WHAT IS SCHOOL?
Different people’s interpretations
After the publication of our debut issue in May 2020, we are honoured to announce the second publication of the Pui Ching English Press!

This time, we are featuring five more down-to-earth stories straight out of the oven, establishing a stronger connection with students and the community around. Ranging from stories of bread lovers to misconceptions about mental illnesses, we hope to provide an all-inclusive outlook on each topic.

Our cover story looks at what school means to different people. We talk to our school’s Life Education teacher and listen to his sharing about his perception of school and what he did to put
his values into action. We also talk to the principal of RTC Gaia School, Hong Kong’s only “green” primary school that promotes learning in a natural setting, to share his picture of ideal schooling. For a more in-depth discussion, we evaluate the limitations of conventional schooling from the perspective of a dropout and invite readers to ponder on “what makes a good school” with insights from a scholar.

In this issue, we also look into the question of whether elective subjects define a career path. In the last story, we feature second-hand culture in Hong Kong. Amid the pandemic, our team still managed to gather information through various means such as surveys, online interviews and more. We talk to people from all walks of life, including professors, shop owners and even our alumni, in the hope of giving readers a better insight from all-round angles. We hope to encourage readers to reflect and express their own views on the issues, or even discuss them with teachers and fellow schoolmates.

As Chief Editors, we are privileged to work with committed reporters, editors and photographers. Their concerted effort on a really tight schedule is very much appreciated. We wish you all a pleasurable reading experience. Enjoy!

Paris Ma
Wing Yu Yip
Chief Editors
Ever since our enrolment at school at the age of three, school hours have occupied most of the time in our daily schedule. At first, we set foot on the school campus with absent-minded smiles on our faces. Yet, as time passes, we seem to have lost our enthusiasm for learning. Maybe it is the humongous amount of homework, maybe it is the tremendous pressure of achieving perfection in public examinations, maybe it is the demanding expectations from our parents. With this despairing phenomenon in view, is school just a venue for the infinite drilling of past papers? Could it be something more than piles of paperwork?

Different people’s interpretations

Reporters: Astrid Luo, Kate Chan, Marcus Chui, Sunny Ye

"A school still exists if we keep the relationships between teachers and students.

- Mr. Leung Chun-chung, the school’s Life Education teacher

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“Even there is no brick and mortar, a school still exists if we keep the relationships between teachers and students,” says Leung. “There are teachers, learners, and people who learn from each other -- that’s the spirit of a school, whether or not a classroom is constructed.” Leung adds that he still has regular gatherings with alumni in which they still talk about the indispensable virtues. Such discussion is a unique characteristic of schools that cannot be found in other forms of education.

Biblical values and mutual relationships are the major elements of Leung’s cognition of a school. “With these values, any other knowledge is just trimmings on top of the foundation.”

School is a place to learn, but it can be anywhere

Mr. Yip Chung-sing, Principal of RTC Gaia School (鄉師自然學校), shares ideas in line with Mr. Leung’s. He says that school should be anywhere, such as a social community, or even nature -- the Gaia School, located in rural Tuen Mun, is the only “green” primary school in Hong Kong that emphasises learning in a natural setting.

Yip perceives school as a place to learn, not just for students, but also teachers and parents. He believes that people should learn from one another. The learning process is not limited to humans -- knowledge can also be obtained from our surroundings, like nature, and that is the purpose of schooling and one of the three core values of the school.

Self-learning is another core value of the school. “The spotlight should not be directed only on theoretical knowledge,” Yip says. “More outing experience is required at the same time.”

While students in other primary schools are drilling for the Secondary School Places Allocation assessment that statistically reflects the school’s performance, Yip’s students are attending camping trips and woodchopping sessions. It is not just child’s play -- students...
are also finding perpendicular objects in nature related to the Mathematics lesson on angles.

“Demonstrating with or teaching through actual actions will be much more memorable and persuasive,” Yip points out. Hands-on experiences are more precious and valuable than doing practices or exercises continuously.

