

Chinese University

# BULLETIN

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## Coming Closer at a Distance

Snapshots of CUHK in the pandemic





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# Coming Closer at a Distance

Snapshots of CUHK in the pandemic

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There is no turning back to the world before the coronavirus. COVID-19 is a great leveller that takes things out of our hands. It redistributes wealth, recasts our ways of living and reminds us of our common mortality irrespective of race, class and age. The incredibly infectious virus has closed borders and all of a sudden nations and nations so much linked by trade and air routes are separated by various quarantine measures.

While the politico-economic heat the world feels may last as long as the virus does, the way we live our lives, learn, work and socialize may be changed forever. In the time of the pandemic, everyone keeps his or her distance and the crowd truly become lonely. The decentering process started by the Internet in the last century is now nearing completion. W.B. Yeats said, 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'. The new-found freedom courtesy of a

digital and atomistic lifestyle can be emancipating as well as frightening. Institution fades; the individual comes to the fore. The ordinary men and women, boys and girls, find a new rhythm in online learning or working from home. When the physical goes virtual, one can be master of oneself at a click. In the age of knowledge in abundance and in open access and when the veracity or fakeness of news cannot be assumed without careful fact-checking, independent thinking becomes a gift, a duty or ultimately a test for those who survive and thrive. Distancing breeds detachment, and detachment breeds introspection, a penetrating and unmediated introspection that takes us back into ourselves and our relationships with others and the world. The ability to read and see, think and tell the real from the fake, determines whether we sink or swim in the sea of knowledge and guides us away from the maddening crowd.



COVID-19 has completed the makeover to Education 4.0—a thorough integration of technology in teaching and learning. Online courseware like Coursera and edX have been around for a while, but it is social distancing that makes computer literacy a survival skill of the learners. Students in different time zones can click on teaching videos anytime and learn at their own pace. The teacher-student hierarchy disappears: the focus has been shifted from the teachers to the students who, with independence suddenly thrust upon them, are to take full responsibility for their own learning. Literally then, the harder one works, even when confined to home, the more rewarding the education will be. New

knowledge and experiences are freely available on the Internet. Many online talks and education programmes, mushrooming in times of lockdown, have made the virtual world a marketplace of eye-openers and intellectual nutrients—the Heart to Heart Talks by the Art Museum and the Arts and Humanities Conversations by the Faculty of Arts are just two examples.

The pendulum of education swings from classroom to cloud, but it does not stop there. The morphing of classes into streaming or recorded videos prompts a rethink on the nature of education: can a stack of videos replace face-to-face teaching? Is education merely knowledge transmission? The answer given by most interviewees in this issue is an unwavering ‘no’. However advanced technology gets, the human touch remains core to teaching and learning. Face-to-face interactions are irreducible if we are to deliver the full wonders of education—cultivation of virtues and meaningful, lifelong relationships.

Liberating as it is, romanticizing mobile learning has its perils. On the other side of freedom lies the abuse of freedom. Acts of academic dishonesty—freeriding in group projects and ghostwriting—are not unheard of, and they become easier and more tempting in a virtual learning environment. As waves of infections strike the city, classes reschedule and contact hours shrink, it falls squarely on the learners themselves, not the curriculum, to take education in their own hands.



Photo by adalam@cuhkimages & gloriang@cuhkimages

# Resonances across the Distance

**Wong Nim-yan**

Associate Professor,  
Department of Chinese Language and Literature

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**W**ong Nim-yan's gentle voice and graceful demeanour belie a woman of character and assertiveness. What would the sparks be when the professor well-versed in classical and modern literature took on online teaching?

'My fear is precisely that all sparks would be lost. On knowing that online teaching was to become the norm, I was taken aback. As a colleague put it half-jokingly: are we becoming YouTubers?' Most students keep their cameras off during Zoom classes. It must feel discouraging for teachers to speak to rows of black thumbnails, but Wong saw it in a different light: 'It is easier for me to stay focused. In face-to-face classes, I feel disrupted when students talk to one another. Now they can send private messages, or type their questions in the chat room.' Humanities students tend to be more reticent and reluctant to ask questions; remote learning is a great way for them to raise their hands virtually and have vibrant discussions. While the medium is cool, the exchanges thereon can be quite heated.

Another surprise was increased attendance. Very few had skipped classes even in the second half of the semester when assignments and exams piled up.

'It was totally unexpected. Distance learning, albeit virtual, offers a way for us to meet each other at a designated time. This sense of togetherness—'we are together, and are attending the same lecture at the same time'—is valuable. Meeting online makes us realize that face-to-face interaction is not something that can be taken for granted.' Teaching from home also brings out the beauty of the human touch and human voice. 'Now I take great delight in listening to my students' voices. After I have talked to a blank screen for the entire class, some students would turn on their cameras to say goodbye and thank you. I never knew "bye bye" could be such music to my ears.'



Speech mirrors one's thoughts; our self-presentation similarly tells the regard we have for our very selves. Wong uses ring lights favoured by influencers in her virtual classes. Speaking of those ghastly faces shown up in weird angles or dim light, the Department's teacher-adviser could not hide her disappointment and amusement. She might even throw in a few words of advice, 'What happened to those bright young ladies and men I used to know? Why don't you pop up your computer a little, or find a place where there's more light?' She would then add, 'We speak through the camera as well. It tells others how they should think of ourselves.'

With the pandemic raging, Wong did her share of soul-searching. 'What is education? Can recorded contents supplant education? I don't think so. The sense of realness is irreplaceable,' she said. 'But the students as well as the teacher have a role to make it real, as every student is unique in his or her problems or ideals. If under the pandemic we have managed to give out any amount of knowledge via the web, then credit must be given to every student, for his or her effort and understanding and for going all the way with us. As a teacher working in the pandemic, I think I owe every one of my students a vote of thanks.'

On a campus that practises distancing, Wong is missing the warmth of physical presence. She took her undergraduate course on thesis writing as an example. 'It is a war fought by seven or eight people together. In person we can support, press, persuade and criticize each other,' she mused. 'The energy is powerful, something Zoom cannot replicate.'



It was early afternoon and -15°C in Kazakhstan, while autumn still lingered in Hong Kong with whiffs of heat wafting in at the close of the day. ‘The weather is pretty harsh in my country, but I got used to it. It is where I was born,’ said **Yerlan** on the other end of Zoom with a guileless smile. Dressed in a deep navy hoodie jacket, the young Kazakh had a subdued demeanour. The thick eyebrows above his serene eyes, though, suggest fortitude and self-restraint that forge the soul of his people.

With flights back home twice cancelled due to the pandemic, the 19-year-old finally arrived home in October last year after a 32-hour trip—in time for his mother’s birthday and ahead of the long dark winter that often causes flight delays. On his Zoom learning experience, he was markedly satisfied: ‘I get used to it. Education is knowledge transmission; I get quality education through Zoom.’ But the eerie time makes self-discipline even harder. Students were detached from real life and the pressure was lower. ‘After one or two months, I realized I won’t succeed if I have no discipline,’ he blushed, a timid smile coming to his lips.

His days at CUHK were not a lifeless steppe. Stranded in Hong Kong over the summer, he was allowed to stay in Morningside, his own college. ‘I did not feel isolated, as there had been some Russian-speaking friends in the University, and friends from different countries as well.’ In the intervals when the social distancing rules were relaxed, he would work out at the University Sports Centre or play basketball with friends, observing the anti-pandemic rules and etiquette while having some quality time.

When opportunities don’t come by according to plan, one goes after new opportunities. Urged to apply what he learnt

and make good use of his time by his family, Yerlan wrote to **Darwin Lau**, assistant professor in the Department of Mechanical and Automation Engineering whom he had got acquainted with in the major allocation online briefing. He got a quick reply, and was invited to take part in the renovation project for the Yard for Environmental Sustainability. Thus he landed his first job in Hong Kong as a student helper, where he linked various robots to the system that was to build a brick installation at the Yard—a building process supposedly free of human intervention.

The stoic youth thought the safety rules in the University logical and rational. ‘It is important to be active in community and at the same time to be aware of other people. Everyone is responsible for himself as well as others.’ His joy at the sight of snow outside while we talked, though, betrayed his innate playfulness.

