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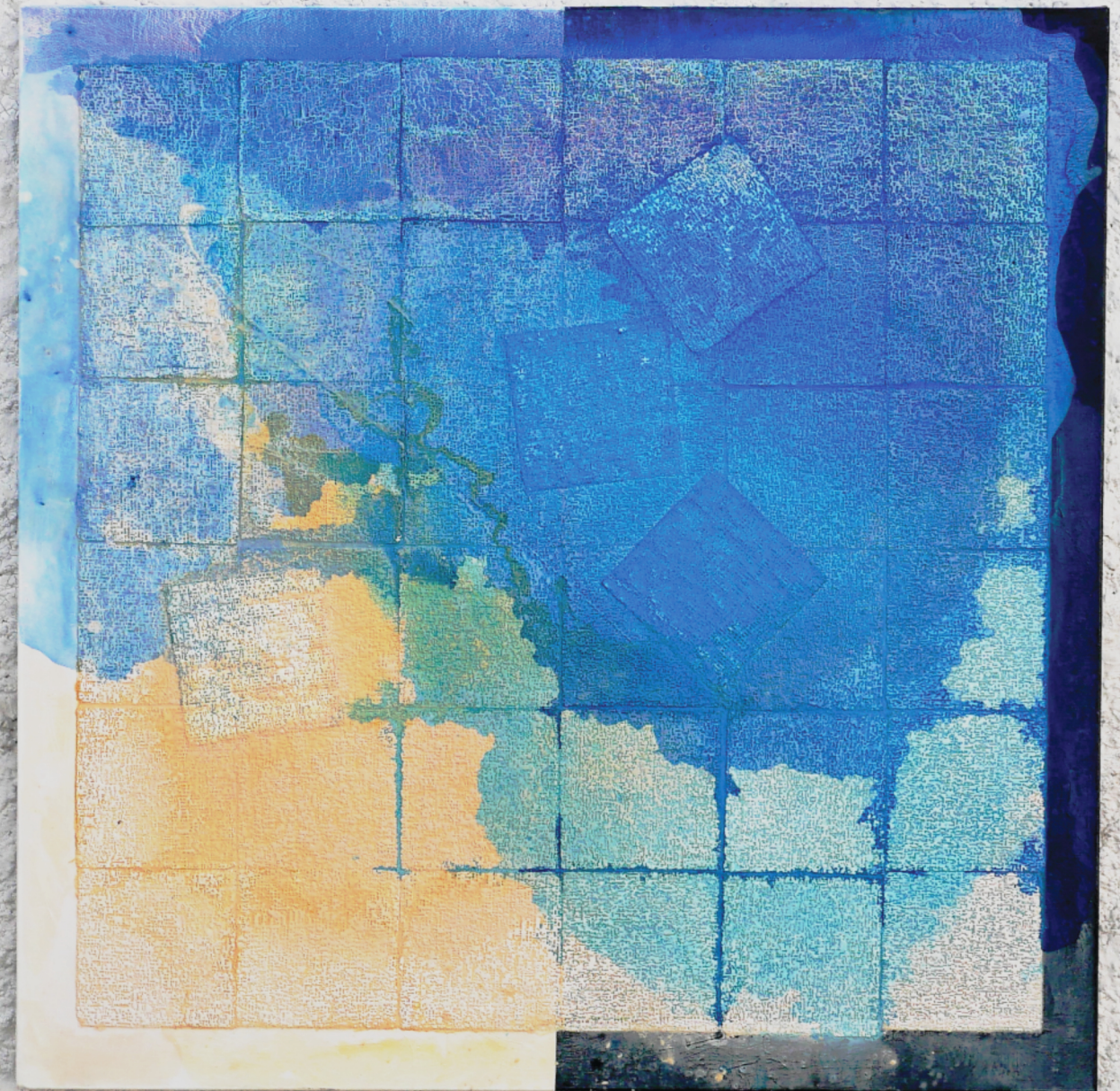
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Argyle (Clean) Timothy Cheng, 2021

Cover artwork by Harry Lau

H. EDITOR'S NOTE □ It is with great pleasure that we deliver to you the latest issue of the *Diocesan Herald*, a culmination of half a year's work from our authors, editors, designers and business managers over the past few months. This issue encompasses a wide variety of topics, from discussions on the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and the widely debated Keto Diet, to interviews asking our Diocesan predecessors the secret to their success in their respective fields.

You may have already noticed that we have deviated from our traditional design, but we have good reason for this change. The issue you are holding is the 18th of its kind. 18, being the general threshold of adulthood, has the connotation of maturity, marking each individual's wilting adolescence and blossoming aspirations. And it is by the spur of aspiration that the biggest changes in life are brought about. We at the *Diocesan Herald* aspire to produce the best reading experience, and have taken the first step towards this change.

Finally, we must thank you, dear readers, for your continued support. We would love to hear from you, so if you have any feedback for us, or would like to contribute a piece, feel free to send us an email at diocesanherald@gmail.com.

Nicholas Lam, Editor-in-Chief

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Your Phones No Longer Come With Their Chargers.

Anson Wong explains why.

ON 13TH OCTOBER 2020, Apple announced their newest model in the iPhone lineup in an online event: the iPhone 12. It boasts faster processing power, better displays than its predecessors, and 5G connection capabilities. However, the most important announcement which shocked everyone was the decision to remove the charging brick from not only their iPhone lineups but the Apple Watch models as well. Additionally, the wired earbuds were also plucked from the box, leaving behind just the paperwork, a USB-C to Lightning cable, and the iPhone itself. These accessories are now sold

separately in Apple stores. Did Apple make the right call? Or did they ruin their sales by making such an unconventional move? Let us find out.

Apple has been one of the main companies leading revolutionary new changes in the smartphone world. In 2016, Apple announced the iPhone 7, which was one of the first phones to have its 3.5mm headphone jack removed. Coupled with the wireless earbuds, the AirPods, which were released a year ago, the AirPods quickly became their most popular accessory, helping Apple make around 10 billion USD

per year. This change caused other well-known smartphone manufacturers such as Samsung and OnePlus to drop the headphone jack and sell their own brand of wireless earbuds to try and replicate Apple's success.

This time, it is no different. Dropping the charging brick is certainly a bold move by Apple, given that no other smartphone company has done this before. However, with this risk comes many benefits. Apple markets this decision as an environmental one, claiming they will cut over 2 million metric tons of carbon emissions annually and greatly reduce e-waste. But first, what is e-waste? E-waste refers to discarded electronic components, which are generally devices with a circuit board in them. E-waste is much more dangerous than normal waste because many circuit boards contain harmful metals such as lead and beryllium, which could cause health and environmental problems if not handled and recycled properly. Apple claims that there are 700 million Lightning headphones and over 2 billion Apple power adapters circulating in the world, not even including third-party accessories. The data goes to show the massive amount of e-waste that would be produced if Apple does not put in the effort to stop the trend. However, because the charging brick and earbuds are now locked behind a paywall, the demand for them will be reduced, thus decreasing e-waste caused by the disposal of chargers and earbuds when people buy a new phone.

Overall, this decision paints Apple's image as a company that cares about the environment, making for good PR and acting as a pull factor to draw in customers.

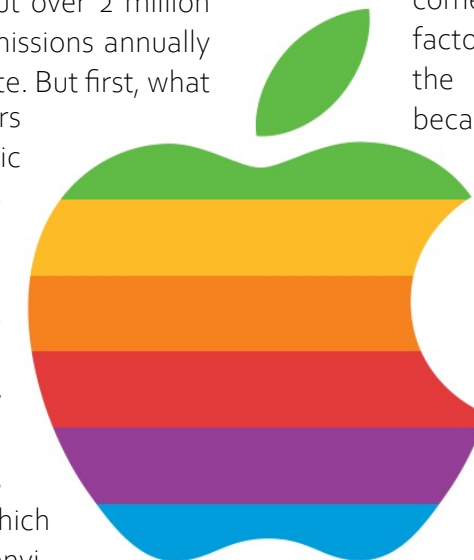
Furthermore, the decision to remove the accessories from the box reduces costs for Apple. According to an interview with The Verge, Gene Muster—a managing partner at the venture capital firm Lous Ventures—estimates that Apple experienced a gross profit of approximately 1% per phone after the charging brick removal. This revenue

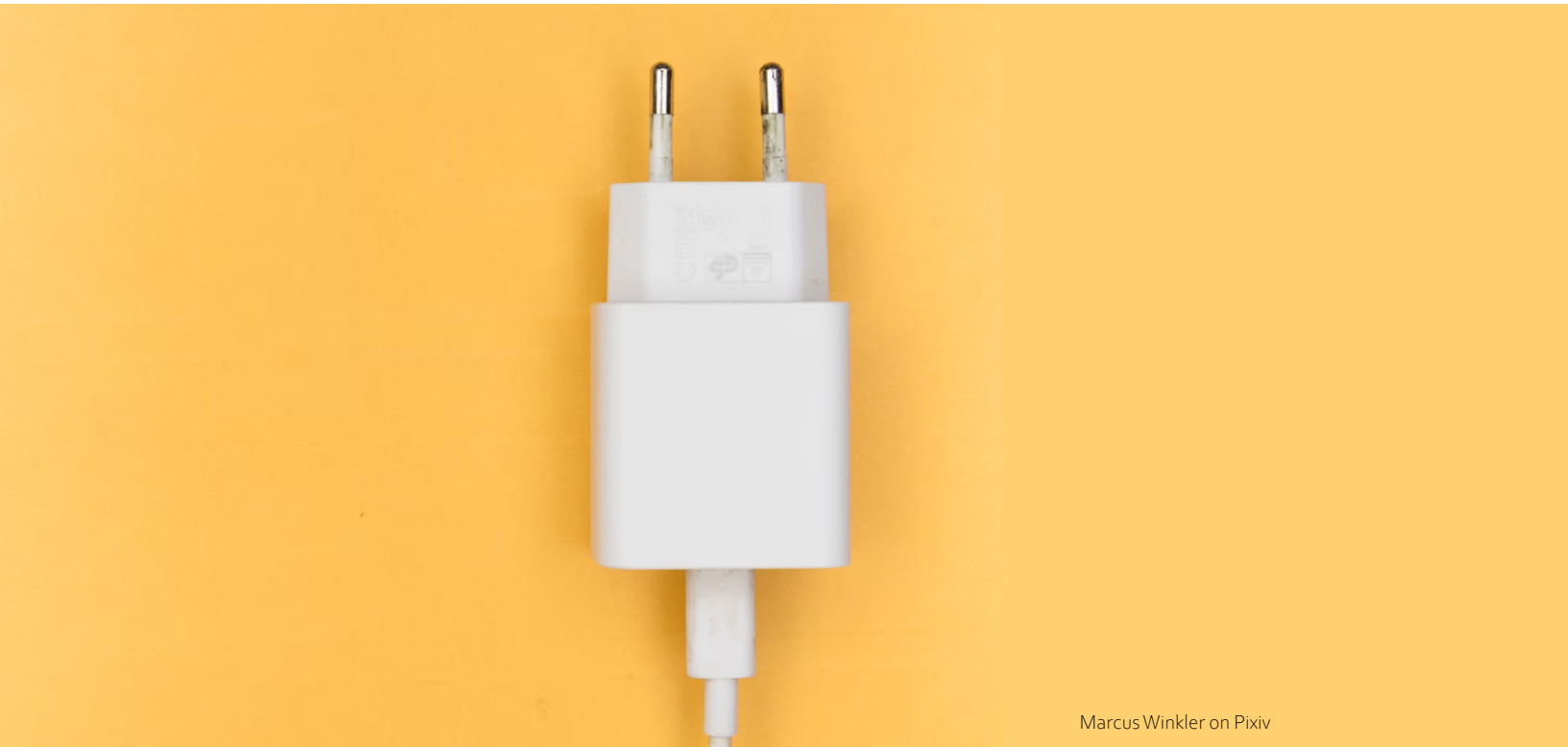
comes from a few different factors. Firstly, the demand for the accessories has dropped because of the change.

Therefore, Apple does not have to produce as many chargers compared to before, ultimately reducing raw material and labor costs. Secondly, the smartphone box is now much smaller after pulling out the charger and the earbuds. According to

Apple, 70% more units can fit into one shopping pallet. This reduces transportation costs and carbon emissions. Finally, the smaller form factor that the box comes in brings down packaging material costs. 1% more profit may seem very little, but given the popularity of iPhones, this decision will surely make Apple tens of millions, or even billions of dollars.

This decision, however, also comes with its downsides. When the news was first released to the public, there was immense backlash from online communities. Many





believed Apple’s decision was not due to environmental concerns, but simply to save costs. Another concern was that the cable that came in the box was a USB-C to Lightning cable, which was different from the USB-A port which the chargers had that came in the boxes before the iPhone 12. This means that most customers will have to buy an extra charging brick anyway, which Apple sells for \$149 HKD (for the slowest charging model). Many other smartphone manufacturers have also taken this opportunity to release satirical advertisements to poke fun at Apple whilst drawing in customers. For instance, a recent Samsung advertisement proudly claims, “Included with your Galaxy”. Despite the outrage, which may seem like a huge disadvantage to Apple, the company has a strong fanbase. Many people will buy the newest product or a new smartphone just because it has an Apple logo on it. The sales numbers also seem to imply that the negative effects of this decision are negligible. According to Counterpoint Research, the iPhone 12 shares a similar

curve in terms of sales with the iPhone 6, one of Apple’s best-selling iPhones, reaching 100 million units sold within 7 months from launch. Following this success, many advertisement campaigns that mocked Apple for their decision were retracted, with Samsung even ditching their charger in the new Galaxy S21 models. As we have seen before with the trend of removing the headphone jack, we can expect to see fewer and fewer new phones packaged with brand new chargers and earbuds now that two of the biggest smartphone manufacturers have adopted this new trend. Additionally, Apple will include more and more revolutionary ideas in its product line following this success, such as dropping the charging port altogether, using only wireless technology to charge the phone. Apple’s decision has certainly brought about a change in the industry, and it further solidifies its role as the trendsetter and innovator in the technology and smartphone world. 🍏

Is *SpaceX* Humanity’s LAST HOPE?



Isaac Yan discusses the feasibility of becoming a multiplanetary species.

SPACE EXPLORATION TECHNOLOGIES CORPORATION, more commonly known as SpaceX, is one of the many ventures by billionaire entrepreneur, Elon Musk. It has the grand vision of colonizing Mars, with the goal of making humans interplanetary under the premise that Earth simply will not be able to sustain human life forever. However, how necessary is it for humans to become multiplanetary? And more importantly, is it even feasible?

Let’s first look at whether there is a necessity to become a multiplanetary human species. If we manage to solve the problems on Earth, there is not really a necessity to go somewhere else. However, our situation on Earth does not look too optimistic. Despite rapid development in renewable energy infrastructure around the world, it is highly unlikely for the entire planet to be able to transition to renewables in the next 30 years, which is the theoretical deadline to cut carbon emissions before the climate emer-

gency has reached the point of no return. This leaves us with carbon capture technology, which pulls in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and stores it underground. Problem is, 25 million tons captured per year is negligible compared to the global emissions of 40 billion metric tons per year, and, although carbon capture technologies do show the potential of being scaled up and becoming more economically feasible, there are not many indicators pointing towards an exponential growth in the industry any time soon. Even if we manage to solve the climate emergency and keep Earth habitable for humans, there is still always a chance, albeit an extremely miniscule one, that an earth-ending event might occur. And if an asteroid comes hurtling down onto Earth, wiping out all human life as we know it, the only way to preserve humanity is by being a multiplanetary species.

So if becoming a multiplanetary species is a necessity for the survival of the human race, is it even feasible? To colonize Mars, the planet with the highest possibility of colonization in our solar system, one first has to be able to reach Mars with rockets. SpaceX is currently the gold standard in the rocket industry in both innovation and launch efficiency. Their workhorse, the Falcon9, has the world's first reusable first stage that can propulsively land back on Earth, allowing them to reuse it for subsequent launches. This reliable technological breakthrough has led to the dramatic slash in launch prices, from 55 million USD per ton for a Space Shuttle launch back in the nineties to 3.2 million USD per ton, a 17 times reduction in price. However, the Falcon9 simply does not have the fuel capacity to reach Mars, and that's

where SpaceX's newest project, Starship, comes in. Starship is a rocket specifically designed to facilitate the colonization of Mars. Unlike Falcon9, where the second stage isn't designed to be reused, Starship is designed to be a fully rapidly reusable rocket, allowing prices to drop even further and making frequent trips to and from Mars economically feasible. As Musk said, airplanes wouldn't be feasible at all if we had to throw them away every single time, so it makes no sense to throw rockets away every time as well. The Starship program is currently still in the development stage, and the first Mars-bound starship flight is not going to happen until 2024 (even according to Musk's overly optimistic timelines), which makes it hard to determine whether humans can really rely on this technology for our survival. Not to mention the trip to Mars involves being brutally exposed to solar radiation for 7 months due to the lack of protection from the Earth's magnetic field. And there is the small fact that there is nothing or no one that can save you if something goes wrong.

Even assuming all goes according to plan during the travelling phase, that is just half of the story. What about the necessities and natural resources that we take for granted on Earth? 95% of Mars' atmosphere is unbreathable carbon dioxide, meaning that we are going to have to "create" our own oxygen. Thankfully, this can easily be done through electrolysis, which is used every day on the International Space Station. What about water? Mars has huge ice caps on both poles, which means water should not be a problem either. But that is pretty much the end of the good news. Due to its thin

atmosphere, Mars has an average temperature of -60 degrees Celsius, so an outdoor pool party is definitely out of the question. This also means that the atmosphere is ineffective in blocking harmful radiation from the Sun, so humans are going to have to stay in protected areas or caves. Added to this challenge are the huge, sudden sandstorms on Mars which can last weeks on end, and if you have watched the movie *The Martian*, you know that things can get pretty dicey in these situations. However, I believe that a 30 year time frame is not unrealistic to overcome these challenges and make colonizing Mars a reality.