For the last core value, the school gives prominence to humanism as well. One of its objectives is to give students a chance to express themselves, negotiate with others and solve problems together. It also emphasises the importance of respecting individual differences.

The Daily Court is a very special part of the school, where students can sue their classmates for mistakes. Students can adjudge and decide whether or not “the defendants” are guilty. Peculiar as it seems, Yip states that it is a process to learn from each other, “Students can express their inner thoughts and emotions without barrier, and they can identify others’ virtues and strengths, and then learn from others.”

Even without a concrete structure, Yip thinks the three school values should be imprinted in students’ minds the whole time. During the pandemic, Yip encourages students to be more down-to-earth with the help of self-learning. For example, students can write heartwarming letters to their loved ones, or create mouthwatering dishes and share them online.

However different from the mainstream, some parents still embrace the vision and values of the Gaia School. Indeed, many of them have been frustrated by Hong Kong’s rigid, exam-oriented schools and start to look for alternatives. In conventional schools, it is not that easy to put these values into practice.

**School is for fulfilling aspirations - not just exams**

Many students are exhausted from assessment and paperwork. Some look for alternatives of schooling, some even drop out of school for career prospects that promise a better future.

Mark, who dropped out during his second-to-last year of secondary school and switched to proceed his studies in courses provided by universities, perceives that formal schooling is not worthwhile to him anymore due to the mere drills on past papers and training exam skills for The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). He regards school as one of the means to fulfill his aspirations by providing opportunities for competitions or training in specialised subjects, which for him is science. By gaining special experience through these means, Mark agrees that school helps him to spend more time on a certain
field and hence get to know more about his life and have a better future plan.

Nevertheless, Mark also points out the inflexibility of formal schooling. “For some students who want to develop more in a certain area, schools may be a drag on them, rather than a place for exploring knowledge,” he says. “Schools require students to learn different things. They could be of certain importance, but not everything covered in textbooks means a lot to our future.”

He adds that school is also a place to socialise with peers, so that it can become a better place to learn.

When home is your school - an alternative: homeschooling

Dr. Lau Yuk-king, a professional consultant of the Department of Social Work at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, is an advocate of homeschooling. She says school dropouts and homeschooled children are still eager to engage in learning. Yet just like Mark, they do not find the environment conducive to learning. She shares a striking illustration -- a boy who is an aficionado of computers. His knowledge in the field had already surpassed his fellow schoolmates and even the curriculum. Yearning for more insights, he asked his teachers questions frequently, yet received the same formulaic response every single time -- “out of syllabus”. Curiosity not satisfied, he switched to learning other curriculums online. Now, he is even starting a business on his own. “They always think that they are not learning at school. They don’t understand why they have to attend school while they can learn much more through the computer,” says Lau.

Lau states that schooling should be a learning experience with diversity. For students who have a high level of inquisitiveness, they can be in charge of what elements they should learn about. They can search for additional learning materials on the Internet that conventional schools are not able to provide. On the other hand, they can still maintain interpersonal relationships with others. ‘Homeschooled students will not stay at home all the time, but will arrange activities by themselves after considering the activities are worth organising for their benefit,’ says Lau. These are, according to Lau, the reasons why some students and parents choose homeschooling instead of conventional schools.

Mark thinks that students should have the opportunity to interact with peers at school.
DesIRE: The watershed and beyond

Relationship between chosen electives and future career

Reporters: Emily Tam, Helen Ko, Ivana Shek, Jocelyn Cheung, Trevor Lee
Form 3, or the ninth grade, is presumably one "threshold of life". Whatever their interests or strengths, students would have somewhat received feedback from their significant others, including friends. Some would claim that studying STEM subjects would have the edge on pursuing their career, probably one with versatility and high income. Such opinions may close in on students, whether they like it or not. Before they lose track in the fumes of other’s opinions, perhaps preventing bewilderment and consulting someone who has gone through such an ordeal is the most desirable.