‘The sun is out and there is snow all over the place,’ he exulted. ‘How I wish to go outside now.’



## Yerlan Turtayev

Year 2 mechanical and automation engineering major



Photo by gloriang@cuhkimages

# Till We Meet Again

**Hugo Lam**

Year 4 physics major

Amid the fourth wave of COVID-19 in November, the golden graduation marquees withstood the wind and hummed farewell songs for graduands strolling between the Beacon and The University Mall. However boisterous the graduands' laughter was, a sense of loneliness permeated the bleakness of the occasion. Basking in the afternoon sunbeam, a tall young man strode leisurely to the venue with a heavy briefcase. Inside his briefcase were teaching materials prepared for his secondary school students.

Aspiring to be a teacher, he focused on developing a novel pedagogy to reduce students' misunderstandings of physics in his dissertation. Throughout November, he taught his Form 4 students thrice a week: two online lessons and one face-to-face class. He taught, in his words, by 'giving examples, sharing his knowledge, and letting students think for themselves.'

**Hugo** is a student himself. Having started his online classes in the second term of Year 3, he found asking questions and discussions not as direct and convenient as in brick-and-mortar classes. 'My classmates wouldn't stop raising hands in regular lectures. They asked professors questions during breaks and after lectures. Physics is a difficult subject; key concepts must be immediately grasped or clarified. If your questions are not answered at the very beginning, you won't be able to go on.' Now students ask questions in the online chat room. The queries, which keep rolling down, are often too overwhelming for professors to respond to all at once.

During the third wave of COVID last summer, he was taking a course which required him to perform a short experiment on thermoelectric effect. He and his fellow classmates were each allotted a station in the laboratory. In keeping with social distancing, they came back at different times. The required lab sessions of the Physics Department mainly take place in the first two years; Hugo's juniors told him in the lab sessions, the teaching assistants would do the experiments and record the processes and data for the students to do their own analyses. Hugo felt this vicarious conduct of experiments less than ideal. 'Not only the experiment result, but the process itself is crucial. This is the limitation brought on by the pandemic.'

Regarding university life, Hugo lamented that more than half of it had slipped from his hands. He should have been

enjoying his hostel life at the fully residential CW Chu College. Now the College's graduation photo day, as well as the Service Team summer camp for secondary students, had all vanished into thin air. The orientation camp had turned into a one-day online event. 'Online interaction is weird. It's not easy to play interactive games online except chit-chatting. Private gatherings could be an alternative, but there was the ban on social gathering.'

Summer internship is another regret. Good at planning and managing his own affairs, he kept sending out job applications in his Year 3 summer holidays, hoping to land a teaching post. His efforts, though, were in vain. He gathered that many companies had cut internship vacancies. 'An institution providing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses for children had only two teaching assistant openings. Unfortunately my application wasn't successful,' he observed calmly.

Regrets make us more grateful for what we have. Hugo feels the fragility of interpersonal relationships in the absence of social contact. 'It's hard to stay connected. Social distancing is not just physical, like you and me sitting apart now,' he sighed. 'Keeping apart has made us aliens to one another. It is a harsh reminder for us to make the most of our getting together, and to explore something new together whenever we can. I'm about to graduate and it's no longer easy to meet up for meals like we did in the past. I've lost so much experience and so many memories with friends because of the pandemic. University isn't merely about studies; it is about experiencing life.' As the last word fell, a shade of resignation passed through his face:

'I feel that I'm getting old.'

# When Lips Fail, Hearts Set In



In the age of COVID, online learning helps us break down the barriers of social distancing. But for some students with special educational needs (SEN), online learning may present hurdles we have never imagined.

One of them is **Win Chan**. Win is a student with hearing impairment and lip reading helps him understand what his teacher or a classmate is saying. Online learning presents difficulties to Win because the screen of the computer monitor is too small, and mask-wearing by teachers and classmates also makes lip reading impossible.

‘I am grateful for the many people in CUHK who have supported me. My fellow classmates are happy to share their notes with me and we also exchange learning tips. All this makes online learning easier,’ Win said.

To help students with SEN overcome the obstacles they face, the Wellness and Counselling Centre of the Office of Student Affairs is ready to lend a hand. The Office has in place a one-on-one buddy support scheme and each student in need is assigned a uShiner who offers assistance in studies and other aspects of university life adjustment.

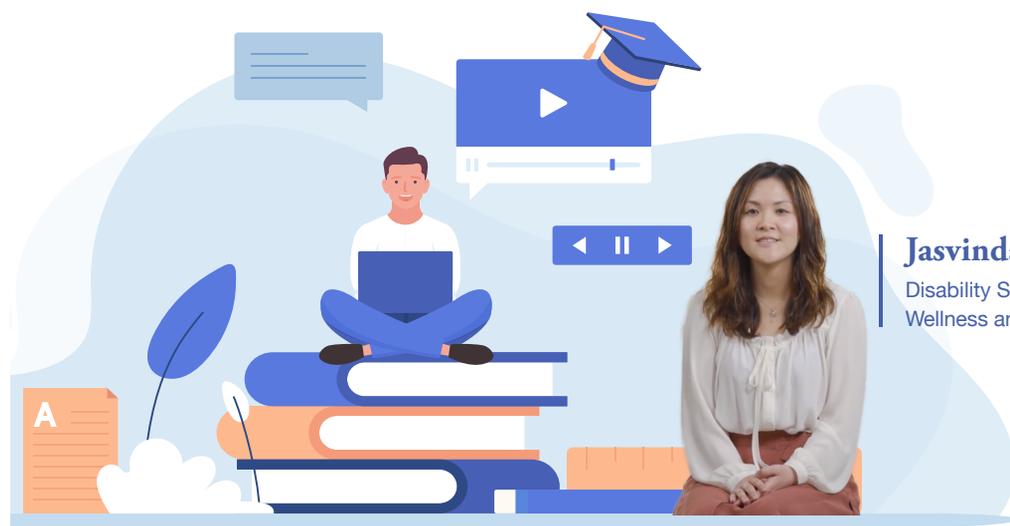
## Win Chan

Food and nutritional sciences graduand



**Jasvinda Ng**, the disability services manager of the Wellness and Counselling Centre, said that the Centre has been working with different university units to explore the development and use of learning aids to improve online learning platforms to fit the needs of students with SEN.

‘What students with SEN need may not be something very high-tech or sophisticated. All they need is collaboration among staff and students who, with a caring heart, offer them the assistance they need in learning during the pandemic,’ she said.



## Jasvinda Ng

Disability Services Manager,  
Wellness and Counselling Centre



### **Angels in Disguise**

Cleaning professionals spraying disinfectant in so-called 'deep cleaning'. In the year past, CUHK had a few members catching the new coronavirus. Upon receiving the news, the Estates Management Office (EMO) would follow up their whereabouts on campus and hire professional cleaners to thoroughly clean and disinfect the places in which they worked, studied or visited. Offices, corridors or lifts frequented by close contacts would receive fogging and 1:99 diluted bleach from EMO colleagues



# For Whom the Phone Chimes





‘Understand what you are getting at,’ said Prof. **Isabella Poon** who had been figuring out what picture we had been trying to take of her, while heeding the requests of the photographer. With backgrounds in mathematics and statistics, the officer of the University who is chiefly responsible for its missions in education wields logical thinking in analysing issues and shares her thoughts on the solutions when she has resolved the intricacies.

At nine o’clock in the evening of 31 January 2020, CUHK announced that all teaching would go online. Poon received a call at about 10 pm from Prof. **Rocky Tuan**, Vice-Chancellor, who had just finished a meeting with other university presidents. He related the doubts on online teaching expressed at the meeting. But after listening to Poon, his mind should have been put to ease. She had been as reassuring as she was persuasive, as her opinions and reassurance come from a firm grasp of facts and her penetrating power of observation.

