUTURE.**

While the social sciences hasn't reached the natural sciences in its level of precision, it's getting scarily close. The marriage of big data with social science insight has increased human predictability. On one hand, it makes our lives far more comfortable as we stay ensconced



Source: Pexels

within a social-virtual ecosystem that harmonises with our worldview. On the other, this comfort numbs the capacity of our human agency. This cognitive comfort dulls our ability to think critically over time.

To answer the question I posed a while ago: when we apply social science insights, the boundary between prediction and influence ceases to exist. This is

anxiety-inducing political news.

Addicted to anxiety? Yes, I became comfortable with receiving and believing that news due to it being so readily available and familiar to me. I was also contributing to the problem (in my miniscule way) by becoming a part of Facebook's addictive feedback loop. After all, I was viewing, sharing, and liking anxiety-driven content. Facebook had successfully

need to understand ourselves as much as large social institutions (companies, governments, etc.) understand us. That way, we can save our agency, and create a more vibrant, meaningful life through concerted effort. This isn't just about critical thinking and self-discipline, because those concepts by themselves won't work. We need to integrate those concepts with an empathy for the dynamics of the social world. This way we can start



BLUE STATE

Ready to talk? Contact Us

Believe in the power of people.

We move people to elect presidents, change laws, fall in love with brands, donate billions, and more.

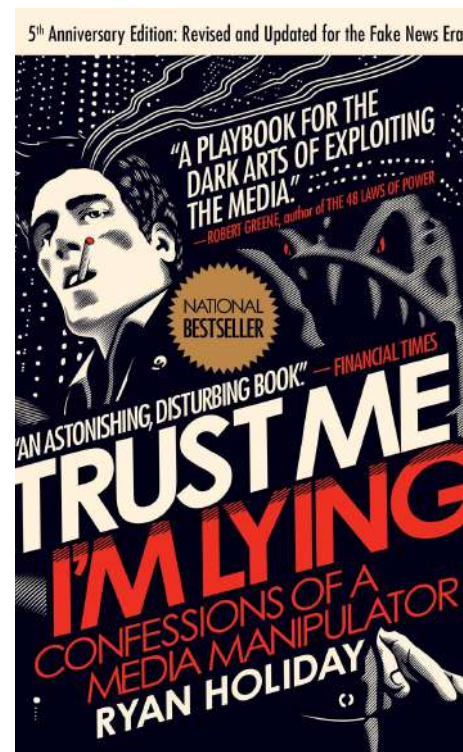
because the very instant we applied our insight, we also became a factor in influencing the outcome. If I, as a company like APCO Worldwide, predict that a US presidential candidate projected with the labels "tough on China", "political outsider", "pragmatic and calm" is likely to be received well by voters, by acting on this insight and running the political campaign, I have also played my part in influencing the outcome. My success or failure would depend on my holistic understanding of the social reality we are living in, right from the language, accent, intonation and body language favoured by different political audiences, down to how the audiences favour the dresses the candidates wear in different states of the US. And there are so many other factors I could test and control for.

Living in human society, we co-create our realities, and the stimuli and the responses are married together in our social behaviour. By being observant, we only tease the strands apart to make sense of the patterns in a causal sense, and this pattern-awareness helps us creatively select alternative behaviours. Three years ago, I was addicted to Facebook because the news feed was full of depressing and

co-opted me into its ecosystem. After reading Ryan Holiday's *Trust me I'm lying confessions of a media manipulator*, I understood the nature of the new media landscape better, and promptly quit Facebook. I rejoined two years later, but thankfully I am now more mindful of how each social platform and its content influences my emotional state. This way I am able to engage with the social platform in my own alternative fashion, selecting an alternate set of behavioural patterns. I set a particular time frame and browse on the site with a set of goals in mind. An example: I tell myself, "You have five minutes: you will search for the Slate article on CV design templates and skim through it, you will wish Yash a happy birthday, and then you will log off." This time Facebook keeps me as a user within its ecosystem, but the engagement looks different and is atypical to the default lackadaisical way users browse Facebook.

Almost everything we do (liking friends' and companies' posts, uploading pictures with location-tags, ordering movie tickets online, etc.) leaves a virtual data-footprint, and this will only become truer as time passes. Our behaviour will become easier and easier to solve for. We therefore

solving for "x" for ourselves. To be curious about the social science could be the key that unlocks our true human potential – and creates a mindful and self-reflective future.



A full-page background image of a pregnant woman in profile, wearing a vibrant red, textured dress. She is gently holding her pregnant belly with both hands. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of her body and the texture of the dress. The background is a light, neutral color.

REVISITING GLORIFIED MOTHERHOOD

MONGOLIA'S ORDER
OF GLORIOUS
MOTHERHOOD AND ITS
IMPACT ON SEX AND
SEXUALITY

BY LOK PING

Sandwiched between its two giant neighbours Russia and China, Mongolia is a special country. It reminds us of the times when the Mongols were fearless because of their brilliant skills in fighting and Genghis Khan created the largest contiguous empire the world has ever seen. But these times are in the past. Today the empire exists no more, but the country remains large: about 1400 times the size of Hong Kong, however, with barely 2.01 inhabitants per square kilometre, comparing with Hong Kong which has 6659 per square kilometre (as of 2019). One day I sat on my bed and imagined. If I were Mongol, the dream of reviving the glory of the nation would be in my blood. It is unlikely though. But why? Let's take a look at the demography of the country.

Unresolved demographic PROBLEM

Being one of the least densely populated country in the world, Mongolia has a population of around three million. Since both of its two geopolitical neighbours Russia and China have much bigger populations, the Mongolian government has been taking population issues seriously. As an incentive to enlarge its population, the government issued a policy honouring women for having children. The policy awards mothers the Order of Glorious Motherhood medals once they give birth to and raised a certain number of children. The awardees are given monetary benefits and are allowed to retire early. In 1958, women awarded the First-Class Order of the Mother Glorio-

us received 200 tugriks, while women given the Second-Class Order of the Mother Glorious received 100 tugriks. The subsidy was equal to between a quarter and half of the average monthly salary for a worker at that time. While many focus on the positive impacts of this policy on mothers and their status, in this article, I hope to look at the knock-on effects this policy has on the lives of people of different sexualities in Mongolia.

Policy intervention CAME ABOUT

Historian David Christian once said childbearing, for centuries, has been regarded by Mongolians as patriotic. "The Order of Glorious Motherhood" is the Mongolian version of Russia's "Mother Heroine". It was first implemented in 1957.

Today, mothers of four are awarded the Second-Class Order of Glorious Motherhood while mothers of six are awarded the First-Class Order. Previously, the Second Order was awarded to mothers who brought up at least five children and the First Order for mothers of over eight children. The relaxation took place in mid-70s due to positive outcome of the policy as reflected in a rise in fertility. Yet, people had become wary of having many children after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and fertility fell again to an all-time low in 2002. In view of this, the Order of Glorious Motherhood was upped by the government in 2006, causing a mild rise in fertility.



On the lives of women IN MONGOLIA

Gender stereotypes are reinforced as the policy came into force. As mothers are praised in an unprecedented way, family expectations on girls have become immense to an extent that distorts the place women have in society as working women are encouraged to give up their jobs and become stay-at-home mothers. Following the 1989 democratic movement, Mongolia was in an economic transition switching to a free market economy. There has been a so-called reverse gender gap in Mongolia where families from rural areas have been eager to send their daughters to study and work in cities. Boys are seen as indispensable for domestic work and herding, while girls are seen as more flexible and should pursue education.

or of History at the City University of New York, observes women in Mongolia think of pregnancy as a civic duty rather than an individual decision, therefore giving more births is “encouraged” actively rather than a result of personal interest or planning. This neglects women’s right to decide how many children they want to have or whether to have children in the first place. Early in its implementation, the Order was even coupled with regulations to prohibit contraceptive use and free abortion. This is effectively no longer “encouraging women to have babies”, but more like telling women “they really must have more.” It gives rise to the perception of these women as incapable of doing anything except procreating.

There will also be fiercer competition between mothers and non-mothers in the work-place. This concerns little about gender differences, but more about stigmatis-

Not dismissing women’s ability to achieve work-life balance, but to the extent in which these women can materially benefit from the policy, that is to raise at least four children, it is very difficult for them to work.

Consequently, over 60 percent of university graduates are female. As Lily Kuo from the Guardian finds out, despite being successful in their careers, women are still expected to be married by the age of 29. Not dismissing their ability to achieve work-life balance, but to the extent in which these women can materially benefit from the policy, that is to raise at least four children, it is very difficult for them to work. Working mothers either face “double burden” from both working and taking care of their children or retreating to home, and the latter further reinforces traditional gender roles. This motherhood awarding policy that reinforces women’s role as mothers could therefore possibly roll back gender equality and hinder women empowerment.

On a deeper level, the policy goes against women empowerment as it is essentially planting a “coercive” idea in society that tells women they should have more children. Central to women empowerment is individuality and autonomy. An empowered woman should have the liberty to decide her career, her marriage, and every other aspect of her individual life. However, as Morris Rossabi, a profess-

ion. Even if these women continue to work after they have more than four children, they are likely to suffer from “the motherhood penalty”, which refers to additional disadvantages working mothers experience compared to childless working women. Halpert, who researched into pregnancy as a source of bias in performance appraisals noted that visibly pregnant women are considered less committed to their roles by their employers, less authoritative and more emotional than women who are not visibly pregnant. Award-winning economics journalist Ann Crittenden also argues that across the world, for women under the age of 35, the pay gap is larger between mothers and non-mothers than between men and women. Her view is supported by Correll et al. (2007), who suggested women with children are six times less likely than childless women to be recommended for hire. Despite a lack of quantitative research specifically on the case of Mongolia, it is sensible to deduce that the more children a woman has, the more disadvantaged she is in the work-place.

Some believe that the policy also perpetuates patriarchy symbolically. On the Second Order medal, the woman is wear-

ing deel, the national Mongolian dress, with her “combed and split hair” that shows she is at a young age. Since mothers are considered “glorious”, it would make sense to value baby girls more as they are expected to become mothers one day. However, a baby boy instead of a girl is shown on the medal. As far as feminists are concerned, the depiction of the woman as young, traditional, patriotic and committed to her baby and the depiction of the baby as a boy demonstrate the embedded values and beliefs of patriarchy. On top of that, the focus on the award has shifted from celebrating mothers to honouring children instead. This is reflected by an unprecedented change of the occasion the award ceremony takes place – until 2017, it took place on 8 March, the International Women’s Day; however, since 2018 it became 1 June, Mongolia’s Children’s Day. From a feminist point of view, this has significant implications for the status of women. Symbolically, since International Women’s Day is an occasion to promote gender parity and recognise women’s contributions to society, awarding it on Children’s Day instead reflects the underlying significance of celebrating motherhood has diminished. Rather, now, it is to celebrate love for children.

On the lives of men IN MONGOLIA

Men are also affected by this policy in a few ways. On the up side, men benefit because, assuming most women are in a stable relationship with their male partners, regardless of whether it is in the form of marriage, their male partners will enjoy the “children’s allowance” provided



Mongolia. An Order of the Glory of Motherhood, 1st Class Badge, Numbered (Source: Purveyors of Authentic Militaria)

It emphasises the notion that while women are denied certain opportunities because they need to fulfil the duties of mothers, lesbians are denied the right of social existence because they do not (or cannot) marry and have children.

by the government as well. This will be especially helpful for men who struggle to make ends meet. Considering these men are oftentimes the bread-winners, this policy helps offset the costs of raising children through, for example, tax reduction. On the down side, a lot of men in the Mongolian society live very unhealthy lifestyles. World Bank found that 47 percent of adult men in Mongolia smoke, compared to 6 percent of adult women. In 2016, adult men in Mongolia consume an average 12.8 litres of pure alcohol per year, while that of women is just 2.1 litres. Men's unhealthy lifestyles have contributed to a huge life expectancy gap between women and men — 74.2 for female and 65.7 for male. Many of these behaviours are associated with “toxic masculinities” — attitudes and behaviours of some men who adhere to traditional male gender roles and feel the need to act in a vigorously dominant way. Honouring motherhood is likely to aggravate toxic masculinities if there are no measures in place to educate the society about the objectives of this policy.

On the lives of sexual minorities IN MONGOLIA

The policy also has a knock-on effect on sexual minorities in Mongolia. After the policy was introduced, there is generally greater family pressure on girls to have babies, regardless of their sexual orientation. This marginalises lesbians and gays who refuse to engage in heterosexual sex because their preference does not realise a woman's reproductive function. This is a similar case to what Hildebrandt (2018) discusses has happened in China. He illustrates how the heteronormative one-child policy negatively affects perceptions and lives of sexual minorities in China through putting greater reproductive pressure on the only child in the family. Mongolia is a similar case to China, despite a different

nature of the two policies — one is family planning and the other is pro-natalist. Seeing the government institutionalising heterosexuality as part of the social order and framing it as a merit rather than just one of the many types of sexualities, some parents in Mongolia push their daughters and sons to have babies. Those who refuse to have heterosexual sex are stigmatised even more severely, given that traditional norms in Mongolia have already put tremendous pressure on sexual minorities. Meeting parents' expectations, which include marriage (and same-sex marriage is not allowed) and procreation, cannot be more acute for sexual minorities in Mongolia. At an individual level, there are instances of violence against LGBT persons. At the state level, this social policy adversely affects sexual minorities as it institutionalises a hetero-normative assumption that when girls grow up, they will be married to men and have many babies. It emphasises the notion that while women are denied certain opportunities because they need to fulfil the duties of motherhood, lesbians are denied the right of social existence because they do not (or cannot) marry and have children.




Taking pleasure INTO ACCOUNT

Pleasure, unlike gender, gets far less attention than it should. Policymakers, scholars, and legal practitioners often ignore pleasure as an important aspect in the making of social policies. A pleasure lens enables us to reorient our focus from broader structural issues to individuals when examining social policies.


Sexual pleasure is an important aspect of life. Awarding mothers with multiple children has pros and cons for women sexuality and their pursuit of sexual pleasure. First, the policy largely ignores women's sexual pleasure since the national official discourse determines sexuality as a means for reproduction, not for pleasure. In Mongolia, sexual intercourse as pleasure and as a form of expression of sexuality is discouraged in mothers. Being mothers oftentimes implies women's desexualisation — an attribute acknowledged by the majority in Mongolia that mothers should put their children first at the expense of their own sexualities. Mothers are always caught between viewing their bodies as an asexual and selfless source of maternal nurturance and as hetero-normative sites for pleasure. This policy neglects their sexualities in many ways: when a woman's baby is young, her sexuality might or might not be expressed because either she gets pleasure from breastfeeding or she does not feel good breastfeeding; as the baby grows up, the mother has to spend time taking care of the baby and sexuality will be interfered, especially if she is meanwhile pregnant; when her first child turns into a teenager and her second child becomes a toddler, she is having a third child; after all the hassle and when all of her children become adults, she is seen as too old to engage in sex and derive pleasure from it, as old people are seen as asexual and their sexualities are often frowned upon in society. It is important to understand that women are just women before they become mothers, and not all women will become mothers, so they should be viewed as individuals with their own likes and dislikes, not just carriers of eggs serving their reproductive function.