Currently, Pui Ching Middle School offers 48 elective subjects, ranging from science subjects like physics to humanities like Chinese literature. Students are divided into six classes according to their electives. From a survey we conducted, most students regard their own interest, ability and future prospects as the most important considerations behind their decision. 73.4% of interviewees think that their electives will affect their future career. Up to 87.3% respondents firmly believe that the electives facilitate acquisition of basic knowledge required for jobs. Subjects that help with adaptation are also popular. Very few students perceive their future careers to be something unrelated to their chosen electives.

Mr Chan Cheuk-wai, who has been a class teacher for ten years, has helped a lot of students who found it difficult choosing their
electives. He mentions that there are many students who cannot decide whether to choose science subjects or the ones related to arts and humanities. Therefore, he emphasises that students should put their interest and ability in the first place instead of electing subjects merely because of the social norm.

Mr Chan says there is a certain relationship between students’ choice of electives and their careers. For example, he chose physics, chemistry and biology as electives when he was in secondary school and now, he is teaching computer science. It goes a long way towards teaching students effectively as the logical path and cognitive skills are so similar.

However, Mr Chan points out that despite the impact of students’ choice of electives on their future career, it is not critical. Studying electives in senior forms assists students to learn the rudimentary techniques for further studies in a related field, but Mr Chan also reminds that choosing the most suitable electives for yourself and balancing between interest and ability should be of utmost importance. Students should also tell their parents about their own aspiration. “Whenever there are different opinions, discuss calmly. Communication is very important,” he says.

Ms Lui Yim-lan Angela has been a career guidance teacher for years. She has also helped a lot of students choose their electives. She says that scores of students have a lot of difficulties in the process, like choosing unsuitable subjects, facing parents’ disagreement with their choices or not knowing that the subject would be a lot harder than perceived. She suggests that students should think whether there are certain jobs they want to do in the future. If so, they should find out whether there are subjects prerequisite for application for that job. For example, if you want to develop your career in the field of medicine, chemistry is required, yet physics and biology would be a boost for further studies. If your future job is related to civil engineering, one of the extended math modules...
may be required. One important point Ms Lui emphasises about choosing electives is that students must never follow what others choose. Whether it’s because the subject is chosen by a lot of other students or because their friends have chosen it, students should never follow suit. "There are always subjects that are more popular or less popular. However, don’t let this fact discourage you from making your own choice.” She adds that students should make choices after evaluating their strengths and interests.

Dee, from our school’s class of 2014 and a fresh graduate from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), is now a freelance artist passionate in acting and drama. A fun fact is that he chose to study science subjects back in secondary school, and in university, he even studied engineering - which are very different from what he is doing now.

He mentions that in Form 3, he had pretty balanced performance in both humanities and science subjects, with humanities edging a tad bit. However, back in those days, he had no idea as to what career he wanted, and thus, chose science over humanities based on the thought that he liked science subjects more. Upon discovering his passion for drama in Form 4 during the performance Unforgettable, he started to develop a strong interest in drama. After graduation, hoping to pursue drama as his full-time job, he wanted to study in the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts (HKAPA). Nevertheless, he was made to study engineering due to family pressure. In spite of the adversities, he never gave up his dream. During his time in the university, he seized different opportunities that involved acting and drama.

Personally, he doesn’t think there is a direct correlation between chosen electives, university major and your career. To him, circumstances are the deciding factor for which path to pursue. Still, he agrees that some jobs, such as teaching math, need a correlating major as a requirement. Dee had electives and majors opposed to his career. Still, with his sights set, the unrelenting circumstances didn’t stop him from eventually pursuing a career as a freelance actor.

Sharing the same view with Mr Chan and Ms Lui, Dee says that when choosing electives, students’ own interest should always come first, as he believes that whether one likes his or her chosen electives will affect his or her academic results. It gives you motivation as you are more willing to spend time on it when you love what you’re learning. It makes everything easier, in Dee’s point of view, as the results one achieves are still very much related to the time dedicated.

