A TYPHOON CHASER
A LIFELONG LEARNER

Greeting with an amiable smile, and laying carefully 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.

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 weather during his hiking and camping experiences, brought him abundant trials and errors while ensuring 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 investigations and pragmatic skills had opened for him, paving the way to his subsequent renowned research.

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