

# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK!



**EXPLORING UNCONVENTIONAL CAREER PATHS: A SPECIAL EDITION**



# FOREWORD

"What do I want to be in the future?" is a question that many of us JC students are asking ourselves. With university looming in the horizon, it's no wonder that JC has become a time for much-needed soul-searching, where we introspect on where and how we really see ourselves thriving in the future.

At this stage, conventional career paths, like medicine, law and engineering may be the most appealing—they're clear and well-trodden tracks that provide certainty in a future that so often feels volatile and uncertain. Yet, there may still be a small part of ourselves that yearns to look towards our dreams.

In this special edition, we complicate this train of thought—what if you can turn your dreams into a viable career? What if you can turn your "side quests"—be it your small crochet Instagram account, or time spent volunteering with kids—into your "main quests" instead?

What can you do off the beaten track?

Indeed, off the beaten track, is a whole other world of opportunities that you haven't had the opportunity to explore yet. In this Special Edition, we provide you with a glimpse into what that looks like, through the lenses of six alumni who have navigated complex routes in their career journey, but nevertheless, flourished in their chosen, unconventional fields.

From the exhilarating story of alumnus Dr Sean Yap, who transformed his childhood fascination of insects into a career in entomology, to the surprising career shift, from the Civil Service to pastry-making, of alumna Ms Yeo Min, there is bound to be a story here that upends your perspective about the future.

Remember: the future is uncertain, for sure—but is also exciting, inspiring, and still in the making. We hope that through this Special Edition, you'll realise that the road not taken offers a beautiful view, even if you can't see it just yet.

**Arisa Binte Kamaruzaman (24A01A)**  
Chairperson, Raffles Press



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# Nursing Patients; Dismantling Stereotypes Mr Benedict Choong

By Cao Yuhan (24SO3M) & Syaura Nashwa (24SO3R)

Benedict graduated in 2015, took BCME and was from 15SO3M.



"Antsy people are not the nicest people, and it will get challenging. Every day at work will never be the same, but we adjust accordingly", says Benedict, a nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and also an alum of Raffles Institution.

Nursing at Tan Tock Seng is his first job, having stayed with the same hospital ever since his time as a student intern.

Throughout his entire journey in healthcare, he has faced numerous challenges, be it from the daily struggle of rushing between departments or reassuring a patient's anxious loved ones when they learn of the patient's diagnosis.

In spite of these struggles, it is the sheer joy of making a difference that motivates nurses like Benedict to keep on caring for their patients.

"I love talking and listening to my patients"

"There's this sense of gratification knowing that you managed to make their hospital stay slightly better."



# The Nurse's Routine

In the surgical ward, most of Benedict's patients are on intravenous antibiotics and have surgical wounds. Nurses have the job of changing intravenous cannulas and doing wound dressings.

It's the norm for nurses to work almost twelve hours a day. Usually, nurses work in shifts: AM (7 am-3 pm), PM (1 pm-9 pm) and night shifts (8 pm-8 am).

Out of all these shifts, however, mornings are the busiest and most challenging. Most changes are ordered in the morning by the medical team. Nurses take vital signs, serve medications, and provide hygiene care. For patients who can't eat on their own, it's the nurses who have to feed them as well.

It's known that night shifts are the "easiest" unless a patient's condition changes. Take low blood pressure, for example. When that happens, Benedict will have to alert the on-call doctors to review the patient's condition.

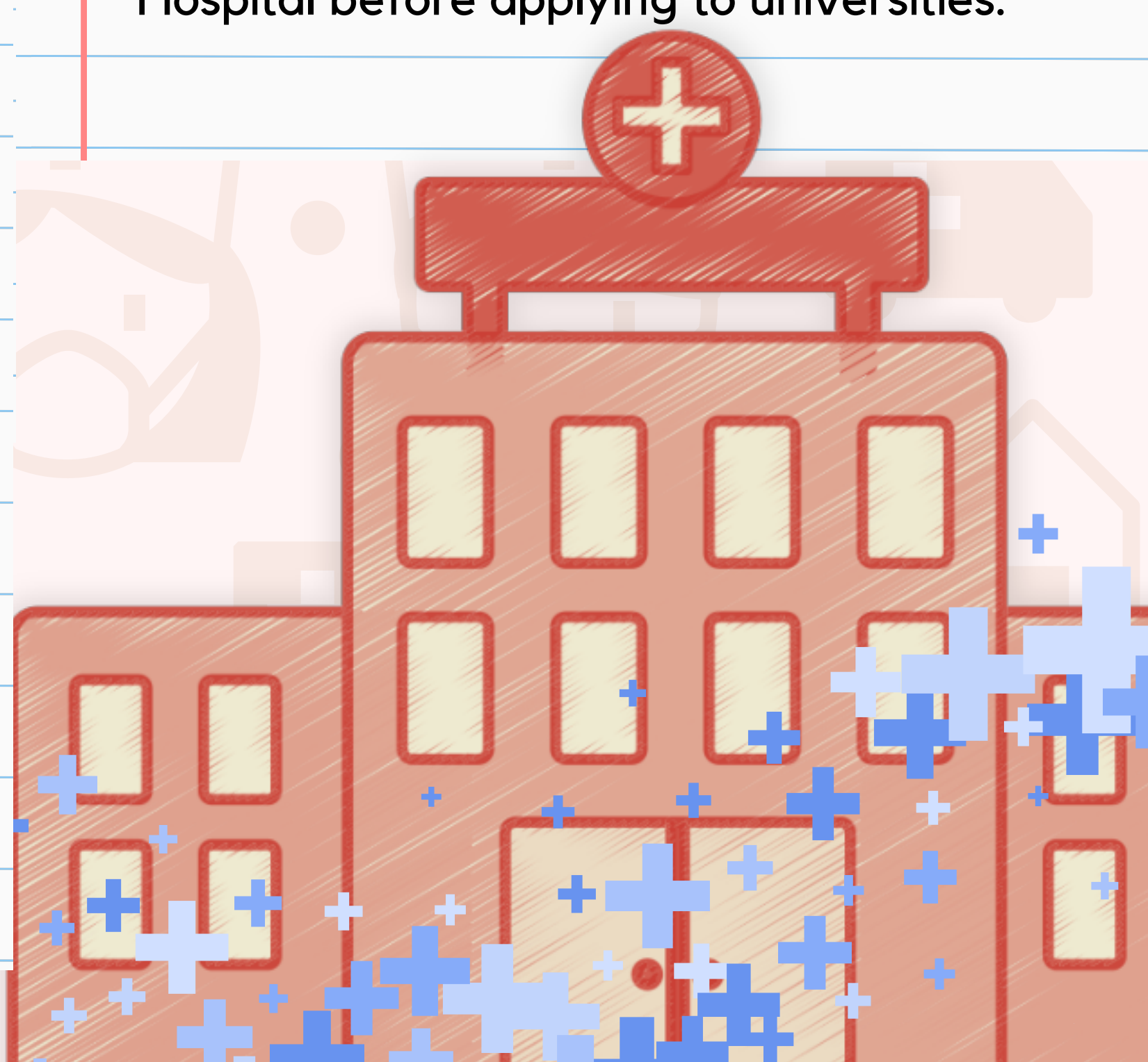
However, the night shifts for Benedict are almost always eventful—whether by a stroke of luck, or sheer coincidence; he is not sure. For most of his colleagues, night shifts are uneventful, but his shifts often look like: "many admissions overnight [and] many intravenous antibiotics to administer". (Funnily enough, this is why most colleagues dread working night shifts alongside him.)

# The Nurse's Role

Benedict embarked on his journey of service through his time as a member of Raffles Interact.

Deep down, he had always known that he wasn't interested in a deskbound job, leading him to look towards fields that were more dynamic in nature. One of these fields happened to be healthcare.

With the intent of exploring the processes and work environment in healthcare, he started job shadowing with Tan Tock Seng Hospital before applying to universities.



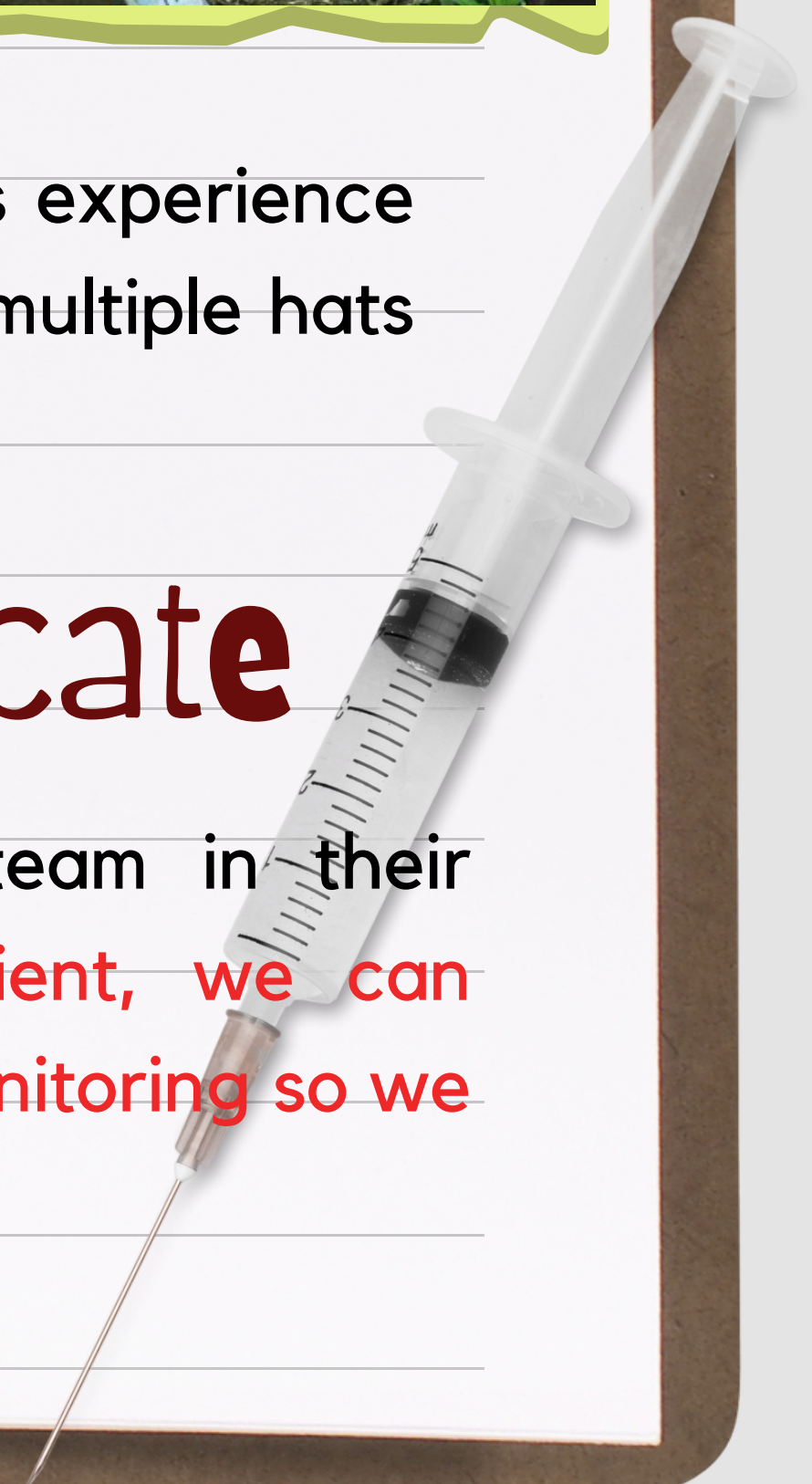
When asked about the experience, he mentioned that it had "opened [his] eyes to nursing and how relevant...[it] is in healthcare." In fact, it was this very experience that steered him towards applying for university courses related to healthcare.