Even if it’s doable, to move the weekly 8,000+ activities online would take mammoth effort. Within the two weeks from the announcement to the commencement

of the term, Poon and colleagues from the Information Technology Services Centre (ITSC) had worked many nights and days on defining issues, fleshing out solutions, formulating policies and apportioning responsibilities for execution. Some of the issues arose from their deliberations, and some were raised by the staff and students in the more than 20 workshops conducted during the period.

She recalled: ‘The issues were nefarious, touching on systems and equipment. Some students owned neither a laptop nor a tablet. We had to find some for them to borrow. The Library’s online resources. No Wi-Fi in the staff quarters. How could we ensure no interruption in teaching when a teacher is quarantined?’ It’s important to get the policies right. So the deliberations would involve the associate dean on education of each Faculty and the coordinators of compulsory programmes. Once the hardware and the policies were in place, the next thing was how well the teaching staff might take to online teaching.

‘There was no time for worries. We needed to handle it.’ The professor responded to every query from the teachers on the use of only the Zoom platform and other policy



**Isabella Poon**  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor  
(Education)

issues. She was as candid in her responses as she was quick in rendering the necessary assistance.

Competing with time, she only had few hours of sleep every day during that period. ‘Not only me, but the colleagues of ITSC also put in many hours, especially those leading the project. It was tough going, but we were driven by the wish to get it done and done well.’

Adrenaline gushed until the moment of truth on 17 February. In the first week of the digital era, she and her team stood by every day from eight in the morning to nine in the evening in front of the computers to keep watch on the logging in of teachers and students and the status of the Wi-Fi. At the same time they had set up platforms where they could immediately respond to enquiries. When

the day’s work was done, the team would meet on Zoom to take stock of the questions received and discuss the solutions. Only after that would each return to attend to matters within his or her normal portfolio.

Poon took comfort in the kind words and reassuring remarks of the associate deans and coordinators before the term commenced. Reassurance turned to jubilation in July when results of the subject surveys and teaching evaluations came in: out of a possible 6, the adjusted average was 5.3, a figure comparable to results in pre-pandemic times.

‘This number was out of our expectation. We tried very hard and had great confidence in our teachers. But an online lesson was bound to face tremendous challenges.



Such good response from the students surprised us all. Our teachers have really done an exceptional job.’ Her eyes got dewy while saying this, and I could feel her heart swell. ‘Every time I mention this, I grow proud of our teachers once more.’

Poon is a champion of technology for education. The past 11 months have taught her that technology plays an important role in university education. Every five years CUHK would formulate a strategic plan for its next stage of development. Starting from this year, the University would introduce a hybrid mode of teaching in some courses as well as offer new online courses, and consider how to make corresponding changes to lab work, internship and final year projects to make the curriculum more flexible. She said that out of the nearly 10,000 comments received

in the surveys of the second term of 2019–20, many were concerned with the lack of teacher-student interaction but at the same time an equal number had affirmed such interactions online. ‘The opinions are divided. Where interactions were thought to have improved between the students and the teachers, it might be due to the fact that the teachers had given more thought to make the lessons more engaging. Our job is to make such good practices known to more teachers and equip them with greater confidence in online teaching.’

In looking ahead, Poon has not forgotten to look back. ‘The IT and the supporting system need to be enhanced,’ she said. ‘We were in a battle mode. Now that the first battle has been won, we need to put our mind to how to do it better.’



# Despite Ebbs and Flows, the Moon Remains

## Elean Leung

Director,  
Physical Education Unit

After her first online lesson, **Elean Leung**, a veteran teacher for 25 years, lost sleep for the first time over teaching.

‘In a class of 30 students, only one of them switched on the camera. I couldn’t see my students’ reactions. I was wondering what they were doing; could they follow my movements, did they hurt themselves? I had no idea.’

Leung has the forthrightness of a sports lover who speaks up and lets her doubts be known. Subsequently, she and other teachers encouraged their students to switch on their cameras, and the atmosphere of face-to-face teaching slowly returned. ‘Switching on the cameras allows us to correct their movements and students can interact with one another.’

Online PE lessons may sound inconceivable, but Leung explained that they would only teach simple movements, such as forehands and backhands in tennis and squash. Students repeated the movements at home, which only required as little space as their opened arms. The online lessons also covered topics on sports knowledge such as hydration, long distance running and weight control. She also reviewed with the students competition tactics by showing video clips, and explained to them competition rules, culture and history. But physical education after all calls for physical training, and one-third of the time was usually spent on stretching and physical conditioning, including high intensity interval training, yoga and gym ball.

What pleases Leung is that online learning helps embolden shy students. She recounted how teachers of the Physical Education Unit would choose the suitable exercises and accompany the students to do them the whole year round. Many students tended to hold back at first, but would gradually fall in line and were finally able to complete the whole set of exercises. They would come to realize the benefits of working out, and would then become a friend and not a stranger to physical exercises.

Leung, who has been awarded numerous teaching awards, said in no uncertain terms, ‘Adapting to changes is a characteristic of the teaching profession, and sports professionals like us should not be afraid of meeting new challenges.’