Edited by Mason Ma
Shabby but Chic

Exploring second-hand shopping

Reporters: Ariel Chow, Andrew Lau, Dorie Chan, Iria Chen
In a second-hand market, a young woman is folding a pile of shirts to welcome her customers. From time to time, she checks whether there are adequate choices for the customers. Sometimes she flips the dresses on the clothing rack to pick the most suitable ones for visitors. Bell, who is a university student in her twenties, is the founder of an online clothing thrift store.

Bell first gained exposure to second-hand culture in early 2018. After that, she is totally obsessed with thrift culture. "Lots of people reckon second-hand clothes are old, dirty and invaluable, some may even think they have been worn by dead people—which is not true," says Bell. "Second-hand clothing can also be very much on trend!" To clear people’s misunderstanding about second-hand culture, Bell started her own online thrift store (@asianangel_hk) on Instagram.

"The first time I held an online second-hand clothing bazaar, I didn’t expect to have a long queue outside my booth." Bell is touched and gratified by her supportive customers. The admiration and appreciation from her customers have motivated her to carry on. When she posts some outfit ideas and second-hand clothing products on Instagram, she feels delighted about all the compliments and ‘likes’ received.

The number of followers of Bell’s shop has increased rapidly. She is glad to see that more and more people are interested in second-hand culture and willing to purchase second-hand products. "I’ll say the market is still not noteworthy in Hong Kong compared to other western countries." Bell suggests the reason behind this phenomenon being that Hong Kong people are conservative. People’s misunderstanding of second-hand clothing still exists. Also, the small number of thrift stores has weakened the development of second-hand culture.

There is a long way to go to popularise second-hand culture in Hong Kong. What can we do to contribute to it? Bell introduces some platforms such as Carousell and other Instagram platforms where people can sell their spare or unfit clothes on these platforms. In the long term, it can stimulate the growth of the second-hand goods market. Bell also suggests people share and spread the message "Stay pretty, Stay eco-friendly", which is also the motto of her own shop, to remind people that second-hand clothing is worth buying. She hopes the society can gradually shake off the stigma of second-hand shopping and the market can be further expanded.

In the era of materialism where firsthand products are still dominating, having an excess of materials has become a normality. In the past, people would be frustrated with how to optimise the use of materials to be as frugal as possible. And now, people are frustrated with how to deal with the glut of
materials. Since it would be such a waste and harm to the environment to discard excess goods, the intention of selling them in thrift stores emerges.

To get a clearer picture of the second-hand culture in Hong Kong, we visited a second-hand market themed “Fantasy” that took place in October in an industrial building in Ngau Tau Kok. It was co-organised by Bell’s shop and two other online shops (@retrovert.hk and @chan4room).

A majority of visitors of the market are young people and most of them are female. When we talk to some of the visitors, they reflect that thrift stores have given customers a positive impression of second-hand products. Some say they find thrift culture “amazing”, “eco-friendly” and “interesting” at first sight. Some describe thrift culture as a “new concept”.

“Stylish T-shirts, American-style clothing and different types of clothes can be found here [in the second-hand market],” an 18-year-old female customer tells us.

Moving away from the shabby but chic fashion trend, we can find a different kind of second-hand shop – second-hand bookstore. My Book Room, a second-hand bookstore, introduces a different shopping concept and style. A windshield of diverse second-hand books is collected and recirculated to people around the society. The founder of My Book Room, Daniel Mok, aims to give people a chance to buy books at a lower price and recirculate them to someone who would like to read them. The bookstore appears to be an airport helping every book to register their arrival and departure - a new owner for each departure, a fresh chance for each book.

Mok has been operating the second-hand bookstore for five years. Before its opening, Mok had lost his job. Because of his deep interest in reading, the idea of starting his book business popped up in his head. In 2015, his first bookstore was launched. In the past five years, he has expanded his business from one to three bookstores in Hong Kong. His shops are located across Sham Shui Po and Prince Edward. He
mainly sells books with titles in literature, arts, philosophy, social science, history, and novels in both English and Chinese. He collects used books from customers or book donors. Books will then be sanitised and sold to the next customer. Customers can get those second-hand books at half the price of brand-new ones.