At this point, however, Benedict faced the difficult choice of choosing between physiotherapy and nursing—a dilemma that plagues most healthcare-aspiring students.

But ultimately, nursing felt like his calling. Benedict's experience as an intern led him to be more appreciative of the multiple hats nurses had to wear.

## 1. The Patient's Advocate

Nurses suggest any changes to the medical team in their patient's best interest. "For a non-diabetic patient, we can suggest changing the frequency of blood sugar monitoring so we don't have to keep pricking the patient's finger."





## 2. The Gatekeeper

Similar to what is often portrayed in medical K-dramas (think *Hospital Playlist*, or *Doctor Romantic*), the patient's loved ones may bombard nurses with questions that cover all the 5W1s and 1H. Nurses are the last point of contact at every patient encounter. They must know the dosage for every medication given to their patients and relate it to their patient's condition. "It takes a sharp nurse to decide whether it is safe or suitable to be served. For a patient with diarrhoea but with laxatives as an active order, it's on the nurse to not serve the laxatives and monitor further."

## 3. The Conductor

Picture the healthcare industry as an orchestra.

Within the healthcare orchestra, nurses play the role of conductors, orchestrating the collaboration of diverse groups of people—doctors, staff, and families. Their skillful guidance results in a melodious symphony, harmonising care, healing, and well-being for patients. They keep track of the inputs of different allied health professionals, pulling them in to review as necessary.

"For instance, for a patient with swallowing problems, when nurses feed the patient and note that they are not tolerating the recommended diet consistency, we drop the speech therapist a message and request for them to review."



# Ups and Downs

When asked about the biggest accomplishment in his career, Benedict's reply warmed all of our hearts.

"Patients with dementia do not have the best oral intake, so we struggle to feed them." He recounted. "One patient was eating very little. One day when I was in charge of him, he mistook me for his grandson and I managed to coax him into eating a full share of his lunch. After he was discharged, I shed a few tears."

To care deeply for strangers is truly awe-inspiring. However, social workers do not have it easy. Oftentimes, their care goes unappreciated.

Nurses are generally **misrepresented** as secondary to doctors, and hence are typically not held up to the same level of respect as other healthcare workers.

Benedict opened up about one of toughest experiences he had with his patients' family members. "A patient's family member once shouted at me because she demanded to speak to the doctor, even though I had updated her on the treatment plans from the morning rounds. When the doctor update[d] her, he communicated similar things but was more satisfied, even thanking him for his time."

In his opinion, it is very demoralising for nurses when the public views them merely as helpers, ignoring their valuable skills and expertise. However, this is precisely because most people are unaware of the challenging and technical parts of the job.

Additionally, in a female-dominated profession, male nurses may find the job difficult when patients stereotype males to be uncaring and less attentive. Benedict, however, does not find that his gender puts him at a disadvantage.

"I also work in an orthopaedics ward. Male nurses are very welcomed here since we need a lot of strength to move patients who are admitted and are bedbound before going for surgery."





# Empowering the Unsung Workers

Nursing is a career that is growing in popularity within Singapore. (Source: ST Times, Today Online). Nurses enjoy better opportunities to advance their career, even at the frontline of healthcare.

In fact, nurses are increasingly empowered to be involved in curating treatment plans, due to a greater focus on interprofessional collaboration.

Benedict hopes for more people to know that nurses play a plethora of roles, beyond what is typically imagined of them as mere caretakers.

**"Nurses are no longer handmaidens to the medical team; we have much more autonomy as compared to the past." Benedict says. "We learn so much in terms of breadth given how we are expected to liaise with various healthcare disciplines."**

Just a colleague of Benedict's once shared while he was a student intern, more of us ought to realise that: "Not all illnesses have a cure, that's why we have nurses.'

# SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY, MAKING AN IMPACT: MR LIM JINGZHOU

**BY CHANDRASEKARAN SHREYA (24S06A)  
AND JERMAINE LEE (24A01A)**



"I like that I get to make different types of impact on people," Mr Lim Jingzhou (15A01B) shares when we ask him what he loves most about his job as a Community Worker. "Generally, people appreciate what you do."

"I think people are interested in trying to marry what they do as a job with something that they feel is meaningful enough, which is where the social impact and contribution to society aspect [of my work] comes in. I get to marry that combination of things together, and I think that has to be a good job."

As you might have already guessed, Mr Lim works in the social sector. He serves as an Assistant Director at the South Central Community Family Service Centre. He also leads the Home Ownership and Livelihood teams to support families living in rental housing to achieve home ownership, while working on a collective approach to supporting low-wage workers on realising their Livelihood aspirations and improving their employment circumstances.

He is also a Co-Founder of the Cassia-Merpati Resettlement Team (CRT). CRT does social, community, and advocacy work regarding interconnected social issues including housing, poverty, health, care, and ageing; with a focus on supporting public rental housing residents through involuntary relocations.

To raise awareness and advocate for better policies for housing relocations, he co-edited a book titled 'They Told Us to Move: Dakota-Cassia' and is part of a research team conducting an on-going study on the impacts of relocation. Since 2017, he has supported the relocations of the Dakota, Tanglin Halt, and Merpati communities.

He has also worked with Tak Takut Kids Club, the Mental Health Advocacy Workgroup formed to advocate for mental health in Budget 2020, the first nationwide homelessness street count, the Mind the Gap Fund and Engineering Good's Computer's Against COVID project.

# Getting Into It

“One of the good things about the social sector is that this thing called volunteering exists,” Mr Lim explains, “It’s a low-cost, low-commitment and high-returns way of trying to understand what this work looks like. In the other sectors, you probably need to get an internship or a job to be able to have a peek into what the work or the career [entails]. But for the social sector, you don’t need an internship or a job. You have volunteering as an easy way to step into it. That was how my journey started.”

While he was still in school, Mr Lim actively volunteered in many different causes. “I [have been]volunteering [since] the end of O Levels. In JC, I was part of ISLE, so that was a good mix of local and regional volunteering experiences. Local service learning was mandatory and ISLE did it with MINDS [Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore], which was my learning opportunity about how the differently-abled cause of work in the social sector was like. We went to one of the Disability Homes, [and] did some engagement with the residents there.”

Mr Lim eventually settled into the Dakota-Cassia cause. “It married a good combination of community work, health and housing. I think that was what made me sure that this was what I wanted to do. Maybe not forever—I don’t think people easily decide what they want to do for the rest of their lives. But for a good amount of time, it was enough for me to say, ‘Well I want to try this as a career’, and it just grew from there.”

***“Every step of the way was conscious, intentional and informed.”***

## So, What Does Social Sector Work Consist Of?

When we ask him to sum up his work with three words, Mr Lim is quick to respond with “Listening, supporting and advocacy.”

For him, the foundation of his work is creating human relationships with the communities he’s supporting—and that starts with listening. “A lot of our work is in listening and relationship-building. We are in an area of work that is in human services and working with human beings. That is the prominent focus of most of the causes in the social sector.”

***“For me, the goal is to support and help that human being in front of me, whether it is for their needs or for them to thrive.”***

“Even if you have no needs, how can I help? How do we journey with you so that your life is thriving fully? The core of it will have to go back to building a relationship with the person you are working with. The relationship may not always be very deep—some of it may be slightly more transactional since we are working together towards a common goal—and that’s also fine.”

“Building a relationship also means that I don’t just see you as a passing stranger in my life. There is that trust and willingness to share more honestly and vulnerably. That relationship is the bedrock of change for both parties and should always be two-sided.”

The second aspect of his work is supporting. “Support can be in many ways. It can be their financial needs, their health needs, their food needs, their housing needs—whatever needs that exist.”

“It can also be going beyond needs and asking, ‘How is it that you can thrive in an under-resourced setting?’ For example, when we’re not looking at the tangible needs, it can be helping you feel less alone or progressing in social mobility.

“You can have no needs and live somewhat comfortably but still be living in a rental flat. You’re still putting food on the table and may not be in poverty in the strict sense but you are still not thriving like how you deserve to, how you can and how you should. There’s various sorts of support that we’re looking at.”

Lastly, advocacy allows social sector workers to empower communities to make their voices heard. “Advocacy means seeing our work as an intermediary where we can bring together different sides of the house. You have the people who are the most directly affected by [the issue], you have the policymakers, you have philanthropic funders and other different stakeholders. In the usual context, when the community is able to advocate for themselves, that’s always the best.

“But when they need support to facilitate that or when they need someone to help put it together or speak on their behalf, that’s where the role of advocacy comes into place. We traverse between different languages, different stakeholders, different priorities, different interests and different frames of mind to bring them together to see what is common in between all that.”





# Cassia Resettlement Team

A ground-up team aiming to **mitigate social isolation and loneliness of the elderly**, and to **support communities**.



Serving residents at Blk 52 Cassia Crescent, a majority of whom **have been relocated from their rental housing estates**.

## CRT's Aims

**Building strong relationships and trust** with the people being served

Facilitating linkages between stakeholders to **address gaps in services** for residents

**Sharing with stakeholders** what is learned on the ground; **public engagement and advocacy efforts**



# South Central Community Family Service Centre

An organisation aiming to **support low-income and vulnerable families** in the community—in their financial, social and relationship issues—while **promoting community self-help and cooperation**.



Volunteers—comprising individuals from vulnerable backgrounds—aid in SCC's poverty transformation work.



Enabling social transformation efforts via hosting myriad community initiatives and platforms.

## SCC's Aims

Enabling low-income communities to **achieve financial self-sufficiency**

Building a neighbourhood that looks for the **safety, care, and education of vulnerable children**

**Activating community mutual help**, and including people **across different identity groups** in supporting one another



# TAK TAKUT

DON'T BE AFRAID (OF) KIDS CLUB

## Tak Takut Kids Club

A club aiming to create a **stable, safer and happier community life** for children—especially vulnerable ones—via building **trusted relationships**, creating a **vibrant and supportive** communal environment, and adopting a **'child-first' approach** to social work.



Youth-spanning all ages—engaged in craft activities at TTKC's maker space (Big TTKC).



Playing with shadow puppets by night: a safe space for children to unleash their creativity.

### TTKC's Mission

**Strengthening self-esteem** for individuals from **vulnerable backgrounds**

Regenerating **supporting culture and networks** in local communities

**Transforming understanding; Co-creating solutions** with local communities and stakeholders

## Making—and Recognising—a Tangible Impact

When asked about the most memorable part of his job, he flusters, "They're all memorable—cannot choose, cannot choose. Skip."