Pleasure, unlike gender, gets far less attention than it should.




It is equally important to understand that pleasure does not only come from erotic experiences. In a broader context, it can also mean pleasure of parenting and a sense of pride. Regarding parenting, some people see it as hard work while some people get immeasurable satisfaction from it, and the pleasure has nothing to do with sensations. In his book *How Pleasure Works*, psychologist Paul Bloom writes “pleasure is affected by deeper factors, including what the person thinks about the true essence of what he or she is getting pleasure from”. He goes against the conventional view of pleasure as entirely sensory. Parents treasure their children’s kindergarten art not because they feel good touching it, smelling it, but because they believe this is an object painted by their children — it is the pleasure people get from loving others. Back to the policy, while it encourages couples who already have children to have more, it also encourages childless couples to consider having children. This changes the minds of these people who would otherwise choose not to have children. More people get to experience the pleasures (and unequivocally, pains) of raising children.



Regarding the sense of pride, the assumption of the policy is that mothers will feel proud when they receive the medals. Pride is also a kind of pleasure. In her article, Mongolian researcher Turmunkh Odontuya discusses the mixed feelings mothers have when they receive the medals. Some mothers said they were happy and proud of themselves. However, she observed that many mothers, particularly young mothers, were unhappy. Some said they felt embarrassed because some working women stereoty-

ped them as useless people. One woman described glorious mothers as “unskilled people who was only capable of giving birth”. This reflects that the policy carries a discrepancy in meaning between governmental and individual spheres. Despite endorsement from the state, certain people in society are disrespectful towards these mothers. They consider these women as incapable of managing their personal lives. From this we see this motherhood-awarding policy has a knock-on effect on others’ perceptions of those women who are awarded the Order, which leads to those glorious mothers either feeling proud or ashamed.

Some final words



Mongolia is a pluralistic country with relatively strong respect for women’s rights. Beneath the surface, however, are stereotypes, gender inequalities, and lingering concerns over the impacts of its pronatalist policy on people with different sexualities. While designing a good policy is important, it is equally important to identify unintended consequences the policy may have on the social structure and different stakeholders’ interests. For centuries and around the world, the celebration of motherhood serves to recognise the sacrifices mothers make for their children but also in the meantime attempts to exert discursive control over what women ought to and ought not to do. Knowing about this is the first step in freeing women who are caught in the cycle of repression. Next time when you see a woman with children on the street, please see her first as a woman, not as a mother.



Patrified

*A brief reflection of what I think
about feminism and the road to
gender equality*

BY BERNARD TSENG



Photo by Chloe S. on UnsplashGender



we are not living inside a patriarchy.

Modern feminism is starting to demolish itself.

When you read the first two statements that I make, you might think, “Are you out of your mind, Bernard? Is this another misogynistic propaganda that aims to defame women all alike when they are in grave need for empowerment?”

Let me make a case for myself.

When I was in my early childhood, I was firmly convinced that women are the only oppressed gender. Physical education courses regarding domestic violence showed pictures of women heavily beaten with bruises all over their bodies, while civic and societal education textbooks taught us how difficult it is for women to shatter the glass ceiling barricaded at the workplace when facing gender-based discrimination. Also, as one of the most beloved grandsons of my family, I often received the impression that there were some preferential treatments among the male members in our family. It was not very hard for me, a young boy who thought one day he would be able to rectify all of the existing problems in the world all by himself, to have loads of antipathy towards the presumed beneficiaries in this distorted system of power — male, the group that I belong to and was guilty of being part of. Patriarchy sucks, I told myself.

Nonetheless as time gradually went by, I started to notice some things that struck me as odd. Why is it the case, for example, that only men are conscripted for military service but not women, when the law in my country stipulates that all people are equal regardless of their gender, and that the judicial explanation to the above-mentioned inconsistency construed this merely as the biological differences between men and women? Also, why is it that gender segregation in sports is necessary?

There came a point where the tenets of my gender beliefs started to crumble.

A clip that I came across online featured a woman who shamed her partner (a man in this case) by threatening and pulling his hair callously out in public^[1]. The reaction of the public is, to a certain

extent, appalling and in disbelief: When the woman punches the man, nobody offers assistance to the man; instead, some choose to even make fun of the man and regard him as a wuss who was not worthy of help. This is in stark contrast to the reverse situation, in which if a man physically assaults a woman, bystanders will immediately intervene.

What is even worse, another clip showed that bystanders also targeted against the man even when he acted in defence against the woman’s attack^[2]. I scratched my head, not knowing why, and my heart throbbed uncontrollably whenever an innocent human being is being mistreated. These clips are a direct refutation against the notion that women will not be the perpetrator of domestic violence. There must be something that we should do.

Meet Cassie Jay - *The Red Pill* documentary

Cassie Jaye is the director of the 2017 documentary film *The Red Pill*^[3], which highlights her circuitous journey into the world of Men’s Rights Movement in America and record what the Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) and feminists alike have to say about men’s issues that are not very easily seen in the mainstream media. As a self-proclaimed feminist before filming this documentary, she started out being determined that she would expose “the misogynistic group” that is so often bemoaned in the feminist circles. Unexpectedly, she ends up starting to challenge her own perspective after having fastidiously listened to many of the MRAs’ points of view.

Erin Pizzey, one of the interviewees, is the first person in the world to set up a sanctuary for women suffering from domestic violence. From the interview she has with Cassie Jaye, I can see her overflowing with such compassion for women that in no way at all would I relate her to a hateful figure oppressing women. Coming from a background in which both of her parents have been violent towards her and from the many conversations she held with the women fleeing from domestic violence, Erin Pizzey is sure about one thing: women are just as likely to be violent as men. As she points out, 62 out of the 100 women that first fled to her sanctuary in 1971 admitted to being violent towards their family members. With the help of tools like scissors, sticks and pliers, etc., women can also inflict violence on

their partners. The often preconceived idea that only men can inflict violence on others due to their physical advantage is a myth that needs to be debunked. In reality, there are as many as one third of women and one fourth of men suffering from domestic violence in the U.S. alone; the fact that there are more than two thousand women-only domestic violence shelters and one male-only one in the U.S. as of 2016 is also part of the reason why I think it is counterproductive to consider feminism a struggle against the “oppressive men”. It is a shame that men’s rights movement needs to be created to counterbalance some of the most radical feminist movements. Striving for equality of opportunity is, from my point of view, not a zero-sum game. Both women and men should work together and join a bigger conversation in which different voices can be heard without the fear of being silenced.

Take another MRA (Men’s Rights Activist), Warren Farrell, as an example. He firmly believes that flexibility in gender roles is what we should be aiming for: both men and women should have the free will to decide what kind of career path he or she wants to choose in the future, whether it be staying at home to take care of the children, or continuing striving to be a CEO. That being said, Farrell stresses that we tend to ignore the issues men face at hand. Each gender has its own unique set of problems that involve many complicated factors and can hardly be generalised into this great meat grinder of “patriarchy”. Anywhere from male genital circumcision and paternity fraud to domestic violence against men are strong indications that the notion of “patriarchy” might not be the best model we can use to guide our societal discourses and predict the “data”, that is,

**Women are just as
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Photo by Tim Mossholder from Pexels

the everyday occurrences that are so often misconstrued as proof of gender-based oppression that may inadvertently prevent all of us from having a constructive dialogue among all parties concerned towards a society with equality of opportunity for everyone.

As one of the most famous statistical adages goes, "Every model is wrong, but some are useful". Patriarchy, in my opinion, is a model that cannot be proven right and should be phased out when it is no longer useful as a model that is of great predictive power. While some may argue that it is because of the so-called "toxic masculinity" that men create and impose on the society so that they in turn, become their own victims as a result of this imposition, I think blaming men as the sole instigator is in many ways counterproductive to the common cause for societal change^[4].

The Problem of Equal Representation

"Only five percent of the Fortune 500 companies are led by women. This is exactly the reason why we need more quotas for women at the workplace to promote equal rights for women and smash the patriarchy!" While for some people this may seem to be a reasonable statement to make in order to strive for gender equality where everyone can be treated fairly, I strongly believe that setting quotas actually serves as an insult to any woman who is excellent at doing her job. It is also doing a disservice to women by implying that women are less capable than men when in fact they are not. If we want the hiring process to be a mathematical function (input being the information about an applicant, and output being whether this applicant will be hired) that is without any influence of gender factors, why do we include gender as a parameter in the first place to justify discriminating others?

Also, men and women actually have different interests and behaviours as far as

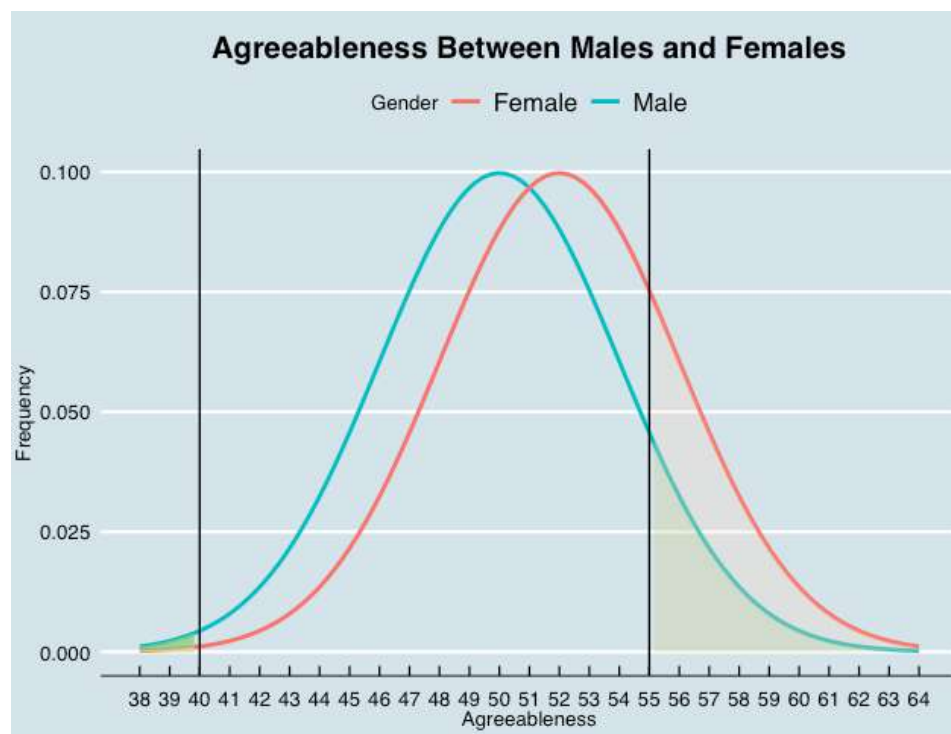
their career choice is concerned. This largely explains that for any given working sector that provides maximised equality of opportunity (or maximised free will), it is really uncommon for either male or female to occupy a representation of 50%. As Dr. Debra W. Soh, a former sexologist and now a science columnist, points out, the level of testosterone a baby is exposed to before birth will in fact decide where the babies' interests lead. For female babies with a genetic disease called congenital-adrenal hyperplasia, the amount of testosterone they get exposed to before birth is so high that the female babies will be more likely to go for male-typical toys like trains and guns despite the fact that the parents have been giving the babies positive feedback for female-typical stuff like dolls^[5].

Let's take one of the gender-related traits, agreeableness, as an example. According to psychological research, low agreeableness is one of the commonly seen characteristics of being a CEO as one needs to be ruthless and negotiate with business partners and competitors all alike when necessary. Women, on average, are slightly more agreeable than men and this partly explains the reason why there is not an even representation between men and women among the Fortune 500 CEOs and that women account for a larger portion in the nursing industry.

Here I draw a diagram containing two normal curves: the male one with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 4, and the female one with a mean of 52 and a standard deviation of 4. (We assume that we have an equal number of males and females). Suppose for argument's sake, we say that people with agreeableness level higher than 55 will be interested enough to go into the nursing industry as being a nurse requires being nice to patients and being communicative, men will only account for 32%; on the other hand, with the threshold being 40, female will only account for 17% of the CEO positions.

It is important to note though, that the mean difference does not equate with absolute difference. This is not suggesting that all women are more agreeable than men; a man may in fact be more agreeable than another woman and we cannot mistake population difference for individual differences.

While the statement I make above may sound inflammatory to those who think that the gender differences all boil down to a societal one, it would be preposterous for me to say that the differences between men and women do not involve any biological factors, as can be seen from the fact that a man cannot conceive babies and, on average, secretes different levels of hormones.



Simple model showing how gender difference affects representation in the working sector.
Male ~ $N(50, 16)$, Female ~ $N(52, 16)$.

This has nothing to do with intelligence at all but rather a preference over career choices.

The often preconceived idea that only men can inflict violence on others due to their physical advantage is a myth that needs to be debunked.

Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, a renowned Canadian clinical psychologist, has aptly pointed out a famous study regarding culture consumption in Sweden: when the societal differences between genders are minimised, the biological differences (or psychological) are then maximised, as can be seen from the different career choices Swedish people make. According to Dr. Peterson, this is one of the most scientifically sound papers and has been repeatedly corroborated by many others. Dr. Peterson contends that equality of outcome is in fact a devil in disguise as enforcing it will devastate one's free will to choose his or her career path^[6].



One of my friends did a little experiment regarding handedness. When given an equal chance for people to choose from both the left button and right button, how will they react?

Conclusion

I believe that society is, in essence, very complicated and can hardly be explained by only a single factor like patriarchy; instead, it is a multivariate model with many interaction terms embedded inside, and that is why we need to observe the society outside of the “men-oppressing-women” paradigm. The psychological differences that I mentioned above is also just part of the multivariate analysis. While many feminists have been achieving considerable progress for many important issues around the world like sexual trafficking and reproductive rights, I fear that the name “feminism” can be hijacked by some of the most radical feminists into silencing others’ opinions. The documentary *The Red Pill* was, for instance, forced to be shut down in several places around the world because it is considered “misogynistic” and “caring only about men’s rights” by some of the most radical feminists. I think the difficulties each individual faces in this society should be brought into discussion instead of pitting women against men and vice versa. Deliberately labelling half the population as inherently pernicious is not productive for a constructive dialogue among all the members in the society; the hardship that each individual goes through may be to your surprise as harrowing as that of Kim Ji-Young [I] and Goo-hara [II]. We, as a society, should not name something bad after half the population and name something representative of equality after another half. Just as Betsy Cairo stressed, “if what we are striving for is equality, why don’t we just call the movement ‘equalism’?”

SO... WILL YOU GO ON THIS JOURNEY OF EQUALISM TOGETHER WITH ME?