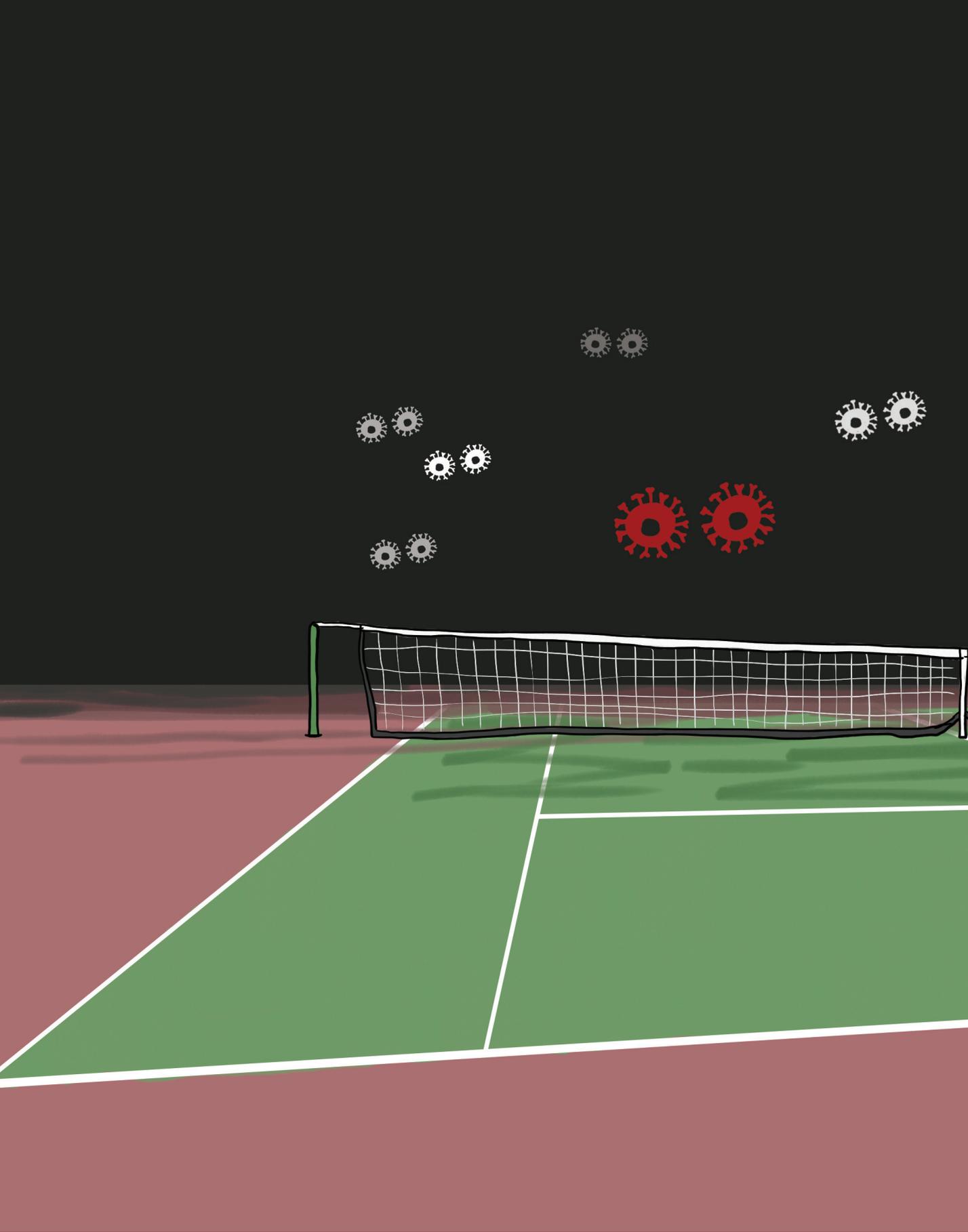


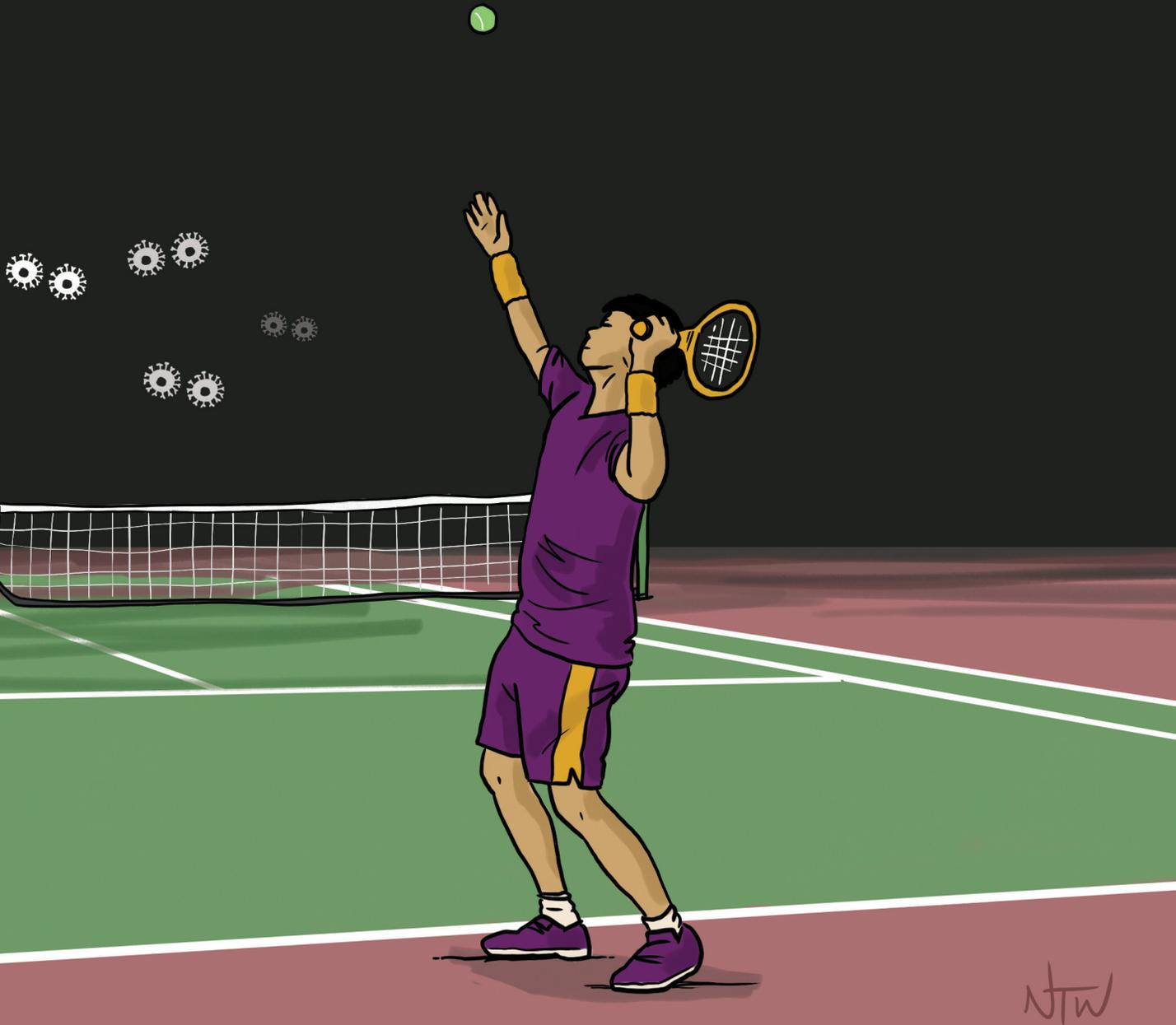
A hybrid lesson seeing students joining the class in person or via the web. On the left is a tablet on a stand, through which students may take part in class remotely

‘I am grateful to my colleagues for reviewing with me from beginning to end the whole course. It was a rewarding process. We faced difficulties together and stood by each other, and of course we also overcame those challenges as a team.’

In October 2020, the pandemic showed signs of slowing down. The Physical Education Unit therefore planned for the revival of face-to-face teaching, but the sheer number of students—a staggering 3,500 of them—gave the University pause. The team did not give up and made more careful planning and preparations. Finally, in mid-November, they were permitted to hold blended classes where the teachers would instruct those students physically present while at the same time supervising the others via the Internet with the use of tablets.

The seasoned educator, who specializes in swimming and has recently taken to running, said, ‘Online teaching is a fascinating novelty made possible by technology, and its efficacy is beyond question. But in terms of establishing a relationship between teachers and students, and promoting interaction between students, face-to-face teaching is still irreplaceable.’ Reflecting on the importance of health in the time of the pandemic, she said, ‘The first person in Hong Kong who died of COVID-19 was very young, but he had diabetes, which can lead to serious complications. Health has to be built up gradually, and you’ve got to manage your body and mind well to prepare for changes in circumstances. All this goes to show how important sports are.’





NTW



# The Hues of Humanism



## Virtual Information Day

‘Only if you were a sycamore tree would you attract the phoenix. Only if you were an ocean and not a drop would the rivers flow into you.’ \*

After I put my questions to Prof. **Wong Suk-ying** at an online interview before Christmas, she would first formulate her replies word by word, and then beam in confidence. That she could be so at ease with the world and with herself

\* In the Chinese context, the phoenix lodging on a sycamore tree has the connotation that you are what you are and will find your destination in life by ending where you belong and meeting the people you are destined to meet.



is because she had done her share of world travelling. Over the years, the words of wisdom of the elders and mentors she encountered have sunk to the bottom of her mind and lain there until happenstance calls them to the surface to be savoured, like vintage wine.

Now the apprentice has turned master. Wong's role is to initiate the uninitiated and match talent with the academic programmes on offer at CUHK. At the helm of University admissions and also a College warden herself, Wong is an excellent listener adept at reading emotions and phenomena. A researcher in educational sociology, she traverses institutions and people and has a dialectical way of thinking. She believes the beauty of Information Day lies in building a bridge for the young to see the vista on the other side, one that is full of possibilities. She explained, 'You have to feel what secondary students feel, and make them identify with and respect the University's mighty mission of pursuing knowledge and truth.' Her desk was scattered with files and documents, but she is deep down a lover of string-bound books. How does she get the University's spirit across in an age of isolation?

In early 2020 when the pandemic first struck, Wong and her team in the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid prepared for both online and offline formats of Information Day, clinging onto the tender hope that the event could after all take place face-to-face. It was June when a virtual Information Day was decided upon, and soon they met their first challenge: there were only three companies around the world with the knowhow and reputation to host large-scale virtual events and exhibitions. 'The world has not prepared for events to move online,' Wong sighed. Among the three companies, one of them declined right away because they had too much on their plate; the other one charged an exorbitant fee. At last, the team engaged an American company to build the virtual platform. Everything was coordinated online. 'We had no actual contact, relying just on WhatsApp messages, phone calls and emails.'

And remote control was the least of Wong's worries. She was more concerned that participants could not step on the campus turf and feel its rolling landscape for themselves.