While his work has been memorable in different ways, he feels most closely anchored to the work he does with CRT. He joined them seven years ago, but didn't start out with the idea that he'd continue doing it after so long. Serving their beneficiaries on a weekly basis, for months on end, is "not a simple commitment to make," Mr Lim says. It's precisely what makes his work there so striking though, he believes. Over the years, they've grown *real*, substantial relationships with the communities they serve.

***"We receive as much as we give to the community."***





**THE TEAM AT CRT—IN THE ORGANISATION’S EARLY YEARS—WITH SOME OF THE RESIDENTS OF DAKOTA CRESCENT, ALL SMILES. (SOURCE: CRT’S FACEBOOK PAGE)**

How often do you find yourself warmly welcomed into a stranger’s home and listening to all their life stories? But this is exactly what Mr Lim and his team at CRT find themselves experiencing. It’s the everyday moments like these that speak to the impact they’ve made on the people they serve.

With the Home Ownership Programme, there’s a unique sense of fulfilment that comes from helping families realise their aspirations. These aspirations don’t just include owning a physical home to spend their lives in—underneath them, lie the universal experience of wanting something, and working hard to get it.

The gratification that beneficiaries get from realising home ownership really matters. “That kind of boost to the self—beyond the actual, tangible outcome of having a house—is important. Because, [it’s often difficult for their aspirations] to be met or realised; so realising this one aspiration hopefully [gets the ball rolling], where other aspirations can also be realised with the right support, determination, effort, and encouragement.”

Ultimately, success comes when Mr Lim and his team can stand by the sidelines, and watch families pursue their dreams, empowered and emboldened.

***“[The families’ efforts] are the success factor. We’re just the supporting factor.” – For Mr Lim, empowering families with the agency to chart their own paths is key.***

# 249

Families Supported under KeyStart Programme

# \$1,799,962.28

Amount of KeyStart Grants Approved



# 79

Families Moved into New Homes

# \$931,667.35

Amount of KeyStart Grants Disbursed

# 116 FAMILIES/ 340 CHILDREN

Approved and Benefitting From KeyStart Grants

**THE BENEFICIARIES OF SCC'S KEYSTART HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAMME, AS OF 31ST MARCH 2023.**

**(SOURCE: [HTTPS://SCCFSC.SG/PAGES/KEYSTART-HOME-OWNERSHIP-PROGRAMME](https://scfsc.sg/pages/keystart-home-ownership-programme))**

## At the Heart of It All: Emotional Labour

Mr Lim's work—no matter how gratifying it may be—is not without its hardships, though. Emotional labour, in particular, is what he believes is the most difficult part of it.

Emotional labour is intimately intertwined with the service sector as a whole, given that most of the work is done on the basis of human relationships. Take the Home Ownership Programme, for instance.

Put yourself in the shoes of someone working there. You're walking alongside these families, on a path towards attaining these very real, very substantial goals of theirs: goals that greatly impact their well-being, goals that they might have invested their lives into achieving.

Ultimately, though, the success of your joint efforts isn't entirely within your control. Failure is an omnipresent reality and possibility, and confronting that in the face of these families' aspirations and dreams? Emotionally, it makes sense that it's a *lot* to handle.

This is precisely why having a realistic outlook on things is important. "[We're] not able to solve all their problems or meet all their needs; there are realistic constraints. We're also as human as the people we're working with."

Maintaining a healthy emotional distance is also crucial. Take the example from earlier: what happens when a family doesn't go forth with what had been discussed? What if they end up doing something you don't agree with? "[It's] in recognising that I'm not responsible for those choices, [and that] they have autonomy in their lives," Mr Lim says.



And if they come back, upset and regretful, questioning why you didn't tell them otherwise, or why you allowed them to do what they did? "[It's] knowing that you've done your part, and not being emotionally affected by that. [...] The family that's made the choice will have to follow through with it, including [accepting] the consequences that come from making that choice."

However, none of this is to say that you should detach yourself from your feelings. *Feeling* what we feel—reveling in the joys of small victories, or letting the gravity of a loss set in—humanises us in the eyes of the people we serve, and is foundational to building strong relationships.

During a volunteering session, an elderly person may come up to you and say, "It's a good time for me to go." How do you handle such a bleak admission? Instead of desensitising yourself, Mr Lim says, understand the elderly's perspective *while* recognising that you don't need to align yourself with their feelings.

"I don't need to feel like dying tomorrow is the best thing to happen to me, and I don't need the other person to feel like they should want to live for the next twenty years. [...] It's about not letting what they feel carry into our lives in an unhealthy way."

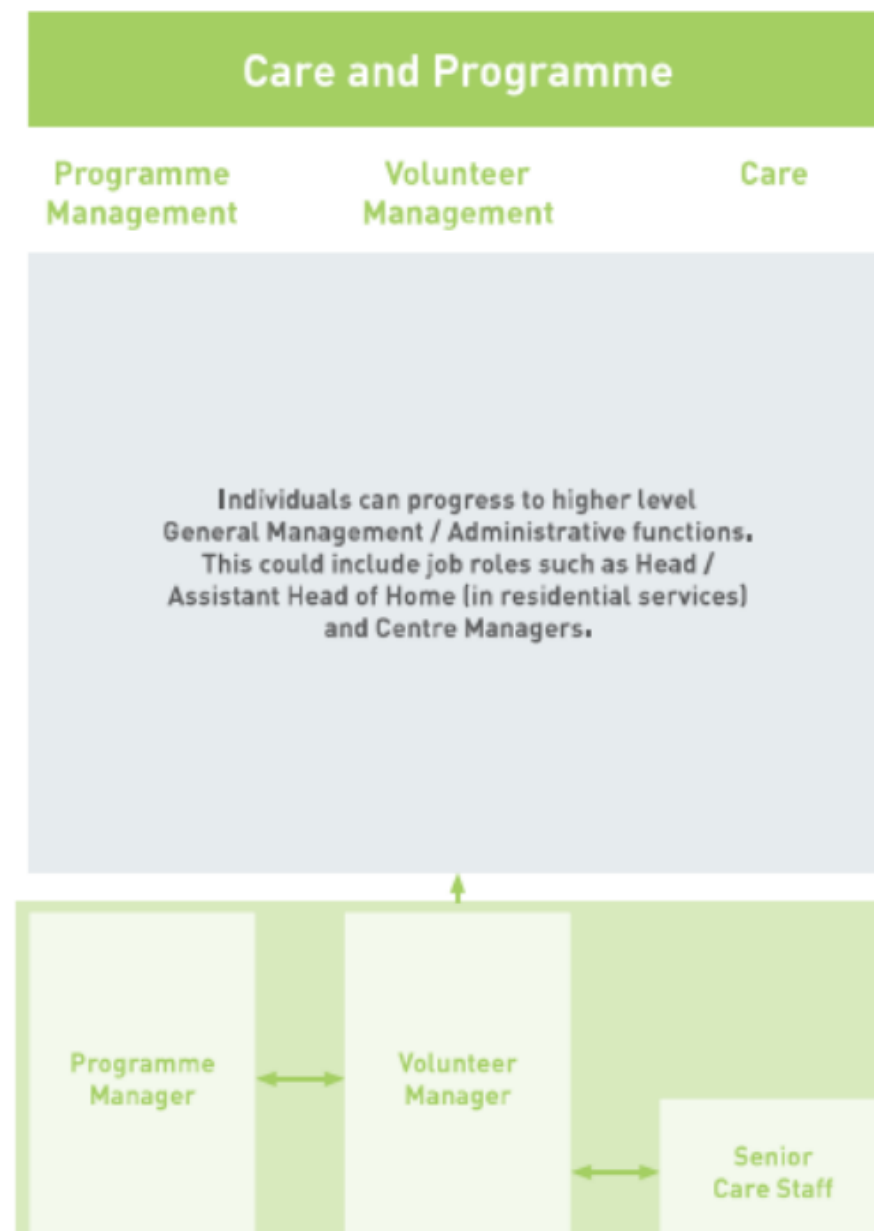
## The Future of Caregiving

Mr Lim sees the social sector as an emerging field. In the future—due to our nation's ageing population, and rising awareness about the importance of caregiving services—many in society will require greater care, such as the elderly, underprivileged, and the marginalised.



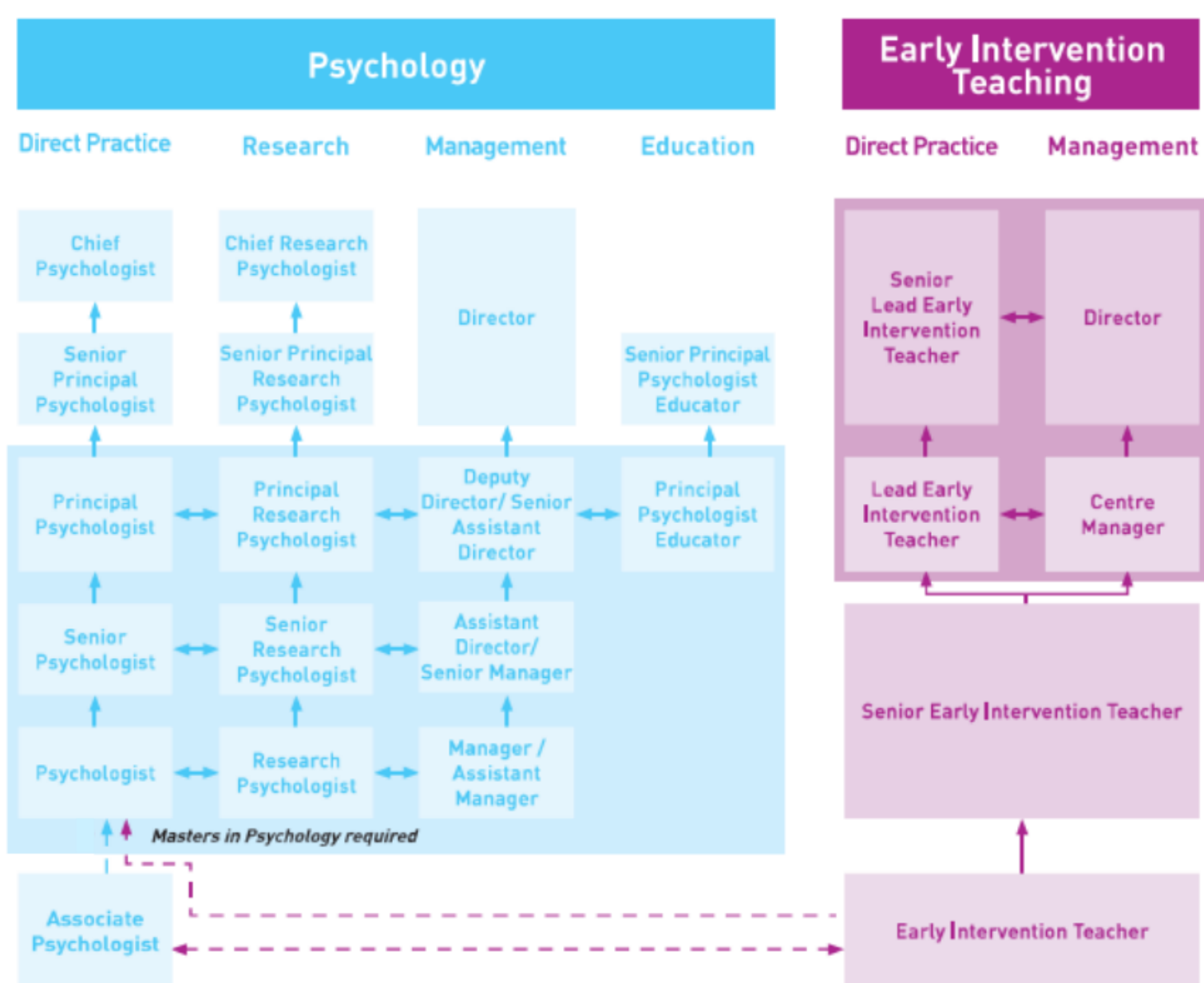
# Career Pathways in the Social Sector

## 02. Care and Programme



# Career Pathways in the Social Sector

## 03. Psychology and Early Teaching Intervention



**THE MYRIAD CAREER PATHS AVAILABLE IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR.**

Chances are, this is the image that'll come to mind when the term 'social sector' arises: a social worker, all smiles, doing a home visitation. It isn't wrong, per se; social work is certainly a crucial part of the sector.