Obviously to send supplies to Mars, frequent rocket launches are needed. Some have expressed concerns about the huge amount of pollutants that will be emitted as dozens and dozens of rockets leave Earth's orbit on their way to Mars. It has been suggested that the environmental cost of SpaceX could therefore be an acceleration of the destruction of the Earth's atmosphere before the first Mars colony is even set up. However, SpaceX had taken this into account when designing Starship. Starship runs on methalox, a fuel which is a combination of liquid methane and liquid oxygen. In the beginning, SpaceX plans to obtain methane through extraction from natural gas. As their infrastructure matures, SpaceX plans to transition to capturing methane and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to produce liquid methane, which will hopefully help combat global warming and alleviate SpaceX's reliance on fossil fuels. What about the emissions? SpaceX projects one Starship launch to emit 2683 metric tons of carbon dioxide

and 1.7 metric tons of nitrous oxide. That results in 1.79 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per passenger, about 2.5 times that of a Boeing 747. However, it is important to note that airplane launches are much more frequent than rocket launches. To even match the airline industry's emissions, SpaceX would have to launch 3512 Starships per day, every day. It is safe to say that Starship's emission will not overtake the airline industry any time soon, and combined with the methane and carbon capture technology, I do not believe that SpaceX's attempts to colonize Mars will lead to a greenhouse gas death-trap on Earth.

Why this focus just on SpaceX? Shouldn't more companies work on this hugely important goal together? The sad reality is that no other company in the world has rocket capabilities that could in any way rival, or even match, those of SpaceX. Neither does any other company have the ambition or motivation to make humans an interplanetary species as it is much more lucrative to specialise in launching satellites into space. However, the responsibility of securing the safety of the human race should not be on one company alone, and other companies should share this burden. And quickly. As Elon Musk says, "if we operate with extreme urgency, we have a chance of making life multiplanetary. It's still just a chance, not for sure. If we don't act with extreme urgency, that chance is probably zero." Ultimately, whether SpaceX succeeds in their vision, or another launch company does, they are going to be our last and only hope when our home becomes uninhabitable. 🚀



ENTERTAINMENT

How does Netflix's Lucifer Measure up to the Myth?

Olive Chan analyses the representation of the devil on the silver screen.

HAVING TAKEN INSPIRATION from Lucifer Samael Morningstar, one of the most powerful beings of the DC Universe in Neil Gaiman's comic book series *The Sandman*, Fox premiered *Lucifer* on January 25, 2016. With an average rating of 5.36/10 for its first season, and with many criticizing its 'hackneyed cop procedural format', many thought that the idea would never take off. Little did anyone know that Lucifer would become one of the most influential and popular television series on Netflix, reaching a total of 1.83 billion minutes of watch time in the week after season 5 was released.

Introduction

The Netflix adaptation of *Lucifer* presents Lucifer Morningstar (played by actor Tom Ellis), the Devil himself, abandoning Hell for Los Angeles in an act of defiance against his father, God. In LA, he runs a nightclub named Lux with a demon bartender named Mazikeen (played by actor Lesley-Ann Brandt). After an encounter with Chloe Decker (played by actor Lauren German), a detective in the Los Angeles Police Department, Lucifer accepts the post of a civilian consultant with the LAPD. Throughout the series, Lucifer works with Chloe to solve crimes while exploring the supernatural world and their increasingly intimate relationship. Lucifer also goes through a journey of redemption through interactions with his supernatural family and friends on Earth, mainly his brother

Amenadiel (played by actor D. B. Woodside) and his personal therapist Linda Martin (played by actor Rachel Harris).

One might just ask: what separates Lucifer from other television series? If you really think that a television series where the Devil goes on vacation to the City of Angels isn't remarkable enough, you will definitely be lured in by the rakish charm of Lucifer's British accent, or his witty banter and humorous interactions, or the way he seems to be able to work an innuendo into just every sentence. Or, it could be that audiences are simply appreciative of the fact that *Lucifer* provides a significant insight into self-value and self-realization.

However, the release of a series which intertwines religious doctrine and fiction has definitely led some to question how accurate the relationships and the storyline conveyed in the series are when compared with mythology from different countries and cultures.

Enter Lucifer Samael Morningstar, the Devil himself

Firstly, let's explore the name Lucifer. The name 'Lucifer' can be traced back to Roman mythology as the son of Aurora, the goddess of dawn. Its origins in Christian theology can be seen through the rendering of the Hebrew word **לְלִיָּהּ** in the King James Version of the Bible into the Latin word *lucifer*. With connotations of 'the morning star, the planet Venus', the entity's name was later employed in Christian folklore as a common name for the Devil.

Lucifer's middle name 'Samael' comes from

an archangel in Talmudic lore, characterized by his accusatory, seductive and destructive traits. This aspect of Lucifer can be clearly seen in the Netflix adaptation, where he sees himself as God's 'fallen son', and how he believes that he is destined to be evil, and shapes his entire personality and behaviour around this assumption. However, although he often is associated with evil in Christian folklore, the show guides the audience to follow Lucifer's redemption arc, portraying his somewhat 'good' side through more justifiable choices such as the punishing of sinners.

Lucifer's last name, 'Morningstar', links to his first name, where Venus can be seen as the 'morning star', due to its bright glow in the night sky before sunrise. In the book of Isaiah, (14:12), phrases such as 'morning star' or 'shining one' were historically tied to the Ancient Greek figure, Lucifer. Allusions to the 'light-bringer' manifest in our Lucifer's redemption arc, allowing him to clear his name, and present how self-actualization made him understand that he is able to 'bring light' to others and himself.

Genesis: The Beginning

At the start of the series, Lucifer is cast out of Heaven and sentenced to rule Hell for eternity due to the rebellion he staged against his father. This can be linked to the Christian narrative, where in the Book of Luke (10:18), Jesus says to his followers that "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

This gives rise to the idea of fallen angels. These fallen angels, including Satan, are cast out of heaven. Although the show *Lucifer* ironically glorifies the Devil, the

From Rotten Tomatoes

Bible verse above suggests that the show certainly alludes to scripture. In the Bible, the fallen angels are said to perform unholy actions towards human women, causing them to be cast out of heaven. The series touches upon this when Lucifer is seen to be intimately engaged with multiple women on a regular basis, facilitated by his demonic role as a devilish nightclub owner, as well as the representation of Lucifer as a proponent of the most titillating of the seven deadly sins.

There have been repeated mentions of Lucifer's siblings throughout the show. In Revelations (8:2), John wrote, 'And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.' The names of the angels are unknown in the Bible, but The Book of Enoch, an ancient Hebrew apocalyptic religious text, mentions the names of seven holy angels: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, Saragael, Raguel and Remeil. Although the Book of Enoch is not included in Jewish scripture, specifically the Torah, it has likely been used by the show as a reference text as many of these names are used for Lucifer's siblings.

These seven angels are considered to be the most powerful angels, or archangels, serving God in Heaven in the Bible. Angels themselves are spiritual beings and do not have a gender, but typically they have been monkered with masculine names. Names such as "Michael", meaning 'Who is my God?', and Gabriel, meaning 'God is my strength', are traditionally male names. These angels have generally led armies or protected thousands, perhaps offering an explanation as to why angels have been often associated with masculinity.

But, while some of the names of the angels are typically male, and their behaviour reinforces stereotypes of masculinity, the show has chosen to fracture this stereotype. They have cast a wider range of actors in the roles of these angels, embracing the modern audiences' desires for more inclusive representation. For example, Gabriel is represented as a sweet female angel, who has a reputation for never repaying debts and lives up to her name as the Angel of Messages with her love of gossip.

The series also has a well-known practice of introducing a new main character or a recurring villain every one or two seasons. It not only reinvigorates the show but also allows for the introduction of well-known biblical characters in this derivative drama. In season 4, Eve returns to Earth with hopes of rekindling her relationship with Lucifer. The serpent who tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit causing Adam and Eve to be expelled from the Garden of Eden was indeed Lucifer. Eve is a main character for a span of two seasons, appealing to Lucifer's mischievous side, causing him to rethink his relationship with Chloe. In Genesis (2:18), Eve is said to be created from a rib from Adam to be his companion. This has undoubtedly nurtured her behavioural traits on screen, acting submissive at first when meeting Lucifer.

In the Bible, Eve is the reason for the fall of mankind as it is because of her weakness that she and Adam are exiled from the Garden of Eden. It could be argued that this is the root of the misogynistic perception that women are the 'weaker' sex. Lucifer, however, depicts Eve as a character who

grows beyond stereotypes: she becomes a powerful and independent woman who chooses to search for her own identity instead of being limited by convention.

Similarly, Mazikeen, Lucifer's demon bartender, is also portrayed as a female character who challenges expectations. Instead of adhering to traditional gender stereotypes, Mazikeen is seen to be an aggressive and violent woman, taking on odd jobs as a bounty hunter throughout the series..

Thus Lucifer manages to successfully balance the old and the new. Ancient characters are given a makeover and represented embracing modern values and meeting the demands of a diverse audience.

The Prince of Lies

However, not everything portrayed in this show is quite so anchored in the source texts. Although the show has recruited a theologian to keep biblical references in check, it is ultimately a fictional television series, and additional information is added and original stories exaggerated to make it more entertaining and appealing to the audience.

For example, one of the major deviations is the relationship between Lucifer and his siblings with their father, God. There has been no evidence in the Abrahamic religions that God has what we would consider a father-child relationship with the angels; instead, they are depicted as benevolent celestial intermediaries between Heaven and humanity, acting as protectors and servants of God.

In addition, in the Book of Kings, some biblical

scholars believe that Asherah at one time was worshipped as the consort of Yahweh, the national god of the ancient Kingdom of Israel. However, the marital status of God is not explicitly presented in the Bible. Yet, after watching the show, viewers must agree that Charlotte Richards, a human being inhabited by the Goddess of All Creation, truly ties the relationship between God and the angels together.

Since his appearance in the pilot episode of Lucifer, the character of Amenadiel has been the deuteragonist of this series. He is incredibly loyal towards God, but his attitude towards his brother Lucifer changes along with his perceptions of humans, eventually backing his brother up and fighting alongside him. While there has been no mention of Amenadiel in the Bible, some have concluded that Amenadiel is a character pieced together from different angels, but mostly from the loyalty and trust traditionally associated with Michael, as well as his status as God's firstborn and his favourite son.

All Bad Things Must Come to an End

The Netflix show Lucifer is a melting pot of a characters and plot on a broad spectrum of theological sources and perspectives. In order to appeal to a modern audience, the show has adapted and modernized religious figures described in ancient texts. Lucifer is part of a long tradition of weaving the devil into fictional narratives to both entertain and educate the audience. It serves as the perfect source for the exploration of philosophical questions, breaking the shackles of traditional conventions in the process. And that might just be the reason why it has flourished. 😈

How **HATSUNE MIKU** influenced the development of **OTAKU CULTURE**

BY GEORGE FIND

ON THE 31ST OF AUGUST, 2007, a musical phenomenon unlike any other was released into the world. She had the musical talent to sing in just about every pitch and genre imaginable and the undying love and support of producers and fans alike, helping to launch her as an international icon with the unique ability to have an almost universal appeal. With an almost supernatural musical prowess, she seemed like she could not possibly be real.

And that's because she isn't. Despite having a listed height of 158 cm and weight of 42 kg, she has no physical form. However, just because something is intangible does not mean it does not exist. Meet Hatsune Miku, a Vocaloid voice bank in the form of a 16-year-old singing superstar—and here is how she came to be and how she has influenced the development of Otaku culture since her conception.



Hatsune Miku's Vocaloid 2 (V2) Standard model
Wikipedia (CC-BY-NC 3.0 license)

A brief introduction

Let's start with the technology. A voice bank is a collection of pre-recorded phrases and sentences that essentially replicates the original providers' voice via a speech-generating device (SGDs). SGDs are used mainly in assisting individuals suffering from speech disorders, such as the late Stephen Hawking who suffered from ALS, as they provide a way for the non-verbal to communicate verbally.

However, the purpose of Miku is not to simulate speech, but to sing. Rather than the user's voice being converted by a text-to-speech SGD speech synthesiser, it is instead converted by a vocal synthesiser, a type of digital instrument used to combine basic sound elements with the human voice for musical purposes. At the dawn of the new millennium, 'the father of Vocaloid' Kenmochi Hideki led a joint research project on behalf of the Yamaha Corporation at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain. Originally not intended to be a full commercial project, the software eventually developed into one, and four years later the first Vocaloid product was released.

Conception and creation

The early Vocaloids were almost entirely different from their modern counterparts. The most significant difference was that the visual identity was essentially nonexistent, as the box art for the very first Vocaloids used a stock image meaning that this revolutionary new project was

void of concept and, most importantly, character. To combat this, as well as to make the new product more popular and marketable, Crypton Future Media (CFM) and its CEO Hiroyuki Itoh decided to go in a different direction. He, along with Vocaloid developer Wataru "Wat" Sasaki, not only wanted to create a superior successor to Yamaha's original synthesiser but also create a series of Vocaloids whose identity went beyond the box art. They created a collection of characters categorised by a purposefully imperfect human voice, quirky personality traits and colour coordinated character costumes. With that, the Character Vocal Series (CV) was born. And the forefront of it all was one Hatsune Miku.

As the software developer for this new series, Sasaki was responsible for creating the headlining CV Vocaloid, and intended to make the character the 'next big thing'. This decision gave rise to the selection process for the voice for the future. Given that Crypton needed the voice to match with their vision if they wanted their new synthesiser and Vocaloid series to make a statement, a pool of over 500 voice actors were called for audition. And emerging from the throng as queen of them all was acclaimed Japanese voice actor Saki Fujita. Her voice a perfect match for what Crypton was looking for. Expanding on what the synthesiser would eventually look like, marketing manager and developer Yusuke Kumagai proposed who we now know as Miku being 'an android diva in the near-future world where songs are lost'. Her name itself literally means 'the first sound from the future'. But, that voice still needed a creative talent to bring the vision to life.



Scott Green on Crunchyroll News (2013)

Manga artist and illustrator Kei "KEI" Garou became the head designer of this new character. Garou had quite the task ahead as he had to create the personification of a vocal synthesiser at a time when such a concept did not yet exist. Despite this challenge, he persisted and finished in a little over a month. After following Crypton's requirements to create an android with the signature turquoise colour scheme of Yamaha synthesizers, KEI did what he does best: draw what he likes until he feels it fits right. Garou crafted a multitude of drafts and patterns. Once he had finalised the outline, KEI incorporated elements of synthesiser software into the android's attire until the character was finally completed. Soon afterwards, the synthesiser, manifested as a 16-year-old singer, was announced.

Nearly a decade and a half since her initial release, Hatsune Miku has attained super-

star-esque levels of fame. She has transcended barriers with her eventual multilingual language proficiency in Japanese, English and Mandarin Chinese. Her image has become ubiquitous and so iconic that many people have at least heard of Miku even if they have no knowledge of Vocaloid. From drawings to dolls, to even a Domino's Pizza app (yes, that does actually exist), Miku has not only become a virtual celebrity of sorts but also such a portentous influence on the development of Otaku (fanatics of Japanese media) culture that her impact has been nothing short of groundbreaking. And here's how that all happened.

The state of Otaku culture before Miku

Prior to the introduction of the digital diva in the late '00s, Otaku culture was in a transitional phase. It had finally rid itself of the vitriolic press coverage surrounding the brutal murders of four young women by Tsutomu Miyazaki, nicknamed 'The Otaku Murderer' in 1989. His collection of 5,763 videotapes, which contained anime and slasher films in addition to videos and pictures of his victims, led the Japanese media to associate Otaku culture with 'perverted, pornographic, and pedophilic' tendencies. After withstanding this malalignment, Otaku culture managed an impressive renaissance in the 90s and 00s and began to seep back into the mainstream fueled by the growing popularity of manga and anime.

However, all of that was halted as Otaku culture found itself in the spotlight once again with the case of Kaoru Kobayashi in 2004, who kidnapped, sexually assaulted and then murdered a 7-year-old girl. Despite the fact that Kobayashi was not an Otaku, his crime fueled another wave of animosity



kdingo on Wikimedia Commons

against Otaku culture, with them being perceived as extremely dangerous and violent criminals, who were particularly a threat to young girls. As a result, Otakus once again became isolated and socially shunned. Pushed to the fringes of society, the Otaku community was in desperate need of something, or rather someone, to not only reconnect the disparate factions of fandom but also restore its credibility. And that is when Hatsune Miku stepped into the ring of the Japanese media circus. And slowly but surely, the perception of Otaku culture began to change.

The influence of Hatsune Miku

While Miku cannot be credited as the only reason why Otakus reconnected with each other, or why their culture was able to reemerge from the fringes of society, she was definitely a driving force and a highly impactful one at that.

Two significant reasons for her impact are because of the sheer musical ability of the Vocaloid software and the social aspect that came with it after Miku. By allowing users to enter lyrics and a melody and fuse them with a voicebank, the synthesiser allows you to essentially create any type of

music regardless of the genre due to its almost limitless versatility in pitch, genre, rhythm and others. Speaking of pitch, the idea of allowing anyone with the equipment and expertise to not only make but also distribute their own music created from the vocal synthesiser made the software incredibly appealing to professional producers as well as aspiring amateurs.

But what exactly is the appeal of a synthesiser personified as a 16-year-old high-schooler singer with long, turquoise twin-tails?