## Wong Suk-ying

Associate Vice-President and  
Director of Admissions  
and Financial Aid

Photo by adalam@cuhkimages & maymui@cuhkimages

‘In recent years, CUHK has been the institution selected by the most JUPAS candidates as their first choice. The physical campus, with its shrubs and streams, is our edge that makes students see us as an ideal place of learning, but we cannot re-create these features online.’ Wong said the closeness of teachers and students that is so conducive to the University’s hallmark whole-person education is another advantage. Without face-to-face contact, the University might appear in a lesser light to those who have never spent a day on its campus.

There were uncertainties to be overcome in constructing a virtual campus, and the Information Day saw a mishap as well. Peak hours were in the morning. After 10:30 am, the server of the American company was down and all live talks were disrupted. The team called the company to fix it right away, and everything worked again at 11 am.

‘I was a bit touched by this. Despite the glitch, we were not inundated by urgent or angry telephone calls, no one pointed a finger, and no participants even mentioned this in the survey afterwards. Having been teaching online for some time, the professors are used to glitches and hiccups. However rosy students may have made the world out to be, they accept it may not be a perfect place,’ Wong confessed.

The Information Day was a marathon of 270+ live webinars and 150 Q&A sessions. ‘For an event of such magnitude, did all the participating units work together?’ I asked, not without a sense of mischief.

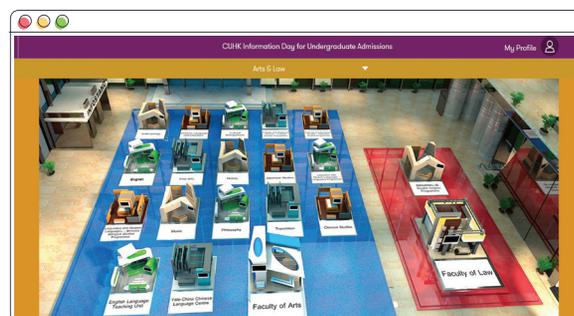
‘I must say—’ The answer that followed was as unexpected as it was expected, ‘Colleagues were all so very understanding and cooperative. They worked hard not just for the outcome.’ Visitors to the Information Day, especially HKDSE candidates, usually spend the most time touring the academic departments. ‘But the nine Colleges and non-academic units, such as the I-CARE Centre and the Office of Academic Links, also put in their all. The responses were so overwhelming that our virtual houses were full and we had to split the last house for three departments to share.’ Before the Information Day, Wong’s team organized a series of workshops to illustrate how the virtual platform operates. ‘Colleagues were meticulous and patient, squeezing every bit of detail out of us. The administrative staff practised and rehearsed with the professors to make sure everything goes according to plan on the day,’ she said.

Virtual events are good because they have far-reaching impact. A student from Africa enquired in detail about the curriculum and the local education system. On the other hand, the Information Day also summoned teachers and students’ creative prowess. ‘In the past,

participants could touch a physical robotic arm. Now it becomes an animation, which is interesting.’ However, in a virtual space, one can hardly gauge the feelings of the other. The virtual Information Day recorded a footfall of around 23,000, but the actual number of visitors and its effectiveness are difficult to measure. ‘How long did they stay? Were they leaving the computer on and going out for games, just dropping in from time to time?’ She wondered, ‘If the participants were on campus, they might remember their communication and encounters with others better, and we could manage the impression of the University more deftly.’

If student engagement is to be done online, Wong knows the University could not rely on one single experience of the Information Day. The team has to come up with topics to catch students’ attention and refresh their interest from time to time, and all events must be carefully planned. ‘We keep connecting with students, who are to filter the information and choose for themselves.’

Having spent years abroad, the chief officer of University admissions keeps coming back to Chinese culture in her private moments. She is a big fan of the classical Chinese writer Ouyang Xiu. As a big-hearted figure of prominence in the political and literary circles of the Northern Song dynasty, Ouyang poured the sentiments privy to himself into his poetry. From the poetry she learned that more than any worldly success, what’s being felt here and now is more important. With love, reason and imagination, one can live through any day, rain or shine. She has climbed many hills and seen many blossoming seasons, and stopped being troubled by the question of ‘to be or not to be’. Her eyes and mind nowadays are on who’s coming into CUHK.



Inside the virtual Information Day

From left: Chloe Wong (Student Development Executive), Irene Ng (Director) and Enoch Ng (Student Development Executive)



# Flow, River, Flow

I•CARE's springs of life

The I•CARE Centre for  
Whole-person Development



Photo by Eric Sin

For Irene Ng and her team at I-CARE, 2020 felt like a lost year. Their Floral Festival, which was to herald the coming of spring to campus, was cancelled, leaving Lake *Ad Excellentiam* just short of excellence with no one there to marvel at its blooms. Their plan to have **Joseph Sung**, former Vice-Chancellor and President and one of I-CARE's architects, to bid CUHK farewell before he sets out for his new position in Singapore also took a hit with the strict disease control measures in place. Approval for his lecture at Sir Run Run Shaw Hall was sought back in September, and yet it kept being postponed. Not ready to give up, Irene kept following up and making her case, and finally it was given the green light—only that the event, bound to take place in January 2021, was postponed again, this time *sine die*.

But 2020 only *felt* like a lost year after all. 'We don't want to be cut off and lose contact with our students, so we carried on with our interviews and training in the first half of the year, only they now took place on the Internet,' said Irene. The team had in fact been thinking of migrating to the cloud for some time as the pandemic broke out: the idea was conceived when the first term of the 2019–20 academic year was cut short amid the social unrest. Thankfully, the enthusiasm for I-CARE events among those within and outside the University had not abated. Invitations to speakers for their six Secret Talks were readily accepted. There was even a guest for one of their trainings, who, diagnosed with cancer, stuck with the programme and only broke the news upon its completion.

'I feel so blessed for all the support I-CARE gets,' said Irene.

Currently, the Centre offers online training for the Community Research Scheme (CRS) and the Social Enterprise Startup Scheme (SESS) in the first term and

focuses on fieldwork and team activities in the second. At the heart of the I-CARE projects, though, is the opportunity to explore the many facets of life outside the classroom—and what better way to do this than to be with an actual person? **Enoch Ng**, coordinator of the CRS and the SESS, feels precisely that the chemistry of being physically together is lost in translation as things go virtual.

‘Besides gaining knowledge, participants of the SESS got to know their peers and alumni. They came together naturally as they took part in competitions in teams, talking to and learning about one another without much need for our intervention. This year, we did a lot to encourage the same kind of exchanges on the cloud, setting up Connect Wall and Zoom chats, yet none of them was as good as face-to-face interactions.’ The web is great for communication that goes one-way or involves simple Q&As, Enoch opined, and the turnout of an online event was comparable to that of a physical one. When it comes to fostering deeper mutual understanding, however, it is not exactly the ideal medium.

Another challenge online activities pose is how they almost require technical skills matching those of a professional TV crew member. It is remarkable how the past year has turned **Chloe Wong**, the student development executive in charge of the Dialogues on Character and workshops on compassionate communication, into a pro-streamer managing the button panel and cables on the microphone and the camera.

‘I was fiddling with the switches and cables every day, learning how to avoid poor contact and noises. I let muscle memory do the work. I wanted to know the drill so well that I could do the whole thing with my eyes closed,’ said Chloe with a toughness in her gentle voice.

Being tough, indeed, was important as the team seemed to run into problems every step of the way. With just half of the

I-CARE activity room being covered by Wi-Fi, Chloe has to set up a cable extension across the room every time there is a webcast before returning to her other position as the sound engineer. And of course, the team had to have the equipment in the first place before they could even start building the set. They had two months before going live, and with the pandemic disrupting supply chains, it took them one and a half months just to get hold of the livestreaming device. And when they were finally ready for an interview with top cyclist **Sarah Lee**, the Hong Kong Sports Institute was locked down. Now that the star of the show could not be with them, they had to come up with a new plan overnight.

Until the on-air light goes off, it is really not the time to celebrate. But as often as things go south, Chloe knows she has her colleagues to fall back on. She said she had come to know her colleagues better than she might have had it not been for the pandemic.

When what used to be solo work was about to get out of hand, even the usually quiet ones in the team would come to Chloe’s aid, alerting her to whatever issues there might be as they sat through the webcasts together.

Apart from live streaming, technology has gifted us with simultaneous interpretation.