“Some customers give books to us and even prepare lunchboxes for us,” he recalls some unforgettable moments he experienced. It shows the connection between the community and his bookstore. This ultimately enhances the relationship between the bookshop and the neighbourhood which could promote second-hand culture. Mok’s bookstore is full of customers all the time. The regulars are the elderly and middle-aged living in the Sham Shui Po neighbourhood.

Talking about the difficulties the second-hand bookstore faces, the owner sighed, “Sometimes the supply of books is unstable because many people don’t know there’s a second-hand bookstore in Sham Shui Po. This problem is not easy to solve as the situation can’t be controlled by us.” Mok tries to advertise the second-hand bookstore via Facebook. “I hope it works!” he adds.

“Rent is our biggest concern,” Mok stresses. Running a bookshop, especially a second-hand one, relies on the number of books the shop collects. As the collection of books is unstable, the income of the bookstore is also unpredictable. The high rent and huge expenditure of his three stores have exerted pressure on him.

Mok counts second-hand culture as a popular trend in Hong Kong. Most of his customers accept reading second-hand books and frequently visit his bookstore to check out new arrivals. He rates 7 out of 10 regarding the acceptance level of Hong Kong people towards second-hand products. “The acceptance of second-hand products really depends on the personal values of individuals,” he comments. “Some may insist on purchasing new products but some may choose second-hand products since they value environmental protection more,” he explains. “Most of the adults do not mind buying second-hand books for leisure. However, many parents may avoid purchasing second-hand books for their children due to hygiene concerns,” he adds.

There are a lot of organisations which sell and collect second-hand products. They could be brick-and-mortar stores or online shops. Christian Action, JupYuen, Salvation Army... the list goes on. Some of these charities also accept second-hand donations. People may try second-hand shopping to not only help the environment, but also pay a much lower price. Save the planet and save your wallet, kill two birds with one stone!

Edited by Paris Ma
Imagine, an enticing piece of bread, freshly baked, covered by an adoringly curved golden crust, is right in front of you. With the peculiarly arresting aroma billowing over, surely, your attention is subconsciously seized. Before you take hold, have a bite and enjoy its crispy yet tender texture; let us ask you a question: what does bread mean to you?

It is evidenced that bread existed at least 30,000 years ago. With such prominent history, the meaning behind this ubiquitous type of food embeds dynamic cultural significances: from being the essential element of the Eucharist in Christianity, to a metaphor of daily necessity and money. In different eras exist distinct perceptions of bread. So, nowadays, what does bread mean to people?

Bearing the question in mind, five captivating life stories revolving around bread are recorded. A student, a housewife, an influencer, a bakery owner, a baking teacher... Divergent identities do not obstruct their common love for bread. Having approached the term “bread” through interviewees, here we present personal and unique anecdotes captured in diversified angles.

“People build relationships via bread. My relationship is with the bread itself.”

Feicha, an all-time, all-round bread lover, perceives bread as a witness of change and adaptation. “The various types of bread represent different cultures in different
places,” says Feicha. Having the knack of exploring bread in bakeries from time to time, he has surely gained a lot in the process. “There’s a special touch of humanity in bakeries.” Feicha not only enjoys the process of eating, but also of discovering. “Striding past bakeries, I would always be enticed by their aroma and couldn’t control myself to try the latest ones.” His love for bread often drives him to give feedback on the new bread, which garners opportunities to establish precious connections in his own community. “I used to hate bread,” he recalls from his memory. “There was once when my parents couldn’t afford me snacks to enjoy at recess. All I got was white bread. To be honest, at that period of time, I cried when I heard the term ‘white bread’, as I thought it symbolised poverty.”