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Sidenotes

- I. One of the protagonists in the film *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, featuring a housewife suffering from depression and the discrimination she faces ever since her childhood
- II. Goo-hara committed suicide after having been physically abused by her boyfriend

AMERICAN, HONGKONGER, OR JAZZ MUSICIAN?

*Prof. Gordon Mathews Shopping
at the Cultural Supermarket*

Written by Carol Ma
Illustrated by Doris Chui

“I DON’T FIT ANYWHERE – BUT THEN, ANTHROPOLOGISTS SHOULDN’T FIT ANYWHERE” – IT WAS THIS ARTICLE WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR GORDON MATHEWS THAT BROUGHT ME INTO THE WORLD OF ANTHROPOLOGY. EVER SINCE, I HAVE BEEN CURIOUS HOW THIS LOST ANTHROPOLOGIST, HAVING SEEN THROUGH ALL THE DIVERSITIES OF CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY, SETTLES DOWN WITH ANY OF THEM. HOW DO INDIVIDUALS POSITION THEMSELVES IN THE MIDST OF AN INCREASINGLY FLUID WORLD?

The CULTURAL SUPERMARKET

Anthropologists traditionally see culture as the static way of living of a discrete group of people. “You know, your parents are peasants and you’re going to be a peasant, period. And there’s not a whole lot of choice,” he says. This traditional idea doesn’t seem to explain very well the globalised world today, where we’re exposed to too many possible ways of living to still believe in the universality of our own.

In his book *Global Culture/Individual Identity*, Professor Mathews introduced the idea of “cultural supermarket”.



People no longer belong to the culture that they were born into, alone. They also belong to a global cultural supermarket, from which they pick and choose aspects of their lives. Maybe you become a fan of Reggae music, or a fan of Bach. Maybe you become a Christian. Maybe you become a Tibetan Buddhist by going to some lectures of somebody.



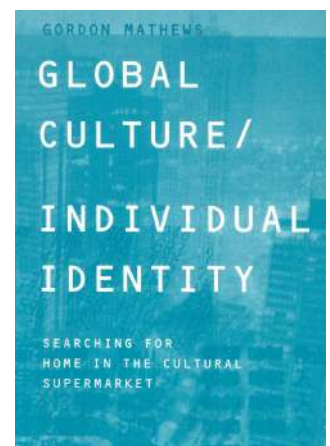
Liberated souls, or MANIPULATED CONSUMERS?

The idea of picking our identities like grabbing Häagen-Dazs ice-cream from a ParknShop fridge does sound irresistibly appeal-

ing, but are we as liberated as it seems? Do we choose Häagen-Dazs ice-cream because it satisfies our taste buds, or because of fancy advertisements instead? Or, simply because our friends like it? “Now, do you finally make these choices or not? I mean, do we have free will? In a philosophical sense, it’s tough to say. But in a cultural sense, we’re certainly shaped in certain ways,” says Professor Mathews.

He gave several examples - if you write songs, but everyone says your music is terrible, you probably don’t want to call yourself a “composer” anymore. If you think you are a Prince Charming, but no one wants to go out with you, “you pretty soon learn where you can make your choices and how far you can go,” as he puts it. “And so, we are at the mercy of other people, and we mostly aren’t brave enough to do stuff on our own.” Education plays another key role - he recalls having to say the United States’ Pledge of Allegiance as a 4-year-old kid - “That’s pure propaganda. Yet, I learned that as a kid, and that stays with me.”

Nonetheless, we are certainly much freer now than a few centuries ago. At least, “we’re trained in several different places,” he said. “I know some young Americans who went to a Christian school, and they’re told ‘never have sex before marriage’. But every movie they ever look at, every video they see, is about sexuality!” On top of that, we do have a whole lot of new products coming into the market. “Electronic musician”, “gay activist”, “football player” - “These identities didn’t exist, obviously. Today, you guys could be anything at all!” he says.



Professor Gordon Mathews' book



“Belonging to a nation IS VERY NEW”

To understand individual identity in such a context, “one of the simplest ways is to say ‘I am a _____’ – how do you fill in the blank?” This was the question Professor Mathews asked at the GE Salon event “Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Hong Kong and the World”. As you would probably have expected, nationality – whether it be “Chinese”, “Taiwanese” or “Swede” – appeared in quite a number of the responses. It seems reasonable that we consider nationality a crucial part of our identity. But is that how it has always been?

The anthropologist sees it the other way – “Remember, this is quite new in history. This began basically, some people say in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, some people would say the French Revolution,” he told us, “France didn’t create national identity really until the mid-nineteenth century. Everybody thought they belonged to their village, but nobody had an idea of being ‘French’.” He recalls asking a scholar what answer he would have gotten if he had gone up to somebody in rural China a thousand years ago, and asked “do you love your country?” The scholar said, “he wouldn’t have understood your question.”

“**National identity is basically the way that the state convinces you to be loyal to them. Patriotism is how rich old people get poor young people to die for them... In fact, it is a particularly artificial form of identity,**

He concluded. The state, who controls the education system and mass media, often tries to make itself appear like a family, in which case loving the nation would be something pretty natural to do. “But it’s not a family... You don’t know other people in the state – it’s this larger body of people,” he says.

In his opinion, national identity should be transcended – “the reason why I say that states and national identity are evil, is the fact that in the twentieth century, you had 60 million people killed by states killing states.” He recalls being in an event promoting Chinese patriotism in Hong Kong, where he raised a question, “think of the Nanjing Massacre – those Japanese who killed hundreds of thousands of Chinese, they loved their country. Will patriots in Hong Kong who love China be any different?” The speaker’s response – “the Japanese are evil, but we’re not.” We both laughed, but the scary part is the speaker, and probably many patriots, actually mean it. “Now, is always fighting for your country wrong? No. There are some times it may be valid to do it... But the problem is, rational love so easily filters over in the irrational love,” says Professor Mathews.

So, what’s in your SHOPPING BAG?

Having debunked even the most taken-for-granted form of identity, how would this sceptical anthropologist ever find home? What does he pick, if he’s picking anything at all, from the dazzling shelves of the cultural supermarket? – I couldn’t wait to go back to this very first question that I had. As it turns out, the answer was simple but surprisingly convincing.

“**At first, I had, like many people, much bigger dreams. You know, I’m going to be a jazz musician, I’m going to be a novelist, and so on. And, it turns out I wasn’t particularly good in either of those. I wind up in Japan, by accident pretty much.**”

Professor Mathews said, telling his story. With a degree in English teaching, he started working for a language school in Japan – somewhere he never thought of going. After 8 years teaching “what did you do this week?” conversations, he realised he could not be doing that forever, which is why he went home for PhD, and eventually ended up at CUHK as an anthropologist.

“So, a lot of my own particular identity has been a matter of chance. Running into certain people, and meeting my wife too, is chance. My wife is Japanese, a very lucky chance, I’ve been remarkably lucky in how this has worked out. But, for me, it was never a matter of knowing what I wanted to do at the start. It sort of worked out this way,” he said. Indeed, if my friend hadn’t sent me that random article by Professor Mathews, I would probably still be that science nerd dreaming of becoming a meteorologist.

“A life is a matter of luck” – he concluded that way.

“**So, do you consider yourself Hongkongese too?**” I couldn’t help putting forward this topical question, clearly with agenda. At first, he didn’t have a quick answer. “Just because I’ve lived here, yes, probably so... On the other hand, do I know anything about Cantonese popular culture? No. Do I speak much Cantonese? Enough to talk to a cab driver for 10 minutes, but that’s about all,” he explains, “so, it depends how you want to define this.”



Ethnic vs. civic identity

NATIONALITY ON THE SHELF

This opens our interview to a whole new discussion – what does it mean, after all, to belong to a place? Before the Umbrella Movement – Professor Mathews wrote an email to Professor Chan Kin Man, one of the organisers, expressing his interest to participate and his concern of being considered a “foreign interference”. Professor Chan, as well as all the locals that he consulted, replied, **“yes, you’re a Hongkonger!”** Whereas, to his surprise, every mainlander who wrote him said, **“you’ll be seen as a foreign interference.”**

Hong Kong is, indeed, quite a unique context for the re-examination of national identity – I thought. Given a blank to fill in, I would say “I’m a Hongkonger”, simply in response to my supposed “national” identity – the common assumption that I am a “Chinese”. Clearly, I don’t share the same experiences, ideologies and values with mainlanders. I am not even sure if the sources of information we get every day overlap at all. If you’re talking about the so-called “Chinese traditions”, for my generation they really are just superficial practices that hardly mean anything deep or spiritual – do I eat moon cakes because they symbolise “reunion”, and that reunion means a lot in “my culture”? Not really. Confusingly, most of my Chinese friends never seem to get my point – “your ancestors are Chinese, how are you saying that you’re not Chinese?!”

“There’s a really interesting difference between two forms of identity, and two ways of belonging to a country. There is what’s called ethnic identity and civic identity,” Professor Mathews explains. Canada, Brazil, the United States, and European countries increasingly, are based on civic identity. “That’s sort of like belonging to a club – anybody can belong,” he says. On the other hand, Japan, China and Korea are typical examples of countries based on ethnic identity. “We’re all the same blood, we’re all the same family. So, we may quarrel just as people quarrel in

a family, but we all belong together,” he explains. Now everything seems to make more sense.

“I know this best in Japan,” he says, “many foreigners consider it racism, but I don’t, because many Japanese would say, look, I want people to understand me, and if a foreigner lives next to me, I can’t understand what she’s thinking.” He added, despite speaking fluent Japanese and knowing the culture well, “if I had to say I’m Japanese, people would laugh at my face – **well, you’ve gotta look Japanese!** That’s the ethnic basis of a society.” Whether this makes sense remains questionable. He remembers a funny story, in which he was talking to a Japanese woman in the dark to show her where the train station was. As the light came and the woman saw his face, she shouted, “I don’t speak English!” and ran away. “I have been speaking to her in Japanese for the last 3 minutes!” says Professor Mathews, “so, that’s a silly aspect of it. On the other hand, both of these identities are perfectly reasonable to have.”

Back to the story from the Umbrella Movement, “that (the mainlanders’ replies), again, is because of the ethnic identity on the mainland – ‘Chinese-ness’ and ‘foreignness’. **And then in Hong Kong, well, no – anybody can be a Hongkonger,**” he says. The recent development of the political turmoil seems to be proving his point, especially after the attack of Civil Human Rights Front convener Jimmy Sham, allegedly by a group of ethnic South Asians. As ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong showed solidarity with protesters at the Chungking Mansions the next day, and as protesters helped clean the Kowloon Mosque polluted by police’s water cannons, “anyone who agrees with the Hong Kong value is a Hongkonger” has become the mainstream notion captioned everywhere.

“I suppose given the way the world is, civic identity is the direction we’re all going in, because you do have more and more ethnic intermixing,” says Professor Mathews. It seems that we’re starting to see nationality, as well, on the supermarket shelf. Or maybe, it’ll stay increasingly on the shelf as we get more and more alternative identities to choose from – we don’t know.

What is the HONGKONG IDENTITY?

If Hongkongers are to embrace a civic identity, what exactly is this "Hong Kong value" that tells us apart from anywhere else? "Certainly, freedom is a big part of the HK identity. I am freer here than I would be in most American universities probably," says Professor Mathews, "one reason that I do really love HK, and I also love this university, is because nobody has ever said that I can't say certain things. It's an extraordinarily open place, and if anyone did try to censor what we say, I think we'd be in the newspaper rather rapidly." This notion of freedom being the city's "core value" is now more explicitly expressed than ever.

"I'm not sure China understands that Hong Kong now has a 'Hong Kong identity', and people say they're willing to die for it, and I think they are," he says. "Now, I said earlier, state identity is really stupid. This new identity?" he questions, "there is a reasonable chance that all of this is going to end in profound tragedy. And, in that case, this effort to create a Hong Kong identity was completely crazy... would this have been worth doing? That's an open question... It probably was worth voicing out one's protest even if it's futile to do it."

I still wonder, will this new identity become, like so many national identities in history, another generator of hatred and violence? Or, will it shape our city into a pioneer of society built on democratic civic values? Nobody knows. "But I'm also proud of Hongkongers to be feeling this kind of identity, because I personally think that China is a much less free place than Hong Kong, and I don't want Hong Kong to become like China - I couldn't be an anthropologist in China!" says Professor Mathews, "this is of world historical significance. So, what's going on in Hong Kong is not off to the side."

IS PROFESSOR MATHEWS A HONGKONGER, AFTER ALL? "I'M OBVIOUSLY DEEPLY EMOTIONALLY LINKED TO HERE. I MEAN, I'VE BEEN GOING TO PROTESTS TOO," HE SAYS. THIS WO LEI FEI (和理非, MEANING PROTESTERS SUPPORTING PEACEFUL, RATIONAL AND NON-VIOLENT APPROACH) OLD MAN QUICKLY CLARIFIES THAT HE HAS NOT BEEN "THROWING ANYTHING", BUT I GUESS HIS ANSWER TO OUR CITY IS CRYSTAL CLEAR.



Professor Gordon Mathews is the chair of CUHK's Department of Anthropology. His research interests include meanings of life, happiness, identity, asylum seekers and low-end globalisation. His popular book *Ghetto at the Center of the World* discusses the Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong as "possibly the most globalised spot on the planet".



YOUR MENTALITY, YOUR IDENTITY

*A DILUTION TO THE UNCONSCIOUS BELIEF IN
THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING ONE'S NATIONAL IDENTITY.*



WRITTEN BY GRACE TSANG
ILLUSTRATED BY DORIS CHUI

"Is Hong Kong part of China?" he asked.

"Geographically yes?" I answered.

"Then it's a certain 'yes'. You have 'Chinese' as the nationality in your passport, isn't it?"

It was a snowy evening, my friend and I entered a glassblowing studio in Quebec City. As the only customers in the shop, our prolonged examination of the glassworks sparked the shopkeeper's interest in talking to us. He asked the question you always ask when meeting someone new - where do you come from? Should you go with where you were born? Where you grew up in? Or your ancestry? If they are different, which do you choose to answer with?

The Perception

I used to say I hate China and its people, and I even hated myself for having "Chinese" genes, which have given me black irises, black hair, and yellow skin. I was overly fond of foreign cultures, everything outside the border was fantasised. The Japanese are the most polite; their articles and commodities are exquisitely and meticulously designed. England is home to many real or fictional characters of fame at different times - Geoffrey Chaucer (the "Father of English Literature"), William Shakespeare, Sherlock Holmes, Harry Potter. Egypt was once an advanced civilisation - they excelled in many fields such as mathematics, geometry and astronomy, and the precision in how they built the pyramids is mysterious and amazing. India's development of yoga and Ayurveda to maintaining health and healing diseases is sacred and brilliant. France offers the best patisseries and bakeries, people dress up with a sense of fashion, with a hint of love and romance diffused in the air.

But clearly, I was naïve and did not see the other side of the world...