‘Having limited resources, I-CARE conducts most of its activities in Cantonese. With the University’s Zoom platform allowing simultaneous interpretation without any extra equipment, we figured out we could ask some of our students to do the interpretation,’ said Enoch. As Irene explained, simultaneous interpretation usually involves an interpreter listening to the event through headphones in a separate room and delivering the interpretation from there. Viewers who wish to hear the interpretation will need to switch to the correct channel and receive it through their headphones.

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MS. IRENE NG  
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Now it is possible for the interpreter to follow the event as it plays on the screen and interpret through the microphone, and the audience could switch between the original and the interpreted with a click. The Chung Chi colleagues running the weekly College assemblies were the veterans the I-CARE team turned to for learning this new trade.

‘They are the first to do this, so we went straight to them for pointers,’ said Irene. ‘This shows how important it is to have teamwork not just at I-CARE but also among the different units of CUHK. It’s how we can improve and make our activities better.’

Under the pandemic, I-CARE found itself a new role of distributing hygiene supplies. Other than the staff, both

current and previous participants of the CRS were involved in the task. From packaging to delivery, the work was taken care of by a most attentive group of students.

‘They would start by taking a good look at the janitors’ rosters so that the supplies could reach the most people. Then they would see if the masks and the hand sanitizers fit everyone’s needs and if management had stopped people from using externally sourced masks,’ said Irene. As there happened to be a great demand for masks, the students later took the matter into their own hands and did the sourcing and delivery independently of I-CARE.

And this is how we watch over one another—with a love that comes spontaneously, a love that asks no questions.



Photo by Keith Hiro



*Zigzagging to the New Normal*

# The Rocks and the Falls

## Alumni Homecoming and *The CU Heart and CU Mind*

### | Alumni Affairs Office

The sharing given by the four organizers of the Alumni Affairs Office (AAO) at the Alumni Association Centre is comparable to a crisp autumn day—to them, 2020 was not an *annus horribilis*, but rather a year of hope and opportunities. Comprising 14 people, this small team has trodden a precarious and uncertain path. As luck would have it, they achieved marvellous results: 3,300 people registered for the online Alumni Homecoming event, they developed a theme song for the occasion, and they enlisted a groundbreaking number of donors for the CUHK Alumni Torch Fund. The pandemic also made the team realize one thing: that CUHK alumni care for their alma mater, are multi-talented, and willing to stick it out through thick and thin.

‘We were pretty worried at first that our alumni would reject the idea of having the Homecoming online, but it turned out the worry was all for naught. For one thing, overseas alumni can be included, and events may be revisited. Temporal or geographical restrictions are lifted,’ said **Joy Lee**, the senior manager. The unforeseen

pandemic has sent events online, meaning the team has to spend more time to handle different kinds of tasks and follow up. ‘The single event of Homecoming was turned into a process. Beyond the event day, we had to make lots of prior contacts with different parties and curated programme revisits. Hosting the Alumni Homecoming online means catering to both overseas and local alumni and requires massive preparatory work and detailed planning,’ recalled **Daniel Cheng**, the director.

‘The most challenging aspect about online events is to keep the human touch. The Homecoming was conducted in a hybrid fashion—alumni might join online or go back to the campus and participate on the spot. It certainly makes you feel good when you can join in person, no?’ he added good-humouredly.

In terms of content, the online Homecoming followed in the footsteps of its predecessors and highlighted the development of the University. The team spent much effort in bringing the event to life, such as inviting the renowned



The CU Heart and CU Mind music video stills



From left: Joy Lee (Senior Alumni Affairs Manager), Eleanor Hui (Assistant Director), Daniel Cheng (Director) and Annie Wong (Alumni Affairs Manager)

host **Akina Fong** to introduce the latest developments around the University railway station and Area 39, as well as featuring the culinary delights and feline inhabitants on campus. ‘Previously, most of our participants were alumni who have children of their own, but more and more young alumni, especially those who graduated in the last 10 years, have been joining the Alumni Homecoming in recent years. Therefore, we have to put our heart and soul to make it as entertaining and captivating as possible,’ said **Eleanor Hui**, the assistant director.

The headliner of this year’s Homecoming definitely goes to its theme song *The CU Heart and CU Mind*. Its heart-pulling lyrics and tune, expert orchestration and performance, mellifluous moving images on video—all these made it an instant hit across the world upon first release. From scratch to hatch, the theme song only took half a year. Lyricist **Kit Wong** took the lead and managed to contact composer **Edmond Tsang** and arranger **Ron Tso** within a few hours after the green light was given for a theme song. With the power trio working their magic, the melody and lyrics of the song were whipped up. In mid-September, alumni affairs manager **Annie Wong** used three days to get in touch with 19 alumni representatives from CUHK Colleges and the Graduate School and invited them to Tsang’s studio to record the song. The vocal and instrumental performances were recorded and filmed in another three days’ time. Twenty-eight alumni and CUHK students also made cameo appearances, ranging from married couples who graduated in the 1960s and 70s to younger graduates. A young couple even had their children apply for a day off from school for a weekday shooting.

‘At that time the third wave of the pandemic was beginning to subside, so everyone was in a good mood when they

**Tune into**  
*The CU Heart and CU Mind*

original      global edition

went to the studio for recording. We rented a shuttle bus on a Sunday to take the alumni around campus for filming. I distinctly remembered they were vying with each other to take pictures with the driver and the bus, saying this “buscation” only happened once in a blue moon,’ Wong reminisced with a twinkle in her eyes. ‘The solidarity of CUHK members is truly amazing. If they have their minds set on one thing, they come together and get it done.’

The global version of *The CU Heart and CU Mind* premiered on the day of the Homecoming. The thumbnails of alumni music videos shown in the video, forming an impressive mosaic, testify to alumni’s devotion to their alma mater. At the end of September, when the pandemic raged severely across most countries, alumni were invited to submit video clips featuring their singing of the song. Despite the restrictions, the alumni thought of ways to do the recordings.

‘One alumna went to the Vancouver airport, one played piano at the Toronto seaside, one strummed a guitar in front of the White House. As Japan had strict lockdown rules, an alumna who live there visited a neighbouring shrine and recorded his singing there. The alumni living in Beijing spent a few hours driving to the Great Wall and to Tiananmen Square for filming. One even approached the Central Conservatory of Music and borrowed the *konghou* for performance,’ said Lee.

Since the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19 outbreak, the team has organized a number of online and hybrid events. In the digital age, reaching one’s audience is a proven battlefield. ‘Event promotion should not simply rely on emails and the alumni magazine. It should be down-to-earth, innovative, and keep abreast of the times. Nowadays,