Yet, it’s all in the past now. The little boy grew to acknowledge the genuine meaning behind bread. For the present him, bread is “variety” – he is utterly fascinated by its motley world. As the wheel of time rolls forward, his love towards bread sprous alongside.

His love for bread has him find people wasting bread unbearable. “It was the picnic day in form three. There was a whole pound of left-over white bread, doomed to end up in the landfill. I simply picked it up and enjoyed it for dinner with peanut butter, jam and condensed milk.” Of course, he found it incredibly delicious at the end. This love affects people around him, some even more aware of reducing food waste.

“When there’s somebody who appreciates, there’s motivation to bake.”

Karly, a mother of three secondary school girls, was invited by her neighbour to go on her baking journey 12 years ago. “Had it not been for her sharing homemade bread, I would never have planned on beginning baking as a hobby. I was stunned by how they tasted exactly just like the sold ones in the bakeries!” says Karly.

Karly says she would bake on a daily basis during her peak days. “I enjoy exploring new flavours and ingredients. Gladly, my daughters and husband are more than willing to be the guinea pigs. When there’s somebody who appreciates, there’s motivation to bake.” Not being taciturn on sharing details of her daily stories, Karly’s doting affection to her family is obvious. Being able to customise the ingredients of a certain kind of bread and sculpt them into the ideal form, she ensures scrumptious yet healthy meals for her family members. “To be in control of the quality of the bread is totally worth it, even when the cost is higher than that purchased at stores.”

Keeping abreast with the

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHU MAN CHING, ONE OF OUR INTERVIEWEES

HOMEMADE BAKING PRODUCTS BY KARLY
pursuit of bettering the features, she also enjoys the diversity of baking. "You can never finish learning when it comes to bread-making." With a bright smile on her face, Karly explains how one should adjust the fermentation time accordingly. Here in baking lies her fervent passion for bread, where her eyes are fixated on the adjustments for refinement through countless trial and errors.

As a mother of three, Karly bakes not only for her family, but also for herself. She finds baking relaxing, allow her to be away from the hustle and bustle. "You cannot rush when you bake, and this gives me time to pause." For Karly, bread represents family and more importantly, a "me-time".

"Baking gives me a sense of relaxation that cannot be described!"

COVID-19 gave Clarice time to work her hobbies out. A main reason why she started her own foodie account (@Baking_diaryyy) on Instagram is to spread her love of bread to her followers and share baking thoughts or products with them. Her jaunty language about collaborating with others demonstrates her palpable fondness of bread. "Some account owners would hold meetings for us to exchange our products and give feedback." The warm and embracing atmosphere doubtlessly played a big role in deepening her love for baking.

With Home Economics experience, Clarice is open to all forms of baking products, but she likes bread most. Especially, "The molding process is a total relaxation." Clarice’s love of bread has driven her to bake nearly four times a week during the school suspension. "While others enjoy shopping for clothes, I stop at pastry shops." Her adorable cartoon buns portray her unique style of baking, unorthodox with ingenious combinations of flavours and ingredients, which arrests people’s attention. During her casual visits at the paradise for baking-lovers, she caught herself discovering new targets of bread that she feels eager to try every now and then, be it Pompompurin, Pikachu or Sumikko Gurashi. Taking it to another level of creativity, she challenges herself with complex baking recipes using simple supplies bought in baking stalls. "I enjoy accepting new challenges."

Recently, preralent kind of commercial opportunity, online homemade bakeries, emerged on social media platforms, like Instagram. Not only does it provide a platform for bread lovers to connect and reach out, but also promotes their products to the public. Clarice has a positive view on this rising industry, treating it as a new path for the public to purchase breads in favour. For Clarice, bread maps out a future full of opportunities.

"I loathed the lacklustre work in chain bakeries."

Lo Siu-hong is the owner of Honey Cake Bakery, who used to work in a chain bakery before starting off his own business. "There were too many restrictions and limits," he recalls the working experience in the chain bakery as far from delightful. "In a chain bakery, everyone has one specific job, implying that you would have to work on that repeatedly for a period of time. I still remember I was in charge of the dough for a few months. Every single day, I repeated the same action. It was dull and lacklustre, beyond words."