The politeness of the Japanese is culture, is habit, but is also a form of suppression; the delicate packaging of goods is environmentally unfriendly. The weather in England is reportedly depressing according to many friends of mine

who have studied abroad there. My sister who went to Egypt said it was a once in a lifetime journey - while it was an invaluable trip, it was a difficult one (in a way she could not adapt to the exclusively bean-based food and scorching weather), and she will never go again. The pollution and environmental problems in India are intimidating. France is subjectively the closest to my idealism, but definitely not without faults.

Do I still hate China? Right now, as I see the place with five thousand years of history, I cannot deny that I do appreciate quite a few elements of its ancient civilisation - Chinese literature, calligraphy, artworks, folk dance... just like I imagined the good sides of all other countries. The prejudice I had only came from my living here, experiencing the bad sides of it first hand. Citizens of other places have their own problems just like we do. As a person who has been indifferent towards politics, being called a Chinese is not a big deal to me, not anymore, because that is how others view me, not how I view myself - unimportant. Like the shopkeeper, who didn't know much about the political status or the different cultures we have, it was unimportant to him whether we are Chinese or Hongkongers, just like we are ignorant to other countries' business, more or less.

**VIEW THE WORLD NOT AS AN
IMAGINATION OF YOUR OWN, BUT
WITH COLLECTIVE OBJECTIVITY.**





The Language



My friend once told me how angry she was, that when she joined a program, she and other Hong Kong students got assigned to the Putonghua group. I could understand her frustration in not having Hong Kong's culture differentiated from mainland China's by other people when the two are so different, especially with language being a critical factor. But my opinion? What is the importance of having yourself exclusively differentiated in the crowd? Shouldn't it be your pride if you can be assimilated into a foreign group without being distinct? If you have mastered a foreign language, and speak it so fluently that a native speaker of the language feels comfortable to talk to you like he does to his homely friends, it is indeed a reward to yourself, of being allowed the chance of earning yourself a dear friend and of commendation for your effort in acquiring the language and understanding the cultures that were previously alien to you.

To many language learners, I believe, and including myself, we share a deadly fear which makes us hesitate to speak in the language(s) we are learning – our

accent. It does not only make you sound awkward in front of a native, but it also divulges where you come from. So does the accent matter? I would say "yes, to a certain extent." You cannot deny that you always listen to your Hong Kong friends speaking Cantonese with more ease than to a foreigner speaking Cantonese with a foreign accent. Such awareness distresses me so much because if I have difficulty understanding someone trying to speak in my language, others probably do not understand me when I speak in theirs. Yet, one day, when I was taking a Linguistics course at my host university in Canada during my exchange, the professor talked about dialectal variation in his lecture on phonetics: "English dialects differ a lot in how vowels are pronounced". (One of the examples he gave was: do 'cot' and 'caught' sound the same when you say them?) This appeared as a notion that really struck me – suddenly, the different accents are not much more than social phenomena to me, indeed there are no better accents. In the end, the purpose of having languages is to communicate, if your pronunciation, intonation, stress, and rhythm allow effective communication in



**VIEW YOUR LANGUAGE NOT AS A
SYMBOL OF YOUR IDENTITY, BUT
AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION.**



The Gene

the language you speak, and do not often cause misunderstanding, you are pretty much good to go, unless you be a perfectionist pursuing certain native standards for your own pleasure.

You may have heard that humans, more specifically *Homo Sapiens*, are about 99% genetically identical. (Although in recent years, scientists have found more differences in terms of the number of copies of our genes, which make us more different than they previously thought.) A few years ago in 2016, there was a famous advertisement The DNA Journey by a Danish travel site Momondo, which illustrated the reactions of people receiving their DNA testing results that come with an estimation of their ethnicity in percentages. Taking one of the participants, Carlos, as an example, who, before the test had thought he is 100% Cuban. What he got was:

Spain/Portugal 22%
Native American 17%
South-Eastern Africa 16%
Italy/Greece 12%
Nigeria 8%

Great Britain 8%
Senegal 3%
Ivory Coast/Ghana 3%
Benin/Togo 2%
Mali 2%
Eastern Europe 2%
The Middle East 2%
Cameroon/Congo 1%
Scandinavia 1%
Melanesia 1%

As the estimations are based on the existing database of the human genome, the results may not be totally accurate, but the important message behind is that there is no clear cut between different races, we are more connected than we think we are. According to the theory of evolution, we all have the same root, the same ancestry. Probably, at some point, be it by chance or by natural selection, mutation of genes caused the emergence of our species *Homo Sapiens*.

The question is – is your genetics important in defining who you are?

As a Biology student, I do regard DNA as the determinant of our appearances

and the basis of our inherent dispositions, which is important on an individual level, in defining one's strengths and weaknesses, as in talents, personality, and health condition et cetera. Environmental factors are not to be ignored in shaping who you are, but with possibilities contained in your nature – every reaction and decision made is the product of your inherent disposition and accumulated life experience.

It is, however, not quite a wise thing to define our nationalities based on the genes we have, or based on appearances (as a partial reflection of the genes we have). For genes appear as DNA codes, and just because of the different combinations of DNA we have, we are different from each other, as well as from other species. The book *Sapiens* talks of our ability to compose fiction. Indeed, we must remind ourselves a lot of things are only created by us, and should they be created in other ways, the world would go on without any of us questioning it. For instance, why do we need visas to go across some borders? – because we are separated by borders created by men.



**VIEW YOUR GENETIC COMPOSITION
NOT AS AN INDICATOR OF YOUR
RACE, BUT AS A CONNECTION TO
THE WORLD.**



You will shape
who you are



A few years ago, when I was still a naïve child, expressing my self-hatred as having a Chinese identity to a friend, she said: “don’t see yourself as a Chinese, see yourself as you.”

As I travel to more places, as I meet more people, I found that compatibility is the key to nurturing any attachment. For every place I went, there is something I like, it could be the gastronomy, the architecture, the history, the cultural etiquette... For any relationship that lasts, there must be a source of motivation for both sides to put in the effort of maintaining the relationship – common values, tacit understanding, mutual attraction... Whether the combination of the factors pleases me is a solely subjective matter, but we don’t have to take it all - each of us is like a piece of a puzzle looking for the other pieces that match with any one side of ourselves, no one piece satisfies all. In whatever you encounter, extract and adopt the elements you want that help to enrich your life and contribute to your happiness, nothing else matters so much as to be worthy of your time and emotion; if developing a sense of appreciation for them is too demanding, an attitude of indifference may help to keep you calm.

ONE DAY, I WILL BE
COOKING JAPANESE RECIPES,
WATCHING SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS,
PRACTISING YOGA,
LISTENING TO EGYPTIAN MUSIC,
DRESSING LIKE A FRENCH WOMAN...

BOUND TO MEET?

ENCOUNTERS WITH VARIOUS PEOPLE

By Zulaiha Zulfika

05:45 a.m. August 1, 2019.

I wake up from a nightmare. Sweating profusely, reaching out to my mother's hand next to me, as I see pictures and shadows of the same nightmare for a while. My mind gets bombarded by questions to which answers are yet to be found.



30 | Identity

Do dreams really come true? Those people that we dream of, have we met them in real life? I have always wondered if dreams actually meant something. I have always wondered if it means anything to have crossed paths with all the different people in our life.

Being an ethnic minority in Hong Kong, I have always dealt with the divergence between these two identities - one of being an Indian and the other of being a HongKonger and at times, they seem to converge as if there is no difference between the two. Both places are home, one in which I was born and one which gave me life, shelter, a community and brought me up. When talking about learning and education, our home is our first school and our first teacher, our mother. Is it only our family members who affect us and our learning?

They say we meet people for a reason, some turn out to be a blessing and some, a lesson. But how about those faceless beings that appear in our dreams or those that we bump into on the streets? Are we 'fated' to cross paths with them? Or is this all by chance? All this just cumulates and comes up to this one single question. As human beings, how much are we "social" as much as we are an "individual"? Our actions, how much do they affect those who surround us? And how much are we affected by them?

I have always thought of myself to be the sole "controller" of my emotions. I thought nothing else could affect me as long as I let it affect me. Even though it is true that we can control our thoughts, we cannot deny the fact that as human beings, we're vulnerable to change and opinions in search of inclusivity and acceptance. In search of the answer to my questions, I found a research done by Daniel J. Mallison and Peter K. Hatemi, which suggests how peer pressure and influence, including the way of information delivery, affect the political presence of people and their choice to vote. A mere change in information along with slight persuasion, changed 33% of people's opinions and thoughts on who they will choose to be a suitable political candidate. And more than half of them responded that either of these methods, change in information, for example, the past deeds of the candidates or their daily habits, or slight persuasion, could change their view on political values.

It made me realise these numbers do not really mean anything if I hadn't experi-

enced any myself. That's when I had my moment of epiphany.

Having travelled around the world quite a few times, I have met and conversed with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Even if those meetings merely lasted for minutes, I believe that such meetings are coincidental and always offer something to take away. One always has something left to learn at every turn of life.

Here are some snippets of my experiences that I believe can be spread out for everyone to learn.

It was not until my recent trip to Europe, did I realise how much of life we are missing out on whilst running behind monetary pleasure and financial satisfaction. One of the instances where this dawned upon me was when I met Emily - a waitress in a small cafe in Lauterbrunnen, a small village on the top of the Swiss Alps. For someone who dreads heights, getting to the top of the mountain by a steep cable car ride was already an adventure, and to gain some intellectual insights was the last thing I expected to happen at a height of 2631 metres.





It was a juxtaposing sight up there. On one side was my family's clicking pictures beyond measure and there I was, sulking over my motion sickness and fear of heights. No doubt, the environment was very picturesque but I was complaining about how there are many other places to visit, why waste time here? And boom, entered a chocolate cake out of nowhere and a voice that said, "This one's on the house". Emily had this great smile plastered on her face. No one would have imagined that we had met just a few minutes ago. Striking a conversation as if we were two long lost friends, she says, "Look beyond your fear and look around you, you're surrounded by nature's beauty, something people yearn for in cities bustling with people! No matter where you are in life, you'll have to miss out or sacrifice one thing or the other, so savour the moment, wherever you are, whenever you can. Live life as it is and go with the flow." And after she drops these wisdom bombs, her shift gets over and she disappears, nowhere to be seen. Sadly, I could not take a picture with her, and I probably do not even remember what she looks like right now but she changed my perspective. Who knew a piece of cake could make you contemplate long enough to completely change your mindset?

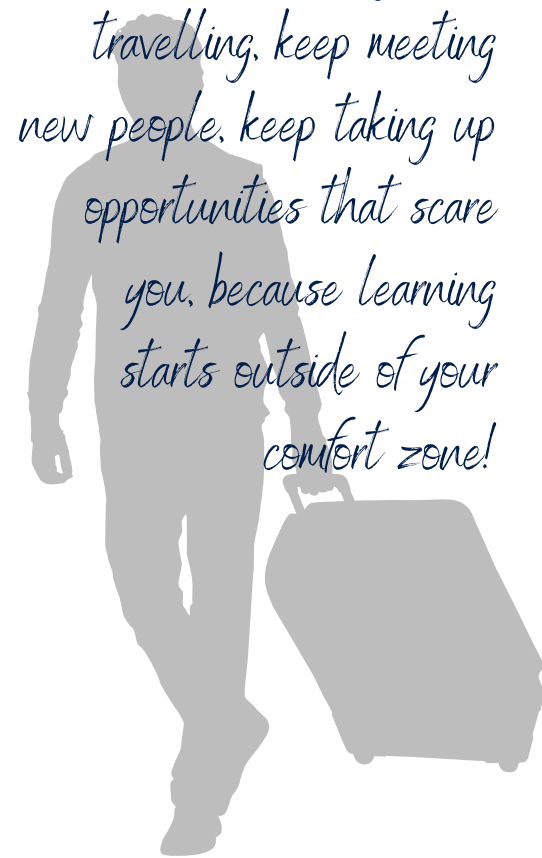
But that doesn't exactly mean that you have to travel miles away from where you are to seek knowledge. Sometimes, you can learn right where you are. And for that, you'd have to take up opportunities which scare you and seem daunting. Chances are, these are the opportunities that might flip your life around.

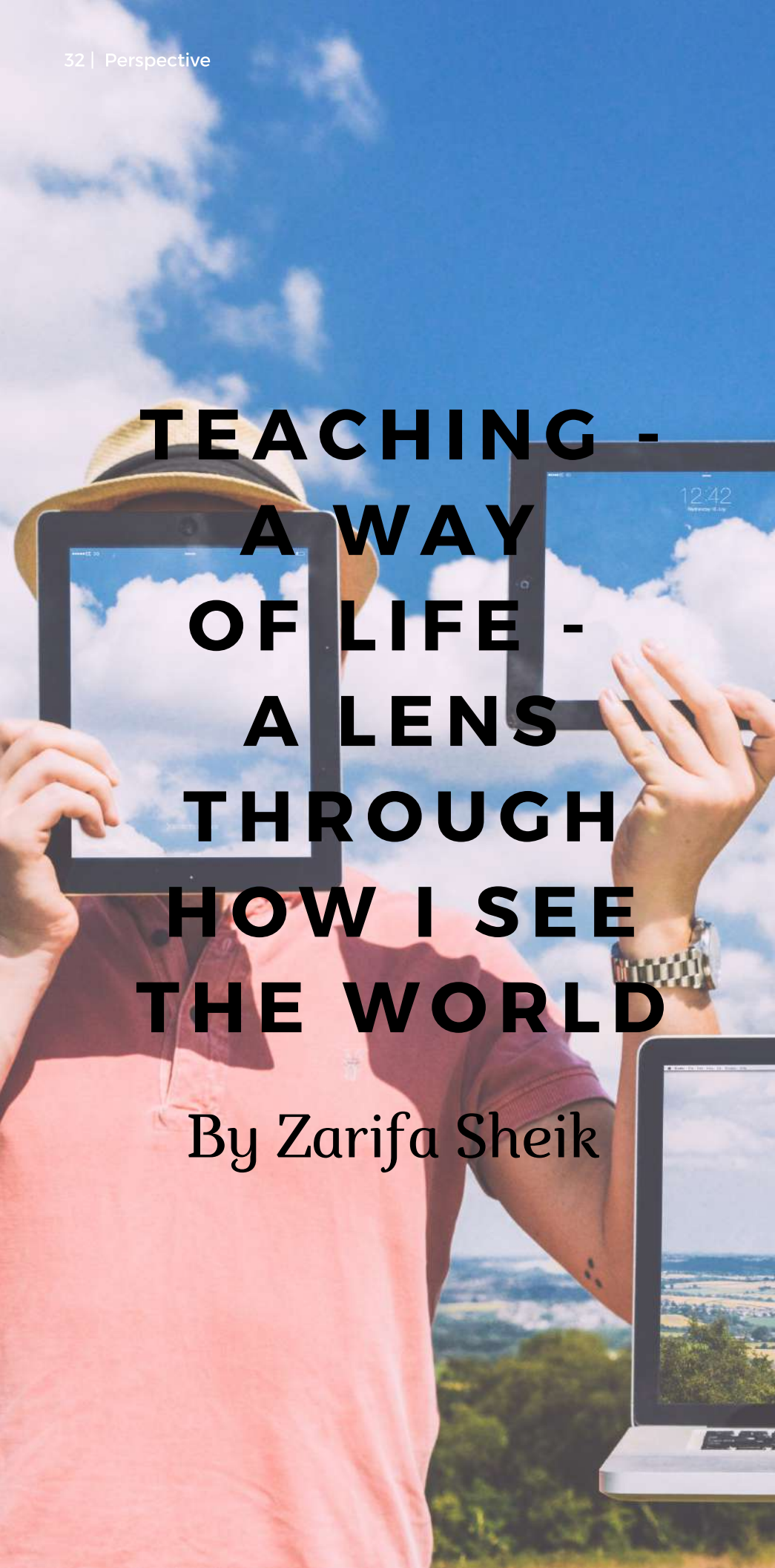
There was this other instance in which some of my questions were answered, again, this was one of those events I was reluctant to join because I didn't know if I would be able to mingle. This dinner was organised for "brown" or "desi" - a term used to describe South Asian people, girls around my age. And as much as I am Indian, I tend to identify myself more as a HongKonger, having gone to local schools and hanging around the local students more often. And for an introvert like me, putting myself out in front of a huge crowd seemed intimidating. In this meeting, we met with doctors, teachers, and engineers, all professionals in their own field. One thing I took away from this meeting, is to form my own community, not just to adjust myself to fit the social norms of my parent's or ancestors' community. Sometimes, it's hard to find a community that you can completely fit

into. It's not always that easy to put forth your opinion in public. And for some reason, it didn't seem all that scary after all, ideas flowed from all corners of the table, stories of abuse and growth, really encouraged me towards my goal with a more practical mindset. Such interactions made me realise things won't always be offered to you on a golden platter but even in such scenarios, you can pull through to move towards things you really want to achieve as long as you have an undying passion for it.

