A TYPHOON CHASER A LIFELONG LEARNER

Greeting with an amiable smile, and laying easefully with a cup of steamy tea, a humble voice started looming over the homey office. Professor Johnny Chung Leung CHAN, the Founding Dean of the School of Energy and Environment and Chair Professor of Atmospheric Science in the City University of Hong Kong, turned back the clock 40 years to give everyone in the room a glance of his life motives and profession encounters.

PROF. JOHNNY CHUNG LEUNG CHAN

1974 BSc Graduate
1986 MPhil Graduate

Major Achievements

- Dean of School of Energy and Environment, City University of Hong Kong
- Chair Professor of Atmospheric Science, School of Energy and Environment, City University of Hong Kong
- Director of Guy Carpenter Asia-Pacific Climate Impact Centre (GCACIC)

Professor Chan, once an ordinary HKU Physics student like many others, buried his incredible mind into the sophisticated atomic world in the Northcote Science Building. Ultimately, he found his amour fou in the field of Atmospheric Science, which molded him into an eminent scholar, especially in the specialties of typhoon and monsoon.

Many may be hesitant to associate Physics with Atmospheric Science. Unsurprisingly, universities tend to regard them as two distinctive disciplines. Yet, Professor Chan incredibly captured their similarities. Physics elements, such as atomic structure, circuit design, radar beam and fluid mechanics, contributed hugely to his dissertation research in developing a prototype raindrop-size distrometer which aims to measure precipitation intensity. Reflecting on his research journey, Professor Chan put emphasis on the importance of integrating concepts and skills acquired in prior studies into entirely new contents. He noted that, "it is not knowledge itself helps you the most in your future career but the underlying concepts and pragmatic skills."

Interests and opportunities are momentous yardsticks of success. "Students should not be short-sighted. They should choose subjects that they are interested in to sustain their perseverance and endeavour in digging deeper," Professor Chan stressed as he took a sip of hot tea. His persisting interest in Atmospheric Science cultivated by his extensive reading, inquisitiveness of cloud formation, and observations of unforeseeable weathers during his hiking and camping experiences, brought him abundant trials and errors while ensuing research success. Professor Chan further highlighted the influence of interests that "nothing is smooth sailing; you just need to grab every opportunity." Looking back at his life, he ensured to seize every opportunity that appealed to him. For instance, Professor Chan took the initiative to request Professor William Mason Gray, a celebrated expert in tropical cyclone, to accept him as his PhD student. Thus, long-awaited doors leading to numerous typhoon and monsoon investigations had opened for him, paving the way to all his subsequent renowned research.

Lifelong learning is significantly valued. Despite Professor Chan's past 30 years of immense research on the Pacific Ocean typhoon prediction, he took a gentle breath and modestly expressed, "I am forever learning, as there are still many things I want to know about typhoon. As you study, the more you know, the more you do not know." He prompted the younger generation to be "inquisitive" and always ask questions as theoretical beliefs may not be completely and unreservedly error-free.

With grants under the European Commission and Research Grant Council Collaboration Scheme, Professor Chan's recent invention of a pioneering seasonal typhoon prediction system with higher precision in predicting the frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones that contribute to landfalls in a season, solidly marked his life milestone. When asked about his life goals, he paused to contemplate solemnly, and expressed his long-standing goal to conduct successful close-distant typhoon research with planes flying into the eye of the storm. He, most importantly, wished to contribute to the society that provided ground to his decision to become a university professor teaching and inspiring the younger generations.

As the steam from the cup of tea evaporated, Professor Chan's every vision and my admiration towards him became clear to my mind. His virtue of humbleness, grit in grasping opportunities, steadfastness in lifelong learning are what we all can learn from. We should dauntlessly chase after our aspirations, just as how Professor Chan chased after the countless monstrous typhoons.

"Be inquisitive – raise more questions as not every belief is correct."

STUDENT REPORTER

"It is my utmost honour to sit down and talk with Professor Chan. Although I am neither from the field of Atmospheric Science nor Physics, I am motivated and inspired to pursue my own interests and become a lifelong learner and optimist with ultimate inquisitiveness, just like him!"

Stella Ho, BEd&BSc Student
(double major in Food & Nutritional Science and Science Education, minor in Counselling)