It was when he had the belief that what one truly desires has a dominant precedence over the stability of living. He used to struggle about finding a way to unleash his full potential. Now, starting a business on his own, he is able to dispel the intangible limitations and race for the freedom he craved long ago. "Only then can I do whatever I want with
full control. That gives me freedom and satisfaction to do what I truly desire.”

Though with the barriers to conquer and the challenges local bakeries prone to, Mr Lo manages to carry out acts of benevolence. “We adjust the amount of bread we make in the evening to minimize leftover bread. Of course, the leftover bread will be given to the poor for free.” Without a single hesitation, he addresses how he copes with food waste.

Unfortunately, that is not the case in chain bakeries. Lo explains how there were inflexible and stern regulations in chain bakeries regarding the amount of bread to be made each day, and that leftover bread would be disposed of “Lest the bread goes bad and the consumer suffers food poisoning. The company wouldn’t allow that to happen.” He expresses his indignation.

Coming to an end, he concludes his relationship with bread as “friends”: simple, yet valuable. This fundamental type of food brings fullness in the most cost-effective way for ordinary people and awards him with heartfelt gratitude towards his work.

“If it’s only about bread, it’s something that is pleasant, magical and miraculous to make.” Chef Chu man-ching is the owner of Chef Chu’s Kitchen, hosting bread baking classes. He was once a worker in chain bakeries, yet he wished for a change in lifestyle. “I entered the bread industry because I didn’t succeed in academics.” The Chef started off briskly, and continued, “I learned a lot in different chain bakeries, but the lack of room for development made me unable to find what I really desire, which turned out to be new challenges.”

With the shift in environment, and a considerable variation regarding the essence of what he works for, a sense of achievement is now easily accessed. “Now, I am able to teach my students how to make different types of bread in two hours, which would normally take a few years to learn when working in a bakery.” Almost immediately, the stark contrast enhances his passion in the post.

When asked about the bread industry, Chu surprisingly insists that young people who have an interest on it should not join. “Young people should not rush into baking careers.” He describes the pathetic truth of local bakeries in Hong Kong. “You must roll the dough for long hours, and it is sold at a relatively low price compared to a dish of fried rice, which is easier to make.”

“It’s better to keep it as a hobby,” he adds. “If it’s only about bread, it’s something that is pleasant, magical and miraculous to make. The mechanics involved in making bread is the most complicated compared to other cuisines, but it also addresses a significantly larger feeling of ecstasy when the product comes out.”

Edited by Yao Hanying
Patients might seriously harm themselves and are regarded as severely depressed persons. On the other hand, some have very minimal warning signs and may suppress themselves.

Coco says a lot of people may think mental illness is distant from them. “For example, in Asian regions such as Hong Kong, we might feel like it’s a taboo, and it’s like ‘Are people might think mental illness patients are over-dramatic or think it’s the result of medicalisation, but it’s actually just a spectrum,” says Coco, a secondary student rehabilitating from mental illness.

The 18-year-old realised she had mental illness around February last year. She couldn’t focus at school, ate too many sweets and cried for hours a day. She was diagnosed to have MDD (major depressive disorder). When it got serious, she would have psychoses (loss of reality and hallucinations due to depression) that affected her concentration and energy level during class. Luckily, she had the opportunity to meet good doctors and received support from her family.

“But honestly,” says Coco, “there isn’t a digital machine or a ruler to figure out how sad you are. It depends on how well doctors and patients interact with each other.” Some patients might seriously harm themselves and are regarded as severely depressed persons. On the other hand, some have very minimal warning signs and may suppress themselves.

Coco says a lot of people may think mental illness is distant from them. “For example, in Asian regions such as Hong Kong, we might feel like it’s a taboo, and it’s like ‘Are
you telling people you are crazy?’ or ‘Are you going to a mental hospital?’” She says, “People stay away from the patients but those patients can recover most of the time. On the other hand, there are also patients who don’t tell others about their mental illnesses so that they won’t get mistreated or triggered.”