Learning and attaining knowledge does not see age or status, you can simply take up anything from anyone, be it a child in a poverty-stricken area or a well-known professional doctor. At times of injustice and natural calamities, the whole world comes together, applying their learnings into solving the issue for a better world. But where were we before the problem started? Oftentimes, problems are created due to the lack of communication and interaction. We often assume things and opportunities to be daunting just because they seem different, but maybe... just maybe these nightmares and faceless creatures that I was talking about in the beginning of my article, are those fights and adventures I am about to take on and travel through. Though frightening at first, once taken up may evolve into a beautiful reality.

So, keep learning, keep travelling, keep meeting new people, keep taking up opportunities that scare you, because learning starts outside of your comfort zone!





TEACHING - A WAY OF LIFE - A LENS THROUGH HOW I SEE THE WORLD

By Zarifa Sheik



My passion for chemistry and teaching has landed me in the world of Education. My love for students has motivated me to continually explore new teaching strategies to keep everyone engaged. One of the perks of being an educator is that you can witness the fruits your teachings bear right away, just as how I was overwhelmed with happiness when my students won competitions under my guidance. To further enhance my understanding regarding the needs of the youth of today, I joined hands with the “Zubin Foundation Youth Advisory Committee” to provide for opportunities for the youth of today through an accessible platform. That’s the thing about the field of Education, it requires the educator to be updated and to never stop learning. So, keep educating, yourself, and others.

"Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world" - Nelson Mandela.

This quote has been deeply rooted in my mind and heart ever since I was a little child. It speaks a thousand words to me, probably due to my childhood background. I was not born in a well-off family, and neither of my parents were university graduates. However, they never failed to remind me one thing: "Never be lazy to learn, Zarifa! Education is the one thing in this world that no one can take away from you." I sometimes didn't understand the depth of that saying back then, but now, it has become my life mantra.

Education has played a huge role in my life, and I believe that it does play a significant part in everyone's. In the past, students were mainly taught facts to score them jobs. However, today, in this ever-changing world, education plays a much bigger role. Education has shaped itself to teach students how to think by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to differentiate right from wrong. More ideally, education plays a role in nurturing confident students to make a positive difference in society, while instilling values, attitudes and behaviours that align with those expected in a society. To put in simpler terms, a school acts like a child's second home and a teacher is child's second

parent. So, the education system and those upholding it have an immense responsibility to (1) bring up critical thinkers in a day and age where Internet is readily available, bursting with information; and (2) contribute to the personal growth of children directing them to become all-rounded individuals.

Moreover, education influences an individual's identity to a great extent. Individuals are exploring themselves, their connections within, and others on an almost everyday basis. This allows them to build a sense of connectivity and understanding about their likes, dislikes and their personal development with regards to their talents and passion. The identity that they discover along the way allow them to place themselves in the society, think about what they can do to serve the community, to develop their careers and so on. The schooling process gives perspective to individuals on who they are and what they can do. It provides an opportunity to think about life while being guided by many adults in the process. Schooling is more of a platform that emulates the real world, but as a safer platform for kids to explore as they grow, before they are pushed into the real world.

Just thinking about the big responsibility placed on teachers did push me away during my early days from wanting to be a teacher. Nevertheless, I made my decision to become a teacher when I was in grade 12. My teachers were a huge inspirations



for that decision. To the outside world, teachers don't need to do anything except teaching, and many are even jealous that they enjoy a 2-month summer vacation. However, what many don't see are the small sacrifices they make on a daily basis, including skipping meals to teach a kid who is struggling with the subject, taking work back home in order to return assignments with timely feedback, or

NEVER BE
TOO LAZY
TO LEARN

worrying about how their students will do on the test the next day. Being a teacher requires passion and constant dedication to the profession and so much pure love to kids, who are not your own. My advice for future teachers would be to work hard, but smart, so as to keep the passion for teaching going.

Many students might have complained how teachers kept giving work to them when they were students. Nevertheless, I did not fail to see my teachers' sacrifice. I saw my teachers rushing through their lunch, just to help me with speech festivals, assignments or even training workshops. I saw the sacrifice behind every supplementary lesson we had after school or even during long breaks. My teachers did more than JUST TEACH. They were more than an educator to me; they were my mentors, my confidants and my friends. They impacted my life far beyond the classroom. I wanted to be just that. I wanted to be someone who could make a difference in the lives of as many students as I can. Many say "doctors change lives, lawyers change lives, and the list goes on" and indeed that's true. But do they change the lives of all, starting from a very young age, like teachers do?



34 | Perspective

Honestly speaking, being a teacher is even more difficult than I thought it would be. My day starts off at 6:30 in the morning. I get ready while planning my whole day ahead in my head. I refresh the content that I need to teach for the day on the train, including my teaching strategies. I get into the staff room at 8 and check my emails. Once that's done, any sanity left in my day has been over. All that's about to come is pure madness. Don't get me wrong though, I enjoy it. Most days, I have 3-4 lessons and one meeting or assembly to get through. The remaining 2-3 free lessons I get, you probably think I would prepare for lessons for the next day. Sometimes, that's true, but in all reality, who has the time to do that in the midst of thinking what went right or wrong with my previous lessons, or replying to countless emails to ensure I am not missing any duties, or preparing assignments or notes for the students? By the end of all this chaos, I pick up my pen to prepare the lessons for the next day. Little do I know, the bell rings signalling the school day being over. If I am lucky, I get to send my students home, so that I can continue to check things off my to-do list. On other days, I get to spend time with students preparing them for various competitions, to unleash their potential that they never knew they had.

I hope just reading about my day did not make you exhausted because there's more that is unspoken of. The most difficult part about being a teacher is having to teach 30 students with 30 learning levels and 30 different learning styles, making sure everyone is safe, secure and having all their needs met. So, how do I manage to cater to their diverse learning needs? If I want to transform lives, I have to be able to impact every student's learning.

Teachers do realise that there is no one-size-fit-all approach to addressing learner diversity. I have learnt some tech-

niques during my very short experience as a teacher. The first thing is to be sensitive to individual student's needs; learn about the students through classroom observations, assessments, etc. This way, learner diversity could be capitalised to design class activities. One example I use very often is to group students with different

talents in the same group, so that they can learn from each other.



talents in the same group, so that they can learn from each other.

Another thing that I recently learnt is to not always use pen and paper to learn. Not all learners are visual and auditory learners, as the general curriculum is designed to cater for. You may not believe it but many learners are kinesthetic learners; they need to move to be engaged in the lessons. So, I have increased variety in my teaching strategies and played around with them in different lessons. I use songs, videos, small whiteboards, Chemistry models of particles, experiments, poster drawings, group discussions, etc., to make the lessons appealing to more students, enhancing learning motivation and efficiency. I have found communicating learning objectives to students helps, too.

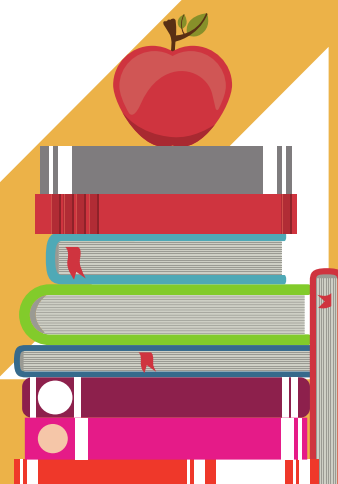
All this work I mentioned may make you feel like I do not have work-life balance. It might be true that I constantly worry about my students' learning and performance, but I do try not to bring work home. I dedicate a part of my day to reading books, to winding myself down. I make sure I spend time with my significant other to ensure my creativity doesn't burn out. Only this way, I can continue to help my students learn effectively. I cannot deny being a teacher is an exhausting job, but I bet you cannot name another job that could be as rewar-

ding as being a teacher either. Just one small heartfelt "thank you for teaching me!" from even one student can make a teacher's day!

Being a teacher makes you realise many things about society in general. I never thought I would be a successful tea-

My teachers did more than
JUST TEACH

ful for. I just have one last thing to say: I believe that there is a teacher in every one of you. You might not end up going to a formal education system to teach, but trust me, you will impact at least one person along the journey we call **life!**



MAN CAN TRY

A FORMER DEBATER'S MUSINGS ON TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

by Billy Chan

Exegesis

Consider me convinced. But for all we know, you could still be wrong."

Could I though?

I could... in the sense that nowadays winning an argument means nothing more than continuously supplying reasons until the opponent is satisfied. It does not follow from a claim being well justified that it is necessarily immune from falsity: A sane individual with no visual impairment may conclude that there are sheep on a hill as he sees one while speeding by. We generally take visual evidence to be adequate in justifying claims about the physical world, sensibly so or scientists will have a tough time justifying any conclusion whatsoever given they cannot trust what they see. It follows this individual is justified in concluding as he does. What he will never know, however, is the fact that the "sheep" he "sees" is but a cardboard erected in the middle of nowhere just to fool him into believing that there are sheep on the hill. Then it

would appear his justified belief is manifestly false. In principle, it seems nothing in any reasonably held belief guarantees its truth.

What if we avoid the subjective standard of justification like the plague? Instead, using logic, we systematically interpret claims and endeavour to gauge at the truth within their meanings? By elevating the standard of proof to that of absolute certainty, our ground for holding a particular conclusion will be infinitely stronger than if it only stands the test of some biased adjudicator in debates.

Ideally, a claim would be translated into the logical form (p), which is then negated or accepted vis-à-vis its opposite (~p). Debaters conclude their cases with clashes – points of contention that can be resolved in favour of one side or the other. Whilst debating whether global warming is fact or fiction, depending on the points previously raised by all the benches, a potential clash would be whether State-funded papers on global warming is factually reliable given the existence of vested interest. In a sense organising deb-

ate rounds into clashes mirrors the logical reformulations of propositions vis-à-vis their opposites, both being an attempt to map out the terrain of the opposition of ideas. However, any supposed parallel between the two ends right where it begins, as clashes are resolved in favour of the winning team only for meeting the subjective standard of justification, whereas in logical reformulations of claims, the outcome is necessitated by the force of reason.

But reducing claims into the binary form is not always a clear-cut process. "I cleaned the room" cannot gratuitously be taken to mean "I did not clean the room" is false because the meaning of "I did not clean the room" is ambiguous. The speaker could mean any of the following:

- (1) *Someone cleaned the room, but not the speaker*
- (2) *The speaker did something to the room but not cleaning*
- (3) *The speaker cleaned something but not the room*
- (4) *The speaker cleaned the room but the room did not become clean*

There are circumventions, though none of which satisfactory: We can pick any of the above and roll with it, but the outcome of such an election would be arbitrary. We can ignore the ambiguity, but the true meaning of the opposing proposition might be lost. We can consult the speaker, but not if she has already passed away. All these have to do with the natural confusion of language, however. If we can look past definitive issues, then what?

Scottish philosopher David Hume believed truth is established by logic and the meaning of words alone whenever the negation of a proposition results in a contradiction. "Contradiction" could mean: (1) a contradiction with the state of the world as we understand it, or; (2) a semantic contradiction, which is by virtue of the consistency language users routine-



Can you see me?

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ly and religiously hold themselves to whenever they speak. Consider the now-obsolete ontological argument for the existence of the Christian God:

P1: The Christian God is by definition perfect

P2: Perfection is being in possession of every conceivable property that a being is objectively better with than without

P3: Existence is a property objectively better to have than lack. Therefore, the Christian God exists

Now of course you, as many others already have, can contest any of the given premises, but it does not change the fact that if those premises are true, the only consistent way of using language would be to acknowledge the existence of the Christian God contained in the argument. Language, fuelled by the force of logic, compels us to, in its usage, give up the proposition that the Christian God contained in the argument does not exist, or be at risk of saying things we do not mean.

Truth is just between the lines... Sounds too good to be true no? Because it is. Ultimately, logical propositions are detached from reality. Notwithstanding lingering issues with definitions, it does not follow from the mandatory existence of the Christian God on some analytical level that the same must hold on the physical level. Any claim which is semantically and logically consistent will still be vulnerable to contradictions with the state of the world as we understand it.

Genesis

"But we don't debate for the truth alright! We debate just so we can think better."

Was that the beginning of the end?

If truth does not follow a winning case, we essentially accept a method that confers absolutely nothing but a warm fuzzy feeling because... reasons? That is unless my opponent and I were both wrong: Maybe there is something to behold in the subjective standard of justification. Ask any seasoned debater, and she will say it is never an arbitrary placing of goal post but a careful calibration exercised to evaluate the strength of any argument. She will support this with maxims, e.g. burden proportional to the strength of claim, burden depending



Do i exist?

on context, etc. She will claim it is in trying to frame and argue in deference to these rational rules of argumentation that we develop as better thinkers.