The answer depends on who you ask, as there have been many differing theories as to why she has become such a success. Miku Futurist and subculture analyzer Morinosuke Kawaguchi believes that Miku's rise is due to her being the modern interpretation of Shinto anthropomorphism. Others have hypothesised that Miku's success is due to her being marketed as a high-profile celebrity, often appearing in commercials and adorning the side of public transport. Some claim, worryingly, that, because of Japan's age of consent being 13, Miku's personification as a 16-year-old schoolgirl gave her the wrong type

of appeal in the country's (often untalked about) hyper-sexualised culture.

One thing is for sure, business was booming because of her. Fewer than two weeks after her release, Amazon Japan reported that Hatsune Miku had become the best selling Vocaloid software of the time, totalling 57.5 million Yen in sales. She sold an average of 300 units a week which 'astonished' CFM CEO Itoh. While he had hoped Miku would be a hit, neither he nor anyone else could have expected her to reach superstar status quite so quickly.

However, while it is easy to get to the top, it is hard to stay there for long. This led to Crypton conceiving of ways to maintain this success for as long as possible. Their solution? Crowdsourcing. Three months after Miku's release on December 3rd, 2007, the company released the primary platform credited for popularising Vocaloid Piapro, so named because of the shortened pronunciation of 'Peer Productions' in Japanese. The free social media platform granted 'the wish that users who have various talents and know-how share these qualities with each other and create something new together.' CFM CEO Itoh explained how the platform pushed the boundaries of pop-culture crowdsourcing, 'Someone says, 'Okay, I like to write lyrics, but I can't program Hatsune Miku's voice.' The other person says, 'Oh, okay, I can play piano.' So you have clusters of fans finding each other through the platform.' By allowing the site to be a community-based platform with a common interest, as well as a conduit for creativity and collaboration, the problem of sustaining Vocaloid's growth after Miku's sudden success dissipated.

Despite cultural seclusion within the mainstream, Otaku culture was enjoying relative commercial success. During the high point of the moral panic regarding Otaku culture, The Nomura Research Institute (NRI) conducted two significant studies on their spending habits and economic contributions. In the first study, it was estimated that in 2004 the Otakus, and associated sub-groups, numbered 2.85 million, and that they spent a total amount of 290 billion yen. Upon the release of the second, more revised and defined study a year later, five main markers and twelve primary sub-groups were identified. This report revealed that the strictly Otaku population numbered 1.72 million and contributed 411 billion yen. The data showed that while Otakus were alone and alienated in the wake of widespread criticism of the culture, they were plentiful and ready to empty their pockets. And once Miku and Vocaloid went mainstream, Otakus went out and spent.

By March of 2014, the vocal synthesiser had been featured in over 110,000 commercially available songs worldwide made by both professionals and amateurs alike. She also appeared in nearly 170,000 released videos on sites Nico Nico Douga, YouTube and Crypton Piapro, as well as over a million user-created pieces of artwork on sites such as Pinterest, Artstation and Pixiv. And the commercial success continues to this day. When it was announced that her annual global concert in 2021 would be made free to view worldwide on the condition that 25 million yen was crowdfunded in two months, her fans met that target in only nine hours. Ultimately, over 61 billion yen was raised.

The new wave of synthetic celebrity

However, this seems insignificant compared to what is arguably her biggest influence: the normalisation of a synthetic singer replacing human entertainment, mainly in markets outside Japan. The island nation has always differentiated itself from others, partly due to its native belief system of Shintoism. The religion believes that there are spirits within everything, including a teenage idol who is eternally young. As such, Japan, comparatively, is much more accepting of the idea of non-living objects being alive. The rest of the world, not so much though. But Miku has changed that perception. With her rise to international stardom, Miku has made the idea of entertainment based virtual avatars less of a foreign, dystopian concept and more of a daily reality.

And since her initial release nearly a decade and a half ago, there have since been many like her. Miku shares many similarities with more contemporary virtual celebrities ranging from Virtual YouTubers (a.k.a V-tubers who stream anonymously using their anime-inspired aesthetic avatars) to "Virtual Influencers" (company driven social media personalities with millions of followers). Miku may not be explicitly mentioned or cited as a point of reference, but she definitely influenced these online avatars.

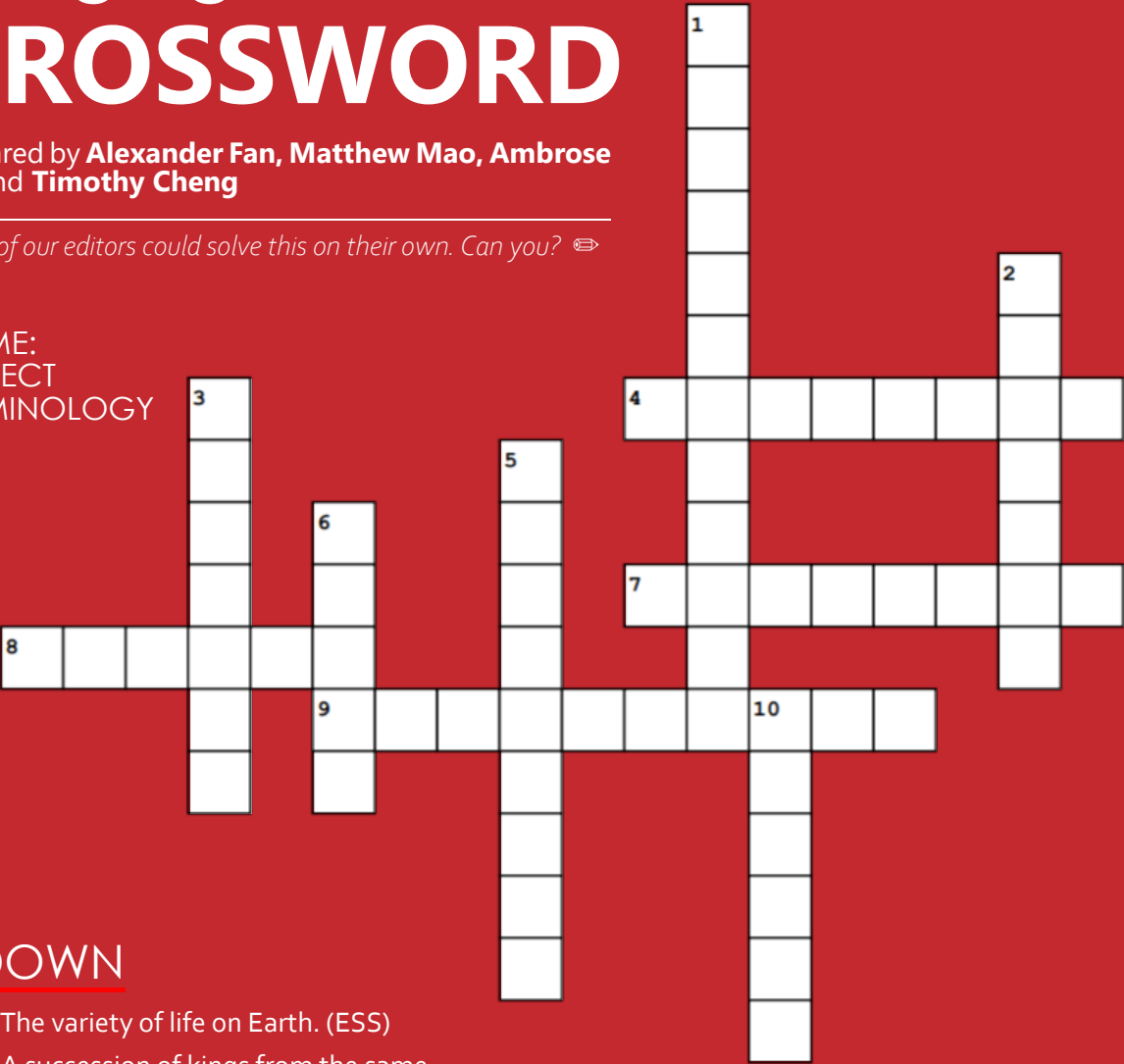
Miku has transitioned from a breakthrough in SDG technology to being at the forefront of an upcoming electronic music scene. She is a cultural influence and commercial success and an entertainment breakthrough. Mikumania is definitely here to stay. 🎤

Bringing back the
CROSSWORD

Prepared by **Alexander Fan, Matthew Mao, Ambrose Lo, and Timothy Cheng**

None of our editors could solve this on their own. Can you? ➡

THEME:
SUBJECT
TERMINOLOGY



DOWN

- 1. The variety of life on Earth. (ESS)
- 2. A succession of kings from the same bloodline for a state. (History)
- 3. Symbols which represent emotion in comics. (English)
- 5. Not influenced by personal opinion. (ToK)
- 6. A theory in behavioural economics that proposes the use of prompts to influence consumer choices to improve well-being. (Economics)
- 10. A mental representation derived from prior experience or knowledge used to organize knowledge, assist recall, guide behaviour and make sense of current experiences. (Psychology)

ACROSS

- 4. An emitted particle from beta-minus nuclear decay which does not interact with most matter. (Physics)
- 7. A term used to describe countable random variables. (Mathematics)
- 8. An anion or molecule which binds to a central metal atom to form a coordination complex. (Chemistry)
- 9. A respiratory process which results in two pyruvates. (Biology)



HOT TOPICS

The Governance and Complexity of the Middle East

By Matthew Siu

SPANNING BETWEEN Southwest Asia and Northern Africa, the Middle East is a region that has been a hub of human civilization and innovation. However, recent years of wars and revolutions have overshadowed this reputation. Its rich cultures and histories have been overlooked and many no longer appreciate the region for its architectural wonders or its beautiful landscape. Instead, events on the news dominate, and it is forgotten that the Middle East is the same region that built the Hagia Sophia, gave us hospitals, and nurtured innovation in philosophy, mathematics and literature, and science.

Although there are many ways of looking at Middle Eastern politics, one way of exploring this issue is through considering the style and influence of its governance.

Specifically, this essay will be examining and comparing

two Middle Eastern regimes on opposite ends of the spectrum: the Israeli government and the Taliban, now the de facto ruling party of Afghanistan, a region classified as part of the "Greater Middle East". Through a review of the influence and governing structures of the two vastly different regimes, this article aims to dispel the notion that the Middle East is a homogeneous, war-torn region; rather, it is a nuanced and complex area of enduring global significance.

The Return of the Taliban

The Taliban are a militia and a political religious movement who have returned to once again rule Afghanistan. Even though the organizational structure and rhetoric of the Taliban have changed over its many years of government and revolution, two main concepts are still central to the orga-

nization's ethos: Sharia law and the ultimate authority of the Supreme Commander. The Taliban's governance is determined by the Sharia, a religious law that follows Islamic tradition and assigns human actions to categories: mandatory, recommended, neutral, abhorred, and prohibited. The regime supposedly fully implements Sharia law under their rule, including punishments such as stoning for adultery, and some argue the Taliban's interpretation is twisted and hypocritical.

The structure of the Taliban puts the decision-making power on one man alone: the Supreme Commander. Called "Commander of the Faithful", the First Supreme Commander of the Taliban and his successors, have the power to make decisions for the organization solely by themselves. As a Taliban spokesperson has stated, "For us consultation is not necessary... We abide by the Amir's view even if he alone takes this view... [he] will be the highest authority, and the government will not be able to implement any decision to which he does not agree... General elections are incompatible with Sharia... we reject them". Ideologically, power is not supposed to lie with the people, instead, power can only be wielded by the Supreme

Commander who carries out the Taliban's divine role.

Similarly, the judicial system of the Taliban is heavily based on Islamic law. Mostly using religious scholars to settle civil cases, the court system of the Taliban focuses on punishments, often delivering what some see as overly harsh sentencing. However, due to the Taliban's ability to enforce the rulings, their courts are also known to be efficient and incorruptible compared to the courts of the recently fallen Afghanistan government, according to an interview conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Legislatively, the Taliban uses a council of Islamic scholars to determine Afghanistan's legal system based on Islamic Law. Messages of Islamic scholars such as Mufti Rasheed, who emphasized complete obedience to the Supreme Commander, have been influential in the centralization of the Taliban's power and their strict hierarchy. Outside of Islamic influence, the Taliban are also heavily influenced by Pashtun culture and identity. Ministerial positions in the Taliban government have historically been reserved for



Graphics on Canva



those who are ethnically Pashtuns regardless of their qualifications, while the recently Taliban controlled Afghanistan has been filling its positions with Taliban military commanders who are, similarly, largely Pashtun.

The Israeli system

Meanwhile, 3000 kilometres away, a drastically different Middle Eastern government runs a country of 9 million people. Unlike many of the Islamic governments the region is famous for, such as those in Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, the nation of Israel is considered a hub of Western civilization and democracy. Operating under a parliamentary democratic system, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. In a land inhabited by many different cultures and people, Israel is a self-proclaimed inclusive society filled with different ethnic and religious groups and the Israeli governance reflects the complex religious and secular balance of its diverse citizens. This can be seen in the Israeli legal system, a common law system highly influenced by the legal systems of the UK and the Ottoman Empire.

The nation of modern-day Israel is in many ways closely connected with its first Prime Minister and national founder, David Ben-Gurion. Israel's identity as a melting pot, its policies towards neighbouring countries, and its religious influences were all shaped by David Ben-Gurion. Through looking at the influences of Ben-Gurion, there can be a greater understanding of Israel as a nation and its founding principles. In addition to the impact of popular Zionist heroes and inspirations such as Abraham Mapu, a Hebrew novelist, Ben-Gurion was largely in-

fluenced by American democracy. Ben-Gurion's adherence to an American style government can be seen in his refusal to compromise Israeli democracy for stability. Historical records have even shown Ben-Gurion reading materials such as "histories of American political parties, practical guides to swaying the masses, books [on] management and the like". The American influence on Ben-Gurion and Israel can further be observed in the close cooperation between American and Jewish efforts, for example, the forging of relations between American and Jewish labour movements.

However, many aspects that make Israel unique as a Middle Eastern country are run in a Western fashion. One is the existence of both religious and secular courts. Religious courts of different denominations have jurisdiction (though not exclusively) on more personal issues such as divorce. Marriages in Israel are conducted exclusively in religious courts following the couple's religious affiliation. People with differing religions who wish to marry are prohibited from doing so within Israel but their union is still legally recognized if they choose to marry elsewhere.

The legislative branch of the Israeli government is equally unique. The Knesset is Israel's legislative branch with 120 seats, comprising of 13 parties at the time of writing. The executive branch meanwhile is headed by the Prime Minister and his cabinet, which is usually composed of a coalition. The extremely large number of parties in Israel is, in fact, one of the most famous aspects of its governance as coalitions have to be formed to create a major-



ity in parliament. With many different fringe parties upholding the values of specific groups such as Arabs or ultra-orthodox Rabbis, smaller parties can help make sure the needs of minorities are met, though some argue that the system gives minority groups disproportionately strong influence.

Furthermore, the Israeli government is not exempt from deep and concerning problems, with corruption and human rights abuses being two criticisms often levelled against the regime. Besides the current Prime Minister, who has only taken office since June 2021, every prime minister of the last 20 years has faced criminal investigation, with the previous Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, being indicted for "fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes". However, what is most concerning about such rampant corruption in Israel's governance is the seeming indifference of Israeli citizens towards such ethical breaches.

In addition, despite being democratic, Is-

rael has been in the international spotlight due to policies such as the restriction of Palestinian spouses of Israeli Arabs from receiving citizenship. Israel is also infamous for its alleged human rights abuses against Palestinians as well as its UN-recognized occupation of the Gaza Strip. Ultimately, the highly Westernized Israel may represent what some see as the hypocritical nature of Western nations, emphasizing fairness and equality without actually practising it.

Geographically distant, ideologically distinct

Although both countries share a complicated ethnic, cultural and religious history, their style and approach to governance are antithetical due to their different political origins and influences. The Taliban's Islamic autocratic approach to governance where the people are not part of the decision-making process, vastly contrasts with the Israeli style of government where power rests with the Israeli people. This can be seen in the representation of citizens in these two regimes. Israel allows for the

representation and influence of minority groups to an extent where political instability can be seen as a constant threat. Meanwhile, representation under the Taliban is mostly limited to the Pashtun, male, Sunni Muslim population. The further allocation of posts by the Taliban are more related to a person's association with the Taliban itself, or their religion, race and sex, as opposed to their necessary skillset. Israel, on the other hand, has its cabinet positions indirectly allocated and approved by the people, who likely fill the position based on merit. The Israeli attitude towards practicality and general lack of focus on morality, as seen by the public's attitude towards corrupt leaders, further contrasts the focus on virtue and unassailable leadership emphasized in the Taliban.

When trying to understand the region, Israel and Afghanistan may be seen as polar opposites. However, both nations are examples of the changes that have been occurring in the Middle East over the past few decades. Israel exemplifies the Westernization occurring in places such as Turkey and Iran under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, while in Afghanistan, the Taliban represents the enduring presence of Islamic fundamentalism and subsequent rejection of Westernization most prominently seen in modern-day Iran or Egypt. Ultimately, understanding both regimes and their differences is an interesting way of starting to appreciate those Middle Eastern governments which lie in between these two vastly different governments, and consider what changes the future may possibly bring for the countries in this famously disparate region. 🧑🏿🧑🏻



Burning

By Ambrose Lo

Another factory built today.
Expand, exploit, axe ahead:
Chop out lungs, burnt homesteads,
Coalers, oilers have their way...

Future heated, wronged, destroyed,
Two degrees near certainty.
Children lost, no naivety,
Greek oil fires burn our global Troy.

Conquerers hold vast wealth and power.
Heat unlike the years gone by:
Heed the warnings lest we die,
Save Our Souls at this eleventh hour!
Or is it too late?