However, the sector is far more plentiful in the job opportunities it has to offer. "It's quite diverse. There are many different areas of work, and it's not as single-track, like 'social work—fullstop'." Volunteer managers, programme managers, researchers: these are just a few of the wealth of jobs available.

***"It's an interesting ecosystem that's more than just social work or volunteering. I think it's under-understood for all the interesting possibilities it could reap." - Mr Lim, on the overlooked diversity of the social sector***

## **Interested in the Social Sector?**

For those looking to join the sector, Mr Lim has two words (of advice) to say: *Volunteer extensively.*

"Be committed to what you choose to volunteer with, and spend more than one or two sessions [with them]." Volunteering for an extended period of time—at least half a year—is when you *really* learn about the community you're serving: things you can only learn from first-hand experience.

There's value in learning extensively, too. As Mr Lim did when he was a student, you can try your hand at different causes, "There's value in that, also: cross-cutting between different [sectors] and seeing how they relate to each other."

No matter the nature of your volunteerism, make the *most* out of it. Be unafraid in reaching out to people in the sector and asking them what the sector's like. Personal insights like these simply can't be gleaned from online searches behind a desk. Instead, as Mr Lim puts it, just "ask for a coffee chat."

Look beyond volunteering, too. When he first started out, Mr Lim looked out for various events, talks, and sharings about social issues where experts and volunteers were often invited to share their insights. It's at such events that people invested in a specific cause come to convene in one location—what better place would there be to network at?

## **No Matter the Sector: Closing Advice**

Social sector or not, Mr Lim believes that any young person who's still deciding on their future career must be *intentional* in their actions. You might have a burning desire to learn about a specific sector of work, but if all you're doing is desktop research, then you'll never be doing *enough*.

Mr Lim recalls an instance when he'd met a youth deciding between the social and healthcare sector. He'd seen them genuinely invest effort into talking to individuals in both sectors, and it was in that moment that he knew he'd be happy for them no matter the decision they'd make. It's because that decision to join whichever sector would've been an intentional one, something they'd made with clarity and could realistically see themselves committing to.



**ON A FRIDAY EVENING AT TTRC'S COMMUNITY KITCHEN, YOUTHS ARE LEARNING HOW TO MAKE CHEESE BALLS FROM AMANDA, A VOLUNTEER WHO COOKS WITH THEM EVERY FRIDAY. (SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.3PUMPKINS.CO/TAK-TAKUT-KIDS-CLUB](https://www.3pumpkins.co/tak-takut-kids-club))**

If there's one thing you take away from this article, Mr Lim wants you to give social sector work an equal chance as other paths you're considering.

"Every job is for public good," He tells us, "A cleaner and a hawker contribute to as much public good as I do, but it's not something that most people think about."

"Not many Raffles students graduate to join the social sector. Most would join civil service, law, medicine. I do think that a job or a career in social services or non-profit work in general can be equally as good, as meaningful and as rewarding as these jobs."

So, what are you interested in? What do you love doing? What can you see yourself doing for work in the future? If 'volunteering' is the answer to these questions, it might just be time for you to dig deeper into the social sector and contribute your services to the community.

*Looking for volunteering opportunities right now? Some of the causes Mr Lim works with, such as the Cassia-Merpati Resettlement Team, are looking for volunteers. If you're interested in working with them, do check out the links in the introduction!*

# From Civil Service to Pastry Making: Ms Yeo Min



A Pastry Chef. A Chef Instructor. A Food Researcher. Oh, and an Artiste too. Ms Yeo Min (Batch of 2014) has a long list of unconventional career roles to her name.

Despite only switching careers relatively recently in 2020, she has already chalked up an impressive string of achievements. She beat 12 other competitors to earn a place in the Finals of the Channel 8 baking competition “Crème De La Crème” in 2021. She also came in second at the World Gourmet Summit Apprentice Chef Competition 2021 with her fusion dish of fried mooncake presented as a Chinese painting. Having published a book entitled the “Chinese Pastry School”, she now double-hats as a Chef Instructor at the [ToTT Store](#) and as a Pastry Chef at [Pastories](#).

Ms Yeo kindly took time off her busy schedule to treat these writers to a half-hour crash course in simple pastry-making. Inside her homely kitchen, her dexterous hands expertly moulded the dough into delicate shapes of flowers. She made quick work of the dough, evidently guided by years of practice.

However, as amateurs, these writers fumbled repeatedly when moulding the dough themselves. Struggling in the simple task of flattening the dough without any breakages or deformations, moulding the dough was even more challenging.



## Career Beginnings

It might surprise you that Ms Yeo didn't start out as a pastry chef. In fact, prior to her transition, she did a brief stint at the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

“I had jumped into the government scholarship thing because of peer pressure,” she admitted, pointing to the unspoken expectations of RI students to pursue prestigious career pathways.

However, when she started working, she realised that the role wasn't what she had expected. The circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic also lent greater impetus to her career transition. “It was the time during the Covid wave of resignations,” she explained, “We realised that we may ‘die’ tomorrow so we started questioning what we were going to do with our lives.”

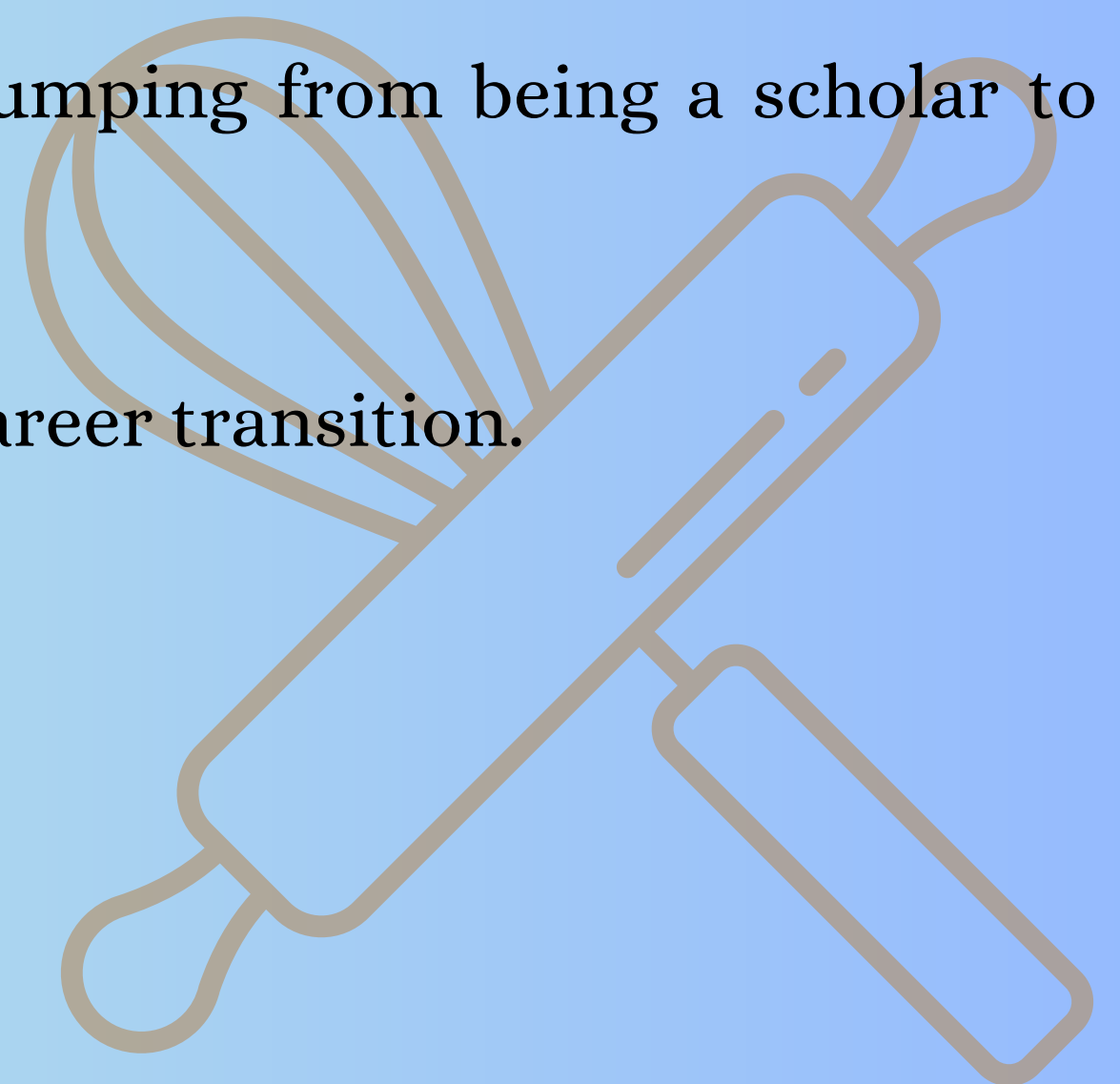
“So I decided to just jump.” Ms Yeo took a leap of faith, breaking her scholarship bond in order to make the career switch from civil service to pastry-making.

A mixture of interest and perceived career viability determined her new choice of career. Having started pastry-making in university, she continued to bake as a pastime even after graduation. She also set up an Instagram page entitled “Pastories by Yeo Min” to share her stories through her pastries.

Even though she was confident of her transition, her decision to switch careers was met with much apprehension from her family. After all, she would be giving up a stable income and the prestige that comes from being a civil servant.

“I think it was hard for my family to accept me jumping from being a scholar to joining the F&B (Food & Beverage) sector.”

Hence, to gain their acceptance, she reframed her career transition.



“I told them, ‘I am going to pastry school to upskill.’”

Her initial runway also wasn't the most smooth-sailing. It was a huge jump from Civil Service to the Food and Beverage industry. She faced many uncertainties as a freelancer with an unstable monthly income. At the same time, she studied Pastries and Baking as a student in a culinary school to obtain her diploma and work as a trainee at the Fullerton Hotel.

When asked about how these experiences have shaped her as a person, she replied, “I think it is very humbling to make such a career switch and step into a whole different industry. You start to see the behind-the-scenes of F&B... that's something a lot of consumers don't think about or know about.”