But rational vis-à-vis what? A subjective standard of justification? Without taking the mere feeling that an argument is convincing as the endgame there is no way of telling whether: (1) these rules, which aim solely to foster a subjective feeling, are rational, and; (2) anyone's adherence to them is rational. The debater's argument is fallacious: Rules of argumentation are worth nothing if not for the soundness of outcomes begotten from their adherence, just as rationality does not distinguish itself from irrationality if not for the former's necessitation of rational outcomes. The debater implores the sceptic to: (a) place her unquestionable faith on rules the validity of which derives entirely from the outcomes of their operation, all the while; (b) turning a blind eye to the soundness of outcomes simply because soundness is unguaranteed. The point is simple: Patterns of argumentation only instruct one's thinking absolutely for the better if they rationally lead to satisfactory outcomes. Given the absence of the latter, we do not know.

Prognosis

Maybe the point is not to answer questions, but to know which ones to ask. Consider the thing we call "colours". Recall René Descartes, famous 16th century French rationalist, his account of the subject in particular -

Colours are powers or dispositions to cause experiences of a certain type

The account is a powerful one. It shows us how we use the word "colours" to denote a metaphysical existence that attaches itself to objects like a splash of paint engulfing the surface of a three-dimensional structure, when in actuality they are nothing more than effects in our cognition produced by interactions between micro-physical structures underlying "coloured objects" and the retina of our eyes. What we call "colours" is not the same as what we want colours to be when we call them so. Similarly, if every good argument we have ever made on the basis of the subjective standard of justification is sound only on account of an abuse of the term (we want the argument to be sound in a way that it actually is not) where does this soundness that we really want, which we constantly conflate with a subjective

Patterns of argumentation only instructs one's thinking absolutely for the better if they rationally lead to satisfactory outcomes. Given the absence of the latter, we do not know.

Like Descartes, we must guard against false judgements, even if it means not judging at all.

sense of justification, actually locate?

Descartes never defined the thing that we want colours to be when we misuse the name. There is a name, however, for the soul of every sound argument, and it is called "knowledge". Knowledge is the relation between cognition and truth. When an argument is absolutely sound, I can claim knowledge because it is something I have reasoned through which stands in absolute relation to truth. To most it is a comfortable notion to hold that such a relation rests on our paradigmatic understanding of objectivity. Hence the right question must be a closed question, one with a settled method of resolution. But what even is objective knowledge? Truth constitutes knowledge only if one subjectively believes in it. And if this standard itself is objective, being a part of truth, we do not fully know about it until we subjectively succumb to its truth quality... the cycle repeats until one fails to see where subjectivity ends and objectivity begins. In framing deep questions about reality on closed terms, have we all become utilitarians, begrudgingly giving curiosity the short end of the stick simply because it is considered better to have a narrow, half-hearted answer rather than to admit ignorance?

In principle, it seems nothing in any reasonably held belief guarantees its truth

Maybe the reason why a concept as ancient and fundamental to our lives as knowledge still fails to be fully captured by an objective, conceptual analysis is because it is just a mental state, like the state of pain, or love. We analyse knowledge objectively only because on one account it is a conjunction between: (a) subjective belief, and; (b) objective truth: To know that I am a man is to believe that I am a man with cause and that I am actually a man; therefore justified false belief corrupts knowledge. But if we think of knowledge as an attitude we hold toward things that are true, then to know that I am a man simply means being in the mental state of knowing about the fact that I am a man, and it so happens that I am. Notice that knowledge here is part accident, which some may find off-putting. But rationally saying knowledge is a factive attitude, at the expense of our ill-deserved comfort

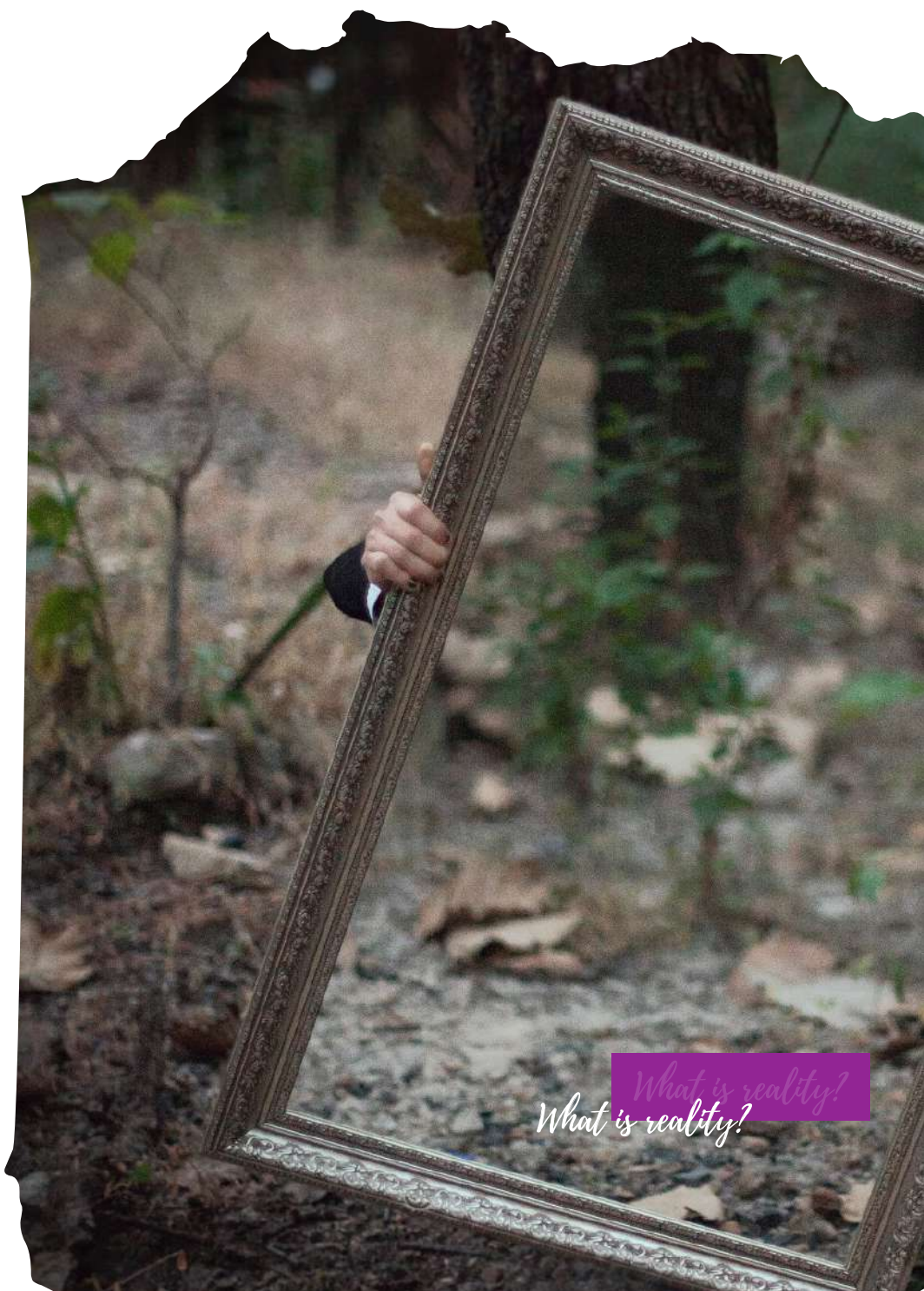
about the notion that one can become a know-it-all in true fashion, is still superior to an irrational endorsement of the subjective standard of justification, or painstakingly trying to seek out that panacean element which completes certain justified true beliefs intuitively, falling short of knowledge. Like Descartes, we must guard against false judgements, even if it means not judging at all. Yet provided one never stops reaching for truth, the attitude of knowing is at least something we can effortlessly conjure up, something innate. We need only permit

the conditions for knowledge to accrue by detaching ourselves from the arguments we make and keeping an open mind. Therefore, this conclusion is by no means a resignation to the fatalist view of truth and knowledge. Quite the contrary, it liberates us from the hubris of reason and is ultimately optimistic.

I believe the message is quite clear.

"Man can try."

"Yeah, right."



UNITY AGAINST THE TEST OF TIME

BY ZULAIHA ZULFIKA

Times have changed, but have we?

What does unity mean? For me, an Indian living in Hong Kong, it means that we stay true to one another, stay glued to one another despite all the differences, come to the aid of one another, educate one another and go together, hand in hand as one nation. Despite our colour, race, religious belief, background and status, we all share the same Earth, which we inhabit and call as home. There is something about my homeland, India that attracts me towards it no matter how many miles I live away from it. Maybe, the essence of familiarity is what draws me to it. The feeling of acceptance and belonging is beyond unimaginable in our motherland. Because, we are not foreign to them as much as we are here in this foreign land of Hong Kong.

But this small community that we have formed here in Hong Kong has always been together. This city is a melting pot of all cultures. Would I have ever been that united with our neighbours, if I had stayed back in India, is something I think about quite often.

How much have we progressed from a nation that was under the British rule? To this day, I see women trembling when mentioning visiting India. "Is it safe?" they ask. I stay quiet, dumbfounded. How do I explain to them that it is not as scary as they assume it is? Or have we actually come to a point where there is no turning back regarding women's safety and empowerment. Are we safe enough for women to roam around the streets at no particular timing without any worry? Be united, but not in a way where you gang up to snatch a woman's dignity and honour.

A nation's unity is its strength. And at times when the nation is forced into chaos and tension, and their strength is tested, unity is what brings us and keeps us together. Hong Kong recently underwent a serious climate of political unrest which shook our roots and beliefs. The unity between people from different sectors is tainted and strained. The trust in the government and officials has been very low. Misunderstandings trickling down from top to bottom, everything has toppled down. Amidst all this turmoil, the unity shone through. A promise made was kept to make sure there was no stain that was left behind, in a place of worship

that was promised to be protected. This place has never failed to amaze us all with its resilience, tolerance and acceptance. Hong Kong and India were both British colonies. They both had to struggle for their freedom and existence. Hong Kong, I would say, is a microcosm of India.

India, is colourful, especially with its various cultures and traditions. No one village is the same. There is so much variance and difference within a single state, let alone, from state to state. It is welcoming and most importantly, this place lets you live. We've come so far from independence in 1947. But in the journey towards independence, have we become less dependent on one another and in turn, less united?

Corrupted politicians, lack of education, lack of awareness, lack of security. These are some of the main reasons hindering our development and growth.

If we had a chance to bump into Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel - the first Deputy Prime Minister of India, this time and day, what would we say about our nation's unity? Would we be proud?

Restating the words of our, "Iron Man of India", "Manpower without unity is not a strength unless it is harmonised and united properly, then it becomes a spiritual power." Unity is something that transcends generations. Something, which I think is vital and lays the foundation of a strong and healthy society. As beneath all these layers of coloured skin and flesh, is a soul that is demanding to be heard, a heart that still beats and a mind that is boundless. After-all, beyond all our boundaries, we are still unified as the same race - the human race. The most intelligent species on earth, yet we still insist upon making so many blunders that divide us in a way that is beyond irreconcilable. Without the support of one another, nothing can be achieved.



Source: Canva



Source: Canva

Well, if I had the chance to meet our former Indian home minister now, I'd say we are pretty united - at times of crisis.

Recently, the news of Sujith Wilson, a 2 year old boy who fought for his life, 88 feet beneath the ground, shook the nation. The nation did come together to his aid. Ministers, government officials, health practitioners, construction workers and Indians from across the world only uttered the names of this toddler for five days straight. It broke my heart to simply have seen the photo of this young boy being stuck in that poorly maintained bore-well. Watching his parents cry in agony and hearing his elder brother say, "I always fought with him, I never played happily with him." "We bought matching clothes for Diwali, please bring him back." "Hook me and let me in, I will save my brother!", was nothing less than heart-wrenching. I understood how helpless we are as humans. Despite all the manpower, we failed to save a single life. For a country which flew rockets outside of space, we couldn't go beneath the ground. We can't completely put the blame on the government or people in a higher position. It was the combined negligence of people from all the sectors. Be it the parents, educators, or the government officials. They lacked unity. There were laws that were enforced and implemented for the digging of bore-wells, but it didn't reach the ears of people from less privileged homes.

The nation was united when spreading the news or creating hashtags on social media, of this boy asking people to pray for him until he was found dead, five days later. The nation was united after this mishap occurred. Where was all this before it happened? Why did we fail to unite all the sectors and all our stakeholders before something of this sort happened? As much as we deny it, we still live in a hierarchical society where the decisions are taken by the ones on the top, which affects those who follow in line. It all boils down to whether we are empathetic enough to think about how our actions will affect others. But everything is about financial growth and blooming. Though such progress is tangible and more practical to think about, it has to be built on the foundation of unity and togetherness. An idea needs the right people to take effect. Whether the death of Sujith could have

been prevented still remains a mystery. But his death taught us all the importance of technological growth but mainly, togetherness. While everyone was busy pointing fingers on whose mistake it was, we failed to come up with a practical solution to save him. He didn't leave without emphasising on tolerance and

acceptance.

We were united. When the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) had failed on its mission of Chandrayaan-2, we supported them. We sent appreciation and words of encouragement through social media and formed hash-tags. When news of rape and honour killings stormed and flooded news platforms, we did support them by expressing our sadness again through social media.

Times are changing, but are we?

One of the major things that divide us India, is religion. Muslims on one side, Hindus on the other. We always manage to dig in and find things that divide us within our religions and fight against disbelievers.

A very commendable sight was witnessed by the world when water drowned the city of Chennai in 2015. When things were getting tough, the unity between people from different religions rose. People in the mosques provided food and shelter. And the same was done by other religious places of worship. If we always focused on what brings us together rather than what divides us, our relationships could furbish themselves and flourish into better things.



Source: Canva

If we put more focus on these things, I believe our nation's unity can achieve greater heights:

1. Eradication of corruption. With a less corrupt government, there will be more transparency between the people and officials. A nation's unity should be built off of the unity between its government and its people. Though this may be achieved only in the long term, there is no harm in taking baby steps towards it.
2. Do not forgo your right to vote. Choose the right candidate wisely. Choose those leaders who set people together, not against each other, so that the consequences would not turn bad.
3. Eliminate or reduce misunderstanding with more transparency between the government and the public.
4. Increase awareness and educate people from all sectors and areas regarding policies that have been enforced which may be vital for their protection and security.
5. Reinforce the obligations of leaders regarding the unity of our country.
6. Connect Indians who live away from home with those current citizens of India for a wider perspective on global development.
7. Understand one another. Reinforce tolerance and empathy. Understand religious diversity and provide practical solutions for transgressional issues.
8. Learn to embrace one another's culture. To enjoy the fruits it benefits us with and to learn and understand their shortcomings.
9. Share knowledge and wisdom, instead of spreading hate. Have conferences on how unity can be achieved.
10. Provide students with opportunities where they can interact with people from different races, sectors, class and occupations.

These are some of the solutions that can promote national unity in our home. Maybe, with these solutions, we would move towards forming a truly "incredible" India.