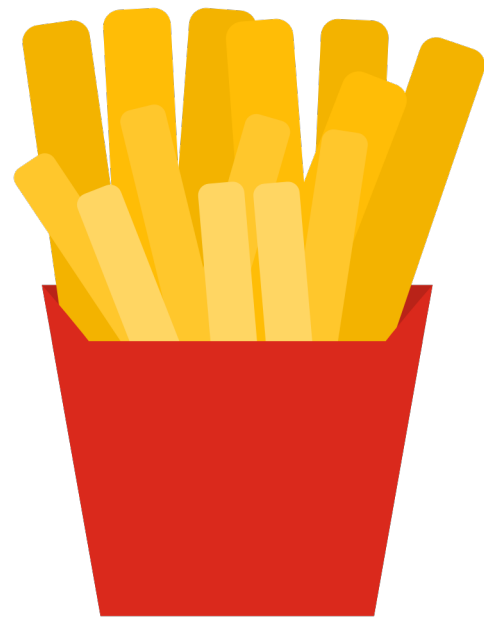
Those who know the worst will burn,
baked in heat, next starved, then drowned.
"Stop this!" Youngsters try to make a sound,
but too late. We all should have heard.

BIG

MACHINATIONS

SUCCESS IN THE FAST FOOD INDUSTRY FOR DUMMIES

BY ANSTON YU



WHenever **ANYONE** gets hungry for a quick bite on the way home or craves hot

food while being short on money, chances are their eyes immediately search for a set of tantalizing gates to heaven—the humble yet seductive doors of the nearest fast food restaurant.

While some can resist its temptation (I am not one of them), fast food is undisputedly ubiquitous. The menus are simple—fries, burger, soft drink—but they can branch off into multiple directions, with some opting for increased variety and others choosing to create variants of the original menu. There is one similarity among these items—they must all be cheap yet tasty.

With this many mouths tempted by simple, decently-tasting food, it

must be easy to dominate the industry. Right? You are not wrong.

Theoretically, the fast food market is one that would be easy to break into, given that the entry threshold is as low as “being able to produce a simple burger”. Many have tried to attract customers to form an established brand. There are unlimited opportunities for innovation as well, given that unique selling points for fast food within the industry are by no means fully exhausted.

However, there is a catch. The venerated position of “the top fast food franchise” is one that attracts many. After all, the profits one may gain from being a merchant of such food are enormous—in this sense, many “eat the rich” when they consume fast food. There are legendary brands that occupy the fast food

hall of fame: KFC, with their finger lickin’ mix of spices; Five Guys, for their high quality burgers and produce; Starbucks, for actually being labelled a fast food company and for having been the patron saint of all those who have felt the need for a pick-me-up in the morning since 1971.

But there is one brand unmatched by any other. Famous for having the lowest of prices and the largest network of franchises, its name is known by all.

McDonald’s.

You would not be blamed for shivering in your shoes. The franchise seems impossible to overcome. Yet, to become the king, one must defeat the king, and McDonald’s is but another rung on your path to the throne.

Let us now go through a thorough analysis of the industry, of the company’s claim to fame and its fatal flaws. I hope this will suffice

1 THE INDUSTRY - \$25.99

as a guide to defeating the overlord of fast food.

To understand McDonald’s, we must first look at the industry over which it reigns supreme, and understand why fast food is so popular.

After the many health reports published on the matter, with Powell and Nguyen arguing that it has led to higher net total energy intake and poorer diet quality, one would assume that consumers would be turned off by the idea of cramming oily patties, and deep-fried fries down their throats. One must also recall Morgan Spurlock in *Super Size Me*, where the American filmmaker showed the relation between consuming fast food and the epidemic of obesity by eating supersize



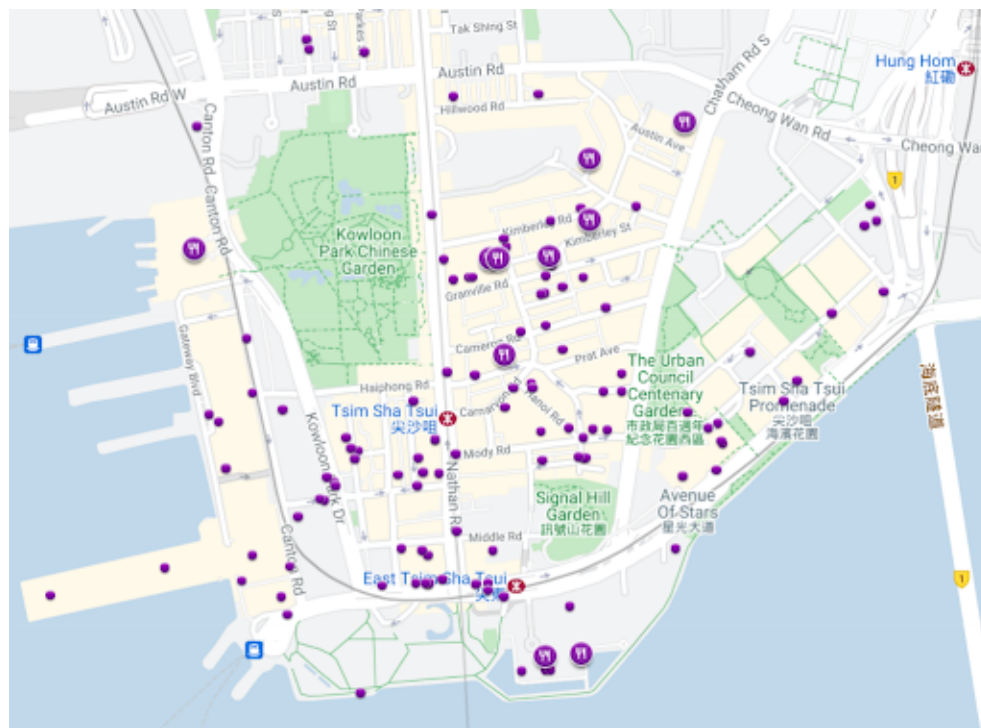


Fig. 1 : A map of the Kowloon Peninsula and the fast food restaurants scattered across it.

meals from McDonald's every day for a month.

All this, however, means naught to the hungry consumer. While fast food companies have indeed cracked down on the use of unhealthy oils and unsuitable ingredients in making our food, the thing to note is that there has always been a huge demand for fast food, even when those consuming it started to note their bellies growing rounder. This means that consumers overlook their health when consuming fast food. There are two reasons for this.

First is the appeal of convenience. Search "fast food near me" on your phone, and you'll likely get a map with dots all over (See Fig. 1). Chances are, if you're in Hong Kong, hot fast food is as close as two blocks to you (unless if you're in the countryside, in which case you should have packed a lunch). This convenience carries over to how

you eat too. With takeaway as an option, eager commuters can consume on the go while rushing to work, after waiting just five or so minutes for their food. Compare this with the 'eat in' option, which may take place over the course of 15 minutes. One may surmise that the ten valuable minutes wasted could mean much to the average businessperson.

The second reason is likely more obvious. Fast food is just good. Compared to what an average person could conjure up with their culinary skills, the magic of the grill and deep fryer works wonders for our taste buds. The kitchen of our humble abodes cannot compare to the equipment within those of fast food restaurants. The time it takes for us to make two simple chicken sandwiches allows for personnel within fast food chains to create and serve a plethora of fried chicken and

grilled burgers served with condiments of all kinds. No doubt consumers have thought to themselves, "Yeah, I could get diabetes, but wow, this chicken is good."

2 WHY MCDONALD'S? - \$39.00

The above holds for all fast food restaurants. What, then, does McDonald's do in particular that allows them to have such power over the market?

We must first look at what the franchise uniquely offers.

The most obvious selling point is that McDonald's has an arsenal of food it sells at low prices. If you're looking to fill yourself up, try the chicken burger meal they have on sale at HKD 24.00, which packs in medium fries and a soft drink as well. If you're just feeling a bit peckish, apple pies, ice cream, and the pastries they sell at the McCafe are all sub-\$20 options for you. The exceptions to this rule are full meals (such as the Signature Collection) priced at HKD 50 or above, which is on par with the regular meals of most other restaurants. The thing to note is that these items are usually deluxe, with more offered both in quantity and quality compared to the cheaper items mentioned above. For the average person seeking to satiate their mortal needs with a humble burger, they need not venture into these territories, and can therefore be satisfied by just paying less than half

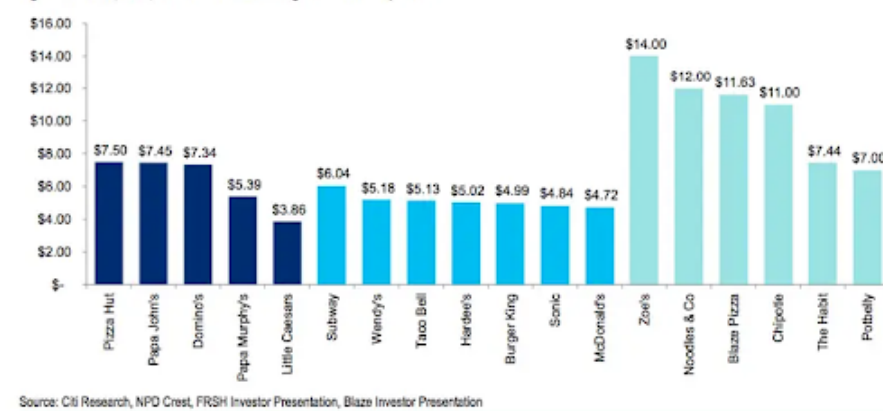
the price. In economic terms, McDonald's uses the generic strategy of cost leadership. This essentially means minimizing costs at all levels within the supply chain to offer products at low prices to those who appreciate it the most—consumers.

Indeed, when compared with other franchises, we see how McDonald's comes out on top. In the below graph, it can be seen that McDonald's has a much lower "average spending level" compared with other franchises, coming only second to Little Caesars on the global stage. When taking into account the fact that the franchise can offer these prices sustainably through their business model, this gives McDonald's a significant competitive advantage over its rivals, as its cheap pricing incentivises consumers to buy from them over, say, KFC if they're just in need of some food and are not looking for any products in particular. This can be referenced with the basic law of demand, which dictates that goods have a higher quantity demanded when they have a lower price. Although this may seem to result in lower total revenue, we must also consider the number of consumers McDonald's gains from this marketing strategy. With the majority of people only looking for food and nothing more, they will most likely go to the cheapest option, being McDonald's. Therefore, a larger amount of consumers for



Consumers Spend Slightly More per Person on QSR Pizza than at Other QSR Concepts

Figure 11. Pizza, QSR, and Fast Casual Average Per Person Spend



Source: Citi Research, NPD Crest, FRSH Investor Presentation, Blaze Investor Presentation

Fig. 2 : Average amount of money spent at different franchises

the restaurant results in a net profit larger than other restaurants.

The accessibility of the franchise is also something worth noting. Globally, McDonald's has 39,198 stores. While the 248 we have here locally in Hong Kong pale in comparison, we must also note that stores are scattered throughout the 18 districts, with some being on outlying islands such as Lamma Island and Cheung Chau. This widespread distribution is bolstered by its highly efficient delivery network, which increases McDonald's reach to places that are far from its stores. McDonald's effectively screams "your wish is my command" with this system. If you crave a Big Mac and order it online, it magically appears roughly 15 minutes later.

McDonald's is also enduringly appealing because of how they sell themselves as a reliable brand to their consumers. This can primarily be seen by how they have presented themselves as a company which cares for its consumers by adapting quickly to the concerns that corn oil—the oil the franchise had been using up to that point—was in fact unhealthy and undesirable. In recent times, it has resorted to using vegetable oil instead, a fact it proudly

flaunts on its trays. Changes to the kids' menu have also led to healthier options being offered by the franchise, with healthier side dishes such as yoghurt and corn cups being offered at stores instead of just fries. Offering orange juice has also been part of this change, securing its reputation as a brand that cares.

Collaborations are also part of McDonald's appeal—or rather, that of their collaborators. Prominent musical artists such as BTS, Travis Scott, and Saweetie have had past meals named after them, with different gimmicks corresponding to the artists. Saweetie's, for example, prompted consumers to "remix" their meal by adding fries into their burgers and adding good ol' sweet and sour sauce. The BTS meal, on the other hand, offers sweet chili and cajun dipping sauces to spice up their McNuggets game. Those without meals also find their way to the McDonald's limelight in other fashions such as local star Anson Lo who has also had his fair share of the spotlight by appearing on promotional posters for McDonald's exclusive drinks.

As always, there are the classic gimmicks McDonald's uses to target different kinds of consumers. The toys locked behind glass cases at every store almost seem to yell at you to free them by buying Happy Meals. Kids fall for this hook, line, and sinker. Many a parent (mine included)

have been begged by their children to buy from McDonald's just for a 15cm x 15cm plastic packet of fleeting joy. This adds to their already expansive range of weapons to produce a truly lethal combo.

3 WHY NOT MCDONALD'S? - \$53.00

This might be a lot to take in. You may even be discouraged from pursuing your culinary dream of standing on top of the fast food ladder.

Fret not.

As always, there is another side to this narrative. In this section, we question the image of McDonald's and evaluate how it has failed its consumers. They say "no one's perfect", and this is certainly true of Ronald.

Let's start small first. Within each McDonald's franchise, there are employees. And each time the branch opens, there is the chance of them being abused or otherwise mistreated. This is very much a sad truth, made even sadder by how there are both internal and external abuses. Internally, managers have been known to sexually abuse their workers, with many cases being uncovered after the #MeToo movement. Externally, extremely unsatisfied customers have been known to pull out guns once they discover they can't get a certain food item, in some cases pulling the trigger. Gun violence, while the most ex-

treme example, is not the end of it though. Employees have been known to suffer attacks or random outbursts from customers if they make even the smallest mistake. Through all that, workers who undergo any traumatic events are forced to continue working due to a lack of worker protection and psychological support. This reveals the dark shadow of the golden arches. While they revel in their financial glory, those working for them suffer hard.

The abuses do not end there. Underpayment is also a huge issue. McDonald's had to resolve a seven-year-old lawsuit by paying \$26 million recently in 2019 for not paying for mandated overtime work, not providing welfare such as frequent breaks for workers on shift, and by forcing employees to maintain their own uniform out of their own pocket.

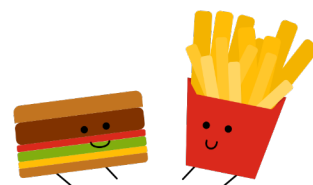
The reason for all of the above is likely due to a profit-incentivised mindset, where McDonald's (or their franchisees) seek profits over decency. This leads to pay cuts down the line, or a reduction in quality of service for the consumer and in protection for the employee, simply because it is cheaper to do that. This is somewhat exacerbated by the low bargaining power workers within the company have.

On a larger scale, McDonald's has been involved in multiple scandals

regarding top management and systematic issues within the company. Most prominent is the case of Steve Easterbrook, previous president of McDonald's who had been accused of having illicit relations with employees in the past. This accusation was well supported with evidence, as was shown in a lawsuit filed against Easterbrook by the company itself last year. Next is the age-old example of the ever-dysfunctional ice cream machines are also relevant here. An independent investigation by journalist Johnny Harris ended up revealing that the malfunctions were likely a result of a shady behind-the-scenes operation between McDonald's and Taylor Company, the entity that made these machines. Finally, the rotten meat scandal from several years ago in Hong Kong remains (ironically) fresh in some consumer's minds, where McDonald's denied any relations with the meat supplier at fault before admitting to one.

There we have it. The mythos of McDonald's revealed. Its performance as the largest restaurant chain is not unwarranted, but its flaws are quite obvious for the world to see. 🍔🍟🥤

To know how to use this knowledge and defeat McDonald's, go to the e-copy!



LIFESTYLE

The Diet for Meat Lovers

Oscar Tam provides an alternative perspective on food.

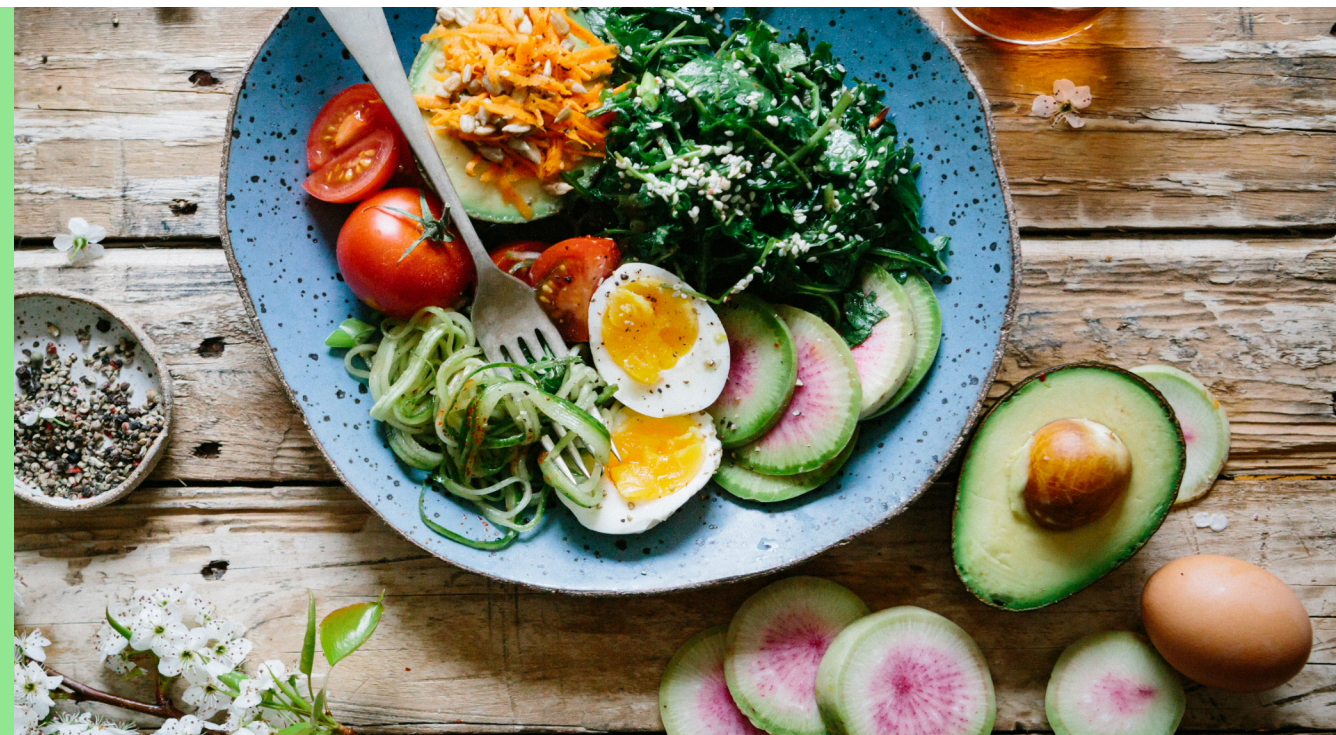
CONDUCT A SIMPLE Google search for the phrase “weight loss”. Amidst the infinite health products and self-help guides the Internet sells to you, you are bound to come across the enigmatic keto(genic) diet, almost the dietary equivalent of Godwin’s law on the Internet. Boasting a diet primarily filled with poultry and dairy products, instead of plain salads and miniscule meal portions, which have now become ubiquitous with “healthy living” and “keeping fit”, it is obvious why millions practice this diet around the world.