An example she raised was the struggle of small businesses like hers. Explaining that the Singaporean consumer base tends to be price-conscious, many people may prefer the lower prices from the factory outlets to a smaller-sized bakery like hers.

“It's a different world,” she admitted. As a civil servant, she never had to worry about income so she could solely focus on social service. Now, even though she has the freedom to express her creativity through pastry-making, she also has generate her own income to earn a living.

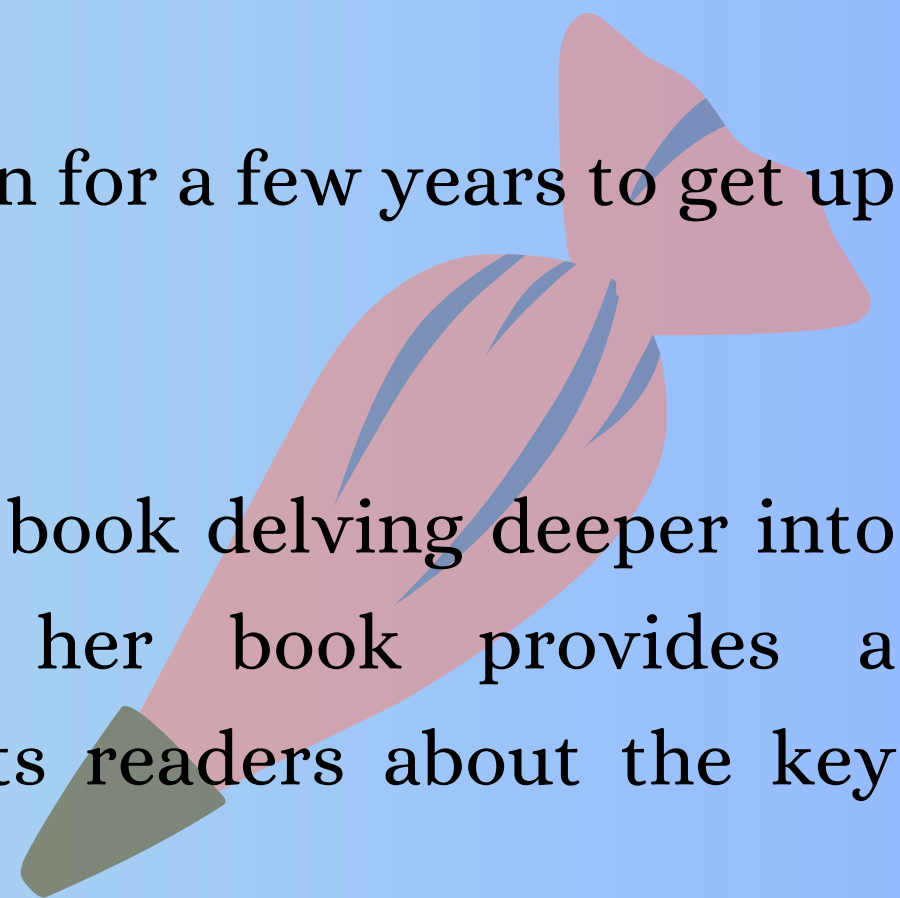
## **Her Current Role(s)**

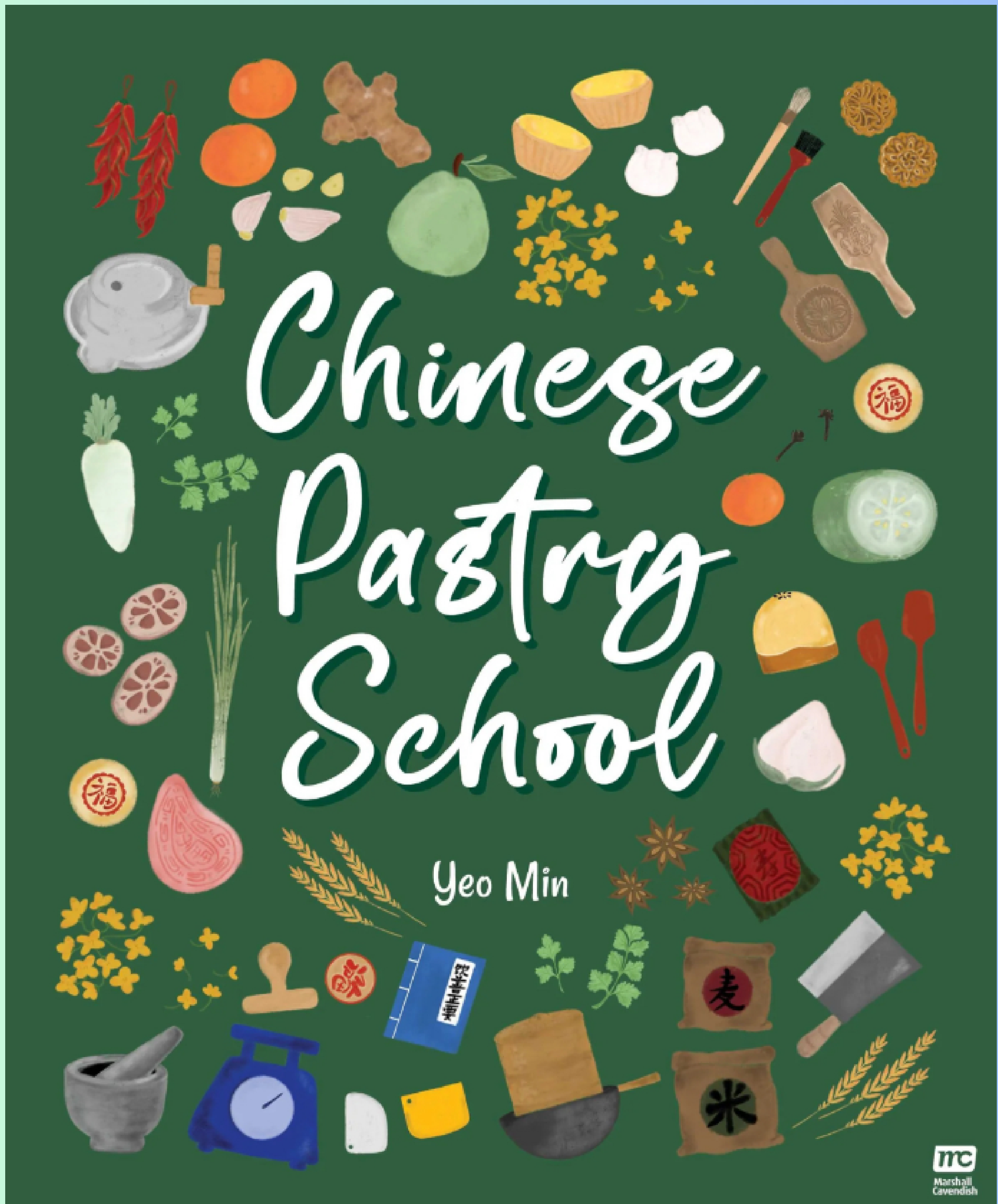
“[Pastry-making] is a lot of work,” Ms Yeo acknowledged. Being a small home-based business, she usually bakes to-order to reduce food waste.

She also teaches pastry-making as a second source of income. “A lot of people expect that [when] they come for one class, they can make a perfect pastry after 2 hours,” overlooking the need for practice in order to perfect the art of pastry-making.

“I have to always start by telling them, ‘No, you need to learn for a few years to get up to standard.’”

Her third role as a food researcher involved working on a book delving deeper into Chinese pastries. Entitled “Chinese Pastry School”, her book provides a comprehensive collection of recipes while enlightening its readers about the key techniques of Chinese pastry-making.





(Her book is available in both the Hullett Memorial Library and the Shaw Foundation Library!) Source: Epigram Books



In the book, she classified Chinese pastries into different categories from all-things-gluten to sugar-related pastries. Her book is all-encompassing, including some jellies (e.g. grass jellies) and puddings.

What's her favourite kind of pastry? "I like them all," she insisted, even as we tried to get her to give us a straight answer.

In order to write the book, she pored over books sourced from China and Taiwan as she worked to translate and synthesise the information. Including a Chinese quote at the start of every chapter, she also appended the romanisation (hanyu pinyin) and English explanation for people struggling in Mandarin.

Other than pastries, she also makes music. Her most recent songs have been featured in MediaCorp's Channel 8 drama series, such as the Truth Seekers (2016), Have a Little Faith (2017), Happy Prince (2020) and most recently in 2023, the Sky is Still Blue drama series.

Despite the many different roles she takes on, she doesn't feel that they tire her out. While she devotes less time to leisure and her social life, she enjoys what she does, and that makes it all worth it.

## **Her Future Plans**

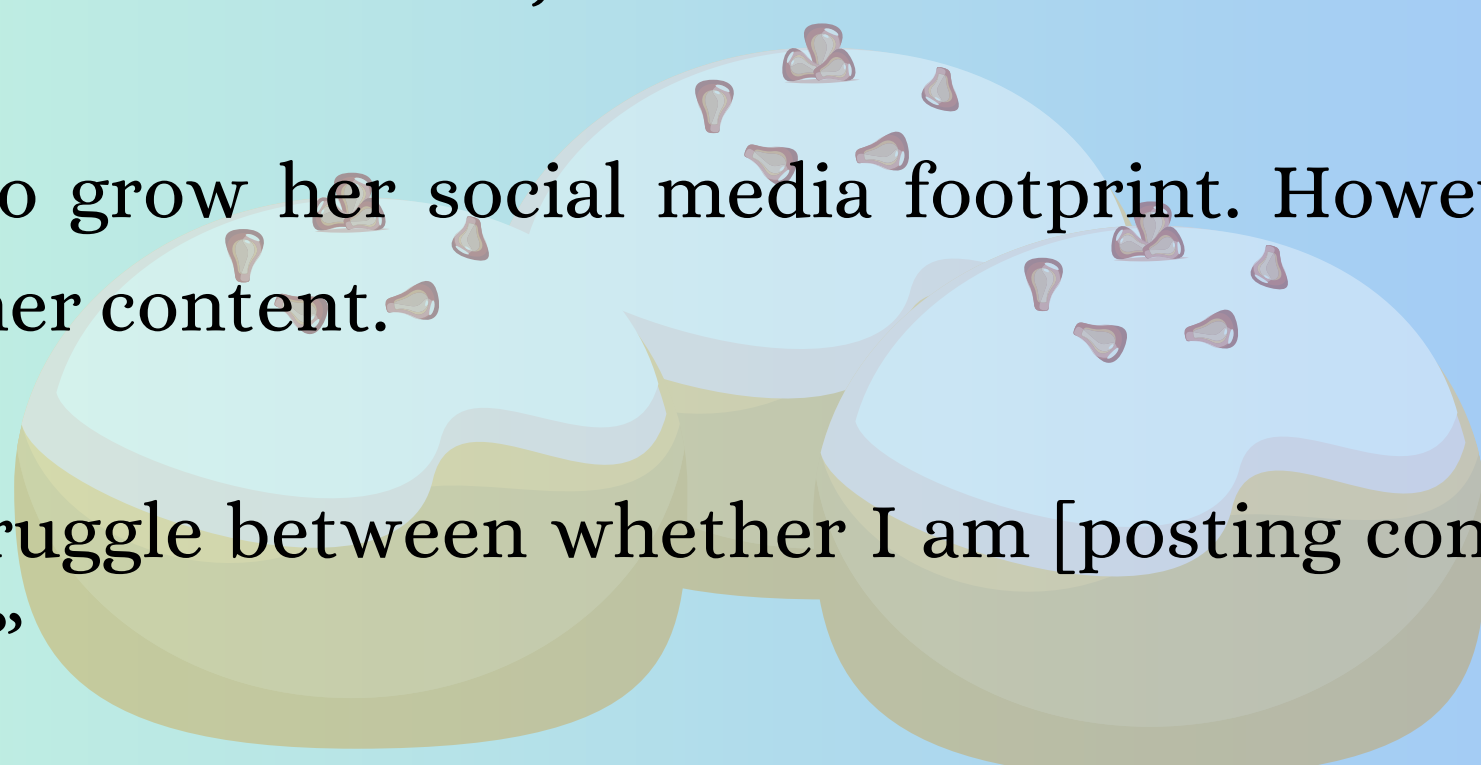
Looking forward, she plans to author another book about Chinese pastries. "I really enjoyed the book-writing process. It's like writing a university thesis, but more fun."