Source: Canva

therhood and togetherness. A nation which is rich in manpower, could only progress with unity. This will be a stepping stone, the first step towards a more unified and powerful nation. Though it is only at times of crises that we value and cherish

We often overlook the effect unity has on humanity. Both its presence and its absence changes lives, irrespective of where or for whom. Unity is strength and it does not come easy. To attain perfect harmony is not easy nor can it be perfected by one person alone. It takes one entire nation to work very hard towards achieving it. It may take years, maybe even generations to find what we are looking for. But, maybe if we lay a strong foundation today, it will be easier for the upcoming generations to raise its pillars towards a more harmonious, unified and peace-ful society.

this togetherness, which I think is very necessary. That is the beauty of human relationships, we cannot see others suffer and let them be as they are. Plus, it is necessary that politicians understand that whatever they say, trying to divide and put people against each other, they all have consequences. To think humanely, and to set their sights to see in the long term, should be their goal. It is our responsibility to choose the right ones.

***Time will change.
When will we?***

Though this article was initially intended for an Indian audience, I believe all these ideas and solutions apply to countries all over the globe. A strong unified nation is one which celebrates bro-

LIVING THE UNCOMMON

By Felix Yue

"Where are you from?"

She asked. "Huh?", said Diya. "Where were you born, or where do your parents come from?" demanded the receptionist at the public hospital counter. "Eh?", again Diya replied. He took a second to think of an answer, only to find himself lost for words. The receptionist seems to have assumed that he was foreign, even though he was speaking Cantonese.

Meet Diya, an ethnic minority living in the city of Hong Kong. Born to a father from a Chinese-Vietnam descent, and a mother from Myanmar, Diya is one of many young teenagers in this "metropolitan" city who seeks a normal life even though he possesses a different but unique cultural identity. His general appearance seems somehow uncommon when compared to those around him. But this wasn't the biggest challenge which was imposed on his living. Diya was also faced with the common questions asked regarding his nationality, which he always came across since he was young. Even though it may have meant no offence, but to him, it was like an arrow aimed directly to arouse unnecessary scrutiny, regardless of why it was asked. Answering it was only the easy part, but what followed were the consequences of revealing his cultural identity, which could be too personally overwhelming. It seemed that revealing such important information might simultaneously cause him both pride and prejudice. Pride being that he could enjoy and cherish his cultural diversity, and prejudice being that he could be judged by his ethnicity. However, being part of the community in which he lived, he sensed a pressure of answering, even if he didn't

wish to.

A few moments later...

"Ngo hai heung gong yahn (I'm from Hong Kong)", he said at last. The curious receptionist then looked at him, slightly perplexed and suspicious, but finally went on with her paperwork. Diya didn't lie about his identity. Indeed, both his parents were not born in the city, but he however was. Despite his parents being immigrants, they had long secured permanent residency by ensuring residence for more than 7 years in the city. Therefore, seeing as how he is recognised by law as a permanent resident, he truly considers himself to be a 'Heung Gong Yahn' (Hong Kong citizen).

But this notion of being 'local' was only apparent to him, where as to others, he was 'an immigrant'. On the bright side, it wasn't a problem to him at all. Diya was always a positive and optimistic person. He didn't mind where his parents came from, or what kind of person he was perceived as. His friends at school have only known him as the 'friendly kid' who always gave out free snacks at recess and

played decent basketball. Given that his social character has always been amiable, he managed to get along quite well with others. Moreover, Diya had learned long ago to care less about what others thought of him. As long as he respected those around him, he would usually acquire the equal amount of respect. Outside the boundaries of his school or home, however, this was not always true.

Although Hong Kong isn't exactly a hostile place for migrants, most people prefer to form or establish their own ethnic environment, and sometimes there can be many ethnicity groups for a single nationality of people. Some ethnic minority groups might have been fundamentally established to protect certain rights and benefits of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, whereas others were established for reasons as simple as to preserve and celebrate culture.

A closer look at the facts

The Filipino population in Hong Kong, for example, is one of the largest ethnic minority groups of the city, and yet have about 5 different Non-Government Organisations that aim to support and raise awareness regarding certain problems faced by migrant workers, or domestic helpers. The Indian Association of Hong Kong. Also, a Non-Government Organisation. However, because many of the Indian migrants come from a rich business or educational background, and have arrived to Hong Kong as large families, their living standard is much better compared to other migrants. Some of the other migrants had to migrate to the city under



The ethnic minority

the “Refugee” status, as Hong Kong also has a reputation for being a political asylum for those in need. But when it comes to individuals like Diya, where his ethnicity is comparably more uncommon, there lacks the demand for a representing public organisation given the shortage in supply of people. This meant that Diya was going to find it even harder to search for a place of belonging.

But why?

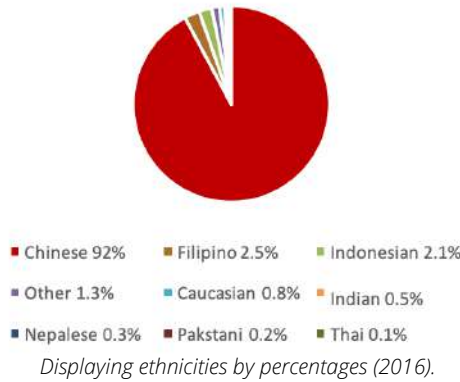
In order to better understand Hong Kong’s population, let us take a quick glance at the records of migration for the city below:

From the information given, one might say that Hong Kong looks fairly international. The city is indeed home to people from almost every country in Asia, and therefore earned itself the reputation where “East meets West”. Unfortunately, this is only true in theory. A closer look at the data says, in reality, just the opposite - its international population only represented 8% of the total population, while the rest are all Chinese.

So we come to ask ourselves: Is one’s identity purely based on his/her passport? Would Diya’s ethnic diversity segregate him from the rest of the population, even though he is a Hong Kong citizen? Can a person be accepted by community even though he/she comes from a foreign identity?

In a financially competitive city like Hong Kong, where the property market plays such a crucial role in structuring the economy, being wealthy is key to survival and success. Fostering a culture of the minority has become a matter of preference and favour, and the wealthier the minority, the better the culture is preserved. Given the fact that 92% of the population happens to be Chinese and that other ethnic minorities are either self-preserving or isolated (data from 2016), there is little or no incentive to encourage the livelihood of smaller or less abundant cultures, such as Vietnamese or Burmese. Therefore, for less abundant cultures like Diya’s, where few people even know of the Vietnamese/Burmese community living in Hong Kong, survival becomes a matter of blending in with the “Local population”.

Hong Kong's Population by Ethnicity



Back to the present

Diya accepts that he may sometimes be isolated or undermined by the polarised society he lives in, and indeed society may constantly have sceptical, supportive, or indifferent views and opinions in general about migration. Whatever the matter, Diya is thankful that he had been given an opportunity to live in such a well-developed city. He knows that his bright-minded and adaptable personality has and will continue to play a fundamental part in sustaining a successful living. Most importantly, being amiable is a personality trait that he enjoys having the most. He perceives his experience as one that is special, unique, and helpful to living as an ethnic minority in a sophisticated place.

Year	2006		2011		2016	
	Population		Population		Population	
	Number of Persons	Percentage	Number of Persons	Percentage	Number of Persons	Percentage
Ethnicity						
Chinese	6 522 148	95.0	6 620 393	93.6	6 752 202	92.0
Filipino	112 453	1.6	133 018	1.9	184 081	2.5
Indonesian	87 840	1.3	133 377	1.9	153 299	2.1
White	36 384	0.5	55 236	0.8	58 209	0.8
Indian	20 444	0.3	28 616	0.4	36 462	0.5
Nepalese	15 950	0.2	16 518	0.2	25 472	0.3
Pakistani	11 111	0.2	18 042	0.3	18 094	0.2
Thai	11 900	0.2	11 213	0.2	10 215	0.1
Japanese	13 189	0.2	12 580	0.2	9 976	0.1
Other Asian	12 663	0.2	12 247	0.2	19 589	0.3
Others	20 264	0.3	30 336	0.4	68 986	0.9
Total	6 864 346	100.0	7 071 576	100.0	7 336 585	100.0

“Main Tables” Data on Ethnicity of Hong Kong. Gathered from <http://bycensus2016.gov.hk/en/bc-mt.html>

UGFH box:

Genevan-French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) once stated, from the Social Contract, that if one wishes to be protected and recognised by the law of sovereignty, one should abandon some of his own freedoms, and that this agreement is the foundation for the Social Contract of people. Thanks to Rousseau’s work in establishing the fundamental rules of society, developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom or Republic of France has become the world’s most culturally diverse places, with a history of immigrants from all over the world, such as Africa, India or even the Middle East. One may say that the Social Contract has partly contributed to this cultural diversity as it has no distinctions over what type of people a society consists of, only that all members of society must mutually abide by the law. As a result, this led to one of the founding principles of being an immigrant, and for one to exchange a previous identity for a new one.

CLARITY WITHOUT VISION

A STORY OF MAKING SENSE OF
AND FINDING STRENGTH IN
DISABILITY

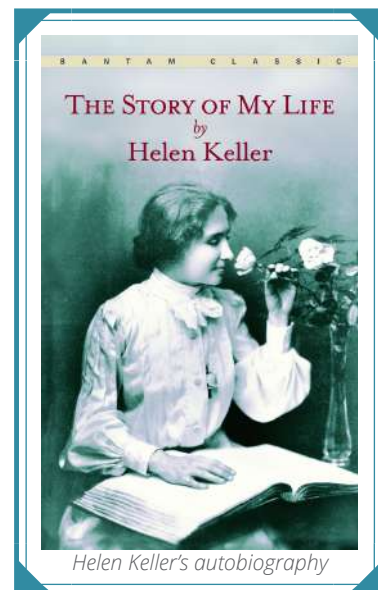
Written and
illustrated by
Serena Yue

"I OFTEN ASK MYSELF: WHAT I POSSESS NOW - DO I DESERVE IT? IF THE ANSWER IS YES, THEN CHERISH IT." HE SAID.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'DESERVE IT'?" I ASKED.

"SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T TAKE FOR GRANTED SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T WASTE... SOMETHING YOU EARNED." HE ANSWERED.

As our conversation draws to a close, I watch him pack away his lecture notes into his school bag, hoist it over his shoulders and rise to his feet. The lounging labrador dog at our feet springs up eagerly and shakes out her fur, her lean muscles straining against her harness. Then, with gentle confidence, she walks her master towards the elevator.



I first met Curtis, a Year 2 CUHK student majoring in Government and Public Administration, at a scholarship award ceremony in July 2019. He was smartly dressed in a suit, his hair parted to the side and groomed back neatly. As everyone bustled together for a group photo, I watched as he stood firmly in the front row, his guide dog stationed faithfully by his side. He reached down and pressed his hand on the dog's lower back, signalling her to sit. Man and dog looked smart as ever. As I watched Curtis, a passage from a book I read recently flowed into my mind, it went like this:

“My aunt made me a big doll out of towels. It was the most comical, shapeless thing, this improvised doll, with no nose, mouth, ears or eyes - nothing that even the imagination of a child could convert into a face. Curiously enough, the absence of eyes struck me more than all the other defects put together. I pointed this out to everybody with provoking persistence, but no one seemed equal to the task of providing the doll with eyes... Eventually, I pulled two buttons off my aunt's cape and indicated that I wanted it sewn onto my doll. When the beads were in the right place I could not contain my joy.

Excerpt from Hellen Keller's autobiography, *The Story of My Life*.

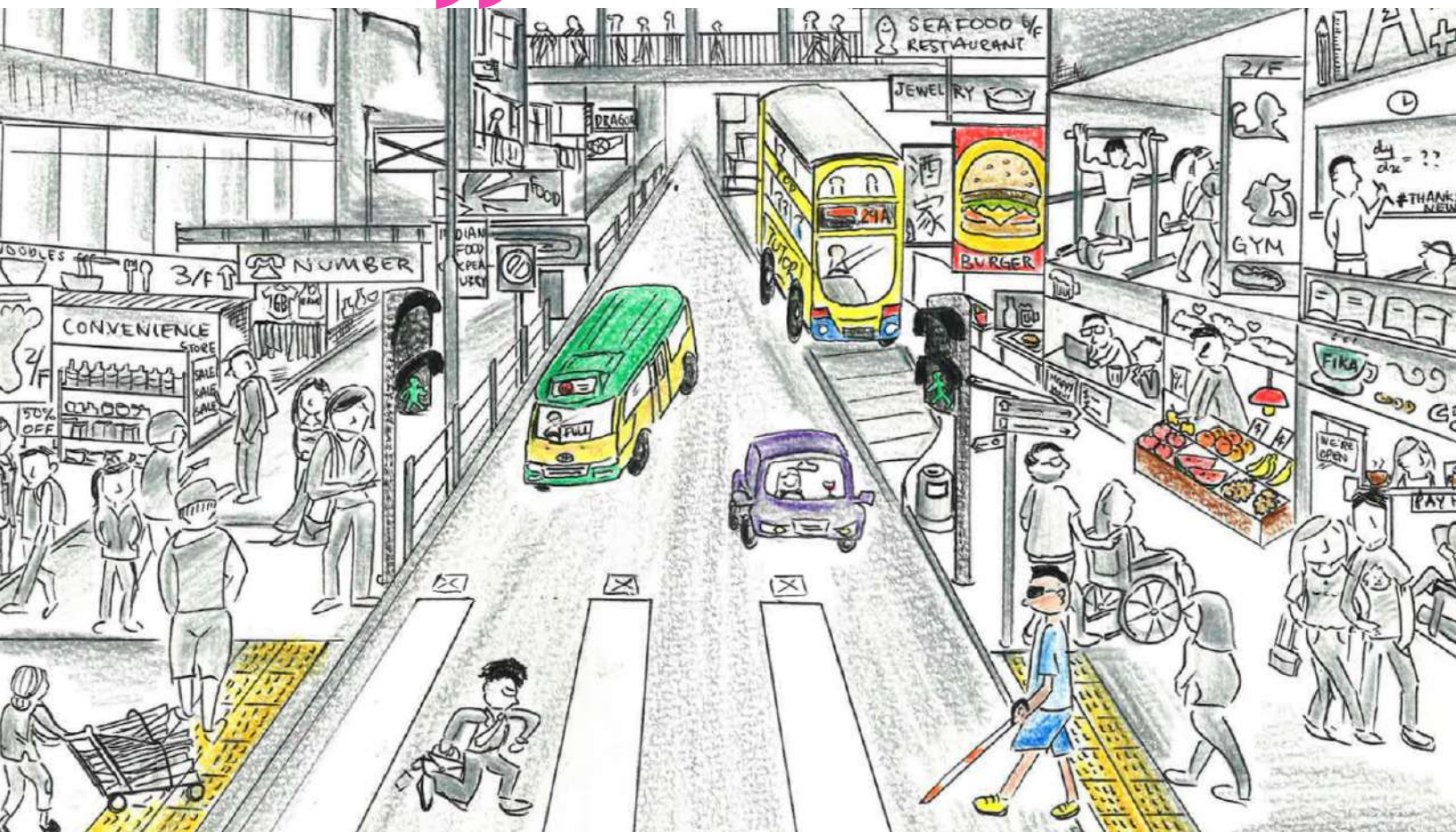
Helen Keller's story is a remarkable one. Born in Alabama, USA in 1880, she lost her hearing and eyesight at 18 months as a result of a serious fever. With the help of her family and teacher, she gradually learnt to read, speak and write. Defying all odds, at 24, she became the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from Radcliffe College of Harvard University. Helen studied German, French and Latin. She read Homer, Schiller and Goethe. Upon meeting the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, she moved him to tears as she recited on the spot Alfred Lord Tennyson's poems when she was given a volume of his poems from Holmes' bookshelf. Such accomplishments appear almost otherworldly, but what **does** feel real is the image of this six year old girl and the distress she felt as she cradled her doll. Indeed, without eyes, how incapacitated one must feel! So much that it would evoke an empathetic burst of urgency to render sight upon her doll. Yet, as I observed the steady mannerisms of Curtis from across the room, I felt the strength, resolve and grace in his movements that precisely defies such perceived essentiality of sight in one's functional life. I decided I want to get to know him...