Surprisingly, the keto diet has been researched by scientists for over a century, with medical interest in it stretching back to the 1920s. At that time, it was hardly advertised as a magic solution to remove ten kilograms of fat like it is today, but as a promising treatment for children suffering from epilepsy prior to the development of effective drugs. Revived and rebranded around the turn of the 21st century, celebrities and social media exacerbated the popularity of the treatment, with the likes of athlete LeBron James and actress Gwyneth Paltrow being firm believers in the keto diet. The former has even told the press that he ate only meat, fish, vegetables and fruit for 67 consecutive days. While the fact that only 6 percent of Americans claim to be followers of the diet seems insignificant, it is already the third most practiced diet option,

just behind clean eating and intermittent fasting, and is by far the most searched diet of the year on the Internet.

The keto diet, similar to a lot of other diets, emphasizes a minimal carbohydrate intake, but is differentiated by a hefty intake of fat. Its standard version advises the intake of a measly 10% of your diet from carbohydrates, but over 70% in fats and 20% in protein. In practice, this means that eggs and cheese, seafood, nuts and poultry make up the base of the modified food pyramid. According to the keto diet, grains and potatoes should be avoided at all costs. There are variations that are less strict with carbohydrates and proteins, as well as some which allow for an occasional increased intake of such foods.

Adopting a high-fat diet to stay healthy sounds bizarre for most, yet a deeper dive into its workings reveals that there seems to be sound science in support. The diet works by manipulating the order of nutrient utilization in humans. Normally, glucose and glycogen, two forms of carbohydrates which are stored primarily in the liver and muscles, are the go-to source of energy for daily activities. Once they are depleted, your body turns to fat stored inside adipose tissues, found below the skin and around internal organs. When even fat is in deficiency, proteins in muscles are hydrolyzed,



Brooke Lark on Unsplash

or broken down, out of necessity. Under a keto diet, the lack of carbohydrate intake depletes short-term glycogen supply. This causes the body to enter into a state of ketosis, the state of reliance on body fat as the energy source, causing weight loss in the long run. Fat generally takes longer, and requires more energy than carbohydrates, to burn, and some weight loss could also be attributed to a loss in water retention. Ketosis is also the mechanism by which epilepsy can be treated: It reduces the amino acid glutamate and promotes an inhibitory mechanism in neurons, preventing them from firing uncontrollably and causing seizures.

Does the diet work? The scientific community has seemingly not yet reached a consensus. Current data examined shows the weight loss induced by the keto diet peaks at a 3-6 month period, and could potentially be even more effective when compared to

conventional diets. As for medical applications, scientists have claimed that it has a positive effect on the prevention and mitigation of type II diabetes. This disease is often caused by dietary imbalance, whereby the body cells become resistant to normal blood glucose regulation mechanisms. When carbohydrates are cut from the diet, there is evidence that this developed resistance can be reversed. If true, this could prove to be a therapy that can partially replace troublesome and recurrent injections of insulin, the current standard treatment for the disease, as a more “natural” cure. A health study by Virta showed 60% of type II diabetes patients reversed their diagnosis after implementing the keto diet, with 94% eliminating insulin therapy completely. There are also a multitude of other benefits that come along with reducing carbohydrate and fat levels, such as lowering the risk of cardiovascular diseases and strokes.

At this point you might be wondering, is this too good to be true? Perhaps it is. Digging deeper, you may find an alarming absence of consensus among scientists regarding the long-term consequences of removing carbohydrates completely from the diet. The health benefits also do not explain the death of Indian actor Mishti Mukherjee, a long term proponent of the diet, from kidney failure in 2020; nor the occurrence of heart attacks in two healthy children, who were examined to be deficient in minerals after practicing the diet. Certainly, the keto diet is not without its flaws and critics, especially give the prolonged period of carbohydrate fasting and excessive fat intake. There are two types of cholesterol, a “bad” low-density lipoprotein (LDL) that forms plaque which coagulates blood, and a “good” high-density lipoprotein (HDL) that prevents plaque formation. Continuous intake of saturated fat, a key component of the keto diet, could potentially increase LDL concentration, which reverses the dietary effects by increasing, not reducing, the risks of coronary heart diseases and hypertension. Nutrient imbalance is also a concern. With limited intake of vegetables and fruits, the lack of dietary fibre could eas-

ily cause constipation or even colon cancer if a nutrient imbalance persists. This is before considering the milder and more common negative effects, which include anything from bad breath to muscle loss to shifts in menstrual cycle, which one should think about before taking on the diet.

Even weight loss itself comes with asterisks. Keto or not, the perception of weight loss across media is precarious, with ill-informed users adopting the “coolest” diet that their favourite celebrities are using. Eating disorders such as anorexia, combined with anxiety when viewing slim models, are at best a physically and mentally tolling habit, and at worst, lethal. Success stories where someone undergoes a complete physical transformation may be true, but whether the exact same diet is a one-size-fit-all solution for everyone is another story. Instagram recently removed any promotions of products relating to unhealthy eating habits, such as appetite suppressants. More action like this should be undertaken by companies and governments alike to regulate such forms of toxic advertising, and to encourage social media users to em-

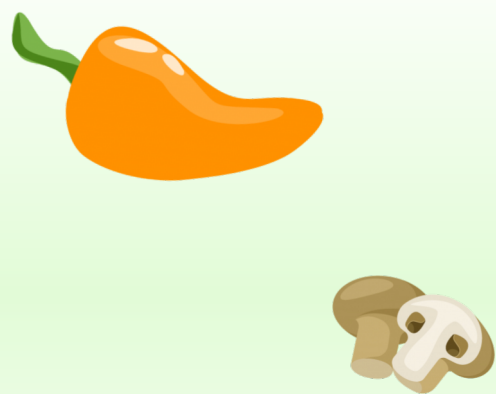
brace the importance of positive body image.

To mitigate the harmful consequences on a personal level, taking a moderate and reserved approach may prove to be prudent. It is imperative for you to filter out the cacophony of promotional messages that keto-based products provide, instead turning to more trustworthy and credible sources. Complementing the daily intake of poultry and dairy is also important, especially with adequate protein, given that it is the basic material that forms everything from muscles and hair, to digestive enzymes and antibodies. Those with preconditions, especially kidney conditions, diabetes and other long-term illnesses, should seek advice from their doctors before undergoing this potentially dangerous diet.

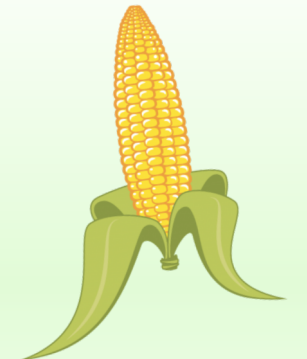
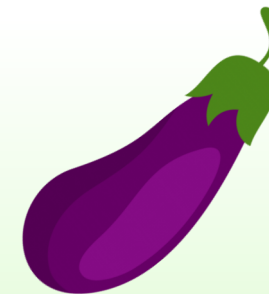
No one should endanger their health in pursuit of an ideal body shape. One’s dietary choice should ultimately be up to the individual, instead of blindly following the latest trend on social media. It is crucial to obtain information about how long your body can survive without carbohydrates, and have

the understanding to back out whenever adverse effects arise. Pushing on will not only do nothing to alleviate problems surrounding body image and obesity, but potentially cause detrimental damage.

Promising research on the ketogenic diet has the potential to revolutionize the health and medical field for decades to come; yet, it is something every follower of the diet should treat with caution. Damage to the human body inflicted by dietary choice could be irreversible and something one may need to live with for the rest of one’s life. The diet’s rise to the echelons of social media royalty is inseparable from the hyperbolic language corporations use to their advantage; its health repercussions, positive or negative, must be detangled from ideas of celebrity worship or peer conformity. Ultimately, the keto diet is neither a lethal toxin that should be avoided at all costs, nor is it a trick to drastically lower your BMI. The truth is, it likely lies somewhere in between. 🥕



Karen Arnold on PublicDomainPictures.net



What if Sisyphus was INDIFFERENT?

Carlos Yiu considers what life is all about.

IT IS OFTEN SAID that at some point we will come to a realisation that our lives are seemingly meaningless. From the perspective of a religious sceptic, our accomplishments that we have worked so hard for will not matter after our heart stops and our brain ceases to fire signals from one neuron to the next. It is not known what happens after death, but it seems most likely that we will simply not be, and everything regarding our current life will no longer matter.

French philosopher and writer Albert Camus argues that humans have an intrinsic need to understand the world through reason, even when it seems that at times the world is unreasonable. Camus calls the tension created when we use our reason to explain the unreasonable “The Absurd”. Accepting the Absurd would be mentally liberating, since accepting the death of oneself would allow for them to live to the fullest. Camus then goes on to state several outcomes when a person experiences the Absurd, the first one being the denial of such an unreasonable world. Such a denial would imply that one does not live just to die, and that everybody can fill their lives with activities that give their lives meaning. The belief in a system, or a “grand scheme of things”, would also deny the unreasonable since it gives purpose to our purposeless lives, an objective for which we

can strive. Such a mindset, however, ties one to a general plan of life. For example, for someone who spent their lives dedicated to saving up for retirement, a financial crisis which results in a catastrophic monetary loss for that person would be existentially painful. To be freed of such mental shackles, we must tackle the incomprehensibility of death itself, which would contradict the aforementioned decision of denying the unreasonable world. The second option Camus explores is suicide. Such a decision is an extreme example of accepting the absurd but committing such an act would be rejecting freedom itself, since Camus’ goal is to live a full life, and suicide would not allow for that to occur.

So how do we live a life accepting the Absurd? Well, according to Camus, one must reject hope, have passion for life itself and revolt against one’s current state of life. Such a revolution would give a person clarity and allow them to realise that defeat will always be there, all the while keeping the absurd present. According to Camus, the rejection of hope would allow one to enjoy the current state of being. If one does not long for a better state of being, they will automatically be satisfied with their current one. Lastly, Camus believes that we must live with passion, and we should live as fully as possible, instead of as good as possible,



since the concept of “goodness” could prove to be restrictive of our freedom. Camus finalises his book using the myth of Sisyphus, a Greek myth depicting a fallen king who tried to cheat death, who ended up eternally punished to push a boulder up a mountain, only for it to roll back down before the task is completed every time. Camus asks the reader to imagine Sisyphus happy, since he has no illusion about his existence, and only lives in the present. He believes that this allows Sisyphus to be in control of his own fate despite his condition, since he truly understands his existence as it is.

I agree with Camus’ conception of embracing the absurd as the only authentic reaction. Life’s meaninglessness calls for one to come to terms with one’s mortality and embrace it, using it to appreciate and treasure life. As Thomas Nagel stated, “Life does not consist of a sequence of activities each of which has as its purpose some later member of the sequence.” To assess these chains of justification there isn’t a need to consider the finality of such a chain. I drink a cup of coffee because it gives me energy. I spend time with friends because I find it pleasant. Such actions do not need a higher purpose, yet they are not pointless. By realising that some of our actions are done without reason, our skepticism starts. Our skepticism allows us to realise that what we do is meaningless, yet it does not stop us from continuing these actions; Such is The Absurd. The acceptance of such absurdity, as Camus encouraged, is the authentic manner of living.

But what if, despite having no illusion about his existence’s meaning, as Camus aims for,

Sisyphus was indifferent? Sisyphus could be frustrated about his state of being even if he was completely understanding of his life. Even if we lived our lives to the fullest, why should we be happy, especially when it seems that everything eventually amounts to nothing when we die?

I would like to challenge Camus’ assumption that one must be satisfied with one’s existence. Before we continue, I believe we shall dwell on the gritty consequences of the ambiguity of language. My argument will be based on my interpretation of Sisyphus’ happiness as satisfaction with his life. It would make more sense for Camus to ask us to imagine Sisyphus satisfied in his state rather than to be literally happy, joyful. My argument that we do not need to be satisfied with our lives is by no means a suggestion that everything within one’s existence must create sadness or discontent but is rather a suggestion that there is no need for one to be happy with their state of being. Why should we be satisfied? The feeling of satisfaction cannot exist without the feeling of pain and frustration, and this can be observed in the internal struggle Camus calls The Absurd, yet somehow happiness and satisfaction are the commonly preferred emotion. The society we currently live in is so deep-rooted in the pursuit of happiness and satisfaction that it has not once stopped to consider what would happen once total happiness is achieved. If we cannot process pain and failure, how different would we be than dopamine seeking squirrels scurrying around to find nuts for our survival? Furthermore, if we were to live in a constant state of contentment, how long would it take until we began to feel discontent at our

content? The lack of sadness and sorrow would create indifference, boredom. White would not be white without the presence of black. Goodness would not be considered such without the existence of evil. There is no rulebook to our existence which suggests that we should be happy with our lives. Happiness is the result of the reward system developed by evolution to reward us when we execute an action that would ensure our survival. We have the right to be unhappy just as much as we have the right to be happy. The acceptance of our mortality and the absurdity of our existence does not require, nor would it necessarily result in, us being satisfied with our current lives. The acceptance of our mortality should be just that—an acceptance. It needs not create an emotional reaction, the same way accepting that $1 + 1 = 2$ does not make one bounce up and down with joy nor fall into deep depression (unless you are extremely passionate about mathematics, in which case I humbly take back this comparison). It is merely reality, something bound to happen to us sooner or later.

Again, that is not to say that we cannot be satisfied with our lives. After all, if we have the ability to make our time alive better, there is no reason not to do so. Aristotle defined happiness as a result of achievements, and that 2300-year-old definition is still relevant to most people these days. Achieving a perfect score on an exam, getting a job, or being in a fulfilling relationship all bring happiness. The value of success is established early in life, where for example, if an infant successfully places geometric shapes in a box through the accordingly shaped hole they are praised, an indirect form of telling them that they

ought to be happy with what they achieved. Of course, the road to success is filled with failures, frustration, and errors, all of which are frowned upon. A careless error in an assignment might cost you marks that reflects on your report card, or perhaps you didn't get the job you interviewed for. The resulting emotion would most likely be a negative one, maybe even that of regret for not trying harder. We must learn to accept pain and failure and view them as opportunities to improve and better ourselves. There is no need to feel bad about failing. If we judged our success by the same guidelines set by Aristotle, our lives would be considered a failure. Aristotle's definition of success places importance on the finality of things, and as we have established a



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priori, our lives mean nothing at the end. And since we are not entertaining a nihilistic existentialist's opinion on this essay, we shall judge our lives with a different standard, one that, as Camus suggests, dwells on the present. Failure should be taken as a blessing, an opportunity to learn. This statement of course does not apply to instances where heavy consequences are present such as a surgery or the case of piloting a plane. Irish novelist Samuel Beckett famously wrote, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." This perfectly encapsulates Sisyphus' condition and provides great insight into how we should value our lives. Should we not value our lives by how hard we have tried? Talent and luck are a luxury

not everybody can enjoy, but the ability to try again and to fail better is. The reason we search for the meaning of life is to justify our actions. We want to give meaning to things we have worked hard for, things we have succeeded in. But it was never about the finish line. It was always about how we tried and how we failed. Being eternally punished to roll a boulder up a mountain does not provide a condition in which success can appear, which is why Camus cleverly chose this myth to convey his message. Sisyphus has no choice but to fail again and to fail better. Our lives are similar to the eternal punishment given to the fallen king, in the sense that there is no way to judge the success of our lives by looking at it retrospectively, we can only focus on the process.

To imagine Sisyphus happy, we must first imagine him sad and frustrated, then him accepting pain and coming to an understanding of his existence. He understands that infinitely rolling the cursed boulder is completely pointless, yet he continues to do it without the motivation of reason. However, we must not limit nor strictly compare ourselves to Sisyphus, since we have so much more going on in our lives than rolling a boulder up a hill. We are not eternally punished by the Gods, nor are we alone in life. That being said, we must learn from him to accept pain even when our lives seem to be bleak, because we all have a little Sisyphus inside of us. ▲

Thanks go to Mr G. Vanderheiden for guest editing this article.