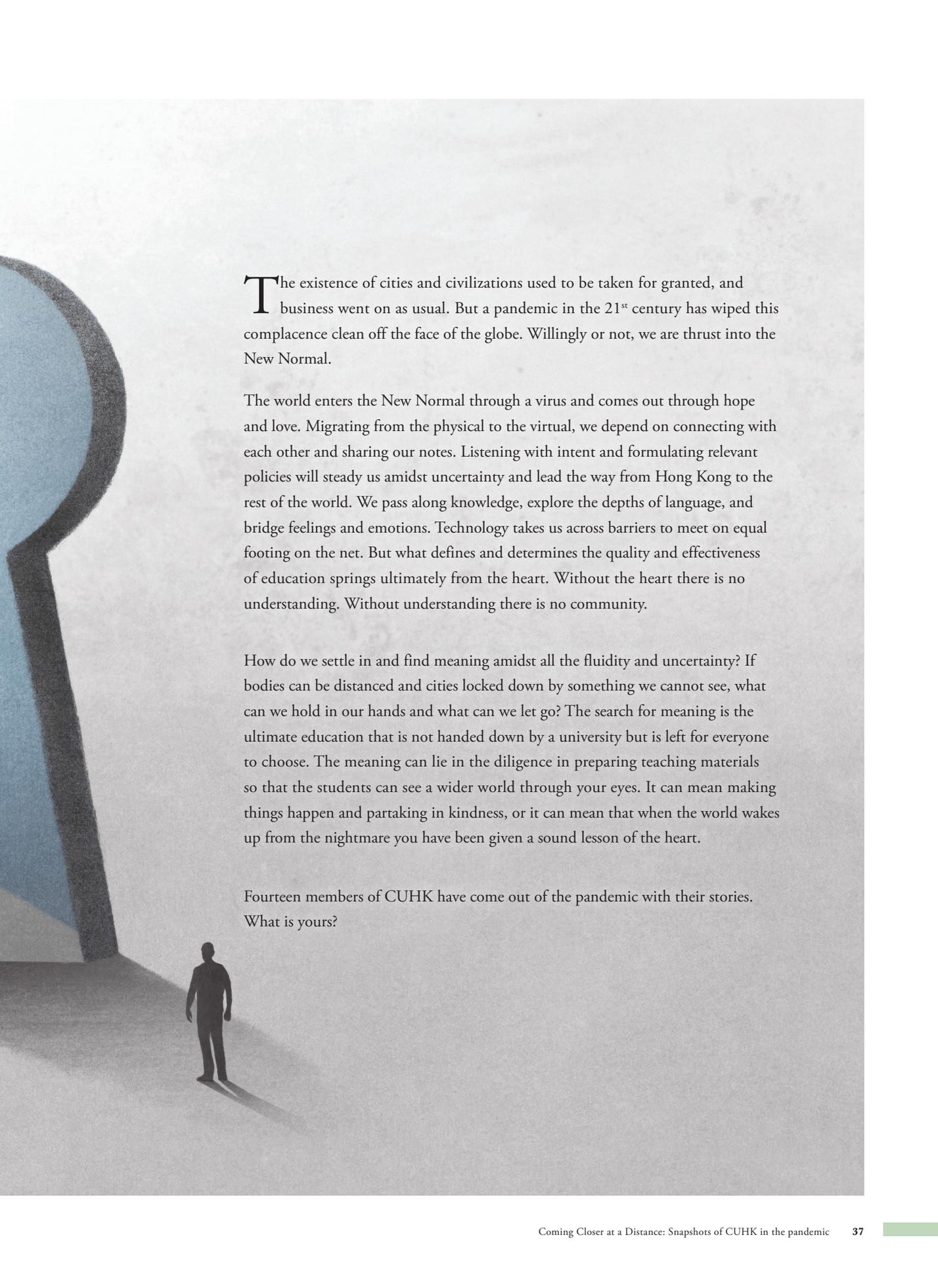
Cameras would flash at the end of each Homecoming session to capture alumni's happy faces. The entire team of the Office also takes a picture as part of its long tradition

people use various channels to receive information. To maximize our reach, we must know each platform well and make good use of them,’ Hui remarked with zeal. Messages on the Office’s Facebook page are mostly colourful images, with brief captions highlighting key events. She took the Alumni Torch Fund as another example: as face-to-face exhortation proved impossible, the committee this year fundraised through digital videos and concise email messages. The donations skyrocketed in the last two weeks and they eventually raised \$1.12 million, a figure far exceeding their expectations.

Empowered yet atomistic individuals make up the digital world. To bring them together, we must count on groups as established points of contact. ‘We have to be in contact with the 136 alumni associations of CUHK. Commitment is borne out of engagement, and engagement comes through taking part. In the first place, though, there must be meaningful causes to draw people in,’ said Hui. ‘Rome was not built in a day—the fruitful results we see today hinge on the relationships we built with our fellow alumni in the past years. AAO must continue to do its part in connecting the dots.’



# When the World Zeroes In



The existence of cities and civilizations used to be taken for granted, and business went on as usual. But a pandemic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has wiped this complacency clean off the face of the globe. Willingly or not, we are thrust into the New Normal.

The world enters the New Normal through a virus and comes out through hope and love. Migrating from the physical to the virtual, we depend on connecting with each other and sharing our notes. Listening with intent and formulating relevant policies will steady us amidst uncertainty and lead the way from Hong Kong to the rest of the world. We pass along knowledge, explore the depths of language, and bridge feelings and emotions. Technology takes us across barriers to meet on equal footing on the net. But what defines and determines the quality and effectiveness of education springs ultimately from the heart. Without the heart there is no understanding. Without understanding there is no community.

How do we settle in and find meaning amidst all the fluidity and uncertainty? If bodies can be distanced and cities locked down by something we cannot see, what can we hold in our hands and what can we let go? The search for meaning is the ultimate education that is not handed down by a university but is left for everyone to choose. The meaning can lie in the diligence in preparing teaching materials so that the students can see a wider world through your eyes. It can mean making things happen and partaking in kindness, or it can mean that when the world wakes up from the nightmare you have been given a sound lesson of the heart.

Fourteen members of CUHK have come out of the pandemic with their stories. What is yours?

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# Pandemic Proverbials



New circumstances call for a new language. Language is the handmaiden of thoughts and sentiments; it in turn penetrates and conditions the latter, shaping our understandings of self and the world. Renew your Covid-bulary with the Covid-fathered words and anecdotes below that capture the tremor and humour of our times.

*Compiled by jasonyuen@cuhkcontents*

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## anthropause, *n.*

A general reduction in human activities. Coined during the pandemic as an alternative to the anthropocentric term ‘Great Pause’, which does not take into account the fact that the impact of the pandemic is felt differently in nature.

- ▶ The **anthropause** is bringing scientists a unique opportunity to study how animals move through built environments.<sup>1</sup>





## revenge spending, *n.*

A boom in consumer spending after a period of economic inactivity. First used no later than 2006, when *The Guardian* ran a piece discussing the risk of a joint bank account being exploited by an unhappy ex-partner.

- ▶ *'We think the **revenge spending** aspect will be very strong in 2021,' Lalumière said. 'People were forced to save during confinement because, in many cases, there was nothing for them to do. Maybe they renovated their house and they accumulated loyalty points on their credit card. So there's a number of positive factors for the summer that perhaps people are underestimating.'*<sup>2</sup>

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## staycation, *n.*

A vacation taken locally, often at a hotel in the context of Hong Kong. An early use of this portmanteau of 'stay' and 'vacation' can be found in a 2006 article discussing the lack of legally mandated paid time off in the US and how difficult it was for Americans to escape from work.

- ▶ *Asda, John Lewis and Halfords said demand for tents, airbeds and stoves had surged due to the **staycation** trend.*<sup>3</sup>



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## quarantine, *n.*

A state of isolation in which one is put to contain an infectious disease. While quarantine is often enforced for 14 days in the pandemic, the Italian origin of the word, *quarantina*, means 40 days.

- ▶ *A recent study from medical journal The Lancet notes that the psychological impact of **quarantine** can be great, resulting in a range of mental health concerns from anxiety and anger to sleep disturbances, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>4</sup>*



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## curfew, *n.*

A ban on going out at night. Comes from the old French word for the act of ‘covering’ a fire and used to refer to a rule requiring fires to be put out after a certain time in the evening. Took on the current meaning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- ▶ *A **curfew** would likely draw significant pushback from businesses on the brink of financial ruin after months of pandemic restrictions.<sup>5</sup>*

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## microcough, *n.*

A cough suppressed for fear of being thought of as a patient. An Internet invention during the pandemic.

- ▶ *I was walking through the grocery store and I had a tickle in my throat but I didn't want people to think I was contagious so I let out a **microcough**.<sup>6</sup>*

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## prepper, *n.*

A person who believes an apocalypse is coming and makes such efforts as stockpiling food to prepare for it. Possibly coined by believers of a Y2K apocalypse and often used mockingly until the pandemic.

- *I've come to respect the **preppers**' ethos of survival and preparedness... We're right to be angry at the people stripping supermarkets bare and hoarding desperately needed supplies. Those people aren't preppers, however. Preppers don't engage in panic-buying. That's the whole point. That's why it is called prepping.*<sup>7</sup>

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## raise the line, *phr.*

To increase the capacity of the healthcare system, 'the line' being the threshold at which the system becomes overloaded. Often used in conjunction with 'flattening the curve', the term for curbing an explosion of new cases, which is another way to prevent the system from being saturated.