Author's depiction of how Curtis (in blue) navigates a bustling street in Hong Kong; the coloured aspects are those that Curtis "sees"

SEEING WITH YOUR SENSES

Curtis lost his sight within the space of a few months when he was 15. Prior to that, he recalls his fascination for cars during his early teenage years: he would peruse car magazines with zeal and planned to get his driver's license at 18. He also loved reading about climates, devouring books on weather patterns and storms. When there is a typhoon, he would observe the way the wind changes. The ability to indulge in these hobbies faded along with his sight. Yet this gave way to new interests to cultivate and engage in. "I would listen to the radio. It used to be funny talk shows, then I started to tune into news commentaries. This spurred my interest in social sciences and politics, which is what I major in now at university." He tells me.

I asked him how did he confront the task of learning to receive sensory information through his other intact senses such as sound and smell. He described standing in the crowded street and listening to all the bustle around him, how he would train himself to differentiate sound from noise. "In the beginning, I was nervous. It was confusing, almost dizzying" he said. He tells of how he would locate himself within a supermarket by picking up on



the scent of the fruit aisle, or the sushi counter.

His account reminds me of when Helen wrote about her rowing experience: how she was guided by the “scent of water-grass and lilies” as she steered her boat. Yet Curtis doesn’t merely employ his hearing or scent to construct his spatial surroundings, there is a more subtle though equally significant change manifesting in him: a sharper ability to retain information. When people speak to him, Curtis listens. He listens *attentively*, and he remembers. Mr. Simon Lau, Acting Chaplain of Chung Chi College who took a group of students including Curtis on a trip overseas, told me about an incident that greatly impressed him: during the debriefings at the end of the day, Curtis, despite being the only student who could not see, was able to recall in stunning detail the various locations of monuments or landmarks described to him during the day - while other students exclaimed: “What tower? I don’t even remember it - where was it?”

“If you hear information from someone and you don’t remember right away, you can google it afterwards. But this will take a long time for me to do. So I try my best to take everything in the first time I hear it.” Curtis tells me.

When I think about it, as vision is deprived to someone, one of their primary modes of receiving information is through having items or surroundings described to them. This would entail not just mere listening skills but information retention and subsequent memory retrieval skills. Therefore, I decided to probe into the neuroscience underpinnings that seek to explain this phenomenon. Professor Amir Amedi’s laboratory at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem used fMRI scans to examine brain activity of the blind when performing certain tasks. They found that in verbal exercises, the amplitude of the blind’s neural activity varied as a function of syntactic and semantic (distinctive and core features of language) processing demands. Further, the primary area in the brain responsible for visual processing, known as the occipital lobe, showed activation in memory-retrieval tasks for the blind, but not for controls (those with

normal sight). In other words, even though the visual cortex is not activated by external stimuli (such as light), it is far from dormant but engages in higher-cognitive functions such as memory and language comprehension. This is known as “cortical plasticity” where the brain essentially reroutes its neural network in order to maximise one’s sensory and cognitive performance. These results underscore the remarkable physiological adaptations within our bodies that enable us to maximise the sensory reception of our surroundings.

Curtis’ case is more than just a culmination of peculiar neuroscience. At a deeper level, it demonstrates that regardless of one’s limitations, one won’t “miss out” on life’s experiences - the adaptable nature of our biology has got our back.

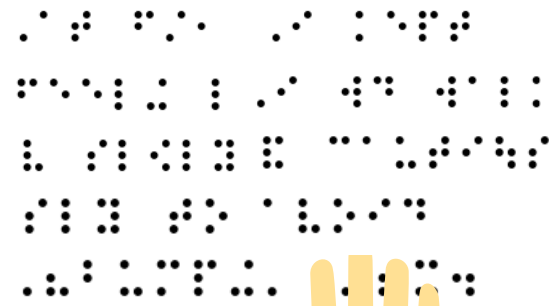
HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE

It is impossible to ignore the scale of obstacles, both physical and emotional, that need to be overcome by someone who is visually impaired pursuing higher education. Helen described some of her difficulties at university in her autobiography:

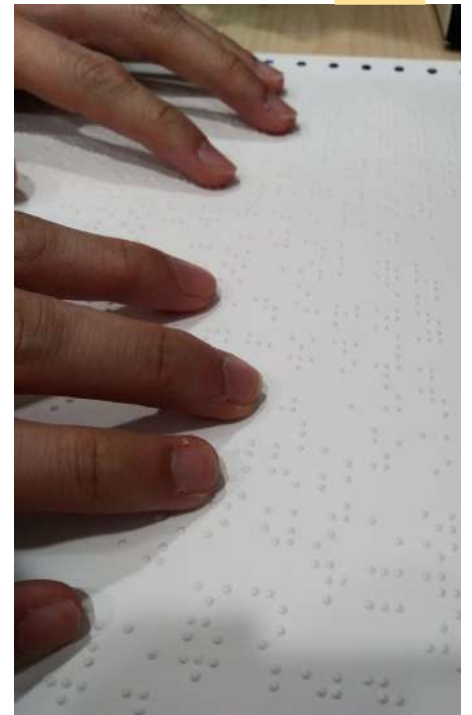
“When I began my second year at school, I was full of hope and determination to succeed. But soon I was confronted with unforeseen difficulties... Sometimes I lost all courage and betrayed my feelings in a way I am ashamed to remember.

There are days when the close attention I must give to details chafes my spirit. The thought that I must spend hours reading a few chapters while other girls are laughing and singing and dancing makes me rebellious.

Similarly, Curtis described some of his adversities. He first took an Orientation and Mobility Skills course at Ebenezer School for the Visually Impaired: “At first, I kept feeling like there’s an obstacle in the front, I would walk very slowly and cautiously to avoid “bumping” into it.” It took psychological courage to eventually overcome this worry. Since he entered



university, lecture notes are sometimes printed in braille for him. He showed me one of his bounded braille notes: one page measures 31 cm by 28 cm (larger than A4) and consists of around four to five sentences.



Curtis reading lecture notes in braille

One such page typically takes him several minutes to read. If it contains an unknown word, he needs to go to his computer, type in the word on Cambridge Dictionary’s website and wait for the lines on the web page to be read out to him by MacBook’s VoiceOver function. Sometimes, the definition is not contained in the first few lines so he needs to listen patiently as every line on the website is read out (including advertisements). This process usually takes more than a minute. The length of time consumed in performing such tasks can be straining.

“At first, I kept feeling like there’s an obstacle in the front, I would walk very slowly and cautiously to avoid ‘bumping’ into it.”





Curtis reading braille

As I watched Curtis demonstrate reading braille to me: his right index finger brushing the raised dots across the page while his left index finger traced the first word of every line down the left margin so as to keep track of his progress down the page, I felt a stir of humility within as I marvelled at his indomitable conviction at the quest for knowledge.

Similarly, Helen wrote of how she regards the act of learning:

To have knowledge, broad, deep knowledge - is to know true ends from false, and lofty things from low. To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked man's progress is to feel the great heart-throbs of humanity through the centuries; and if one does not feel these pulsations a heavenward striving, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life.

SENSIBILITY AND SELECTIVITY: THE TECH DILEMMA

One particular thing that stood out to me during our conversations is that, Curtis tells me how, throughout the school term he often employs his MacBook's Voice-Over function to read out the lecture slides to him. This is undeniably convenient. However, when it comes to revising for exams, he sometimes deliberately prefers the hardcopy braille version over the soft-copy powerpoint file despite the former being much more time consuming to go through. "Why?" I asked him. Curtis explains that when he reads the braille with

his own hands, sometimes uttering the words out loud as his fingers trace along the page, he takes in the information more comprehensively which in turn enhances his learning outcome. What this shows is that with all the ease and convenience offered to us by technology, it may not necessarily replace the benefits reaped when we engage in more "active" or traditional means of studying.

This insight is corroborated by Jared Diamond in his Pulitzer Prize-acclaimed book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*: he observed that those growing up in some Western societies who spend a majority of their childhood receiving "passive entertainment" (such as watching television) experience less cognitive stimulation than a child who grows up in the rainforests of New Guinea and spends his time engaged actively outdoors. While those living in advanced technologically adept cities rely on Google Maps to navigate, Aboriginal New Guineans employ their brains more proactively as they build up mental maps of unfamiliar surroundings with no aid nor reliance on a smartphone screen. These New Guineans also possess a remarkable knowledge of hundreds of plant species' edibility and medicinal value. Such knowledge is acquired through keenly observing one's environment, discerning between useful and irrelevant information which is built on or filtered out respectively. The exercise also requires creativity and innovation, which altogether fuels an active engagement to memory commitment. Such a dynamic interaction between nature and mind has arguably waned in those of us who are accustomed to just googling when attempting to understand something new. This begs the question of whether reliance on technology supports or suppresses learn-

ning.

As I watched Curtis "scroll" through his phone (the screen is entirely black), I see and feel a stature of calm that depicts what it means to use technology in a more sensible way: to search up the definition of a word or to have his lecture notes read out. To me, technology is designed for specific purposes that create convenience, but not distraction. And this requires a conscious selectivity when we are in front of a screen. For example, in his bestseller, *Digital Minimalism - On Living Better with Less Technology*, Cal Newport pointed out that: "we added new technologies to the periphery of our experience for minor reasons, then woke one morning to discover that they had colonised the core of our daily life." For those who spend hours scrolling through social media, checking Facebook notifications, uploading photos to Instagram, glancing surreptitiously down at their phone screen during meetings, watching hours of videos on YouTube or Netflix or texting WhatsApp while eating - they exemplify the modern, hyper-connected existence in which the social critic Laurence Scott observes: "a moment can feel strangely flat if it exists solely in itself." This can result in a distracted or even discontent state of mind, the ramifications of which ought not be underestimated as it impinges on our social and psychological health.



Navigation: city dweller

THIS IS YOUR JOURNEY: EARN IT, OWN IT

In her autobiography, Helen describes the momentous day she learnt her first word at the age of seven:

I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away. As we returned to the house every object I touched quivered with life as I began to “see” with the strange new thought that had come to me.

Prior to that day, Helen described her world as dark and silent, where she felt no sentiment or tenderness. She was frustrated, even furious, at the knowledge that people around her communicated in a method different from hers. Because she lost her sight and hearing at just 19 months, Helen had not yet acquired the skill of language, hence the inability to express her thoughts would reduce her to fits of anguish on a daily basis. One can therefore imagine how that first experience of connecting an object (water) with a word (“w-a-t-e-r”) that was being spelt into her hands



Left: Helen Keller and her water pump
Right: Curtis

by her teacher) must have empowered her! It is like being faced with a colossal hardship yet equipped with the reassuring knowledge that you can pull through. In this sense, Helen’s journey was a continuous ascent since she learnt to read and write.

Now imagine the reverse. Imagine you have lived your life with intact senses and then at 15, one of them cruelly abandoned you. This is what Curtis calls “The Drop” in his life. Losing his vision therefore adds an additional layer of pain to his journey because before any “ascent” to speak of, he must come to terms with the full, inevitable manifestation of the devastating descent. Over the years, he occasionally receives words of sympathy from well-meaning people along the lines of: “How dreadful it must be to have normal sight and then lose it. Perhaps it would have been less cruel if you were never able to see from the beginning...” Yet, Curtis tells me that he has never perceived his plight this way. When I asked him why he thinks so, he replies: “Because the gap is not that big.” How so? I asked. He explains that if someone was blind from birth, there are some concepts they will never be able to fully grasp, such as colours or brightness. These congenitally blind individuals can only learn through association. For example, to understand what the colour “red” looks like they may link it to feelings of fear or anger. But for Curtis, he can draw on what he already knows about the visual world from his memory. “This is a blessing for me,” he says.

When he could no longer see, he tells me that he decided not to dwell on the loss of his vision and made a conscious de-

cision to move forward: he learnt braille, he learnt to use the guide stick, he learnt to navigate a computer with a keyboard instead of a mouse. While some may assume he became more introverted after losing his sight, Curtis explains that he actually learnt to overcome his shyness and became more confident through the many opportunities he had in sharing his story, his feelings and his experience with others. He even joined a musical performance in his secondary school! Through all this, he learnt patience and courage. His positivity and optimism moved me. As I sat beside him, my fingers hovering over the iPad I used for taking notes, he broke the silence: “It’s like emigrating to a new place. When you do, you take all the experiences and memories you had in your original country with you. This is what makes your journey unique. This is **your journey**.”

DISCIPLINE AND DIGNITY

“I don’t need others to make any “exemptions” for me,” Curtis tells me, his voice poised and steady. “There’s no need for others to take special sympathy on me. For example, if I didn’t do well in my studies, some may think it is understandable because I have my impairment. On the other hand, if I receive a good grade some people think it must be because I made a lot of effort and sacrificed a lot of my leisure time in order to achieve good academic results. But this shouldn’t be the case!” he exclaims in earnest, “getting good grades is a matter of good time management. Any



vs. native aboriginal

We should not find excuses for ourselves when our actions disappoint just as we should not approach someone's disabilities with presumption or ignorance. When asked how she felt about the inopportune calls of newspaper reporters ever wanting to profit off a piece about her, Helen remarked:

I dislike people who try to talk down to my understanding. They are like people who when walking with you try to shorten their steps to suit yours; the hypocrisy is exasperating.

Thinking back to my last conversation with Curtis, where he defined “deserving something” as not taking it for granted, not wasting it, and earning it - I start to understand what he means by not needing others to make “exemptions” for him: It is equally a commitment to discipline as it is an affirmation of his dignity.

Curtis and Helen's stories evoked within me admiration and respect. Despite being born into this world more than 100 years apart, they exemplify the spirit of pursuing knowledge. They tread the walk of life with undiminished poise, they mount their hardships with unrelenting grit. They inspire me to want to work (even) harder...

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"It's like emigrating to a new place. When you do, you take all the experiences and memories you had in your original country with you. This is what makes your journey unique. This is your journey."



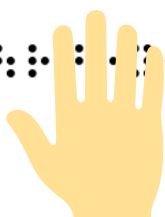
SPECIAL THANKS
TO THE
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