<https://whatparentsask.com/5-reasons-allow-your-child-to-get-bored/>

AMBROSE CHEN: Behind Boredom

“Boredom, the desire for desires.” ~Leo Tolstoy

THE UNCOMFORTABLE FIDGET in the middle of a 12-hour flight. The unconscious tapping of feet when waiting for a doctor’s appointment. The spinning of a pencil in a classroom. Subtle signs of boredom are all around us. I’m sure boredom is a ubiquitous feeling among many of us, and the era of social distancing and lockdowns has certainly made it worse. Yet most of us, no matter how overreaching our boredom is, choose to ignore or hide from it. So why exactly is such a common emotion so misunderstood and frustrating to deal with?

In modern English, the word “boredom” was first used by Charles Dickens in his novel *Bleak House* in 1852, but its history extends far beyond that. In ancient Rome, Seneca described “taedium vitae” — a kind of nausea at the weariness and monotony of life. In *Epistulae Morales*, he writes, “How long the same things...is there no end?” During the Middle Ages, monks

Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian characterized the “demon” of listlessness and torpor known as “acedia”. In the Romantic movement of 19th century Europe, boredom manifested as *mal du siècle*, a feeling of disillusionment and melancholy.

Currently, boredom still lacks a fixed and universally accepted definition, which increases its complexity. Some definitions I’ve come across include a “mild form of disgust”, a “lack of interest and attention” and, my personal favorite, the “sensation of the emptiness of existence”. Tolstoy once wrote that boredom is the “desire for desires”, which I think sums up the essence of boredom relatively well. In this vein, boredom can be the desire to do something different. The desire to escape monotony. The desire to use your skills.

So, what leads to boredom? University of Florida professor Erin Westgate has proposed that, simply put, boredom stems

from two paths. The first is a loss of focus. This can happen when you are doing a particularly difficult piece of homework, for instance, or listening to your teacher drone on about a topic you don’t understand. This phenomenon can also happen on a larger scale: factors brought on by Covid such as city shutdowns, lengthy quarantines and remote learning can all negatively affect our mental sharpness and ability to focus as these sudden changes often trigger stress and anxiety. The second is a loss of meaning, which can be prompted by conditions such as having a dull office job, lack of personal life or not having clear goals. Most activities are either uninteresting but meaningful or interesting but meaningless, but the boredom that is evoked from an activity that is both tedious and meaningless is, in Westgate’s own words, “doubly bad”.

Now that we have clearly identified the two catalysts of boredom, let’s take a look at how they are prevalent in our daily lives. According to a 2016 study by Udemy, 44% of American employees felt that the reason they were bored at work was that they weren’t being challenged enough. This is largely due to the fact that their work is repetitive or monotonous, or doesn’t require them to make use of their problem-solving skills or education. Therefore, linking back to the two catalysts, there is a lack of meaning. On the other hand, 30% of employees listed the main cause of boredom as not having enough work, while 25% were on the other end of the spectrum and felt that they had too much. While the former is pretty self-explanatory, the latter may be more interesting. How can having too much work be a trigger for boredom? This is because when employees are over-

whelmed with difficult, unfamiliar or time-consuming tasks, they are likely to lose motivation and zone out. This correlates to the second factor: the lack of focus.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, boredom in the workplace and boredom at school share common denominators. Some of the most commonly cited reasons for school boredom include feeling that the materials taught and assigned are unchallenging, repetitive tasks and there is a lack of incentive to achieve them. According to Indiana University’s annual Survey of Student Engagement of more than 81,000 students, fewer than 2% of students said they have never been bored in high school, and 75% of those who had been bored referred to the material being taught as uninteresting. Furthermore, among the students who considered dropping out, 60% stated they were unable to see the value in the work they were being asked to complete. Thus, by extension, boredom is one of the leading reasons for underperformance at school. When students are not engaged with their schoolwork, they will naturally become disinclined to study or do well. Indeed, a 2016 study by the University of Munich observed a cycle across an academic year in which boredom resulted in lower test scores, which in turn led to even higher levels of boredom, and so forth.


Besides the boredom at work or school, there is also the question of pandemic boredom. Certainly, all of us have experienced being trapped in the limbo of lockdown and Zoom lessons. As people struggle with having too much time and too little to do, a tendency for risky behavior, such as holding social gatherings and holidaying

in Covid-prone areas, has been observed by many researchers. When the impulse to escape boredom tips the scales and outweighs rational thought, people may overlook, or even ignore, the potential consequences of their valiant boredom-curbing pursuits. In this way, boredom is an “incredibly powerful motivator for behavior”, and sometimes, people may react to this in unsafe and risky ways.

The connection between boredom and risk can be exemplified by the well-known shock experiment of 2014. In that study, participants were asked to sit in an empty room for 15 minutes with no distractions. The only activity the researchers allowed them to do was to press a button that sent a small electric shock to their ankles. While sitting out 15 minutes doesn’t sound too hard, 67% of men and 25% of women decided to shock themselves. This shows that when faced with boredom, many people would rather do something that may be dangerous or painful to themselves. The same trend can be seen in many other investigations, such as those about the correlation between boredom and substance abuse and the correlation between boredom and gambling. I’ve even read about a Russian man who stole a tank and rammed it into a supermarket. Why? You guessed it. He was bored.

To this point, I’ve been framing boredom as this all-pervading and overwhelmingly negative force, but that only happens when you respond to it in the wrong way. In truth, boredom is a neutral emotion: it cannot be used to justify reckless behavior; rather, it is simply our brain’s way of telling us we

need a change, whether it be in activity or lifestyle. As psychologist James Danckert said, we want to interact with the world “purposefully” and to feel “capable and useful”; when we are unable to do that, boredom seeps in. This is why doing things that only keep us shallowly and momentarily engaged, such as scrolling through social media or binge-snacking, don’t actually solve the root causes of our boredom. Hence, the best solution would be to do something that addresses our two factors—something that is simultaneously meaningful and engaging. This can be something like learning a new language or a new instrument, although it’s different for everyone. Of course, finding this special something can be difficult, but once you have found it, the frustration and discomfort boredom brings might just become a force for good - for example, you might discover an interest you’ve never had before.

Boredom has been a subject of fascination from the philosophical musings of ancient philosophers to the complex psychological experiments of modern researchers. The intricacies of boredom have never ceased to intrigue us and will, perhaps, only get more complex in the future. Boredom manifests in different ways for all of us, and it is up to you to devise methods to tackle ennui and find something that matters most. When responded to correctly, boredom can, most certainly, be a catalyst for creativity and productivity. 

Dina on Pexels

An interview with Dr. CC Luk

NICHOLAS LAM

DBS ALUMNUS Dr. Luk Che Chung is the recipient of the CUHK Distinguished Medical Alumni Global Achievement Award, former Hong Kong East Cluster Chief Executive and Hospital Chief Executive of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital, Wong Chuk Hang Hospital and St. John’s Hospital. His role as a key hospital administrator has lent him great insight into both the microscopic and macroscopic workings of the healthcare industry in Hong Kong.

Here’s The Diocesan Herald’s conversation with Dr. Luk, looking back over his 35 years of practice, his view on the current status of the medical system, and the medical profession as a whole.

Medicine is not an easy career to get into. What stirred your passion or inspired you to get into this profession?

Honestly, back in the day, we didn’t have too many complicated considerations about the future of our careers like people do nowadays. At the time, many of us considered medicine to be a noble profession, doing good and helping people, and for a young person it was quite natural to aspire to do something good. A particular experience I had when I was young was visiting relatives at Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QE). In that experience I witnessed the conditions of a public healthcare setting for the first time. The environment of the hospital was extremely poor, and the patients were cramped into wards. I would describe QE



back then as a “battlefront hospital”, and I asked myself, when one is sick, how can someone have such a treatment? My relative was not seriously ill, but this short visit into a busy, overcrowded hospital gave me a mental image that has stayed with me my whole life, and also stimulated my passion and conscience for serving people when I was young. I therefore struggled for a good academic result and got into medicine.

Hong Kong is currently running a dual medical system, i.e. having both private and public sectors. Would you say that such a system is a failure, or a success?

I think there is not a straightforward answer, as it has its success and failures. In the end I believe a dual system is necessary, but as to what kind of system a society should have, that depends on societal values. Collective societal values dictate the healthcare system. E.g. US private vs UK public. There is no perfect system or solution, or all countries would have adopted it. There is no perfect system because we are looking at different attributes of a system. The common framework we adopt is efficiency, cost, and quality. It would be perfect if we achieved 100 marks in all areas, but they often compete with each other, and thus will ultimately depend on how society weighs each of the attributes against each other. If a society treasures individual freedom, then a private system would be preferable, if a society treasures equity, then a public system. Cost is an issue, not the most important one, but is still important since it involves affordability. HK is very affordable, as we are very rich, and concerns of money seem to be less. Right now we are spending a huge chunk of public resources on healthcare. If the government has one dollar, one fifth of this dollar goes to healthcare. The Government should not and cannot spend more on healthcare at the cost of other sectors, and the HA (hospital authority) should not rely solely on the government for funding. Hong Kong is a capitalist society, but healthcare wise we are relatively socialist. The beauty of our system is, if you are sick we will take care of you whether you have money or not. Whether society will continue to support this attribute continues to be the center of debate. Everyone will support it if they don't have to pay, but we must pay. There is a huge price tag

on the issue, the question is who pays, and how.

Whenever we compare the public and private sectors, inevitably inequity comes up as a serious issue. Do you see the policy of pumping money to the HA as a way to close the gap?

The government has been very supportive of HA, finance wise, despite the economic ups and downs. The issue is however much money the government gives the HA, it is capped. But in terms of demand, it's not capped, therefore the current system we have is not sustainable in the long run. It's just natural human behavior—if the quality of healthcare is good, if it's virtually free, what will happen? Patients will be attracted from the private sector to the public sector. So if we improve the quality, improve the efficiency—decrease the waiting times, for example—the only end result is that more patients will come. On the other hand, we do not wish to make ourselves bad, in order to turn away patients. That's against our conscience, and against the professionalism of medicine. So we are stuck, stuck in a position.

Therefore, it is not sustainable just with money, but rather we need a systematic approach to the issue instead of increasing our budget and building more hospitals. Even if the government has enough resources to give the HA, unless you are turning Hong Kong's system into a national health service, it is simply not sustainable. So the direction to go is, if we work on a dual system, then how to allow the two sectors to coexist, and how to collaborate? Right now the linkages between the two systems have improved a little, but

still far from adequate, so this is something we must work on in-between. This is why we used to say we are the victims of our own success in the HA.

Another thing we must focus on is the before-hospital primary and community care. After-hospital is long term care. Right now HA is responsible for the middle part, hospital care. How this middle field works with the other two fields is of paramount importance. On primary care, if primary care is not good enough people will unnecessarily enter the hospital system. Obviously if the condition is serious, then they have to go to hospital but most are chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension that can be easily managed in a community setting, and there is also a lot of preventive care to be done, both primary and secondary prevention. Right now in Hong Kong we do not have a good primary care system. Only a very low percentage of citizens in HK have a family doctor. Because of this they see doctors on an episodic basis, or "Doctor shopping", going to see one doctor in the morning and another in the afternoon. That's nothing wrong on the side of the patients—they just want to be cured. From a system angle, this is a total waste of resources. Right now the government is spending 80 billion dollars on the HA, and another 80 billion is spent by patients in the private sector. Altogether, that's a huge amount of money and a lot of it is being wasted. If we have a good primary system, then the family doctors should in theory be looking after the patients well, all the unnecessary investigations, doctor shopping and so on can be prevented.

On the other side is the after-hospital care. We have a major problem with patient discharge, especially with older patients who have to seek elderly homes, where, in Hong Kong, the quality of which is extremely diverse. The end result is that they come back to the HA soon. This sort of "revolving door" leads to a major wastage of resources, as well as causing frustration for healthcare professionals.

Recently the government introduced a bill that would allow foreign-graduated doctors to practice in Hong Kong without a licentiate exam. What are your thoughts on this? Will it solve the doctor shortage crisis?

It will help. I have worked in the profession for 35 years—I graduated in 1986, and there has not been a single day in these 35 years that there have been enough doctors in the public sector. Any policy that will bring qualified doctors into the medical system, I will support. As 93% of all the public relies on the public sector, we have a huge social responsibility. In order to deliver appropriate care, we need enough qualified doctors. The devil is really in the details, so how do we ensure these doctors are qualified? How long will these doctors serve the public system? The problem at hand is with the public sector, so we must stress that these doctors should work in the public sector. But, for how long? If we require them to stay in public health for 30 years, no one will come. If we require them to stay for 3-5 years, it will not have any meaningful impact on the problem at hand. If you ask me, it is somewhere in between. The dividing line is still undecided, no one knows for sure.

The practice of medicine is commonly described as being an art as much as a science, can you tell us what that means to you?

You really have to understand what a doctor can, should and can't do. Even though the line between "can" and "should" may often be blurred, the latter is a far more complicated matter, as it not only requires professional excellence, meaning to make the correct diagnosis and prescribe the correct treatment, but also far more importantly, the ethical side of medicine—which some would call the art of medicine. The art of medicine is far more important than the "science" part, despite that the science part will be much more appealing to young people. In terms of "should do", of course you need to be a technically competent doctor. But far more important is whether you care, and love your patient. For example, the other day I wrote an article on quitting smoking. A lot of patients have a disease because of chronic smoking. For some, if they quit smoking, the disease can be contained. But it is so hard for a doctor to persuade them to quit. Why? As a doctor, it's not just about making a good diagnosis and passing correct information, but to understand why an individual will follow your advice, or why not. You have to understand the patient's psychology, as well as their lifestyle and life difficulties. Doctors are relatively well paid, belonging to the middle to upper social class, while the majority of patients belong to the grassroots, and they have their own lifestyle and life difficulties much different from doctors. For example, if you ask a construction worker to buy healthy foods to eat, he won't be able to afford it because can only afford packed lunches ev-



ery day, so how can he be healthy? And his cigarette may be his only "quality of life" for the whole day. By telling him to quit that, you are telling him to quit his quality of life. No way! This requires patience, and time to thoroughly understand the patient. Bringing us back to "can do, should do, and can't do", "should do" is extremely difficult. This brings me to my last point, "can't do". Doctors aren't gods. Every profession has its own limits. Don't pass that limit. Some doctors are notorious for being too heroic. When doctors do not know their own limit, they will cause harm to patients in terms of over-treating, in terms of doing something beyond their own capability as a result of overconfidence in oneself. Really disastrous things have happened before because of this. We train doctors to be independent, have self-confidence, and be professional, but the dividing line between self-confidence and

superego is very fine. As society has given doctors a high social status and a lot of authority, this comes with a lot of responsibility. If a doctor certifies a man to be disabled, the government will give them an allowance. Why does society choose to give such authority to doctors? Because society trusts their professionalism, their knowledge, and their integrity. As society has given doctors such authority, doctors have the responsibility to maintain all these. We have to earn society's continuous trust. If doctors abuse this authority, one day society will take away this authority.

What kind of qualities or mindset would make one suitable to become a doctor?

Whether you love people, and whether you love interacting with people. As doctors, in general, we are in a profession of

looking after people—a "people profession". If a student hates interacting with people then he should really rethink his choice. The majority of a doctor's time is spent on interacting with living individuals. For patients, these individuals are stressed, worried, sometimes stubborn and have different values, etc. And for the medical team, doctors are not superheroes. We need extremely good teamwork. Doctors need to work with others on a daily basis, other doctors, nurses, or even cleaning ladies in the hospital. The way I see it is that not many students prefer working with people. If you don't enjoy working with others, it would be rather difficult for such a type of person to enjoy the practice of medicine. At the end of the day he would still be able to be a doctor, of course, but the advice I would give to young people is to please, at your age you should find something you truly enjoy and not what your parents, and what society tells you. This is the luxury of being young. I know in your generation you were brought up in an era of social media, but I encourage young people to go out, meet, and come together with people, and soon you will genuinely enjoy human interaction. And then, once you achieve that the chance you will enjoy being a doctor will become significantly greater.

The technical side of medicine is tangible knowledge that can be obtained by studying medical textbooks. In comparison, the ethical side of medicine is much more intangible and abstract. So how can one cultivate and accumulate this knowledge?