"There's still a whole world out there that I haven't dived into," elaborating on how she plans to include information from her post-pandemic travels to China and Taiwan.

"I am also looking out for more collaborations," she adds, although she is unable to disclose more details at this current juncture.

She is also looking to grow her social media footprint. However, she is conscious about the quality of her content.

"I guess there is a struggle between whether I am [posting content] for the fame or to make a difference."



# “I want to do things that make a difference.”

She also hopes that she can encourage Singaporeans to try food from different cookbooks of different cultures. “Trying food from another culture is what makes us feel connected to [each other].”

## Words of Advice

While peer and parental pressure may discourage some from pursuing their passion, Ms Yeo wants to remind her juniors to always remember to take time to explore their interests.

“Keep your doors as open as you can. Don’t ever feel that any skills that you learnt are a waste of time because it all depends on how you use it.”

For interested readers whose aspirations intersect with pastry-making, she advises them to take it slow.

“A lot of my younger students are quite harsh on themselves,” She pointed to the problem of unrealistic expectations of baking that social media perpetuate. “[Pastry making] is no different from learning an instrument or learning a sport. You need to put in the hours, hard work and the resources.”

At the end of our interview, Ms Yeo brought up the concept of horizontal growth: having skills in a little bit of everything rather than specialising in only one aspect. In many cases, she is indeed a Jill of all trades. Having worked in the Civil Service, pastry-making, the music industry and teaching, her wide array of interdisciplinary skills has served her well no matter what role she takes on.

Ms Yeo’s relentless pursuit of learning exemplifies what’s most important in the modern-day workforce: facing challenges without being daunted by failures. Indeed, it is never too late to change paths and chase your dreams. What’s most important is working hard to follow your passions, and having the confidence to make the most of the life that you have.



# Beyond the Blueprint :

HOW MS CHARISSE FOO MADE THE SWITCH FROM  
**ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN TO UI/UX DESIGN**



Darren Wong  
24S03C



Low Jing Kai  
24S03H

The shape of this button. The font of that text. The colour of this arrow.

To most, these might seem like insignificant and arbitrary considerations, but not to Charisse Foo, a UI/UX research associate at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

To her, user interface and user experience (UI/UX) design is more than shapes and colours on a website; it's about understanding the audience you're designing for, and crafting an experience that suits their needs.

Charisse is an RI alumnus from the class of 2012. She was part of the Humanities Programme with a rather uncommon subject combination of Literature, Economics, Mathematics, and Art. Like most of us in JC, she wasn't fully set on what or where she wanted to study in the future. Eventually, she decided on architecture at Cornell University in the US.

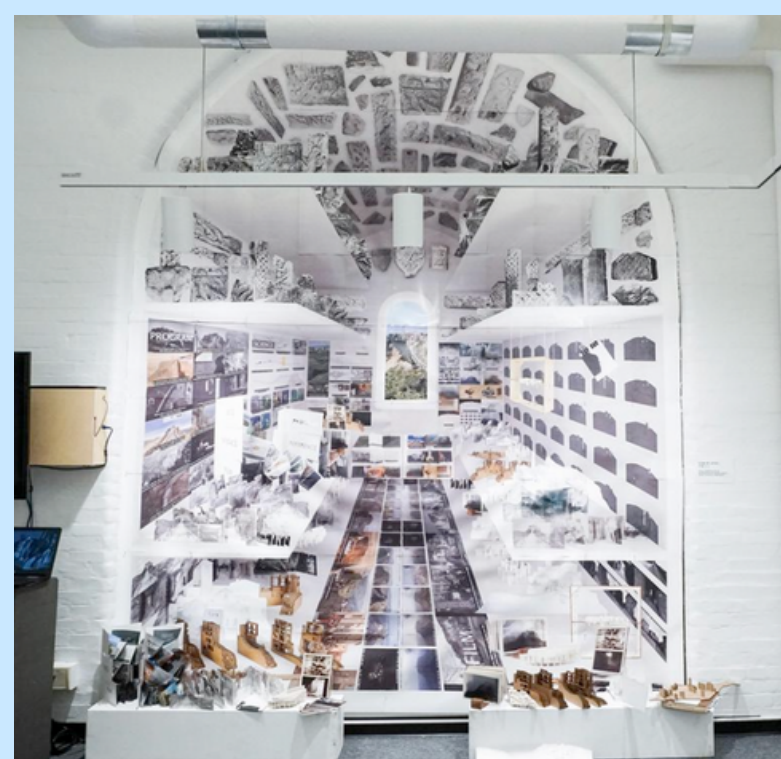
The pipeline from taking H2 Art to studying architecture then becoming a UI/UX designer hasn't been a conventional one. Still, to her, it's been a fulfilling journey of personal growth.

"I don't regret any of it," she says with a smile, looking back on her journey to get where she is today.

## Life in Ithaca

Charisse graduated from Cornell with a Bachelors in Architecture (equivalent to a Masters in Singapore) after a 5 year course.

"I think I still prefer the big city", Charisse laughs, when comparing the environments between small-town Cornell and NUS.



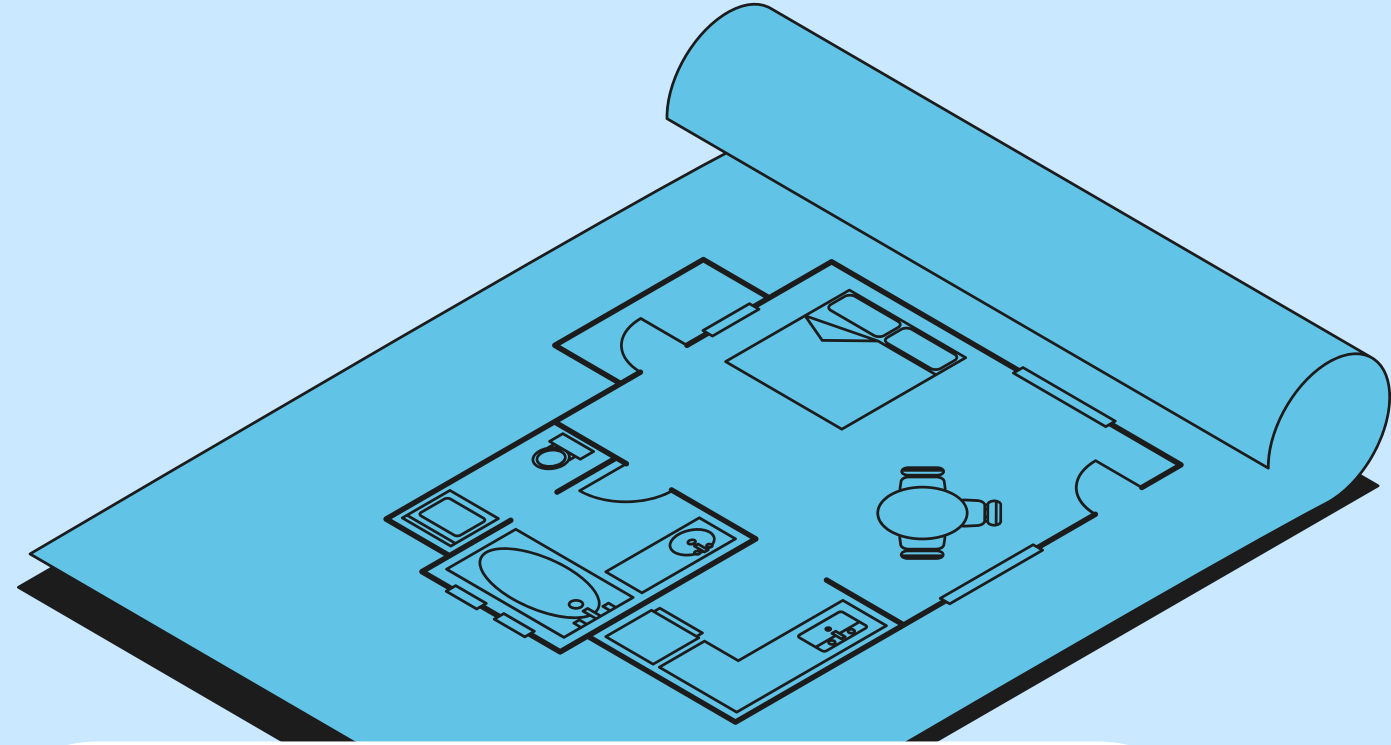
*Charisse's thesis piece titled: "The Constructed Ruin"*

In her spare time, Charisse took on a few design internships at architecture firms around the area. Though, most of her time was swallowed whole by the notoriously demanding Architecture curriculum.

“Focus on how you can make the most of being in such a good academic institution”, Charisse emphasises, with a refreshingly positive outlook on the large workload that she faced.

What she enjoyed most at university, however, were the multitude of projects she embarked on. From “The Art of Memory”, a mixed media exhibition on 4 towns in Italy, to “In All This House”, a hand illustrated graphic novel, Charisse’s own personal interests in photography and art really shone through in her projects.

“I really believe in [my projects]”, Charisse says when highlighting the importance of personal projects—avenues that helped her explore and express her interests throughout her schooling. Even now in her working life, she hopes to continue embarking on even more.