- *Manufacturing more supplies like ventilators, masks, and gloves—another key element of **raising the line**—isn't easy, exactly, but it's no mystery how the US can do it: by reengineering America's immense manufacturing power to focus on the current crisis.*<sup>8</sup>

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## untact (언택트), *adj.*

The Korean-English word for contact-free, formed by the prefix ‘un-’ and the word ‘contact’. Invented in 2017 and now seen in all conceivable contexts, the term is becoming the new standard way of life in Korea.

- ▶ *The pandemic has shown that any ‘untact’ future in South Korea will be about much more than online shopping. It will be about the equal distribution of information among all demographics, the ability to stay connected to health and social services, and the knowledge that ‘non-contact’ doesn’t mean leaving behind the vulnerable in society.*<sup>9</sup>

## *dugnad, n.*

The Norwegian word for the state where people come together and voluntarily contribute to a shared cause. Comes from the old Norse word for help and took on the current meaning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Comparable to *samfundssind*, the Danish word for community spirit.

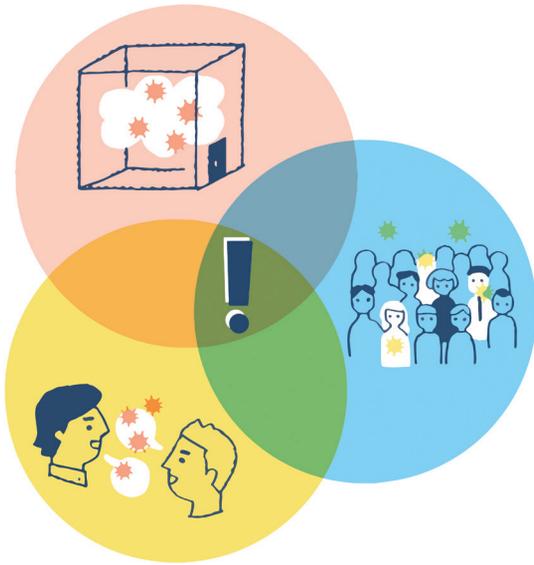
- ▶ *To tackle the spread of the virus, Norway didn’t issue a strict lockdown like France, Spain or Italy. They called on a [national] dugnad instead.*<sup>10</sup>

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## caution fatigue, *n.*

The state where one is tired of being cautious and becomes lax with taking precautions. Came into widespread use during the pandemic, though it had previously been used to describe Scottish homebuyers who were tired of refraining from making their purchases as Brexit impended.

- ▶ *Positive vaccine news could also prove to those struggling with caution fatigue that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel, as long as it’s described as a fresh source of motivation rather than an excuse to abandon other pandemic precautions.*<sup>11</sup>



## *Sanmitsu* (三密), *n.*

Named buzzword of 2020, the Japanese term refers to the three ‘C’s to be avoided during the pandemic: closed spaces, crowds and close-contact situations. Possibly borrowed by the Abe administration from the identical Shingon Buddhist term, which refers to the three ‘mysteries’—action, speech and mind—involved in achieving enlightenment. Abbot Matsumura noted these three pillars of the belief happen to be helpful in coping with the pandemic.

► *Even if foreign tourists return to Japan by that time, casino operations will be dictated by a new normal full of safety precautions to prevent a dangerous ‘sanmitsu’, or ‘three C’s’.*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt Simon, ‘The Anthropause: How the Pandemic Gives Scientists a New Way to Study Wildlife’, *WIRED*, 29 June 2020

<sup>2</sup> Frédéric Tomesco, “‘Revenge spending’ to fuel travel rebound: Montreal tourism boss”, *Montreal Gazette*, 28 November 2020

<sup>3</sup> ‘Camping gear sales jump amid staycation boom’, *BBC*, 18 August 2020

<sup>4</sup> Karen Gilchrist, ‘Psychology experts share their tips for safeguarding your mental health during quarantine’, *CNBC*, 20 March 2020

<sup>5</sup> Emiley Deruy, ‘California coronavirus curfew? Gov. Newsom considering it’, *The San Bernardino Sun*, 18 November 2020

<sup>6</sup> PeteLoaf320, ‘microcough’, *Urban Dictionary*, 25 November 2020

<sup>7</sup> J. Oliver Conroy, ‘We mocked preppers and survivalists—until the pandemic hit’, *The Guardian*, 30 April 2020

<sup>8</sup> Eliza Barclay et al., ‘The US doesn’t just need to flatten the curve. It needs to “raise the line.”’, *Vox*, 7 April 2020

<sup>9</sup> Julie Yoonnyung Lee, ‘The South Koreans left behind in a contact-free society’, *BBC*, 6 August 2020

<sup>10</sup> Ingri Berge, ‘Norwegian expression of the day: *Dugnad*’, *The Local Norway*, 15 April 2020

<sup>11</sup> Jamie Ducharme, ‘The U.S. COVID-19 Outbreak Is Worse Than It’s Ever Been. Why Aren’t We Acting Like It?’, *Time*, 19 November 2020

<sup>12</sup> ‘Editorial: Virus pandemic turning Abe’s casino dreams into a losing bet’, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 12 June 2020

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# World through the Language Glass

## The Second Gentleman of Corona

When the 81-year-old William Shakespeare from Warwickshire, England became the second person in the UK to get vaccinated, the Internet was quick to come up with puns on the Bard's works from 'The Taming of the Flu' to *Hamlet*, where it is at long last decided that 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer the needle and antigens of outrageous fortune'.

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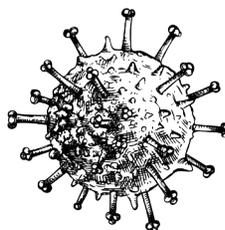
## Unprecedented Popularity

Alongside the outbreak of the pandemic is an explosion of the use of such words as 'unprecedented'. Writing for *Bloomberg*, John Authers argues that the abuse of the word is more detrimental than a mere nuisance as it has provided 'an (illegitimate) defense [to] companies or politicians with bad news to explain away, or good news to exaggerate'.

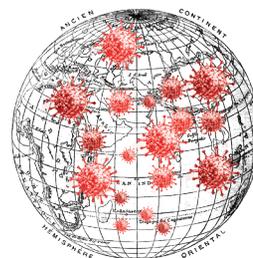
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## Masculin ou Féminin?

Authorities of languages where nouns are gendered, such as the Romance languages, have come to pin down the identities of various pandemic-related terms. For instance, the French Academy has ruled that the virus is masculine and the disease is feminine. Similarly, the Royal Spanish Academy has said that the disease is feminine. Meanwhile, the Florence-based Accademia della Crusca has found both masculine and feminine designations of the disease acceptable. While it also determined that it should be feminine, 'it's so widely referred to as masculine by now that it's too late to correct it'.



*Le Covid-19*



*La Covid-19*



Illustration by Stacy Innerst



# Appointments

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## Council Members



Mr. Dennis C.I. Chow

	Name	Period
New	Mr. Dennis C.I. Chow	27.11.2020—26.11.2023
Re-appointed	Mr. Heung Shu-fai	13.6.2020—12.6.2023
	Prof. Justin C.Y. Wu	1.8.2020—31.7.2023
	Ms. Lina H.Y. Yan	25.8.2020—24.8.2023
	Mr. Hamen S.H. Fan	10.9.2020—9.9.2023
	Mr. Alfred W.F. Hau	18.10.2020—17.10.2023
	Ms. Kelly Y.S. Chan	27.11.2020—26.11.2023

## University Officers and Senior Staff



Prof. Chan Sun-on



Prof. Fan Xitao

New	Name	Period
Head of New Asia College	Prof. Chan Sun-on	1.1.2021—31.12.2024
Dean of Faculty of Education	Prof. Fan Xitao	6.1.2021—5.1.2026

Re-appointed	Name	Period
Master of CW Chu College	Prof. Chan Wai-yee	1.1.2021 until further notice
Master of Lee Woo Sing College	Prof. Lau Wan-yee	1.1.2021—31.12.2023

## Emeritus Professors

1.9.2020



Prof. David Faure  
Department of History

1.9.2020



Prof. Xia Keqing  
Department of Physics

1.11.2020



Prof. Leung Po-sing  
School of Biomedical Sciences





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