“I hate it when people think that mental illness is a punishment from God because certain countries used to have that perception in the 15th to 16th centuries,” Coco says, “People might perceive mental illness as god’s punishment or testing. Now that we have medications and explanations for it, I hope that more people can be more open-minded to mental illness.”

Clara, another secondary student, also shares a similar experience. The student studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong once suffered from an eating disorder. She says such a mental illness has brought her both pros and cons. Gaining 40lbs due to binge-eating, her self-confidence was brutally defeated. This disease troubled her a lot, making her unable to attend school and crying every day with fluctuating emotion. “I have experienced the extremes of voices around telling you that you’re not perfect enough, you have to try harder.”

- Clara, a student recovering from eating disorder
dangerous”. 42.3% stated they fear mental illness patients and think that they are “weird, unstable, and ignorant”.

Mr Mak Wing-fai, the school’s social worker points out a possible source of people’s misconception about mental illness. “Usually, we understand mental illness from the TV, where it is often being exaggerated,” says Mak. How the media depict these patients skews the public’s perception heavily, for humans tend to be more sensitive to dramatic contents.

“In addition, everyday jokes, especially among children, are also a predictable factor in stigmatising those with an illness,” adds Mak. This results in a low acceptance of these patients, as they are always conceived along with the stereotypes.

Nearly half (48.1%) of our survey respondents stated that they would avoid contacting these patients whenever possible. Yet still, around a quarter (27.9%) said that they would try to initiate contact. A majority (80.8%) would even try to help patients they know.

Mak points out that the public perception of mentally ill patients is simply that they’re not behaving like everyone else, and it is all about social norms. This is made worse by how mentally healthy people could not experience the trouble one is going through with a mental illness. “Very often, the symptoms of those in need mentally, are the reasonable reaction of a normal
human being when faced with unreasonable, illogical situations,” Mak emphasises. “They’re just one of us, but we could never perceive nor imagine their difficulties in life.”

Having a low acceptance in the society regarding the myths, it is quite arduous for patients to open up their perturbation to others. Less than half (45.2%) of our survey respondents would try to solve the problem themselves when they are having doubts about their mental health, while only 16.3% would seek help from professionals.

“At school, seldom does a student take the initiative and walk-in to ask for help,” says Mak. “Rather, a case of possible mental illness is more often discovered by physical symptoms and abnormal actions. Even if a possible case is referred to me, the student would still, to a certain degree, be reluctant to talk about their experiences in the past.”

Mak adds that support to those in need, especially people close to us, is very important. “It doesn’t need to be big or fancy. ‘I’m here, I’m listening’ is often enough.”

There are still a lot of unknowns and debates in the diagnosis of mental disorder, but there are some universally acknowledged ways to help maintain good mental health and this implies to everyone based on the saying ‘There is no health without mental health’.

Matthias Chung, a clinical psychologist trainee, points out that the trend of people struggling with mental illness has become more and more serious nowadays. According to a survey conducted by Mind HK, a mental charity committed to improving awareness and understanding of mental health in Hong Kong, it is shown that 61% of Hong Kong adults currently suffer poor mental health, with 1 in every 7 people developing a common mental disorder in their lifetime. Moreover, the number of children and adolescent psychiatric patients has increased by 50% from 2011 to 2016. Therefore, it is high time for mental health awareness to be aroused in the city.

Our interviewee Coco would like to say to all who are suffering from mental illnesses, “It doesn’t really harm you to seek help. If you suspect it (having mental illness) but are not sure, perhaps you can find a social worker, therapist or a counsellor. It might be less expensive than consulting a psychiatrist. If you are certain you have mental illnesses, seek help from a psychiatrist.”

“We need to accept ourselves first to understand that mental illness should not be a taboo,” she adds.

Edited by Paris Ma, Wing Yu Yip