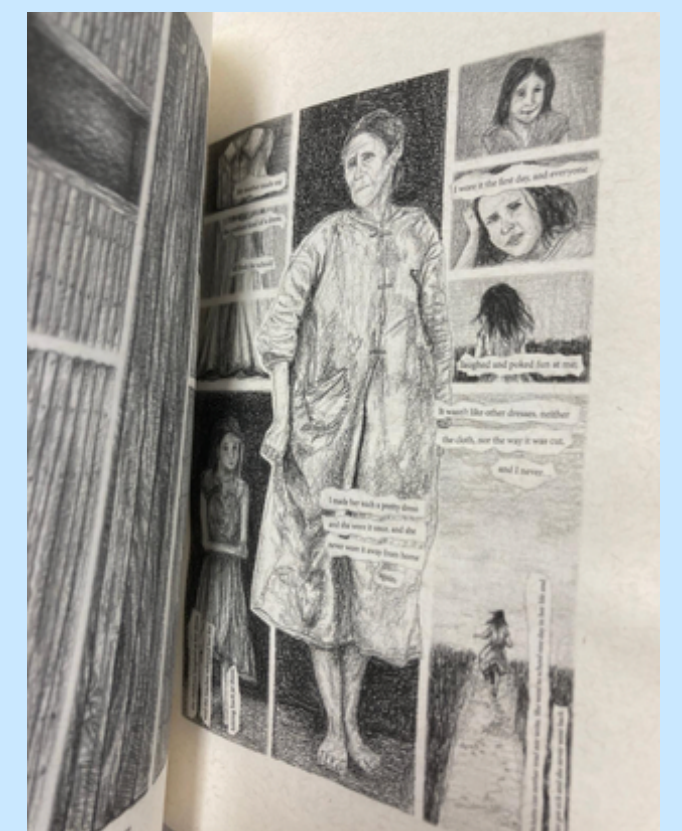


## From architectural design to UI/UX Design

During her 4 years in the architectural industry, Charisse worked as an architectural designer as well as a 3D artist, creating models and images for firms she worked for.

Charisse’s decision to switch careers came from her desire for personal growth and making an impact on people’s lives. She believed continuing on the architectural career path would have eventually led her to do the work her bosses were doing—work that was less artistic in nature and was not something she found fulfilling.

“I am not inherently interested in building buildings,” Charisse explains, “But I still am building on my skill set and evolving in a different way, so I do not feel I am giving up anything major.”



**Extracts from “The Art of Memory” and “In All This House”.**



*The “Art of Memory” exhibition at the Cornell APP NYC Studio*

## From Architectural Design to Ui/Ux Design

During her 4 years in the architectural industry, Charisse worked as an architectural designer as well as an architectural visualiser, utilising CGI to create 3D models and images for firms she worked for.

Charisse particularly enjoyed creating 3D renderings of buildings, which had already been designed, for marketing purposes. “This was a whole sub-industry in between architecture and the entertainment industry, which I felt was really fun,” explained Charisse.

Charisse’s decision to switch careers came from her desire for personal growth and making an impact on people’s lives. She believed continuing on the architectural career path would have eventually led her to do the work her bosses were doing—work that was less artistic in nature and was not something she found fulfilling.

“I am not inherently interested in building buildings,” Charisse explains, “But I still am building on my skill set and evolving in a different way, so I do not feel I am giving up anything major.”

Though she has left the industry, Charisse emphasised that the study and discipline of architecture are still things that she holds dear. She felt that the firms she worked in, where commercial value and workload was valued over creative exploration, just did not suit her.

However, Charisse does acknowledge that different firms do have different work cultures and her industry experience is based on the firms she worked in.



*A Sample of Charisse’s personal 3D project, “The Monument To the Labours”*

**“In the university I went to, you are not just taught to be the most efficient, but you are being taught a more high-level conceptual understanding of architecture itself.” Charisse states, highlighting the difference between the study of architecture and the reality of the industry.**

**Charisse does however note that those who pursue architecture are able to find avenues for creative expression in freelance work and personal projects.**

**When all was said and done, Charisse felt her calling lied with UX/UI design. Charisse appreciated that UI/UX design allowed her to have a more immediate connection with the end user, and believed that UI/UX design, and digital products in general, will open doors to other projects she is interested in.**

**She had briefly dabbled in the industry when she did game design in college, which sparked her interest in digital interfaces and products. Charisse’s prior experience with graphic and 3D design had also equipped her with the necessary skills to seamlessly transition into UI/UX design. Charisse was also inspired by her peers, many of whom made the switch from architecture to UI/UX design and have found success in their new roles.**



## **Life as a UI/UX designer**

**Currently, Charisse is a UI/UX design research associate at the NUS School of Public Health, under its Telehealth core division, with her scope of work being covered under healthcare and Human Computer Interaction.**

**As of late, Charisse is working with a team of UI/UX designers to design a website with the purpose of preparing caregivers of patients with serious illnesses for end-of-life decisions, through the use of interactive forms for caregivers to reflect and gain insight on themselves and their charge.**

**However, being good at design is not enough for a UI/UX designer, skills such as research skills and paper writing skills are also essential for someone in the role of Charisse. As Charisse puts it, “UI focuses on building what is on your screen, the text, the button, the pictures, while UX focuses on understanding the user identity, the goals, contexts, and behaviours of the end user, which requires research.”**

In Charisse's case, her research is done to better understand the attitudes of caregivers and how the forms can be designed so that caregivers are more willing to complete them. clarify, UI/UX does not usually involve coding, which is done by a separate team of programmers after the design has been approved.

Conceptually, UI/UX design is more akin to a social science, with user research being the core of UI/UX and the visual design is built upon that. In fact, some of Charisse's colleagues do have a background in psychology.

"The UI/UX designer is the advocate for the user," Charisse explains, highlighting that UI/UX designers prioritise the user's needs instead of what the engineering team thinks is easiest to implement or what the business team believes is best for the company.

Charisse also enjoys the flexibility with regards to lifestyle and work her current role gives. This can be attributed to the nature of the research aspect of her UI/UX project, which is slower paced compared to other industries.

Charisse admits that this can make work less fulfilling in the short term as getting to the end product is a long process with many changes along the way.

In fact, Charisse believes that UI/UX designers should be no strangers to change. "[Change] helps to challenge the premises of what we are operating under, and it is good to try different things and not to commit too fast to one way of doing things." Charisse says.

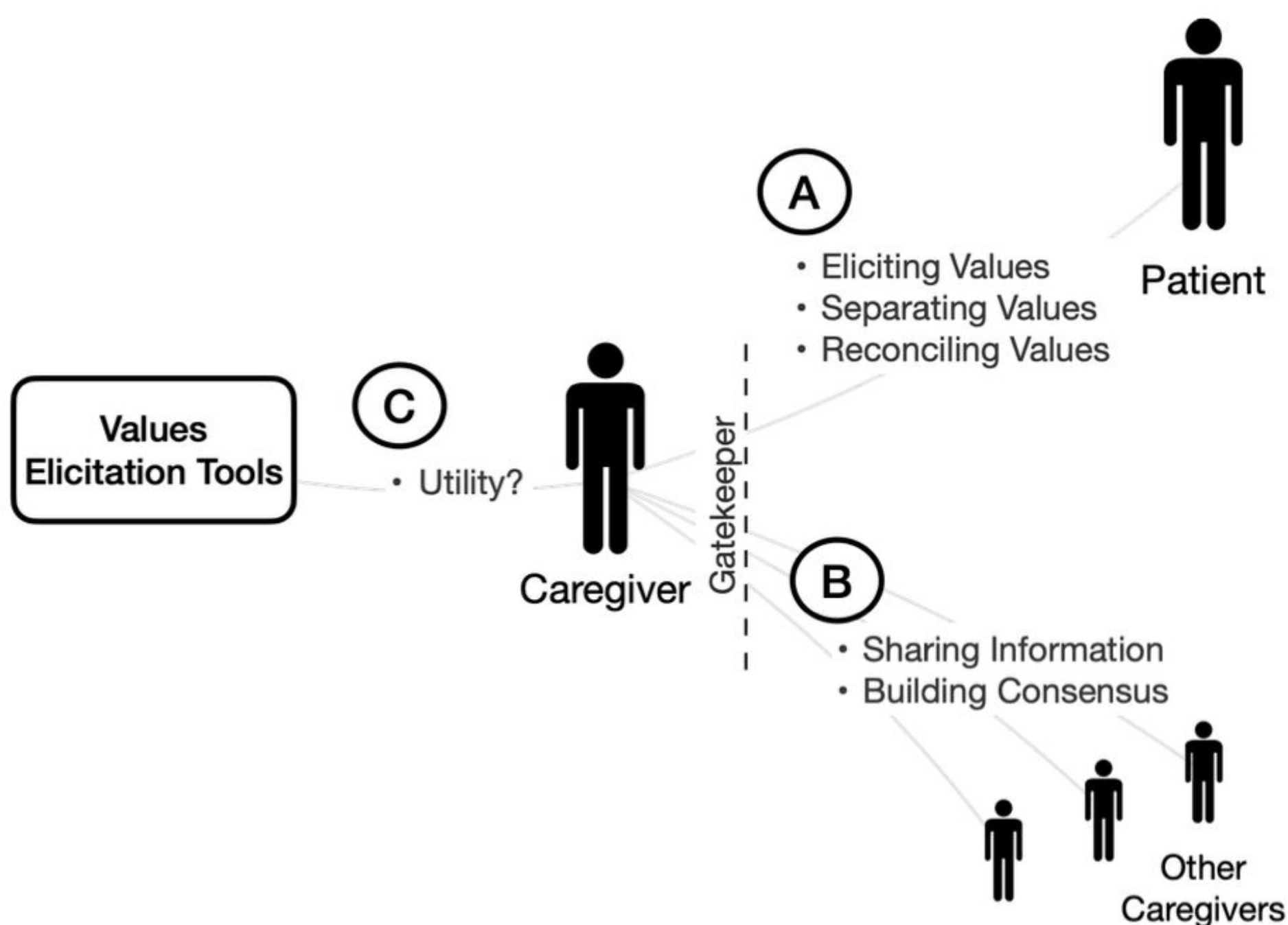


Fig. 6. Summary of Findings.

*A Snippet of the research that Charisse worked on*

For future design students, Charisse recommends YouTube tutorials and joining online design communities as good starting points and avenues for networking. As UI/UX is a very discussion-based industry, Charisse also highlights the importance of interpersonal skills, as most of the time, designers will be working in teams. Charisse hopes to continue her personal design projects sometime in the future, having put those aside ever since she joined the UI/UX designing.