Anything that allows you to meet and interact with people and promote your so-

cial skills. Not necessarily charity events, but of course these are desirable. You can join an orchestra. It's not just you playing the violin by yourself; you have to work well within the orchestra. Same with joining the choir, football, swimming team etc. These are the activities that allow individuals to truly experience the value of human interaction, and develop your appreciation for it. You will learn from others, you will be hurt by others, and you can also learn the wisdom and different characteristics of other people. I sit in the selection panel for medical students. I have observed over the years that many students have a predefined mindset, like I must have certain accredited hours of visiting elderly homes and doing volunteer work, but the value of these experiences is not defined by the number of counting the hours you have committed to volunteer work, but what matters is we assess the applicant's attitudes towards people, towards life, and this is the sort of intangible knowledge that you cannot learn from a book, but from your own experiences. And if you have enough experiences of interacting with people, you will have sustained enough personal growth to equip yourself to be a good doctor. You don't have to forcefully arrange uncanny volunteering activities just to help your application, but as long as you put your heart into it, you can learn something. If you're a violin soloist, you will learn technical skill; but if you join an orchestra, even if you are the best, you may be assigned a secondary role. What we value is your decision-making process, of how you interact with other people in situations like these. Whether you have that perspective is far more important than the activity itself. You have to

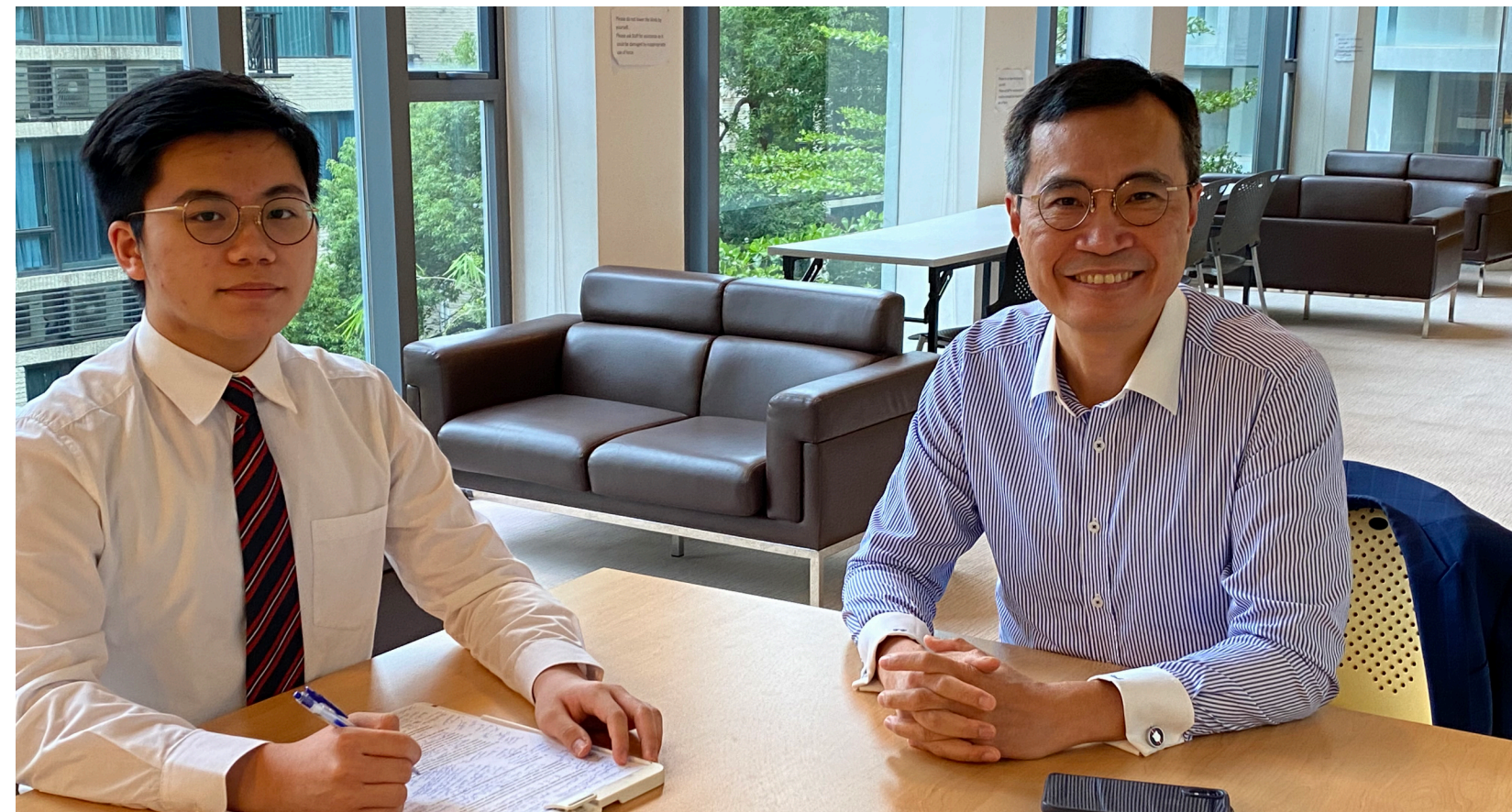
enjoy talking to people. There is another Chinese idiom that says, 醫者父母心, remember this dearly. Meaning to love your patient as a father or mother would love their child, unconditionally, unidirectionally. That is the sort of expectation for doctors. Another really good idiom— 仁心仁術 (Ren Xin Ren Shu), Ren Xin meaning ethics, morals, etc. while Ren Shu is technical skill. In this idiom, Ren Xin comes before Ren Shu, because having a heart, having compassion, and love for the patient, is far more important than professional expertise. Ren Shu can be learned, can be acquired, can and will probably be replaced by AI and technology in the future, but Ren Xin—never. In fact, the more technical skill you have, the more important compassion is. That's because Ren Shu can harm—the drug, the surgical knife, if inappropriately used, can cause a lot of harm. I had a vocal coach in the past, who used a metaphor—a lightbulb by itself shines brightly, but is blinding to the eye. Hence the reason light bulbs are lit behind lampshades—to dim the light, so it would not be blinding, but still serve the purpose of illumination. Ren Xin—compassion is the lampshade, dimming Ren Shu, the lightbulb that can harm.

Do you have any final words or advice you'd like to give to DBS boys who are considering joining the medical profession?

My advice to young people who want to study medicine is that you have to understand, and be honest with your heart, whether you really wish to study medicine. Do not allow yourself to be over-attracted to the prestige, whether it be financial or social status that comes with being a doc-

tor. These considerations are not as important compared to the true value of being a doctor. I suggest you really think about, talk to people you trust, like or respect, on whether medicine is a good career for you. If you work till 75, you will be working 50 years. Also, once you are a doctor, the cost of switching professions is extremely high. Unlike law or economics, it is extremely difficult, and therefore is a lifetime commitment. Really ask yourself, would you like to be a doctor for 50 years? If you are looking for a decent life, don't choose to be a doctor. Don't fall for the medical dramas where all the doctors are all handsome boys and girls, sitting in beautiful lounges. That's not the true life of a doctor. DBS is one of the most important schools in Hong Kong, some would even consider

us the most important, but there are always two sides of the coin. At the back of the glorious side, there comes great responsibility. When we are that level, everyone in society looks at us, it is good for us to be ambitious. I would say, think for yourself, think for the school, and choose something you really like, go for it, and deliver at the highest level of excellence. Choose something you are really passionate about. DBS boys are already the crème de la crème. We need not doubt our ability. The only worry I have is whether you have chosen what you really love. Once you have done so, I am extremely confident that you will make it. I hope there will be more DBS [students] to be future doctors, and look after me when I am old. Good luck! 🙏



A BIG LEAP FOR ESPORTS

Geoffrey Wong comments on the rising status of eSports in the Olympics.

THE 21st CENTURY has seen the rise of international eSports tournaments. In the wake of the rollout of the Olympic Virtual Series, and with the number of worldwide eSports enthusiasts proliferating from 58 million in 2012 to 234 million in 2021, the debate as to whether or not eSports should be considered an Olympic sport has started to become a hot topic.

Is eSports a sport?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a sport as 'a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/ or as a job'. By this definition, one could argue that gaming is a sport as it has a competitive

nature and standardized rules. Yet this assertion has long been disputed due to eSports' lack of physicality. Popular eSports franchises, such as 'Counter-Strike: Global Offensive' and 'League of Legends', require the physical movement of only one's hands as the player sits on a squashy gaming chair, concentrating on a digital screen. In this regard, it is hard to define eSports as a sport owing to its limited physical movement.

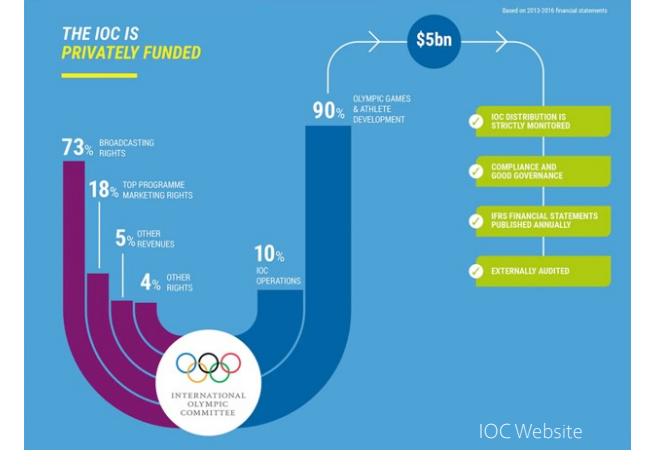
However, rifle shooting, which does not require any physical movement except a finger, is in fact one of the most established sports in the Olympics. The focus of the sport is on precision and accuracy in lieu of physical agility and strength. Similar to rifle shooting, eSports does not focus on physi-

cality, but places emphasis on hand-eye coordination, a skill that is just as difficult to master. Following this line of thought, competitive and rules-based activities that involve physical activity of any level of vigour can be classified as a sport. Therefore, eSports can be classified as a sport that is skill-oriented rather than physically-oriented. This triggers another debate: Should eSports be included in the Olympic games?

Why should the Olympics add eSports?

Youth attraction to eSports is one of the most significant reasons why the sport should be added to the Olympics. As a matter of fact, the average age of traditional sports viewership is about 50, whereas that of eSports is just 26 – almost half the age. According to NBC, its audience for the Tokyo Games saw a drop of around 45% in comparison to the 2016 Rio Games. On the other hand, the worldwide viewership of eSports in 2020 saw a rise of more than 9% from 2019. Hence, if eSports becomes an Olympic sport, youth enthusiasm for the Olympics, and by extension, the number of youths watching the Olympics would skyrocket, and some of them might even end up participating in the Games. This positively influences young fans in a sense that they and their parents might acknowledge eSports as a newly-discovered career path due to the international fame and prestige afforded by its inclusion in the Olympics.

In addition, the potential amount of revenue that could be gained by the IOC exemplifies the financial incentive to include eSports as an event in the Olympic Games. The pie chart shows that the IOC's income is mainly generated from the sales of broadcast rights and sponsorship, which



could potentially be enhanced by introducing eSports into the Olympics. Given the growing popularity of eSports, the IOC could reap huge profits, which in turn could help sport as the IOC's revenue is distributed to sporting organizations worldwide, providing athletes with more desirable facilities to enhance training.

The importance of adapting to a change in social context is another reason why eSports should be an Olympic sport. From a historical and philosophical perspective, even though it is arguable that adding eSports to the Olympics would violate the Olympic tradition that originated from ancient Greece (dating back to 2000 years ago, the Olympics originally emphasized the pursuit of physical perfection, as shown in drawings and carvings of chiseled men doing vigorous sports), it is inevitable that our social context will change as technology becomes more advanced. In the case of the Olympic Games, the rise of eSports should be embraced since it is an outcome of technological development. To further elaborate on this, a parallel can be drawn with skateboarding. Skateboarding had its first Olympic debut in this year's Summer Games. This was the culmination of a long journey from arrival of the first professional skateboarders in the 1980s to the sport's eventual validation through its acceptance into the Games.

Why shouldn't the Olympics add eSports?

The other side of the debate, however, believes that the IOC should take the serious gender discrimination in the gaming world into consideration. In spite of the increasing prominence of the gender equality movement, a survey conducted by Evil Geniuses in 2020 found that 44% of women experienced gender discrimination when gaming—nearly three times the amount that was reported by men (16%). Many of the surveyed women had disguised their identities, changed their profiles and characters to neutral or masculine ones and abandoned voice communication in order to combat this problem. Moreover, in an interview, Anita Sarkeesian, a Canadian public speaker, said she received a barrage of rape and death threats after producing an online video series about sexist tropes in video games. These examples illustrate how eSports goes against Olympism. Olympism, a philosophy created by the IOC, states that a sense of fair play and respect for fellow competitors are the common goals that athletes must work towards, regardless of their backgrounds. With the severity of gender discrimination highlighted, it is obvious that eSports does not yet echo the values of Olympism. Further, depending on the severity of the case, gender discrimination might culminate in psychological effects, including low self-esteem, negative body image, exposure to chronic stress, and trauma. The IOC should therefore consider how eSports could be supported to align with the Olympic spirit and values.

A further mismatch of values is apparent due to the fact that a ban on most of the well-liked 'violent' games is likely. IOC

President Thomas Bach said the Olympic Games would accept eSports only on the grounds that they do not involve any forms of violence, indicating that most of the popular games such as 'Player Unknown's Battlegrounds' will be excluded for featuring violence. Consequently, many of the best players in the world might not compete in the eSport category in the Olympics because it does not include the game which they have played professionally for years, thus reducing viewer count and profitability from partnerships and sponsorships.

What could the IOC possibly do?

Organizing an e-Olympics is one potential way to promote eSports. As the Summer Olympics and Winter Olympics are held biennially, the e-Olympic games might be an innovative way to fill in the gap in between the games and to attract a younger audience. Non-violent games in the e-Olympics could be those being featured in the Olympic Virtual Series, such as virtual versions of motorsport, cycling, baseball, sailing, and rowing.

"The youths are interested, so let's meet them", said Tony Estanguet, co-chairman of the 2024 Paris Olympics organizing committee. As eSports continues to garner more attention from the Olympic community, so the possibility of its inclusion in the Games increases. If gender discrimination becomes less of an issue in the future years, and non-violent games can successfully attract youths, it will be more of a boon than a bane to give eSports the green light. 🏆

Together? You Wish.

Bernard Shiu explored how politics clashed with sports at the recent 2020 Olympics.

BEFORE THE 2020 OLYMPICS, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) added the word "Together" to its motto. This change suggests that amidst the pandemic and other various socio-political challenges, the IOC believes that global cooperation is imperative to success. It is, therefore, unfortunate that the Olympics was plagued by political affairs that have sparked controversy. These tensions will remain obstacles to solving the globe's problems. The most notable example of which belongs to the long list of Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko's acts to secure control over a nation that is becoming increasingly reluctant to bend to his will.

Krystsina Tsimanouskaya is a sprinter who finished 38th in the 100m event of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. How did she become one of the most well-known Belarusians in the world today? Because she posted a video on Instagram complaining about how her coaches had signed her up for an event she had neither competed in before nor wanted to compete in, and criticising doping test arrangements by the National Olympic Committee (NOC). And Lukashenko, who obviously only likes positivity and praise, decided to force Tsimanouskaya back to Belarus in response to

her criticism. This move was, of course, received poorly by the international community. Several European nations swiftly offered her asylum and humanitarian visas, with Tsimanouskaya choosing neighbouring Poland as her eventual destination. Western states, including the US, also imposed sanctions against Belarus. Responses from within Belarus were more diverse. The Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation believed Tsimanouskaya's life would be in danger if she returned to Belarus and urged her to flee, and some fellow Belarusian athletes followed suit, seeking refuge in Germany. On the other hand, supporters of the regime sent her threatening messages, and the state media described her as "lazy" and "foul-bred".

This event highlights the way individuals can be impacted when sports and politics collide. It is widely recognised that a key element of sport is that the participants are driven by a passion for their pursuit of excellence. However, the NOC did not give Tsimanouskaya a choice as to whether she wanted to participate in the concerned event, which raises questions about their views of the purpose of sport—as an individual pursuit supported by the state or solely as a tool of the state to promote their interests. In addition, Tsimanouskaya's experience of

coming close to being repatriated against her will exposes the Belarusian authorities' intolerance towards any form of dissent, calling more international attention to their management of internal affairs. However, what makes this incident troubling is more than the phenomenon described above. Despite the Belarusian government's infamy, that they would take such drastic action in response to such a trifle is quite surprising. It is undeniable that Lukashenko and his henchmen have been ruthless and unreasonable in their political actions. Since the 90s, they have attempted to kidnap and assassinate anti-government activists and succeeded a few times. Most recently, police used extreme violence in a crackdown operation targeted at protests against corrupt elections in August 2020. In September 2020, a report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported 450 cases of the mistreatment of detainees, including the beating of unclothed areas of the body, sexual abuse and the denial of medical attention. In May 2021, Lukashenko ordered a passenger flight to land in Minsk enabling the arrest of Roman Protasevich, an opposition journalist. Tsimanouskaya's treatment cannot match the events described above in severity, but it still lies in the realm of the abuse of power. The attempt at forced repatriation; the declaration of her poor "emotional and psychological state"; and the use of terms like "scandalous", "unpatriotic" and "undeserving to represent" all hint that the Belarusian authorities view this incident through a political lens. Hence, it is worth questioning whether the response by the state was in proportion to the perceived offence—it seems like an overreaction. Tsimanouskaya did not direct her criticism towards the Belarusian government in

her initial display of frustration; she only denounced the NOC. Tsimanouskaya's husband also stated that the couple had never been interested in political affairs. "We never had any connections, never supported the opposition. We're just normal sports people, we're just devoted to sports and we're not interested in the opposition movement," he said.

Amnesty International has a theory as to why the Belarusian government is so strict regarding the conduct of their sportspeople. They observed that athletes in Belarus had high social status and were widely recognised by Belarusians as heroes. Hence, when a significant portion of them started openly denouncing the government, they receive more severe retaliation. Amnesty International gives the example of over 1,000 athletes signing an open letter in August 2020 calling for re-elections and respect for the rights of peaceful demonstrators, only to receive retaliation from the state not long after. 95 athletes were detained by authorities for taking part in peaceful demonstrations and 124 others have suffered the wrath of alternate forms of repression, with 35 of them seeing themselves dropped from the national team. This reveals the government fears that the opinions of athletes will have a garnering effect on the wider population and consequently disrupt the political status quo. When we witness those who potentially benefit from a system stand up to reject the system, it is a matter of the needs of the many overriding the needs of the few. The fall of athletes from being national heroes backed by the state into voices of dissent bullied by the state or even imprisoned is counterproductive. It could most likely further anger the Belarusian population, further uniting opposing forces

against a controversial leader. It is in this context that we understand that Tsimanouskaya's misfortunes were not a coincidence or anomaly, but rather part of a trend whose formation has its roots in the increased desperation of Lukashenko to suppress "undesirable voices" in his state.