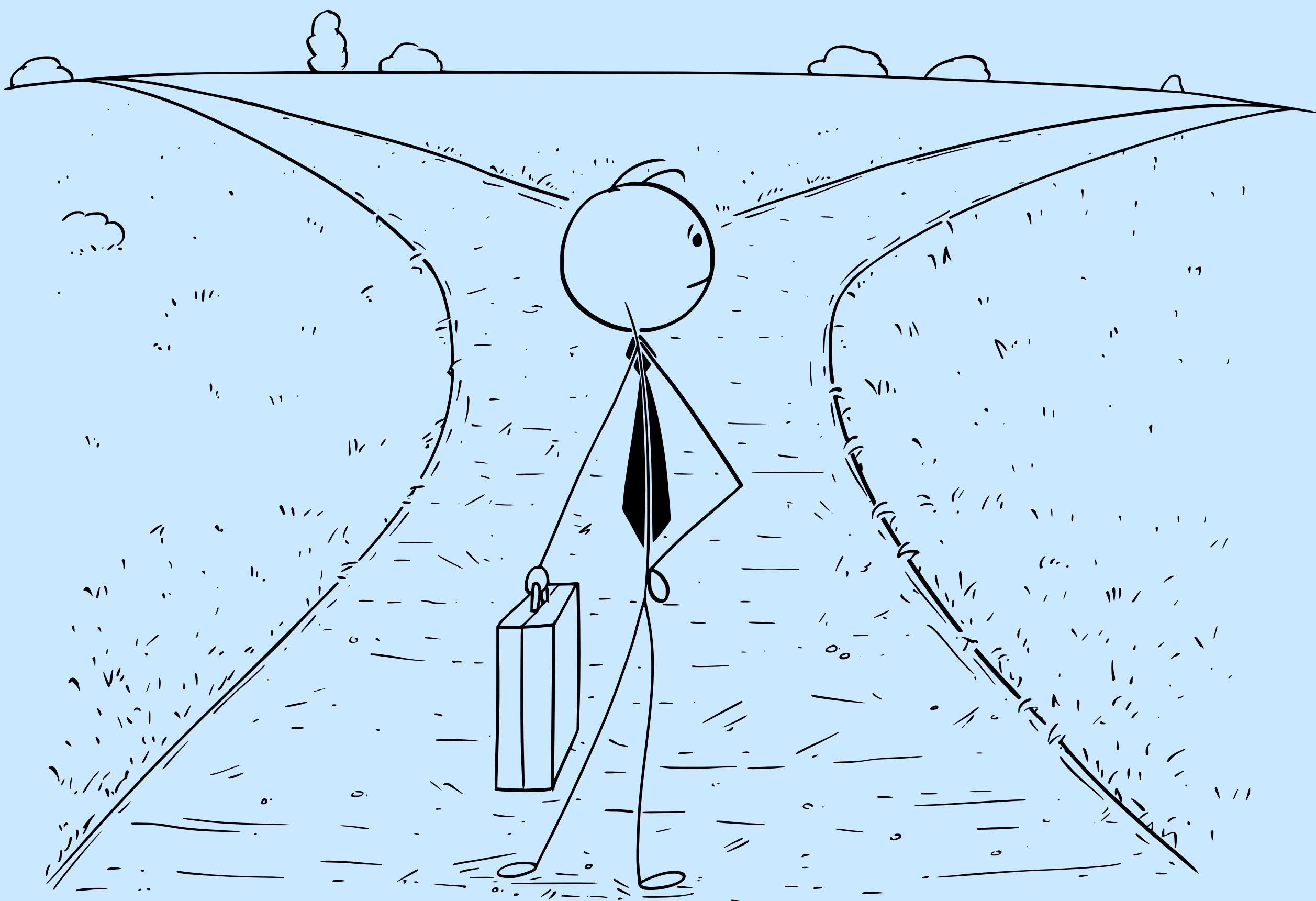
## To The Aspiring Artists...

When asked about her number one tip for aspiring artists, Charisse emphasises the importance of “building your own practice”, developing your own processes, and leveraging your own “diverse experiences that shape you as a designer”.

Charisse’s path as a designer is certainly a testament to keeping your options open and following your interests, even when they lead to something as daunting as a career switch.

Making the decision of what to study in university is often fraught with lots of back and forth, anxiety, and stress. We tend to think of it as a decision that will dictate the rest of our lives, whether we like it or not.

But that doesn’t always have to be the case. Take a page out of Charisse’s book—explore the unconventional routes, walk the roads less travelled, and find a career that you find fulfilling.





# PUNCHES OF PASSION

# SHI YIN TAN

## MMA FIGHTER AND TEACHER

BY ALENA SIAW MIN EN (24S030) AND  
SHANNEN LIM EN-QI (24A01A)

To Tan Shi Yin (12A01D), fighting is all in a day's work. Her average day looks like this: waking up early to train in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), teaching classes to impart her skills and knowledge of the sport, and then pulling together her strength to train once again, at night.



It is a big departure from her previous job as an English teacher at The Learning Lab, which she left just less than two years ago. However, Shi Yin has always had a passion for MMA. "Even though it sounds a bit weird, I already knew I wanted to train and compete even before I went into JC," she says. Shi Yin started training in martial arts, specifically in Muay Thai, at 15 after seeing MMA fighters in a Taiwanese reality television show.

"I was hooked from the first [training] session, and I knew there and then I was going to train for my whole life," she says, her voice full of joy. She finds herself lucky to have found her passion so early, and to like something so intensely.

MMA has always been a big part of Shi Yin's life, so despite her career in it being relatively new, it feels more like second nature to her. "It's less pretending to be proper, answering to superiors and doing admin all the time, more doing what I like to do and sharing it with others," she says.



Though she appreciates the hands-on, active approach of her current job, the career switch from 'steady and proper' to 'unstable and rough' was initially very scary. "There's this typical Singaporean mindset [which encourages] you [to] want a stable job and a plan for the future, as Singaporeans are very risk averse," she explains.

It was daunting to not have a fixed or stable income as she worked in a few different gyms during her career transition, with the uncertainty of it all stressing her out. Her parents were also initially unhappy and not supportive of the decision, but she understands now that it came from a place of care and concern for her.

"I'm glad I took the risk, because if I didn't try it, I would've regretted it," she says. "All jobs have instabilities and change, I just needed to adapt and be more proactive on my own."

Now, Shi Yin focuses on having her own voice and self-evaluating her skills as she trains. "When I was younger, I was a lot harder on myself and took whatever my coaches said as the [unchallengeable] authority. But now that I am a coach, I realise what it's like to be in their shoes and that we actually don't know anything [definite]. It's important to balance self-awareness on what you do well with feedback from them," she says. "But ultimately, this all comes from experience."



As a coach, she finds joy seeing the kids she trains change and grow right before her eyes, progressing quickly in the art of MMA.

As a fighter, the controlled chaos of the cage seems like a realm where her comfort zones are shattered and true mental resilience awaits. Embracing the scariness of pushing her limits both physically and mentally, Shi Yin finds her growth from MMA translating into various aspects of her life, powering her to remain unrattled against the relatively minor setbacks and tedium of daily routine.

**"WHEN YOU DO THINGS THAT ARE SUPER UNCOMFORTABLE FOR YOU, IT REALLY HELPS TO MAKE YOU A MORE MENTALLY RESILIENT PERSON AND IT TEACHES YOU TO JUST TRY A LOT OF THINGS THAT YOU'RE SCARED OF."**

**SHI YIN TAN, ON STEPPING OUT OF ONE'S COMFORT ZONE**

While many may perceive success in MMA as a female fighter to be an uphill battle, Shi Yin's reality has defied these expectations. Undeniably, her smaller physique raises the intensity and challenge of training sessions. However, in a sport historically dominated by men, professional female fighters are in a better position to stand out, garnering attention and respect for their skill and tenacity.

“Finding people who are of the same size and level to train with is difficult, but women pursuing it as a career actually have an advantage due to [fewer competition]”. As such, the road to success in MMA for women, while challenging, is paved with ample opportunities for those willing to seize them.

Like many other things, taking the first step to explore a new path may seem impossible, but they often make the fondest memories. “My first fight was in J1. I had a presentation the day before and I started crying due to all the anxiety... so it was really memorable for me.” Most of the time, the first experience is rarely one of success, but it’s more important to learn from it—rather than letting it affect us for the rest of our journey.

Being an MMA fighter is challenging due to its constant risk of injury, yet despite its inherent danger, the sport continues to captivate and attract people from all walks of life—including Shi Yin. “My most life-changing fight was when I tore numerous ligaments in my knee during one of my fights in Malaysia before my MMA debut... Surgery and recovery took a few years but everything worked out! Just don’t give up.”

Choosing a career path as an MMA fighter requires a unique blend of courage, determination and passion.

Be it the rigorous 6-days-a-week training regimens, or the significant emotional toll that comes with the territory, can understandably cause many individuals to be hesitant in pursuing this profession. However, the opportunities opened up by such a career path that allows one to try new things can also be what makes MMA such a compelling sport; only through experiencing failure can one gain insights and grow as a person. To Shi Yin, this career transcends the realm of a typical mundane job; it’s a lifestyle and a journey filled with profound lessons. Unlike traditional occupations, every aspect of an MMA fighter’s life revolves around discipline, perseverance, and self-discovery.

All in all, she interprets her unconventional career as one that involves “finding peace in the chaos”. Being from the arts stream back in JC, she finds this quote by Francis Bacon apt in underscoring the duality between the relentless pursuit of physical and mental excellence, and finding peace amidst the chaos of it all.

With her love for the art of MMA and the creativity behind it, such a quote resonates with her through how fighters must cultivate a calm and focused mindset, and the ability to remain centred in the face of chaos that extends beyond the octagon.

To her, it’s about embracing the unpredictability of the sport—and in extension, life itself, finding solace in the midst of turmoil, and emerging stronger and more resilient with each punch thrown.



# INSECTS ENTHUSIAST TURNED ENTOMOLOGIST: DR SEAN YAP

By Arissa Binte Kamaruzaman (24A01A) and Pan Haotian (24A01B)

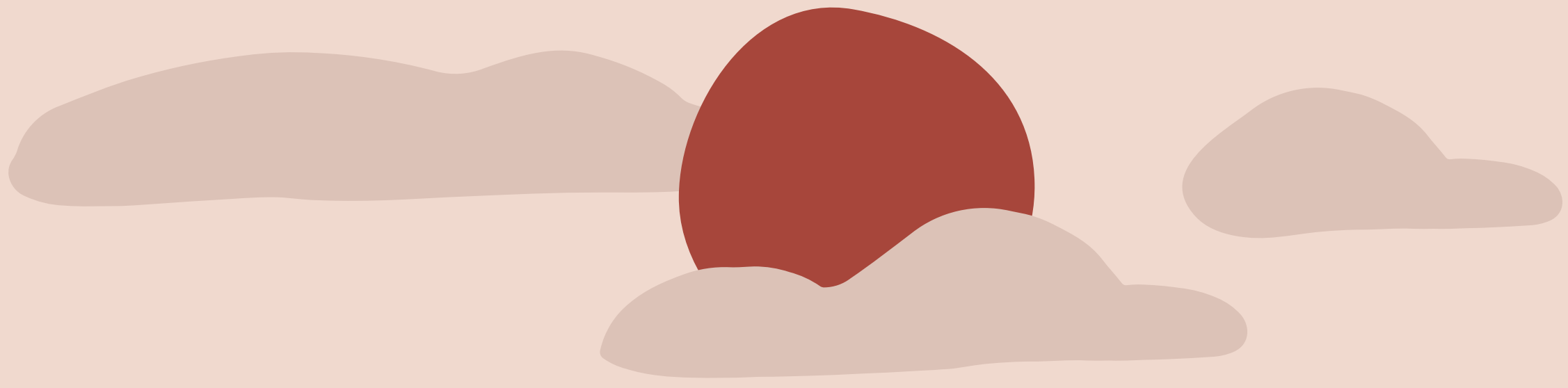


**Dr Sean Yap is an entomologist working at the Asian School of Environment, in Nanyang Technological University.**

In our interview with him, he talks about his journey thus far, shares a few useful tips for anyone looking to embark on a unique career, and of course, explains some fun beetle facts! Check out our interview video (which includes a fun game segment on “the best insect”) in the QR code below:



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



## WRITERS

Alena Siaw, Arissa Binte Kamaruzaman, Cao Yuhan, Chandrasekaran Shreya, Cheah Zong Heng, Darren Wong, Gabriel Ho, Jermaine Lee, Low Jing Kai, Pan Haotian, Shannen Lim, Syaura Nashwa

## EDITORS

Chia Kei Yin, Jermaine Lee, Syaura Nashwa

**THANK YOU FOR READING!**