Tsimanouskaya's treatment suggests something more about the politics of Belarus. First, Lukashenko and his gang are feeling more and more insecure about their position in the country. Since the August 2020 demonstrations and opposition leader Tsikhanouskaya's self-exile to Lithuania, public opinion has not been in favour of those in power. Lukashenko has gained the nickname of "Sasha 3%" in recent years, a humorous poke at the lack of support he has (those who use this nickname claim that only 3% of the population supports Lukashenko). While the 3% jibe is an exaggeration of his unpopularity, it still speaks to the dwindling support the politician garners today. And for the dictator who has never been favoured by the West, and who has not exactly had good relations with neighbouring Russia, this loss gives him one less entity to rely on, which might prove to be fatal for his political career. It may be, for this reason, that he seeks more extreme measures to seize the initiative in manipulating public opinion. As a populist politician with more than two decades of experience, Lukashenko understands the power of values like nationalism in shaping public opinion; it was through the manipulation of such tools that he was able to stay in office with only limited popularity for quite some time (the highest support ratings he attained were around 50%). Using distractions to divert attention from his disastrous rule sounds like something he would do, and it may just be his only choice when

desperate. Undoubtedly, the politicisation of sport will further corrode the meaning of normal life in Belarus, giving Belarusians fewer options of escape from the tragic political condition of the nation. This may lead to a further decline in the morale of Belarusians and increased socio-political conflict.

Simultaneously, other problems arise. Tsimanouskaya and her husband classify themselves as politically neutral; the extreme action taken against them is rare. There are two possibilities to explain why the Belarusian authorities made this decision. First, they may have broadened the definition of "opposition" to include a broader spectrum of people. When we use the term "opposition", we usually refer to a group of people with antithetical political goals. Tsimanouskaya, however, was only unsatisfied by the performance of the NOC. Her actions lacked political motivation. If the Belarusian government has started to classify people with any complaints as the opposition, it is yet another heavy blow to Belarusian society. Second, the Belarusian government may have unconsciously got used to the oppressive practices they have used against political leaders and started implementing them against the general public. If this is the case, there's reason to believe that the liberties of Belarusians may face more and more suppression.

Either way, the Belarusian government's newest scandal further fuels the fire of dissent against the regime, while possibly antagonising the politically neutral. This will only mean increased conflicts between different stakeholders in Belarus and more turmoil. It is hard to say whether Lukashenko will be able to rein in his horse at the edge of the cliff in time. 🤸

Petr David Josek on AP Photos

How the Olympics got ROCed

By Mark Lee

The... ROC?

You throw yourself carelessly onto the couch, the springs creaking as the ancient piece of furniture gently protests against the suddenly added burden. After a while of aimlessly picking at a piece of loose thread from your shirt, you squeeze your eyes shut, exhale deeply, and stretch, trying to revitalize the tired vessel that is your body. It's the summer holidays, and there's nothing for you to do. To try distracting yourself from the mind-numbing monotony that occurs on empty days when there is too much time on your hands, you stretch out, and,

in a minor feat of acrobatics, manage to get hold of the remote without getting up.

The screen flickers to life, and you watch as a camera pans over a stadium, the seats empty and lifeless, before it zooms into the volleyball court at the center. Before slowly zooming in on the contestants' faces. "For the bronze-medal match, we have Turkey going up against the ROC..." You sit up for a moment and stare at the flag displayed on screen. It seems familiar, but something feels off about it. Racking your brains, you cast your mind see if you have come across a

country called the ROC before. Then it hits you. The ROC flag is a lazily revised version of the Russian national flag.

The ROC, or Russian Olympic Committee, was the Russian response to a slew of sanctions from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), but to fully understand the scope of the situation, we must first look back to the allegations, investigations and subsequent decisions made by

both the international governing bodies of sports and Russia half a decade ago.

The build-up and the scandal

In 2016, Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, the chief architect in the Russian doping scheme, blew the whistle. He exposed a deeply entrenched, state-run program where hundreds of Russian athletes were given performance-enhancing drugs in the run-up to the 2014 Olympics. According to Rodchenkov, Putin had told the team in charge of the doping that they "had to show the best results at the Sochi-Olympics", using any means possible. Soon after, Yuliya Stepanova, a Russian middle-distance runner, released several damning pieces of evidence, including a phone recording of her doctor boasting about administering performance-enhancing drugs, shedding light on the situation of endemic doping rampant within the Russian sport.

On the 12th of May 2016, The New York Times published an article titled "Russian Insider Says State-Run Doping Fueled Olympic Gold," alleging that "dozens of Russian athletes at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, including at least 15 medal winners, were part of a state-run doping program, meticulously planned for years to ensure dominance at the Games."

Following these developments, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appointed Professor Richard H. McLaren as the Independent Person to lead an investigation. Into the allegations made. The ensuing investigation showed that Moscow and the Federal Security Service (FSB) had constructed an intricate scheme which manipulated positive samples from select athletes so they were reported as negative, whilst other less fortunate, designated athletes would be reported as having tested positive to doping. All this was part of a plan that was years-long in the making, a meticulous strategy constructed to avoid suspicion

from the international community, allowing FSB agents to switch dirty urine samples with clean, pre-stored ones. In short, not only was the Russian government involved in the cover-up that happened in the aftermath, it was also the body that instituted the doping programme in the first place.

After the investigation was published, the WADA decided to implement a 4-year blanket ban on all Russian athletes, effectively barring them from competing in all major sporting events. This was later overturned in 2020 by the Court of Arbitration for Sports rules (CAS), which adopted a halved sentence instead, banning Russia from sporting events for 2 years, with the concession that all Russian athletes who tested negative for drug tests could still compete under a "neutral" flag.

The 2021 Tokyo Olympics

With the ban still in place, Russia was not allowed to officially compete in the Summer Olympic Games. In a move that angered many, the IOC did allow Olympians who were ethnically Russian to participate under the new title of the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC). Many critics took to news outlets and social

media, pointing out that a team called the "Russian Olympic Committee" was not in accordance with the original mandate that Russians had to compete under a "neutral" denomination. To exacerbate the situation, the team uniform of ROC athletes consisted entirely of colours displayed on the Russian national flag, and the symbol of the ROC is, quite literally, a rotated Russian flag placed on top of the Olympic rings.

The response was that of slight incredulity, but other than overall lukewarm reactions, the situation did not blow up. To their fellow competitors, however, the admission of the ROC and Russian athletes was mentally taxing. "It is a huge mental drain on me... that I'm swimming in a race that's probably not clean," four-time Olympic gold-winning American swimmer Ryan Murphy said at a press conference. "I don't have the bandwidth to train for the Olympics at a very high level and try to lobby the people who are making the decisions that they're making the wrong decisions."

In politics, the Russian doping scandal has evolved into a fiasco. Many have slammed the CAS's decision to reduce the severity of the sentence by overturning the IOC's imposed ban, allowing Russian participation under the ROC banner. The IOC has also been uncharacteristically harsh on the CAS's ruling, with British IOC member Adam Pengilly saying he was "appalled and angry" at the decision. The US also jumped onto the political dogpile, with the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency CEO Travis Tygart expressing disappointment in what he called "a weak, watered-down

decision".

On the other hand, Moscow has been framing the sanctions as "anti-Russian hysteria". Blaming Western politics for the ban, Russian twitter accounts, be it the official ROC account or standalone patriots, have denounced the ban and celebrated the halving of the original punishment, saying that "justice had finally triumphed" in a statement.

Even though the curtains have closed on the Tokyo Olympics, the shockwaves from the decision to let the ROC participate in sport are much more far-reaching. Looking through the scope of sports, this sets a precedent which affects both the trend and scale of doping. Politically, the back and forth between the West, Russia, international sports organizations and athletes has exposed exactly how precarious the situation is, with tensions thick and relationships brittle. Most importantly, this presents an intriguing jurisprudential dilemma: should we, for the sanctity of sports, err on the side of increased retribution as a means to deter cheaters in sports? Or should we err on the side of caution, and prioritize making sure all clean athletes get to participate, even if that recognises that a few dopers might end up in the mix? Regardless of what the answer is, one thing is clear: we need tighter surveillance of the drug testing process, and more importantly, accountability. Accountability for different governments, accountability for sporting institutions and the decisions they make, and most importantly, accountability for each and every athlete. 🏊‍♂️

Collaboration interview with Mr. Angus Ng

DIOCESAN HERALD

WE HAD THE PRIVILEGE of interviewing an Old Boy, and celebrated Olympic badminton player, Mr. Angus Ng (Class of 2012). From winning multiple local tournaments, to becoming a representative of Hong Kong at the 2016 Rio and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, he was once ranked 6th place globally, and currently remains the highest seeded badminton player in Hong Kong.

HIS CAREER

Why is badminton so appealing to you as a sport?

When I was in primary school, I played both ping pong and badminton. But during a break from playing ping pong in an inter-school competition, I walked over to the badminton courts, and was immediately mesmerized by the game. As a youngster, the fast pace of badminton interested me, but its allure was not limited to just that. Badminton was a blend of strategy and physicality, which greatly endeared it to me.

It was no easy work to persuade your parents to support you in pursuing your dreams. What did you do to convince them?

My parents did not fully support me in being a full-time badminton player right from the beginning. When I was in Grade 9, I had an opportunity to leave school to be a full-time badminton player, but my parents thought that I was still too young and hoped that I could finish my secondary studies. I think



the crux back then was to show my determination and passion for badminton. I believed that my actions spoke louder than words in terms of persuading my parents. When they sensed that I was serious about committing to badminton, and that I would really put the effort into it, my parents were more assured and gave me the green light to go ahead.

If your child one day decides to quit school in favor of pursuing a career in sports, would you be supportive of that notion?

Firstly, I would evaluate whether or not my

child has the talent to succeed. Secondly, and more importantly, I would have to see him or her show determination and dedication to his or her craft. If the criterion was met, I would willingly let them pursue their dreams.

What are the traits of an exceptional athlete?

The most important characteristic a good athlete should possess is the constant desire to improve. There will always be people who are stronger than you. Constantly forcing yourself to become a better you is essential for maintaining competitiveness. Of course, the ambition for victory is also crucial. The most successful athletes are always those who will not back down without a fight.

Are there any memorable moments as a badminton player that you would like to share with us?

Among the significant tournaments that I have participated in, the most memorable experience would definitely be my victory in the 2016 Hong Kong Open. Firstly, as it was an international event, being able to win proved that I was capable of being successful as a professional. Secondly, I was playing on my home court, so having good results here was especially memorable.

Were there times where you encountered some difficulties and wanted to give up on professional badminton? How did you overcome such challenges?

Having played badminton professionally for around a decade, I have performed well in quite a lot of competitions. But it wasn't always like that. In fact, my first two years

as a professional athlete were filled with setbacks. I was playing in adult tournaments as an 18 or 19-year-old, and I would often be eliminated after one or two games. After moments like these, I would question my decision to play singles badminton professionally—I would consider playing doubles instead or giving up on professional sports entirely and going to university. Luckily, my friends and trainers were there to encourage me to persevere. They also assisted me in thinking of ways to improve. Of course, I long for success in what I feel passionate about, and my thoughts about giving up didn't last long. I would certainly have had regrets if I had decided to give up by then.

Is being a representative of Hong Kong stressful? How did you overcome your anxiety on the court?

Being part of the HK team is indeed stressful. One who desires to become an exceptional athlete must be prepared to face psychological pressure. This is especially true for those who are famous, as they need to learn how to face public discussion. This is an inevitable part of growth. Learning from pressure and failure is the key to success.

As a former student-athlete, what would you say to students who think that balancing academics and sports is next to impossible? What would you say to students who want to pursue both?

The most difficult, yet most vital, quality in the pursuit of balancing academics and sports is time management. When I used to train in school, by the time that training ended, it was already 9 to 10pm. With the number of tests and homework we got, it was a challenge to manage both at the

same time. Yet, since I had chosen a path to pursue badminton, undoubtedly I had to sacrifice some leisure and spare time like the lunch period or recess in order to focus on my goal—it is impossible to be perfect and manage every aspect of time.

How has COVID-19 affected your badminton training and performance? How did you cope with such challenges?

The most affected part in my routine was not being able to participate in competitions regularly, unlike previous years. Although I did play friendly matches with my teammates as a simulation of actual competitions, it was still hard for me to maintain my competitive mentality. Regarding its impact on my performance, since there used to be a large audience watching and cheering during competitions, which is an essential element that cultivates the atmosphere, my psychological state might not be able to reach the standard necessary for competitiveness without an audience.

What are your views on the future of badminton in Hong Kong?

In recent times, there have been progressively more talented sportspeople in this sport. Since they have been able to participate in various competitions to gain experience, I predict that their results would improve in the future. Also, we as their seniors can teach them and pass on our determination and insights in badminton, assisting them in their growth. All in all, I am optimistic on the future of badminton in Hong Kong.

ABOUT HIS LIFE AT DBS...

Why did you choose to study at DBS?

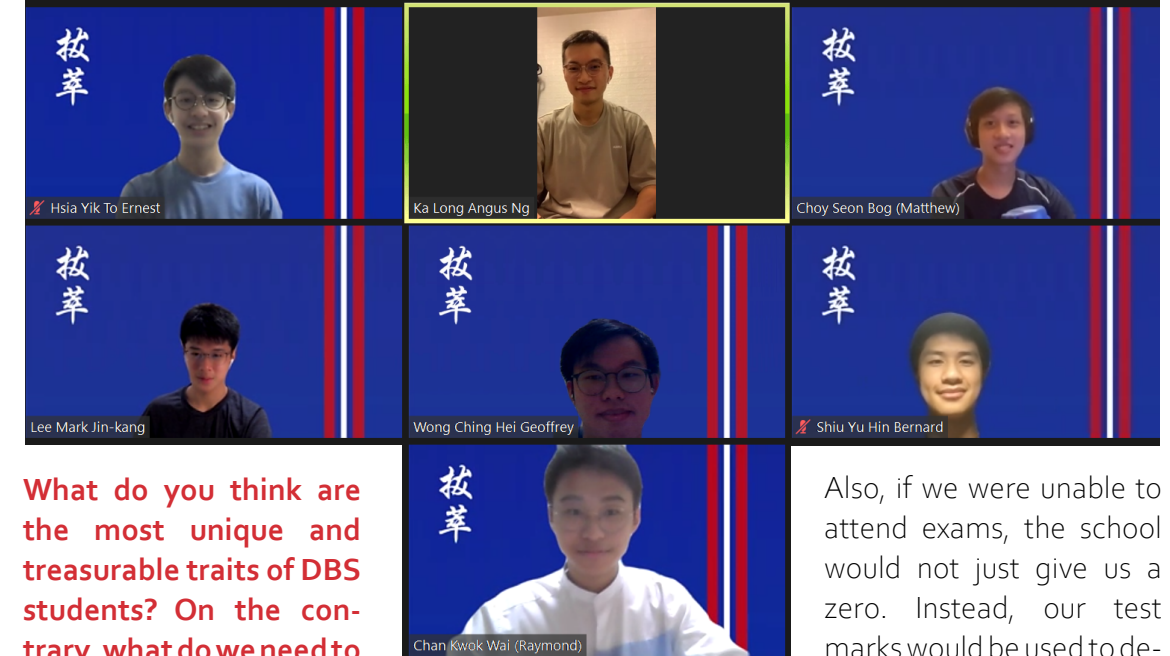
It was mostly my parents' choice. They wanted me to attend DBS because it had a great school environment, and they felt that it would be a good fit for me. Furthermore, the wide array of diverse talents at DBS was quite beneficial for my all-round growth.

Which student organisations did you join when you were at DBS?

I was very busy as a student. I would usually have to practice badminton for six days a week, and I still had to study. As a result, I didn't have too much involvement in the school's activities. I guess that's a regret of mine. The most notable experience I had was serving as a co-captain for the badminton team. Leading the team in inter-school competitions taught me valuable lessons about leadership and responsibility.

Could you tell us the most memorable experience you had at DBS?

My most memorable experience at DBS would be the Apple Race back when I was in Grade 7. As we all know, the Apple Race is one of DBS's traditions and it was the first time I participated in a competition that wasn't related to badminton in DBS. What made it so memorable was the unity among classmates and the intense cheering from classmates and friends at the sides of the race track. It was the first time I experienced the DBS spirit, and the determination to win no matter what for my class, house or school. It has nourished my dedication to strive for excellence.



What do you think are the most unique and treasurable traits of DBS students? On the contrary, what do we need to work on?

Everyone in DBS is talented in his respective aspects. Owing to this, DBS students have a certain aura that radiates confidence. However, sometimes students should refrain from being overbearing. They should take it down a notch and be humble, no matter how talented they are.

How did DBS pose an influence on your badminton career?

During my six years in DBS, whenever it came to the annual inter-school badminton tournaments, I would remind myself that I was representing the school, so I would do my best to bring glory to DBS. I was trained not only to have a desire to win, but more importantly to fight for the glory of where I belong.

What makes the DBS athlete-nurturing program special?

The school provides ample support for student-athletes. If we had to skip lessons for competitions, the school would allow us to pursue our personal goals and offer academic assistance afterwards. The teachers were also very supportive. Back then, a teacher gave me tutorial lessons during lunch time to catch up with the syllabus.

Also, if we were unable to attend exams, the school would not just give us a zero. Instead, our test marks would be used to de-

termine our grades. Our needs were being cared for, and we could pursue our dreams with fewer worries about schoolwork.

Which member(s) of the Diocesan Community would you like to thank the most?

I would like to thank Mr. Ho, the teacher-in-charge of the school's badminton team, who provided me with support through any difficulties I came across in my six years of school life, not just those concerning sports, but in my personal life as well.

Do you have any words for students studying in DBS?

I would like to remind students that may be experiencing stress in various aspects like academics or sports, or even students that are going to take their HKDSE/IBDP exams in the following year, that it is a must to have a positive mindset. At many times, it does make a difference when you look at things with a different attitude. You can never change reality, but what you can do is to change your attitude and your mindset. 🔍

The Diocesan Herald thanks Mr. Ng for his time and cooperation. Amendments made to the print copy can be found online.

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- *More Olympics content;*
- *More poetry!*

the architecture of trees
Luk Chun San Carroll, 2021

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